

Not a Nongqawuse story: An anti-heroine in historical perspective

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A teenager is particularly well known in South Africa. One of the greatest anti-colonial movements was called after her. As the millennium approached, she was the only woman whom the current president mentioned by name, as a democratic Constitution was adopted. Her imprint on oral, visual and literary culture is deep – and the heritage industry deems her a godsend. On what does her notoriety rest?

Hayi uNongqawuse

Intombi kaMhlakaza

Wasibulala isizwe sethu

Yaxelela abantu yathi kubo bonke

Baya kuvuka abantu basemangwabeni

Bazisa uvuyo kunye ubutyebi

Kanti uthetha ubuxoki (Peires 2003: 21)

O Nongqawuse

Maiden of Scatterer

She killed our nation

She told the people she said to them all

Buried people will arise

Bringing joy together with wealth

Yet she tells lies

A woman, then, apparently outstripped most men in her destructive powers. She allegedly killed a nation of some 150 000 people, calling themselves amaXhosa, on Africa's southeast coast. Since she did so as a fatherless peasant – and as a member of the sex forming 'so large a proportion of the poor in this patrilineal, male-dominated society' – she has almost no counterparts, worldwide (Iliffe 1992: 72).

The dominant explanation as to how she became one of the most destructive women in all history runs something like this (Gqoba 1888; Ngcofe-Masabalala 1997; Radebe 1990; Sandi 1986; Scheub 1996; Vilikazi 1965; Yalimanisi 1980): once there was a golden age among amaXhosa: rain fell, crops flourished, everyone ate beef. There was so much food that cats curled up with mice. Money, trade and poverty were absent. Ancient hierarchies sustained the nation: girls respected boys, women respected men, men respected *iinkosi* (lords, chiefs.)

Then a maiden entered this Eden. Men, she said, had arrived: men who had died, and were now rejuvenated. They, together with infinite supplies of everything desirable, were in an underground cavern, and had asked her to broadcast their message. If people destroyed their cattle, if they ceased cultivating, if they threw their stored grain to the winds, then an even better world would be born. Departed men would become visible to all, as an invincible army, led by Sifuba-sibanzi, the Broad-Chested One. White oppressors would be eliminated. Paradise would emerge, in which all were immortal, enjoying boundless prosperity.

AmaXhosa, mourn narrators, swallowed her lies. They destroyed their Eden. They gathered for the Great Day, when the sun would set in the east. '[K]uza kudiban' izulu nomhlaba' ('heaven and earth will meet together') promised the maiden (Radebe 1990: 95). But no one witnessed the sun turning its back on the west. No one attained heaven on earth. Instead, whites ruthlessly dispossessed famine-stricken survivors. They imprisoned or shot leaders, appropriated millions of acres, hustled starving people into cheap labour – and watched as tens of thousands died. A nation disintegrated. The movement was given the maiden's name. An idiom emerged: '*Uteta u-Nongqause*' – those recounting wondrous tales would be told: you are telling a Nongqawuse story. Deemed responsible for destroying a patriarchal pre-colonial order, she attracted much negative commentary.

*Ulizothe Nongqawuse ulizothe,
 Ulinyala Nongqawuse ulinyala,
 Ungumbulali Nongqawuse ungumbulali,
 Ungumkhohlisi Nongqawuse ungumkhohlisi...
 Tyhini! Baphela ubutyebi ngenxa kaNongqawuse,
 Vuthululu ubukhosi ngenxa kaNongqawuse,
 Laphela ulonwabo ngenxa kaNongqawuse,
 Yaphela intlutha ngenxa kaNongqawuse,
 Waphalala umzi ngenxa kaNongqawuse –
 Nde-e vovololo-o! Nde-e folokohlo-o!!!* (Sandi 1986: 27)

You are nauseating Nongqawuse you are nauseating,
 You are indecent Nongqawuse you are indecent,
 You are a murderer Nongqawuse you are a murderer,
 You are a deceiver Nongqawuse you are a deceiver...
 Hey! Wealth disappeared because of Nongqawuse,
 Chieftaincy shattered because of Nongqawuse,
 Pleasure disappeared because of Nongqawuse,
 Abundant food disappeared because of Nongqawuse,
 The nation spilt out because of Nongqawuse –
Nde-e vovololo-o! I collap-se like one stab-bed!!!

Nongqawuse was also anathema to white men manning the colonial state. She and Nonkosi, another female seer, were among the leaders captured. In 1858, both were dumped in the ' "Female Kaffer Prison" ' in Cape Town, capital of the British Cape Colony (Bradford 2004: 73).

Nongqawuse, as the image on this page suggests, was not the only visionary. Millenarian movements, which anticipate heaven on earth, to be attained through superhuman means, have occurred worldwide. They have thrown up many similar seers. In southern Africa, as hundreds of thousands of peasants travelled towards a perfect world, a millennium, on a seven-year journey between 1850 and 1857, some 20 visionaries shepherded them along this route. Nongqawuse herself operated alongside a dozen other people near her homestead. Vision was her domain; many other organisational tasks existed; oratory fell into the province of her uncle, Mhlakaza (Scatterer). The most important words were issued by the ruler of the Xhosa nation: Rhili kaHintsa commanded everyone to cease cultivation, kill cattle and destroy *ubuthi* (poison, weapons of sorcery), in preparation for the black army.



Nongqawuse (on the right) and Nonkosi, photographed as political prisoners.

Somewhat oddly, influential actors other than Nongqawuse largely faded from memory. Although she was only active for nine months, as the movement climaxed, she soaked up narrative energy. Her contemporaries often spoke of her in praise poetry. This sophisticated genre, monopolised by men, was organised around discrete segments, providing pithy summaries of the past. Nongqawuse – a name rarely used, since poets preferred metaphors – was repeatedly accused of having given birth, in monstrous ways.

Some connected her to abortion or miscarriage. The famous historian-poet, Samuel Mqhayi, blazoned her name in the newspaper he sub-edited, insinuating an abortion (Rubusana 1911). Other forms of non-human birth appealed to traditionalist bards. One, terming himself a hard-headed man, hostile to cattle-killing in the name of fantasies, described her as:

*Intw' eyamitwá iminyak' emibini,
Ukuz' izalwe seyinamazinyo.
Nal' irámncwa livele kulo-Tise engcotyeni* (Rubusana 1911: 382)

The thing impregnated for two years,
So that the begotten already has teeth.
Here is the wild beast, it appeared among Rhili's people in the reed grass.

Another deployed even more devastating images:

*Ngu qongqotwán' ezala, uxam ehlomkisa, incúk' ijwatyula.
Ndifik' oxam befukamisana...
Nyakana yatshat' intonjane ka xam* (Rubusana 1911: 379)

She's the dung beetle giving birth, the leguaan that swells, the hyena leaking milk.
I arrived as leguaans were secluding the breast-feeding mother...
The year that the leguaan's daughter was initiated through marriage, throwing a
spear into the cattle kraal.

