

Een-Gonyama Gonyama!: Zulu Origins of the Boy Scout Movement and the Africanisation of Imperial Britain

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British imperialists in the late 19th century denigrated non-western cultures in rationalising the partition of Africa, but they also had to assimilate African values and traditions to make the imperial system work. The partisans of empire also romanticised non-western cultures to convince the British public to support the imperial enterprise. In doing so, they introduced significant African and Asian elements into British popular culture, thereby refuting the assumption that the empire had little influence on the historical development of metropolitan Britain.

Robert Baden-Powell conceived of the Boy Scout movement as a cure for the social instability and potential military weakness of Edwardian Britain. Influenced profoundly by his service as a colonial military officer, Africa loomed large in Baden-Powell's imagination. He was particularly taken with the Zulu. King Cetshwayo's crushing defeat of the British army at Isandhlwana in 1879 fixed their reputation as a 'martial tribe' in the imagination of the British public. Baden-Powell romanticised the Zulus' discipline, and courage, and adapted many of their cultural institutions to scouting.

Baden-Powell's appropriation and reinterpretation of African culture illustrates the influence of subject peoples of the empire on metropolitan British politics and society. Scouting's romanticised trappings of African culture captured the imagination of tens of thousands of Edwardian boys and helped make Baden-Powell's organisation the premier uniformed youth movement in Britain. Although confident that they were superior to their African subjects, British politicians, educators, and social reformers agreed with Baden-Powell that 'tribal' Africans preserved many of the manly virtues that had been wiped by the industrial age.

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In the 1920 edition of *Scouting for Boys: A Handbook for Instruction in Good Citizenship*, Sir Robert Baden-Powell explained the proper way to conduct a 'Scouts' War Dance'.¹ Directing the scouts to march single file into a circle while singing the 'Een-Gonyama song', he described how the boys should conduct themselves as Zulu warriors:

Into the centre of [the circle a scout] steps forward and carries out a war dance, representing how he tracked and fought with one of his enemies. He goes through

¹ The central ideas for this essay, which envision the British empire as a medium of cross-cultural exchange, come from a graduate seminar that I co-taught with Richard Davis entitled 'Britain in Africa'.

the whole fight in dumb show, until he finally kills his foe; the Scouts meantime still singing the Een-Gonyama chorus and dancing on their own ground. So soon as he finishes the fight, the leader starts the 'Be Prepared' chorus. . . . Then they commence the Een-Gonyama chorus, and another Scout steps into the ring, and describes in dumb show how he stalked and killed a wild buffalo. While he does the creeping up and stalking the animal, the Scouts all crouch and sing their chorus very softly, and as he gets more into the fight with the beast, they simultaneously spring up and dance and shout the chorus loudly.²

Although he claimed an expert knowledge of Africa from his service in colonial wars, Baden-Powell could hardly be considered an authority on Zulu customs. This mattered little as metropolitan Britons were almost entirely ignorant of African institutions. Nevertheless, they were fascinated by the romanticised and exoticised depictions of their new colonial subjects they read about in the popular press, juvenile literature, and memoirs of colonial war heroes.

The British public's growing interest in Africa in the late 19th century did not spring from respect or admiration for African culture. Rather, communities like the Zulu came to represent the simpler, savage, but nobler qualities that nostalgic observers worried were vanishing from Edwardian Britain. Politicians, clergymen, generals, and social commentators worried that industrialisation, urbanisation, and class struggle were sapping the vitality of British youth, thereby leaving the nation militarily and morally unprepared to defend its empire from overseas and continental rivals.