Contemporary poets had numerous reasons for linking Nongqawuse to monstrous birth. But whatever their individual motives, a broader point can be made: female fertility was a masculine concern. Patriarchal 'appropriation of the productive and reproductive capacity of women was central to the structures of southern Africa's precapitalist societies. It was the social feature on which society was based' (Guy 1990: 40). In Xhosaland, patriarchs arranged women's marriages, which required cattle, the prime masculine resource. A bridegroom's menfolk would place some ten cattle in a bride's natal home, to gain rights over her womb. Once married, she was expected to give birth to some eight to ten children: men's children, the children of those who had paid cattle. Were she to produce no offspring, she could be returned to her natal home, and the cattle regained. Were she to die in childbirth, cattle were also reclaimable. Her life-giving powers were commoditised: patriarchs exchanged them against cattle, expecting a refund were she to prove unsatisfactory. Men who had lost their cattle, without gaining a world reborn, thus had good reason to attach a particular insult to Nongqawuse: monstrous birth.

Wombs, however, became less central to manhood as southern African peasants were conquered, dispossessed, extruded into a colonial order. Instead, female life-giving powers were often deemed burdensome. Women were increasingly valued not for their fertility, but for their sexuality. This historic shift was reflected in representations of Nongqawuse, as tropes linked to birth faded into the background.

Commentary about a century after the events was more westernised in form and content, paying greater attention to her appearance. There was, however, no consensus as to whether she had been swollen-breasted like a cow, or flat-chested and frigid (Jolobe 1959; Mutwa 1966). A leading Thembu bard, asked in 1970 if he could produce a poem about the events, provided some insight into popular opinions. His poem was composed after 22 seconds' reflection, suggesting that he drew upon common knowledge:

*Kulo mhla ke lehl' inyala,
Kuba yem' intombi kaMhlakaza,
Iba ngakuvela phezu komlambo,
Ibuy' ingxak' iyiphethe ngomlomo,
Ibikel' amadoda.
Int' ezingazanga zeva ngedikazi.
Yayilishobo kwaloo nto,
Ukuqalekiswa kwesizwe sikaXhosa,
Kusuk' umntw' ebhinqile
Ath' uthethile namanyange...
Nalishoba kuloo nzwakazi,
Intomb' emabele made:
Kuloko loo min' ayezizibhungu,
Kub' intombi yayiqal' ukuz' ebuntombini.
Yathi kanti noko kunjalo
Ishoba lokubulal' umzi kaPhal' ungenatyala
Liya kungena ngayo (Yalimanisi 1980: 108, 110)*

On this day, then, indecency descended,
For the maiden of Scatterer stood up,
She even appeared on the river bank,
She returned carrying the problem in her mouth,
She reported to men.
Those who have never been told what to do by a promiscuous woman.
That in itself was an omen,
A curse upon the nation of Xhosa,
A female gets up
Saying she spoke with the ancestors...
There is an omen in that handsome woman,
The maiden with pendulous breasts:
Except that on that day they were large and protuberant,

Because a marriageable maiden had begun to emerge from maidenhood.
And yet even if it were so
The omen killing the innocent nation of Phalo
Will enter through her.

By the 1970s, a further twist had developed. Whether this sexualised woman had possessed a mind of her own had long been debatable. She had parroted the words of a lover, drawn from black enemies, declared some contemporaries. A century later, as the full weight of the apartheid state bore down upon peasants, a new racial dynamic was ascribed. It became common knowledge that Nongqawuse had been manipulated by a white man: the British Governor. A sexualised relationship was easily insinuated. As a 1970s' song ran:

Sir George Grey took our country
He entered in through Nongqawuse
The cattle died, the sheep died
The power of the black people was finished off. (Peires 1990: 51)

As the apartheid order ended and a new millennium arrived, another theme began emerging. Time was passing, but Nongqawuse was becoming younger. She was slipping into the ranks of pre-pubertal girls, for whom neither fertility nor sexuality was a seemly topic of discussion. According to the author of the sole scholarly book about her and the movement, only one first-hand description of her exists: two English sentences, in colonial archives, generated by a black male spy, suggesting that she was mentally disturbed, dishevelled, and about 16. The author adds his own conclusions: she was an *intombazana* (a little pre-pubertal girl). This contributed to her tendency to be scatter-brained. But her 'fantastic promise of the resurrection [that] lured an entire people to death' was plausible precisely because she was an 'undefiled child' (Peires 2003: 11, 375). Similarly, a recent novel describes her as a disorientated waif (Mda 2000). In a play, 'The Prophet', female sexuality was so insignificant that the 'sick little girl' was played by a hunchbacked male dwarf (Bailey 2003: 159).

In all, representations of a well-known pre-colonial woman are overwhelmingly negative, but significant change has occurred over time. The focus has shifted from fertility, to sexuality, to childishness. These changes have depended less on new material being uncovered (historical research is largely conspicuous by its absence), than on broad social transformations.

Change, however, has not affected one feature: comments almost invariably pivot around Nongqawuse's sex. Rare is discussion suggesting she may have been poor. Discussion of her anti-imperialist politics is sparse. Above all, little interest is shown in the context of this daughter of war, who joined a mass movement six years after it originated, and operated amid a phalanx of other seers, in a region under overwhelming threat of war and colonisation. Instead, most narratives have focused on ahistorical biological attributes, and gendered characteristics conventionally assigned to the subordinate sex (silliness, deceit, and so forth). Many accounts would be drained of impact if the lead

character were to resemble Nongqawuse in all respects but one: the seer were male, like the leading actors of the 1850–57 era. Asked to explain Nongqawuse's visions, late twentieth century Xhosa men summarised consensus lasting some 150 years: 'she was a *b[h]inqa*, a female, and that was the sort of behaviour one expected from a *b[h]inqa*' (Peires 2003: 196). Overall, the corpus of accounts surrounding Nongqawuse is a treasure trove for those interested in sexist modes of analysis and misogynist invective.

Remaking the past

Women often approach mainstream wisdom with some reservations. On first encountering the Nongqawuse story, I was perturbed by representations of the anti-heroine. Could gender bias not be countered and neglected variables injected? Did the cattle plague, which scholars deemed the prime cause of millenarianism, not have gendered implications? Could research not illuminate whether Nongqawuse were a child, a maiden or a pregnant woman?

I tried following this route (Bradford 1996). But I became increasingly aware that I was inserting a revised image into a problematic framework: one constructed by those who had created the original disturbing portrait. Just as Africanist history cannot breathe within racist paradigms, so feminist history is stifled within frameworks created for non-feminist purposes. Adding women to extant paradigms, as scholars have repeatedly noted, is a flawed project; much broader issues need to be addressed.

A key limitation of the conventional Nongqawuse story is the narrow time span into which it is crammed. Since a teenager structures the period deemed relevant, this extends backwards, at best, to her childhood, then pivots around the nine months when she was active. Deep-rooted crises and preceding visionaries are of little interest. Yet only if she is positioned within a long line of influential seers grappling with comparable problems – and who began making similar prophecies decades before she was born – is she comprehensible. I departed, therefore, from periodisation revolving around an anti-heroine, and sought a much longer historical perspective.

Gendered blind spots constitute a second major problem. In standard accounts, we are directed towards fanciful female visions and an emasculating cattle epidemic – yet what of hyper-masculine arenas? What, in particular, of war? Throughout the time that Nongqawuse was active, the masculinist colonial state was preparing for violence. Virtually unnoticed in almost all accounts, warships, British regiments, and German mercenaries were pouring in. War threats were being made by officials on war-alert. Death of the land (*imfazwe*, war) meant that armed white men would attempt to eradicate homesteads from the face of the earth: burn homes, uproot crops, loot stock. Visionaries, consequently, had resonance when warning against planting crops that soldiers would destroy, or when urging self-consumption of resources that armed men

would steal. They also electrified audiences – who were surrounded by destitute defeated men – when proclaiming the arrival of an invincible black army. Accounts of a woman ‘luring’ a nation to death with fantastic promises are misleading when they fail to tell of a hyper-masculine colonial army preparing for scorched earth warfare, and fail to analyse the equally hyper-masculine black army which had arrived from over the sea. I became increasingly perturbed by the neglect of these competing masculinities. This is at odds with what has been argued of millenarian movements in general: at their ‘very heart’ stands ‘the new man’, and new ways of ‘defining the criteria by which the content of manhood is to be measured’ (Burridge 1969: 11).

Marginalisation of the voices of those most intimately connected to this movement constitutes a third problem. Vernacular sources, emanating from Nongqawuse’s black contemporaries, abound; they are of little interest in either popular or scholarly accounts. Praise poems discussing monstrous birth have thus fallen by the wayside, in favour of westernised gender stereotypes. Relevant sources, according to professional historians, derive overwhelmingly from people like themselves: educated white men speaking English. Two newspaper articles constitute ‘our only Xhosa-language primary source’ on Nongqawuse’s movement (Peires 2003: 387). If someone were ‘semi-literate, his letters are of little value as historical sources’ (Stapleton 1994: 229). I found, on the contrary, that numerous people more familiar with orality than literacy offered crucial insights; that Xhosa-language primary sources overflow and are extraordinarily rich; that nineteenth century historians writing in isiXhosa are more informative than many a modern scholar.

Vernacular voices, violent masculinities, a longer historical perspective: these were key in my attempts to construct a different framework. But I was pursuing a lonely and back-breaking path. There is a price to be paid for dissent from popular consensus: that activities should revolve around exhumation of a female corpse, which can then be exhibited, in varying attire, as exemplifying the evils of the *bhinqa*. I stumble as I walk away from this tourist attraction. I lose my way as I depart from a westernised highway. I remain baffled by many features of an anti-imperialist movement of the illiterate poor, who bequeathed few explanations for actions which were almost the last that many performed on this earth. I know only that I cannot breathe within the extant corpus of gender- and western-biased work.

What follows, then, is not a Nongqawuse story. It is but my attempt to indicate the value of a longer historical perspective, within a gendered paradigm, paying particular attention to themes and sources marginalised within orthodoxy. I have constructed it under the influence of an indigenous historical genre – praise poetry, which possesses discrete layers from which central themes gradually emerge – as well as visual sources, which evoke the domain of visionaries. Such aids, I found, were helpful, as I journeyed towards the time when a woman appeared on the coast, saying that men who constituted the heart’s desire had arrived, led by the Broad-Chested One.

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This 1752 map depicts the route of an expedition from Cape Town to Thembuland.

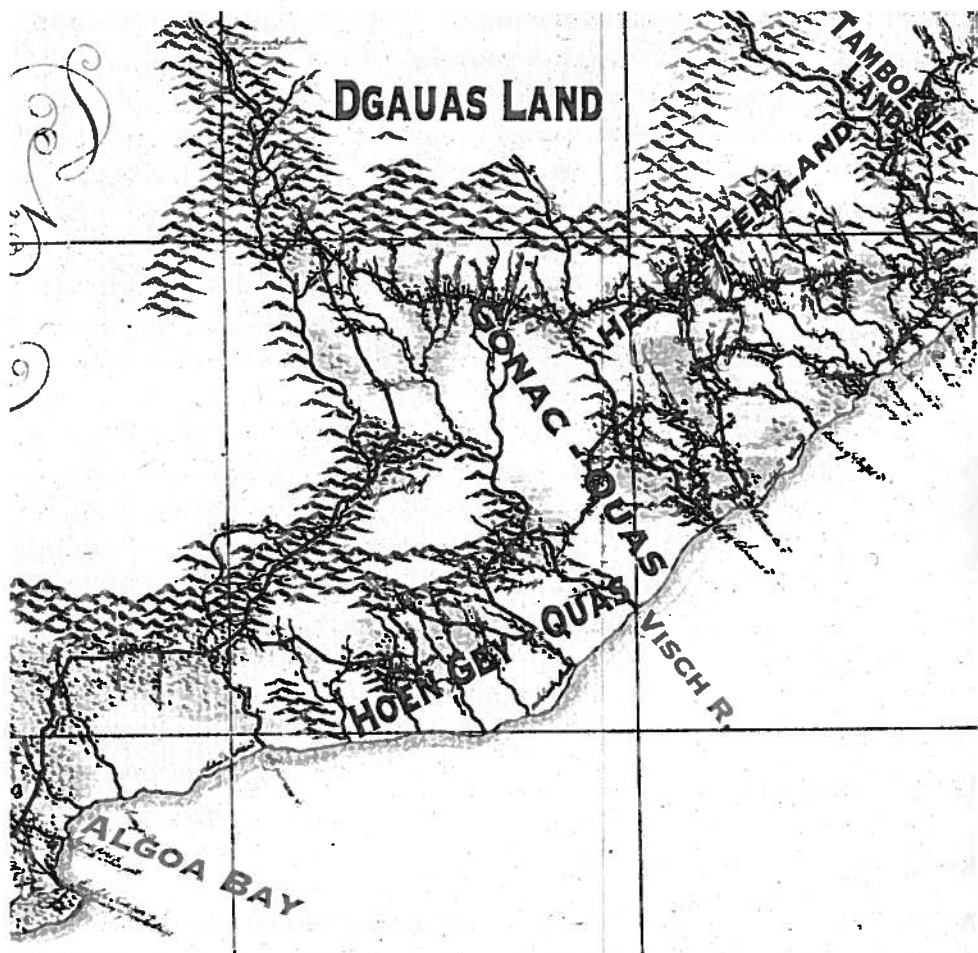
ns'obomvu

d dawn

century after the world's greatest trading company had colonised the southern tip of Africa, it dispatched an armed expedition east of Cape Town, seeking new sources of f. After travelling almost 200 miles in ox-wagons, the men reached Mossel Bay. Here is the last farm 'aan deese oostzyde van Africa by Christenen bewoond' ('inhabited by Christians on this east side of Africa') (Godée Molsbergen 1922: 272). They travelled on rough non-Christian Africa, passing two major bays, Algoa Bay being the easternmost e on the map above. Around here, winter rainfall, too low for crops, gave way to summer nfall and agrarian potential. In the transition belt, different ecosystems, economies and tures collided.