Baden-Powell incorporated 'tribal' elements into scouting to promote national fitness by inspiring young Britons to emulate what he interpreted to be the most praiseworthy aspects of African life. He drew on a diverse and eclectic mix of tribal peoples in designing the Boy Scout movement that included Amerindians, Arab Bedouins, New Zealand Maoris, and British youth gangs, but Africans occupied a central place in his thinking. Late Victorian and Edwardian British imperialists believed that their non-western subjects lived in primordial static tribal societies that were far down the evolutionary ladder in comparison to the 'modern' west. In truth, tribes were political units that usually formed in response to the expansion of imperial power, but the concept of the tribe was a useful category that allowed empire builders to make sense of the unfamiliar and confusing societies they conquered.³ Regardless, Baden-Powell firmly believed tribal peoples preserved pure and noble institutions and traditions that could be recaptured by the west once they were shorn of inappropriate or 'immoral' underpinnings. More specifically, he sought to teach younger generations of Britons to embrace the self-discipline, obedience, and physical toughness that the soft comforts of western modernity had stripped away.

Most historical considerations of the later British empire emphasize that British rule introduced new values and customs into the non-western communities of the imperial periphery. Yet the processes of conquering and governing 'tribal peoples' also transformed the British metropole. Older histories of imperialism tended to assert that either the empire had no impact on metropolitan British history, or that it represented a set of

² Sir Robert Baden-Powell, *Scouting for Boys: A Handbook for Instruction in Good Citizenship* (9th edn, 1920).

³ P.S. Well, 'The Barbarians Speak', in *Roman Imperialism*, ed. Craig Champion (Malden, MA, 2004), 254.

abstract ideas that politicians and public intellectuals used to promote national unity across class and party lines. More recent studies have moved beyond this debate to explore how the British public interpreted and internalised imperial ideas.⁴

In reality, however, the processes of becoming a global imperial power influenced metropolitan politics and society even more directly and profoundly. British imperialists may have denigrated non-western cultures to legitimise the violence of empire building, but they also had to assimilate their new subjects' values and traditions to govern them. Imperialists on the periphery brought these values back to Britain when they returned home, where the partisans of empire romanticised non-western cultures to convince the British public to support the imperial enterprise. In doing so, the imperial special interest groups introduced significant 'tribal' elements into British popular culture. For example, Nupur Chaudhuri has shown how western women returning from India made Kashmiri shawls and Indian curry staple elements of metropolitan British life in the 19th century.⁵

Similarly, Boy Scouting was not an African institution, but it taught British boys to 'act African'. Baden-Powell's idealised tribal institutions bore little resemblance to their African equivalents, but neither was British curry authentically Indian. Baden-Powell's vivid accounts of African tribal life were not mere topoi intended to critique the failings of metropolitan British society. Just as colonised peoples appropriated and reinterpreted western culture, Britons borrowed freely, albeit sometimes unconsciously, from their imperial subjects. In doing so, they did not create an alien colonial 'other'; rather, they were confident enough in their cultural superiority that they could appropriate and reinterpret what they considered to be the most virtuous aspects of 'tribal life'. Urban British boys embraced scouting, at least in part, because they found its anglicised African elements added adventure and stimulation to their increasingly mundane daily lives.

1. *Scouting and Colonial Soldiering*

The Scout movement's African characteristics reflected the expertise and biases that Baden-Powell acquired in roughly two decades of fighting in African colonial wars. As a member of the colonial military caste, he actively sought service in these campaigns to advance his career and win fame and fortune. Although his career began in India, he made his reputation during the Zululand campaign against Dinizulu in 1888, the 1895 Asante expedition in the Gold Coast (Ghana), and the suppression of the Ndebele (modern Zimbabwe) uprising one year later. Baden-Powell supplemented his income by publishing accounts of his exploits, which built his reputation and helped him win the rank of brevet colonel during what the British termed the 'Matabele expedition'. He made no apologies for his brutal treatment of the Ndebele and justified killing 200 African fighters on the grounds that 'any hesitation or softness is construed by them as

⁴ Much of this work comes from the 'Studies in Imperialism' series of the University of Manchester Press. For examples see: *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature*, ed. Jeffrey Richards (Manchester, 1989); *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, ed. John MacKenzie (Manchester, 1992); Anandi Ramamurthy, *Imperial Persuaders: Images of Africa and Asia in British Advertising* (Manchester, 2003).