The largest label on the map, 'Het Bosjesman Land', referred to small communities ere women and children collected flora and small fauna, providing the bulk of bsistence. Male hunters killed, not least, cattle. Outsiders often gave them derogatory lective names ('Bushmen'). More complimentary was one name bestowed by their ighbours: 'oonondala', those present at creation, aboriginals.

Along the better-watered coast, women had, historically, provided most subsistence ough gathering *veldkos* (wild plants), herding sheep and milking cattle. They and

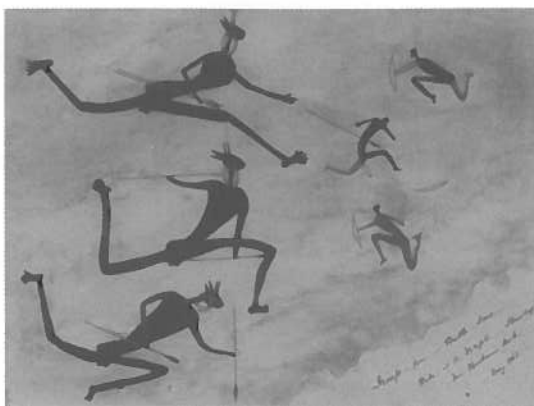


Detail from the map on page 51 showing the Fish River (Visch River), Xhosaland and Thembuland.

their stock-owning menfolk collectively called themselves 'Real People' (Khoekhoen). The expedition, however, met few but paupers, who had lost their stock to neighbouring warriors or robbers. Frontier zones typically enshrine masculine interests – and female pastoralists were disappearing. Hybrid lifestyles were emerging. The polity labelled 'Gonac-Quas' ('Foreign Men') was ethnically heterogeneous, following survival strategies such as working for richer neighbours.

Contained within the last quadrant on the right, second from the top (shown above), was the only country where cattle seemed abundant. The expedition crossed the Fish River. Xhosaland ('Het Caffer Land') began at the next marked river, and extended to the Kei, the last big river. Here and in neighbouring Thembuland ('Tamboegies Land'), women tilled the soil. The expedition had traversed numerous countries, distinguished less by different male activities than by distinctive women's work.

...



George Stow copied this painting in 1868, claiming it depicted amaXhosa hunting 'Bushmen' like game.

Many decades before the expedition's arrival, female gatherers living around the Kei River had encountered invaders from the east. Male hunters were in the vanguard. They were followed by male pastoralists. The immigrants slaughtered women and children, killed game, appropriated land and cattle, renamed rivers. Local opinions of these newcomers were encoded linguistically. They were called '//kosa', meaning 'the men who do damage', derived from the verb 'to destroy' (Harinck 1969: 152).

The newcomers seemingly adopted this name as a badge of pride, calling themselves 'amaXhosa'. They absorbed subordinates, ranging from wives from other polities, to 'Foreign Men', to shipwrecked Europeans. By 1752, this heterogeneous nation had established control over a heartland, as depicted on the map on page 52. But *emaXhoseni* (the place where amaXhosa are) had no set boundaries.

A patriarchal social order enhanced cohesion. Whatever their origins, women typically lacked independent access to land or stock, tilled the land, performed almost all the heavy manual labour, spoke a distinct 'women's language', and ate separately, of inferior food. Patriarchs controlled homesteads, cattle, politics, all intellectual domains bar healing, and violence. The last was of major concern to their neighbours. This nation, warned the frightened 1752 expedition, was more militarised than any encountered since leaving the Atlantic Ocean. AmaXhosa, warned their western neighbours, sought 'to pounce on foreign nations' (Godée Molsbergen 1922: 288). AmaXhosa, confirmed their eastern neighbour, were ravaging Thembuland. Hunter-gatherers in the north were often redefined as beasts, and pursued with genocidal intent.

Violence was not restricted to outsiders. Rulers (hailed as 'fathers' or 'elephants') might attack insubordinate 'dogs' (commoners). They also struggled for pre-eminence among themselves. The heroes of a nation colonising new territory were aggressive warrior-rulers. Its dominant currency was the spear. Weapons were virtually items of male dress. The name '//kosa' was well earned.



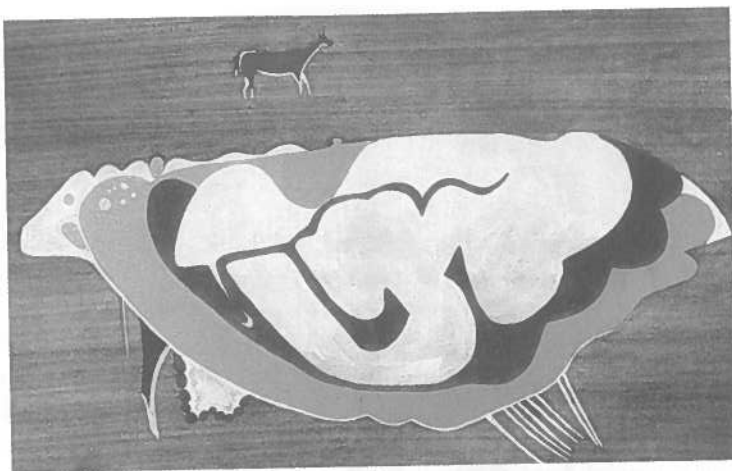
This anonymous rock art partially captures what many remembered about Nolutshungu: she gave birth, as a single woman, to a 'child of the stomach'.

The lives of almost all 'dogs' in the second half of the eighteenth century are lost to history, but one woman was long remembered. Nolutshungu originated far towards sun-rising (well to the east of Xhosaland), suggests one Xhosa biographer (Kaye nd). As a child, after the adults looking after her were killed, she fled westwards to Thembuland. When people here were scattered, she fled westwards *emaXhoseni*.¹

Here she encountered a custom: maidens would be press-ganged and compelled into sexual encounters with royalty and its clients (*uphundlo*). Nolutshungu hid. When finally flushed out, she had acquired a lover, Balala. But then she became heavy (pregnant). Balala failed to marry her. Normally, women possessed crucial allies in a patriarchal society: their fathers. But Nolutshungu had no father.

She bore this son, called him Magolo (Arse-holes), and left him to the care of his own father. She continued her journey towards sun-setting, entering the slave-owning Cape, where men calling themselves Lords (*Heren*) had their own versions of sexual violence. She began sounding a new note: '*yayimana isite imite umtana wenkosi*'; she constantly said she was pregnant with a child of a lord. On returning to Xhosaland, she was asked where she had met a man among whites. '*[A]kuko maxosa Emlungwini, mna ndimite umntana wenkosi*' ('There are no amaXhosa in whites' land, I myself am pregnant with a child of a lord') (Kaye nd: np).

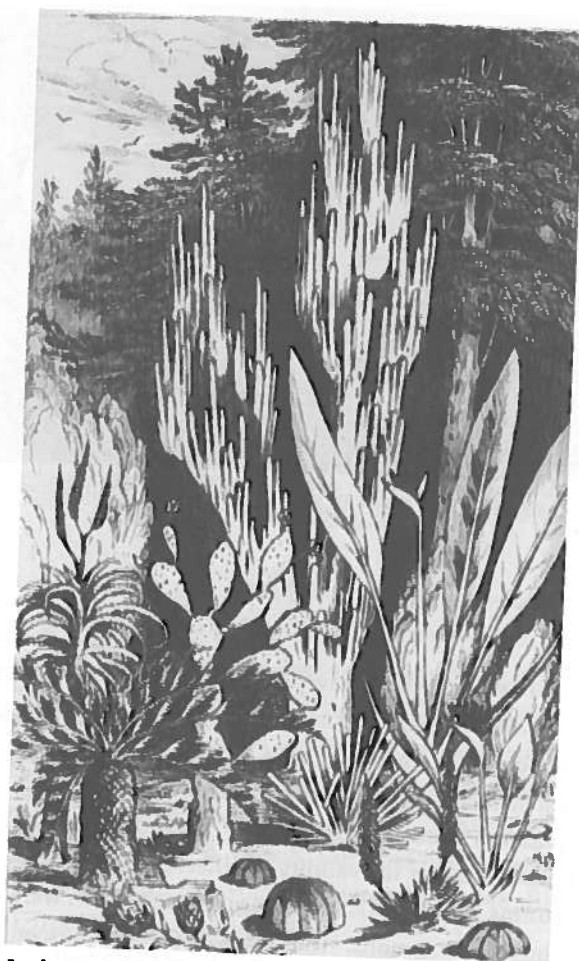
Nolutshungu bore this prince, called Makhanda (One who Pounds). She renounced him, it was said. She placed him in a trench in her home, for years, approaching him only to suckle. Women were expected neither to place infants in the earth, nor to bear sons without known fathers. '*[U]mntu ngumntu ngoka yise*' ('a person is a person through their father') ran popular belief (Rubusana 1911: 502). Although many things might be remembered about a fatherless woman who had traversed patriarchal worlds with little respect for female bodily autonomy, male narrators commonly focused on one feature: she had given birth, in transgressive ways.²



Indigenous people often saw the heavens through earthly lenses.
This depicts a 'rain-animal', bearing hail.

Men's spears had limitations: *izulu* (heaven, lightning) was unconquerable. About once every four years, serious drought occurred *emaXhoseni*. The rain-giving hole in the heavens, explained a queen mother, had been blocked by malevolent people.

According to scientific discourse, a warm current flowing down Xhosaland's coast collides with low-pressure systems originating in Antarctica, generating violent weather, with wild fluctuations. Whatever the validity of different explanations, rooted in different lifestyles, thunderstorms were spectacular. Storms *emaXhoseni* were compared to being encircled by ten thousand cannons. Tons of water could descend. Crops might be shredded by hail. Stock could die in their thousands. One woman had six members of her family struck by lightning at various times; three died. 'God (*Uhlanga*) has been amongst them,' people would say (Thompson 1962: 449). Although men often fought God, hurling spears, stones and curses at the heavens, victory proved elusive. A storm-god created scenes well captured in the apocalyptic pages of the Bible.



In characteristic frontier fashion, euphorbias and aloes typical of arid zones mingle with subtropical strelitzias.

In the centre of the image above is the *umhlontlo* (candelabra euphorbia). When the arms of euphorbias are wounded, they leak latex: severely irritant, often toxic, sometimes lethal. Aboriginals used one species to poison water and grass, in order to weaken game. AmaXhosa also acquired a reputation for manufacturing plant-based poisons (*ubuthi*), to kill human enemies. Dread of *ubuthi* suffused daily life; 'tasters' existed, since all food was potentially toxic. Fear of death from poison – like the vegetation in which it is rooted – stretches from earliest recorded Xhosa history until today.

Those who killed people in this way were deemed sorcerers. When illness struck, poisoner-sorcerers were prime suspects. When heaven's hole was blocked, their malevolence was suspected. Specialist shamans, claiming the powers of fearsome animals, popularised their ability to 'smell out' poisoners, who were not infrequently killed.

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This depiction of trapped game is imaginative, but captures the violence inherent in hunting.

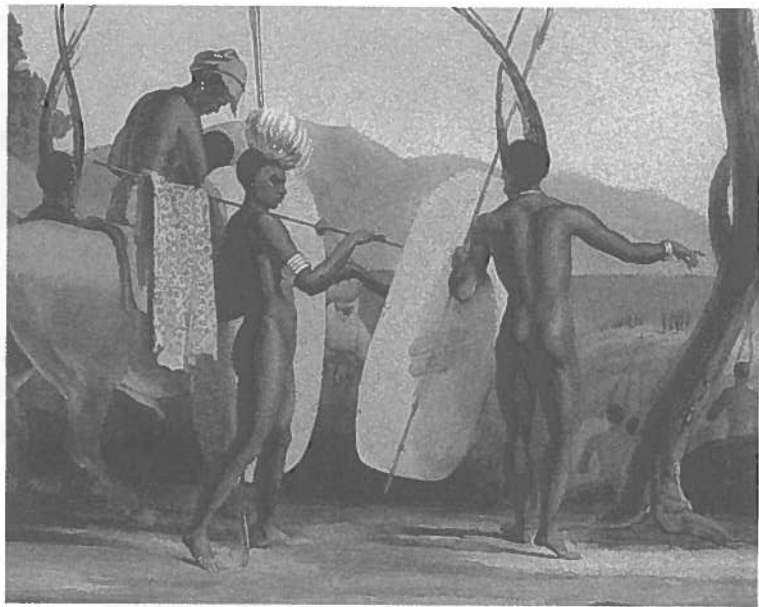
Until the early nineteenth century, hunting was at least as central to Xhosa masculinity as pastoralism. Royalty asserted rights over all cattle, deemed merely on loan to 'dogs'. Boys were largely responsible for livestock; men's imaginations were captured by wild animals. They were passionately fond of slaughtering game, using the same weapons as for killing people. Hunts could extend over months; animals were forced to plunge into pits, or encircled, sometimes with walls of flame.

Prowess in slaughter was advertised. Late eighteenth century men wore long antelope karosses. They adorned their arms with canines, claws, and, as a mark of distinction, ivory. Hair and heads were decorated with paws, plumes, bird skins, zebra or jackal headdresses. Until the early nineteenth century, venison was second only to milk as a staple. Although women ate game, wore minor animal products and were porters on hunts, slaughter was a male prerogative.