⁵ Nupur Chaudhuri, 'Shawls, Jewelry, Curry, and Rice in Victorian Britain', in *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance*, ed. Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel (Bloomington, 1992), 238–41.

a sign of weakness, and at once restores their confidence and courage'.⁶ With his expertise in African warfare firmly established, Baden-Powell published a small handbook on frontier fighting and tracking called *Aids to Scouting for NCOs and Men* that would later serve as a key inspiration for the Boy Scout movement.

Although Baden-Powell won a measure of fame killing Africans, his reputation grew exponentially after his successful defence of the frontier town of Mafeking during the South African War. His leadership of the small garrison during the roughly yearlong siege by a much larger Afrikaner force made him a national celebrity in Britain. After the British victory, the war office put him in charge of a new paramilitary police unit called the South African Constabulary. The command gave Baden-Powell the opportunity to put his ideas on leadership, self-improvement, and character building into practice. The force's motto 'Be Prepared' would eventually become the scout motto, and its uniform of a Stetson hat and khaki shirt and shorts was the model for the scout uniform.

Baden-Powell was a fully-fledged imperial hero when he returned to Britain to become the inspector-general of the cavalry in 1903. His exploits captured the imagination of British boys, who helped push sales of *Aids to Scouting for NCOs and Men* over the 100,000-copy mark.⁷ William Smith, the founder of the Boys' Brigade, asked him to rewrite the manual for his christian uniformed youth movement. The Brigade was Britain's first national organisation for boys, and Baden-Powell became one of Smith's vice-presidents. He parted ways with Smith, however, when Smith refused to give his scout programme a more central role in the Boys' Brigade curriculum.⁸

Scouting grew out of Baden-Powell's decision to found his own independent youth movement that would promote physical, moral, and imperial fitness among British youth by capitalising on their fascination with 'frontier scouting' and tribal life. The publisher of *Aids to Scouting* bankrolled the venture and brought out a new edition of the book for the youth market entitled *Scouting for Boys*, which is what Americans now call the 'Scout Handbook'. In 1909, over 11,000 uniformed boy scouts turned up for a rally at Crystal Palace. Scouting's growing popularity inspired Baden-Powell to retire from the army to devote his full attention to the movement.

Initially, Baden-Powell gave relatively little thought to developing a coherent ideology for scouting. Over time, several key themes emerged in his thinking and became the central core of the scout creed. Worried that urban slums, social unrest, and moral laxity had undermined Britain's national security, he sought to prepare younger generations to defend their nation and empire. Just as life on the imperial frontier taught virility, resourcefulness, and self-discipline, scouting was a 'school of the woods' that would save the empire by instilling these same ideals in British youth. Baden-Powell looked to the tribal peoples of the frontier to rediscover the vital martial qualities that materialism had expunged from 'civilised' western society. In explaining why Africa and Africans occupied

⁶ Robert Baden-Powell, *The Matabele Campaign, 1896* (Westport, 1970), 63. Baden-Powell, however, failed to mention that he almost faced a court martial for his decision to make an example of captured Ndebele fighters by executing them without trial. For the official correspondence regarding the British government's decision not to prosecute him see: TNA (PRO), WO 32/5626: governor Cape Colony to colonial secretary, 22 Dec. 1896.

⁷ Tim Jeal, *The Boy-Man: The Life of Lord Baden-Powell* (New York, 1990), 361.

⁸ J.O. Springhall, 'The Boy Scouts, Class and Militarism in Relation to British Youth Movements, 1908–1930', *International Review of Social History*, xvi (1971), 131–2; John Springhall and Brian Fraser, *Sure and Steadfast: A History of the Boys' Brigade* (1983), 102.

a central place in scouting, he declared: 'Why do I like Africa? Well, because you can get away from cinemas and jazz, motor-buses and crowds, noisy streets, stuffy with petrol-exhaust fumes, and all the artificial life which we call civilization.'⁹