Major masculine arenas built on the hunting foundation. The sole martial training that existed rested on killing animals. Cattle were re-imagined as game: men cut their horns to resemble those of buck; those of appropriate colours were called 'black springbok', 'red springbok', 'female eland'. Royalty was linked with big game: a leopard skin kaross and, outside a Great Place, an elephant's ears and tail, were its insignia. Prestigious game products had to be surrendered to 'elephants'. Xhosa aristocracy, ran tradition, emerged when one Tshawe repudiated this obligation, overthrew his overlords, and established a new dynasty.

Tshawe's descendants ruled those who were colonising land west of the Kei River. But change was inherent in a society coupling heroism to blood. By the 1750s, wildlife was being killed faster than female animals could breed. By the 1820s, Xhosaland allegedly contained less game than anywhere else in South Africa. 'Men who do damage' excelled in plunder – but a red dawn had, perforce, to give way to another time.

...



Eighteenth and early nineteenth century European observers, including this artist, Samuel Daniell, often waxed lyrical about Xhosa men's virility, terming them muscular, tall, brave, the finest men ever seen.

Intlazane

Milking time, late morning

In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, poorer lower-ranking Xhosa peasants were on the move. Squeezed out of the heartland by war, lack of game and droughts, many were migrating towards sun-setting. On colonial maps, the Fish River marked the Cape's border. Thousands of peasants waded across it. They were land-hungry. Huge tracts had to be set aside for game; some 20 to 40 acres were needed to support one cow. These pastures were still being walked by women who milked cattle, but the newcomers saw no reason why female pastoralists should not become female cultivators within their own society.

Tiny numbers of hunter-pastoralists of European descent were advancing from the opposite direction. They coalesced around common denominators, calling themselves Boers (farmers) or 'Christians'. Men heavily outnumbered women, whose prime workplace was the home. This gender order shaped class and racial dynamics. Unable to work farms through family labour, Boers drew upon Khoekhoe descendants, accorded the colonial label of 'Hottentots'. One Clara, owning 177 sheep and 33 cattle, thus laboured on a Boer farm in 1798 (Giliomee 1989: 431).

Since the bankrupt Dutch company was here virtually non-existent as a colonial state, Christians were thrown on their own resources as they encountered Xhosa competitors for land. A frightened Swede was met by a group, 'robust and manly':

about one hundred, all men, and each of them armed with a few *hassagais* [spears], or a couple of *kirries* [clubs]. They marched, moreover, directly on towards our waggon, not with the careless gait of ordinary travellers, but with measured steps...with an almost affected pride and stateliness...they came towards us wedged up, as it were, into a close body. (Sparrman 1977: 193–4, 201)

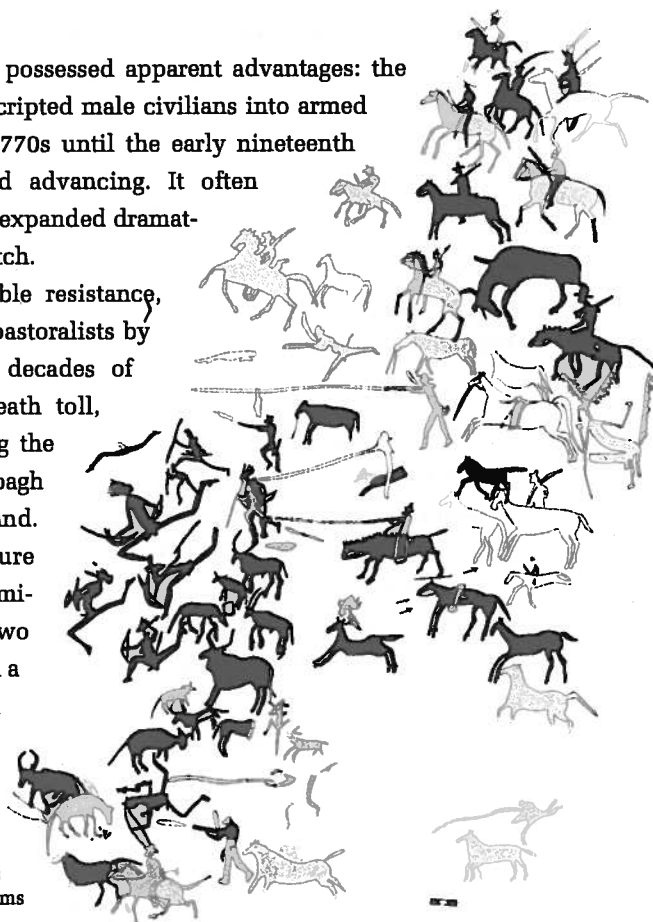
Such intimidation, available to male commoners on an everyday basis, was far more important than mass military mobilisation by royalty. If several thousand amaXhosa, with 15 000 cattle, encircled a Boer squatter, he could do little if they encroached on 'his' pastures. If Xhosa men descended on his farm, it was unwise to refuse their requests for hospitable sharing of stock, brandy, clothes. If slaves decided to flee and become amaXhosa, it was hard to retrieve them. Large groups of armed Xhosa men, summarised a lone magistrate, whose district was about the size of Portugal, could virtually do as they pleased. We suffer greatly, cried distraught Boers, 'from oppression by the heathens' (van der Merwe 1995: 245).

...

Boer men and their indigenous clients possessed apparent advantages: the gun, horse and commando (which conscripted male civilians into armed brotherhoods). Nonetheless, from the 1770s until the early nineteenth century, the colonial frontier stopped advancing. It often receded. A European colony, which had expanded dramatically for over a century, had met its match.

Aboriginal hunters offered implacable resistance, blocking the northward advance of all pastoralists by killing their stock. In 1807–10, after decades of merciless violence and a terrifying death toll, raids and counter-raids continued along the length of the northern frontier, from Tulbagh to the Mathole mountains in Xhosaland. Among pastoralists themselves, seizure rather than slaughter of cattle predominated. Mutual Xhosa–Boer robbery (two clashes have been elevated to 'wars') had a standard outcome, well described by a man who grew up in the Zuurveld (which extended from the Fish to the Nqweba/Sundays rivers):

This retracing of (disintegrating) rock art indicates why southern Africans frequently perceived firearms in terms of 'lightning'.



When our fathers, and the fathers of the Boors, first established themselves in the Zuurveld...they were brothers – until the herds of [amaXhosa] increased so as to make the hearts of the Boors sore. What these covetous men could not get from our fathers for old buttons, they took by force. Our fathers were men: they loved their cattle: their wives and children lived upon milk: they fought for their property...Our fathers drove them out of the Zuurveld: and lived there, because they had conquered it. There we were circumcised; there we got wives; and there our children were born. The white men hated us, but could not drive us away. (Pringle 1827: 74)

Firearms, then, were frightening, but not decisive. Even skilled men could fire only three times a minute, misfiring two out of five shots, with a range of perhaps 150 yards. Moreover, if water rendered ammunition damp, guns were useless. Africa's thunderstorms could defeat Europe's industries.