Historians have debated whether Baden-Powell secretly intended scouting to prepare young men for military service in the tense years before the First World War.¹⁰ Baden-Powell always emphatically denied the charge, but the popular backlash against militarism stemming from the war in Europe in the 1920s led him to de-emphasize the movement's overt nationalism. Instead, he recast scouting as a force for promoting international peace and understanding. In later editions of *Scouting for Boys*, he declared that European frontiersmen like the North American trappers, Central American hunters, Australian drovers, and the South African Constabulary were in fact 'peace scouts' rather than agents of western imperialism.¹¹ His later writings still emphasized that scouting would strengthen the empire by preparing British boys to face the rigours of the frontier, but Baden-Powell also now acknowledged that non-Europeans could also be scouts. In this sense he believed that the movement could help convince colonised peoples to see things from 'the white man's point of view'.¹²

2. *The African Roots of the Scout Movement*

Although Baden-Powell believed firmly that Britons were racially and culturally superior to their colonial subjects, tribal peoples in general, and the Zulu in particular, loomed large in his imagination. He did not fight in the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, but like most Britons he was impressed by King Cetshwayo's crushing defeat of the British army at the battle of Isandhlwana. It did not matter that the Zulu eventually lost the war. Their success in standing up to the imperial forces fixed their reputation as a prototypical 'martial tribe' in the eyes of both military elites and the general British public. Queen Victoria herself described the Zulu as 'the finest and bravest race in South Africa'.¹³ As was the case with the Nepalese Gurkhas in South Asia, British imperialists reasoned that any non-western people who could defeat them in battle had to be particularly tough and noble.¹⁴

Over time, many British officers came to believe that the Zulu and related groups like the Ndebele preserved the virtues of loyalty, morality, and self-sacrifice that were

⁹ Robert Baden-Powell, *African Adventures* (1937), 73.

¹⁰ For a summary of the debate see: Michael Rosenthal, *The Character Factory: Baden-Powell's Boy Scouts and the Imperatives of Empire* (New York, 1984); Allen Warren, 'Sir Robert Baden-Powell, the Scout Movement and Citizen Training in Great Britain, 1900-1920', *EHR*, ci (1986); John Springhall, 'Baden-Powell and the Scout Movement Before 1920: Citizen Training or Soldiers of the Future', *EHR*, cii (1987).

¹¹ Sir Robert Baden-Powell, *Scouting for Boys: A Handbook for Instruction in Good Citizenship* (13th edn, 1920), 25.

¹² Sir Robert Baden-Powell, 'White Men in Black Skins', *Elders Review of West African Affairs*, viii (1929), 7.

¹³ Carolyn Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention* (Cambridge, 1998), 112.

¹⁴ In practice, the Gurkhas actually had diverse ethnic origins. Initially, they were a product of the British military imagination that viewed them as 'warrior gentlemen' who soldiered for the empire because they respected the equally brave British officer caste. Lionel Caplan, *Warrior Gentleman: 'Gurkhas' in the Western Imagination* (Providence, 1995), 10-12.

vanishing from the increasingly individualistic modern western society. With Zululand entirely pacified in the 20th century, Baden-Powell could comfortably claim: 'I loved the Zulus, even though I had to fight against them.'¹⁵

Yet Baden-Powell also had more practical reasons for giving Zulu cultural elements a central place in scouting. In the early years of the Scout movement he borrowed heavily from Ernest Thompson Seton's plan for using Amerindian culture and lore to train western boys in woodcraft. Seton was a British-born American naturalist who had a complicated relationship with scouting. Although he helped found the Boy Scouts of America and met personally with Baden-Powell on visits to Britain, he resigned from American scouting's executive board in 1915 on the grounds that the movement was becoming too militaristic.¹⁶ Seton's books on the North American frontier fascinated the British public, but Baden-Powell was reluctant to incorporate too many American elements into scouting because he wanted sole authority to define the nature and character of the movement. He therefore implied that Seton had overstated the virtues of the Amerindians: 'I know a little about the Red Indian, and he is not (and was not in his prime) all he is pictured by some who write about him only on his sunny side.'¹⁷