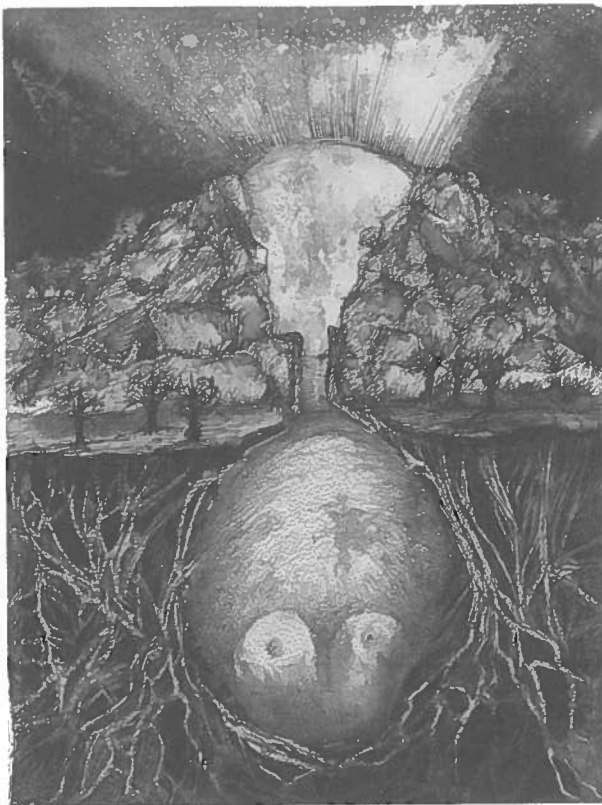
Links between storms and firearms were tightened by culture. As the image on page 59 suggests, guns were not symbols of industries that no one had seen: for many, they indicated that the powers of *izulu* had been tapped. Men with firearms were widely deemed to command lightning, thunder and hail. On the far right of the image is a person-animal: a shaman. When Christians armed with heaven's weapons thundered down on civilian spaces, opponents had every incentive to turn to their own shamans.

• • •

AmaXhosa, urged a colonial official around the turn of the century, should be banished to their ancestral home. He asked them about their origins. All he could learn, he lamented, was the following:

In the land in which the sun rises,
there was a cavern,
from which the first [amaXhosa],
and in fact All peoples,
as also the stock of every kind of animal,
came forth.
At the same time,
the sun and moon came into being,
to shed their light,
and trees, grass, and other plants
to provide food for man and cattle. (Alberti 1968: 13, lineation altered)

This earth-mother legend was pleasing, and useful. It thwarted colonial officials. It obscured sordid historical origins: as colonisers, dispossessing autochthons. It was more plausible than the biblical tale of a lone Father giving birth to the world – at least



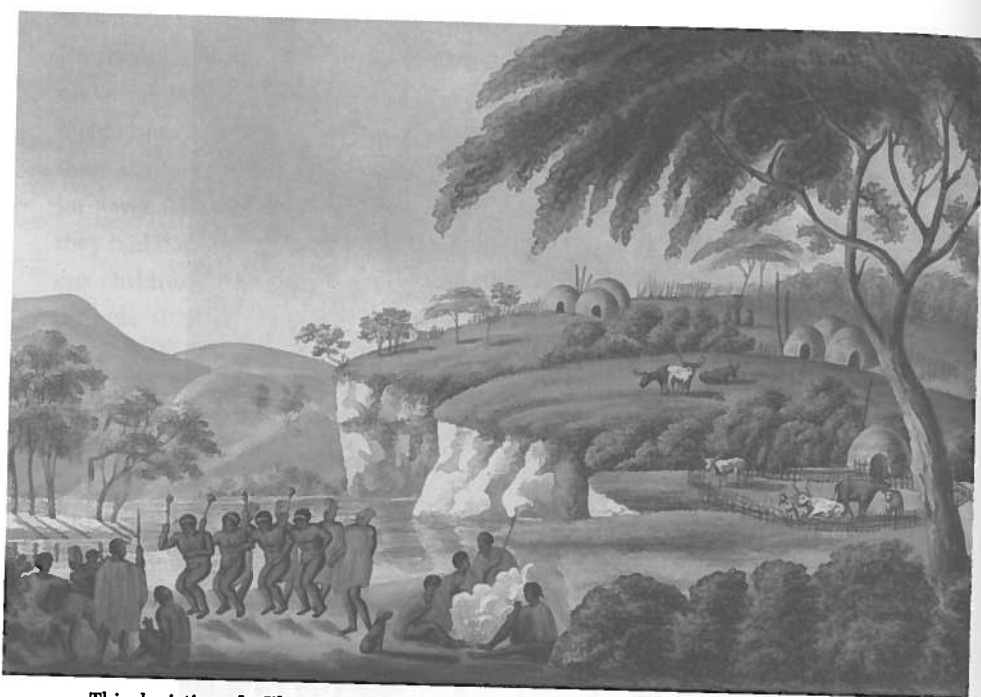
Jill Wenman, 'The Womb of Creation'

to peasants, whose lives revolved around the earth and female fertility. All her people, explained a Xhosa woman to a Christian, 'believed that the cattle came out of a hole of the Earth' (CWMA, J Read to LMS Directors, 9 April 1815).

Everyday culture reinforced indigenous knowledge. At the birth of each child, women both re-enacted and symbolically invoked humanity's first emergence from a dark cavern. (The image above suggests why an earth-mother legend has resonance worldwide.) When recounting history, Xhosa men often started with Creation. The cavern and a male Creator, they explained, shared a name, Hlanga, 'the Source'.³ Once all had emerged, the male Source took to the heavens, becoming closely linked with lightning, the sun, rain, the moon, stars. The dark female Source acted like a normal woman, preparing for rebirth. Everything on earth flourished in primeval luxuriance, underground. If an entrance were rediscovered, Eden might pour forth.

Deep pools were particularly promising as entrances to the female Source. River people (*abantu bomlambo*) inhabited them. Beneath the water, their dark herds walked on dry land, *eluhlangeni*, in the Source.

...



This depiction of a Xhosa homestead was sketched around 1803 by Paravicini de Capelli.

In 1809, the child destined to be the 'father' of the Xhosa nation for most of the nineteenth century was born, partaking of Scottish ancestry derived from his mother, Nomsa, a castaway's descendant. It was high noon. *EmaXhoseni*, having expanded both westward and eastward, had reached its greatest extent ever. A guesstimated 40 000 or 50 000 peasants – double the Cape's white population – were now between Algoa Bay and the Mbashe River. Others were scattered further afield, on farms and in independent settlements.

Otherwise expressed, when Rhili kaHintsas was born to the Great House east of the Kei River, half his nation was thought to be west of the Fish, within colonial borders. They could not leave, peasants would politely explain. They had been driven west by drought or war. They said 'they were so happy among the Christians, and that there was no better country for hunting' (Lichtenstein 1928: 409). Their most influential leader, Ndlambe kaRharhabe, had one Great Place near today's Alexandria. The second most important *inkosi* was pasturing stock around Plettenberg Bay. A third had trekked to Cape Town, to investigate settling there. Others were north of the Gqili/Orange River. The dominant frontier power was clearly continuing to expand.