By comparison, Baden-Powell claimed an expert knowledge of the Zulu. Stressing that his expertise in African tribal life came from personal experience rather than books, he implied that he had discovered, rather than invented, the Boy Scout movement during his travels and campaigns in Africa. The Zulu thus became prototypical scouts who could teach British youth the virtues of discipline, chivalry, friendship, and woodsmanship through their exemplary reading of the 'book of Nature'.¹⁸ Yet Baden-Powell's self-declared respect for African 'savages', did not mean that he viewed them as equals. He referred to colonial campaigning as 'nigger fighting' and openly questioned whether African boys had the skull capacity to comprehend western education. Nevertheless, he paid the Zulu what he undoubtedly considered to be the supreme compliment by declaring that they were 'white men at heart'.¹⁹

Baden-Powell first introduced British boys to his version of Zulu customs in 1907 at a, now famous, experimental camp on Brownsea Island. Intended to test out the ideas in *Aids to Scouting for NCOs and Men* that he had adapted for youth work, the outdoor gathering marked the formal beginning of the Boy Scout movement. For approximately ten days, Baden-Powell led a mixed company of 22 public school and working class boys in camping, cooking, playing games, tying knots, and learning tracking and woodcraft. Every morning he blew an Ndebele kudu horn to wake the scouts, and in the evening he told them 'yarns' about his adventures in Africa. He also taught them his interpretation of a Zulu call and response chant that he called 'Een-Gonyama – Gonyama'.²⁰

¹⁵ Baden-Powell, *African Adventures*, 115.

¹⁶ Jeal, *The Boy-Man*, 376–7, 381.

¹⁷ Robert Baden-Powell, *B.-P.'s Outlook: Selections from the Founder's Contributions to The Scouter from 1909 – 1941* (Ottawa, 1979), 95; July 1920.

¹⁸ Baden-Powell, *B.-P.'s Outlook*, 95; Robert Baden-Powell, *What Scouts Can Do: More Yarns* (Philadelphia, 1922), 74.

¹⁹ Baden-Powell, *What Scouts Can Do: More Yarns*, 129; Robert Baden-Powell, *Scouting and Youth Movements* (New York, 1931), 101; Baden-Powell, 'White Men in Black Skins', 6.

²⁰ Jeal, *The Boy-Man*, 383–6.

Baden-Powell did not incorporate African elements into scouting in a systematic fashion. Instead, he fell back on his personal impressions of the various African societies he encountered during his military career and turned his personal mementos into scout artifacts. Collecting 'trophies' was a common practice in most of Britain's colonial wars, and the British victors in the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 went home with spears, shields, clubs, wooden milk jugs, spoons, and even the dried sole of a foot of a dead Zulu.²¹ None of Baden-Powell's African treasures were this grizzly. Most were fairly simple items that took on totemic qualities once he incorporated them into the Scout movement.

The kudu horn used at the Brownsea camp was a fairly innocuous keepsake of the Matabele campaign. It became the stuff of scout legend after he donated it to the British Scout Association for use in its scoutmaster training courses at Gilwell Park. John Thurman, the Gilwell camp chief, told generations of scoutmasters that Baden-Powell acquired the horn because he was impressed with how Ndebele warriors used it as a 'war horn' to send coded messages to each other.²² In his later years Baden-Powell made a point of blowing the horn for rapt audiences at international scout jamborees.

Similarly, Baden-Powell incorporated carved willow beads from a 12-foot-long Zulu necklace into the badges, marking successful completion of the Woodbadge scoutmaster training course. He claimed to have captured the necklace from King Dinizulu in the 1888 Zululand campaign, but his biographer, Tim Jeal, asserts that it actually came from a dying Zulu girl that he happened across during the fighting. After Baden-Powell's death in 1941, the British Scout Association made the story more palatable by turning the necklace into a gift that an admiring Dinizulu bestowed on Baden-Powell. In fact, the Zulu king surrendered to the governor of Natal and there is no evidence that he ever even met the founder of the Scout movement.²³

Nevertheless, official scouting now holds that the beads are symbols of loyalty and bravery. The South African Scout Association, which faced international condemnation for its unwillingness to speak out against apartheid, tried to use them to win allies in the world Scout movement. It commissioned four reproductions of the complete necklace and gave them to high-ranking officials of the American and British Scout Associations at the 1967 World Jamboree. Scout lore also holds that the Zulu royal family demanded the return of the remaining original beads until they learned of their esteemed place in the scout programme.²⁴

Many of the other important African elements in the Boy Scout movement were largely products of Baden-Powell's imagination. Starting with actual Zulu institutions, he appropriated and reconfigured them as exotic tribal customs for consumption by impressionable British boys. Critics charged that scouting had a secret militaristic agenda because its members wore uniforms and advanced through military-style ranks.

²¹ Michael Lieven, 'A Victorian Genre: Military Memoirs and the Anglo-Zulu War', *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, lxxvii (1999), 119.

²² John Thurman, *The Gilwell Book* (2nd edn, 1930).

²³ Jeal, *The Boy-Man*, 134; Malawi National Archives, 17/BSA/1/210: organizing commissioner Nyasaland Boy Scout Association to governor's private secretary, 16 Nov. 1951; Jeff Guy, 'Imperial Appropriations: Baden-Powell, the Woodbadge, and the Zulu *Iziqu*', in *Being Zulu: Contesting Identities Past and Present*, ed. Benedict Carton, John Laband and Jabulani Sithole (forthcoming).

²⁴ South African Scout Association Archives, Cape Town, BC 956/H/1967: Jamboree, Dinizulu's Necklace, South African Boy Scout Association, c.1967.

Baden-Powell, however, claimed that he got the idea for the scout ranks of tenderfoot through first class scout, which really do not conform to military norms, from Zulu age tests. In one of his standard 'yarns' he recounted how Zulus, Ndebeles, and other related peoples tested young candidates for warriorhood by painting them white before sending them alone into the 'jungle' armed only with a spear. These young men had to rely on their stalking and hunting skills to survive, and could be killed by any adult who discovered them while they were still white. If they survived the month it took for the whitewash to wear off, the tribe welcomed them back as warriors.²⁵ In recounting the story to British audiences Baden-Powell added: 'I don't suppose that very many British town boys could do it unless they were Boy Scouts, and I expect that a good many even of these would starve in the attempt. . . . I am supposing that you have nothing more than your shield and assegai with you. Think it over.'²⁶ Baden-Powell based the 'Een-Gonyama – Gonyama' praise song that he taught the Brownsea scouts on a song he heard in Zululand. Claiming that he at first confused massed singing Zulu warriors with a church organ, he tried to teach his boys to replicate what the novelist H. Rider Haggard, who was similarly moved by Zulu singing, called a 'chant never to be forgotten'.²⁷ Baden-Powell similarly drew on Zulu military dancing as inspiration for the scouts' 'war dance' mentioned at the beginning of this essay. He appears to have initially envisioned his adaptation of Zulu war songs and dances as entertaining campfire diversions, but later Scout authorities ruled that the 'Een-Gonyama' song was only for special occasions.²⁸

Smaller examples of Baden-Powell's 'Zuluisms' are peppered throughout the traditions and literature of the Scout movement. He told them that scouts were to carry long walking sticks because Zulu boys acting as 'orderlies' for older warriors used similar staves to carry supplies and sleeping mats. Baden-Powell also adopted the Zulu title *Mhlalapaunzi*, 'the man who lies down to shoot', as the motto for the Scout 'marksmanship' proficiency badge on the grounds that it meant planning before taking action.²⁹

3. Boy Scouting in an Imperial Context

Baden-Powell's appropriation and reinterpretation of 'tribal' tradition demonstrates the indirect influence of subject peoples of the empire on metropolitan British society. Scouting's romanticised trappings of African culture captured the imagination of generations of British boys and helped make Baden-Powell's organisation the premier uniformed youth movement in Britain. Although confident that they were superior to their African subjects, British politicians, educators, and social reformers agreed with Baden-Powell that 'tribal' Africans preserved many of the manly virtues that had been undermined by the industrial age.

²⁵ Robert Baden-Powell, *Young Knights of the Empire: Their Code and Further Scout Yarns* (Philadelphia, 1917), 204.

²⁶ Baden-Powell, *What Scouts Can Do: More Yarns*, 73.

²⁷ Baden-Powell, *What Scouts Can Do: More Yarns*, 75; H. Rider Haggard, *Cetywayo and His White Neighbors* (1882).

²⁸ Kenya Scout Archives, Nairobi, KBSA/C/54/34: Uganda Boy Scout Association Quarterly Newsletter, no. 5, Apr. 1948.

²⁹ Baden-Powell, *What Scouts Can Do: More Yarns*, 124, 164.

Baden-Powell and his allies were largely unaware of the broader implications of their cultural borrowing. Scouting was not simply a case of disenchanted western elites romanticising an exotic colonised 'other' to critique their own social failings. Just as Britons wore Kashmiri shawls and have come to love their version of Indian curry, the Boy Scout movement taught British boys to 'act African', albeit in an entirely western fashion. More to the point, scouting grew into an enormously successful institution because adventurous and imaginative British boys actually wanted to be African, at least in the way that Baden-Powell described being African. In the 1930s, several schoolboys embarrassed the segregated white South African Scout Association by asking how to join the Pathfinders, the segregated African branch of the movement, on the grounds that it was more authentically African.³⁰

Popular British enthusiasm for 'tribal' Africa did not translate into respect for Africans any more than eating curry generated metropolitan support for Indian nationalism. Rather, scouting demonstrated how imperially-minded Britons appropriated desirable African cultural elements, reimagined them, and made them their own. In this the Scout movement had a great deal in common with African efforts to appropriate useful elements of British culture by founding their own independent schools and christian churches.³¹

Scouting was thus part of a larger hybrid imperial culture linking Britain with peripheral societies that transformed both the British and their colonial subjects. From the metropolitan standpoint, the British empire was much more than a set of ideas that could be invoked for political and social purposes by politicians and public intellectuals. It was instead an intimate embrace between Britons and the people they conquered and reigned over. The realities of imperial governance and indirect rule required British administrators first to understand and then to assimilate the cultural values of their subjects. Scouting's African origins demonstrate that, despite their overt cultural chauvinism and sometimes open racism, imperialists developed a tacit admiration for their colonial subjects that they imparted to the larger British public.

Finally, the cross-cultural dialogue between the coloniser and the colonised fed back on itself. Although scouting had its roots in Africa, both Baden-Powell and British colonial officials doubted whether Africans had the sophistication and intelligence to grasp the central message of the movement. In practical terms, the fourth scout law, which declared all scouts to be brothers, undermined the strict racial segregation in the settler societies of eastern and southern Africa. Although many African boys and their elders enthusiastically embraced the movement, during the transfer of power it appeared that scouting would die out along with the other trappings of British colonialism.³²

Yet this did not come to pass. Scouting has survived and flourished in post-colonial Africa. Nationalist politicians seized on the African origins of the Scout movement to reimagine it as authentically African. President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, who was

³⁰ Tammy Proctor, ' "A Separate Path": Scouting and Guiding in Interwar South Africa', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, xlii (2000).

³¹ E.g., see Derek Peterson, *Creative Writing: Translation, Bookkeeping, and the Work of Imagination in Colonial Kenya* (Portsmouth, 2004).

³² For a full discussion of the Boy Scout movement in British Africa see Timothy Parsons, *Race, Resistance and the Boy Scout Movement in British Colonial Africa* (Athens, OH, 2004).

himself a former scout, claimed Baden-Powell simply learned scouting from the Zulu.³³ Similarly, Jeremiah Nyaggah, a Kenyan cabinet minister and scout chief commissioner, declared: 'Scouting is African in origin, it was FOUNDED in Mafeking (Africa), NURSED in the United Kingdom, SPREAD all over the world and the founder decided to be buried in Nyeri (Kenya). . . . Why, therefore, shouldn't we Africans feel part and parcel of Scouting? We should modernise and perfect it for others to learn and follow.'³⁴ In other words, the Scout movement is popular in many African countries because African boys are drawn to the anglicised version of their own cultural heritage.

³³ *Zambian Daily Mail*, 7 Oct. 1975.

³⁴ *Nation*, 27 July 1971.