If one rode from Uitenhage for five hours eastward, one might everywhere see homesteads resembling those in the image above. Rivers (and river people) were always nearby. Diets pivoted around cows which had recently given birth: the importance of female fecundity was inculcated at every meal. Commoners' control over cattle had increased in tandem with greater distance from the Great and Right-Hand Houses. Not a cow could be

milked without their permission, faraway royalty continued to assert – but patriarchal rights, in practice, were vested in the oldest men of extended families. As control shifted downwards, cattle became the pivot around which commoner masculinity revolved.

Crops sometimes flourished in small gardens alongside rivers, but are absent from this illustration. During drought or war, three years might pass with zero agriculture. Women's cultivation ran a very poor third to men's pastoralism and hunting as a contribution to subsistence. Not for nothing had female pastoralists avoided tilling poor soil subject to low rainfall. Their descendants constituted a large minority of the Xhosa diaspora, which leaned towards minimal cultivation rather than the extensive agriculture in better-watered zones.

Xhosa wives were thus distinct from most of their peasant counterparts in southern Africa: their agrarian workloads were lighter. To be sure, contributing eight to ten children to peasant labour forces involved recurrent risky childbirth, and heavy domestic labour. Nonetheless, wives tasted the leisure and flirtations that occupied much of their husbands' time. Most commoners were in monogamous marriages. As breadwinners, husbands could ill afford to feed multiple families – and every head of cattle depicted in the image opposite would depart were another wife to be added to this homestead.

Poorer lower-ranking people had clearly transcended the limitations of a red dawn. By migrating, intimidating or absorbing outsiders, multiplying their numbers and their herds, they had moved into milking time, into high noon. Definitions of manhood were shifting away from plunder: 'men' were patriarchs who controlled cattle, fed their dependents on milk, defeated those who threatened their breadwinning roles. Subordinated women, too, benefited as their polity continued its triumphant expansion. Xhosa wives led less burdensome existences than many of their counterparts, and the high value placed on female fertility was symbolised by their genesis story, where 'men who do damage' had been displaced by a womb.

...

Ukujika kwelanga

The turning of the sun (early afternoon)

As a new century opened, novel tidings arrived on the eastern frontier. Following the industrial and French revolutions, Europe was engulfed in war for almost 25 years; poorer people sought spiritual aid for cataclysmic times. Millenarianism became relatively mainstream. (In London, an ex-domestic servant, denouncing male villainy, acquired some 100 000 supporters as she declared herself the bride of Christ, pregnant with the Messiah.) Since vigorous efforts were made to warn the rest of the world that the apocalypse was nigh, humble men imbued with millenarianism began arriving in southern Africa as missionaries. Among them was a *déclassé* Dutch army doctor who,



Dr Johannes van der Kemp, Xhosaland's first missionary, declared himself a messenger of the Great Chief of Heaven and Earth. He was given a less reverent name: Nyengana, 'bald head in front'.

days after his wife and daughter drowned, believed he had physically encountered Christ. In 1799, Johannes van der Kemp was struggling towards Xhosaland, to become its first teacher (as missionaries were termed).

The ferocious third frontier war (1799–1803) was engulfing the eastern Cape. Desperate farm labourers, allied with some members of the Xhosa diaspora, were attempting to reclaim ancestral land. Van der Kemp refused to arm himself. Only in self-defence, he preached, could Christians kill. On reaching the relative peace of the Xhosa heartland, he said he had been sent by the Great Chief of Heaven and Earth, to prepare people for Christ's Second Coming. His impact was minimal. AmaXhosa, he mourned, were a nation of atheists.

Having fled Xhosaland, he and James Read, a British millenarian, were allowed to establish a 'Hottentot institution'. The first eastern Cape school (as mission stations were termed) was established in a war zone, near Uitenhage, surrounded by Boer farms and Xhosa settlements. Called Bethelsdorp, it was nicknamed Bedelaarsdorp, Beggars' Village. The teachers married racially oppressed women, shared the poverty of their supporters, and pioneered two missionary traditions. First, Christianity was not a racial monopoly, as the entire preceding history of Europe and the Cape suggested. Second, school people should either abstain from war, or support Christians.

But Cape Christians, the teachers declared, were not true Christians. Many weapons could be used against 'wicked' Christians: politics, courts, the media, international and almighty support. Apocalyptic divine vengeance on colonists – for shedding native blood, appropriating their land, treating blacks worse than Pharaoh did the children of Israel – could be anticipated. This was exceptionally good news to many desperate dispossessed people. Violence having failed, traumatised descendants of 'Real People' flocked to Bethelsdorp. Poverty, however, compelled many ardent converts 'to wander about the country, working for their bread...they are, by necessity, itinerant preachers' (Philip 1969 Vol 1: 110). The most important disseminators of radical millenarianism were not European teachers, but indigenous casualties of the advance of colonisers, from the west and from the east.

...

Around the start of the new century, Nolutshungu returned to the Cape, with Balala, who was seeking work. One farm on which they lived, together with their eldest son and two daughters, was near Uitenhage. Makhanda joined them as a youth, after a conflict relating to his fatherless status. '[K]uba engenyana kubani,' as the son of no one; he had



Samuel Daniell's 'Boors Returning from Hunting' suggests both the subordination of black labourers and their acculturation.

been overloaded with portage when hunting, despite his desire for an antelope for himself (Ntsikana 1888a: 13).

The price of becoming the son of someone, however, was farm labour. He learned Dutch. He heard tidings from nearby Bethelsdorp. The rising of the dead, at the last sunset, impressed him. He was also exposed to heterogeneous communities of *izi-alam* (poor people, derived from the Dutch 'arm'), and new masculine skills. As the image above suggests, men of Khoekhoe descent often accompanied employers on hunts. Forbidden to waste bullets, they were easily the Cape's best sharpshooters.

Makhanda was a contemporary of Shaka kaSenzangakhona (born c.1787), who was to found a formidable military kingdom further east. Both were sons of single mothers, scorned as sons of no one, yet allegedly sons of lords. Their class positions diverged. In the west, the lord's child grew up as a farm labourer in a European colony.

As Europe's bloodshed became global in scope, London snatched the Cape as a military base. In 1806, 11 British regiments, supplemented by the Cape Regiment, occupied Africa's tip. The army, in other words, was almost as large as the Cape's entire adult white male population. Officers flowed into the state; economic activities targeted soldiers; in 1808, the Cape Regiment consumed a third of colonial revenue.



'Three shades (The Bully Boys I, II, III).' Wilma Cruise created this sculpture in memory of Nicholas Cruise, killed by a bomb while working for an anti-militarist organisation in apartheid South Africa.

In 1808–09, this militarised state began implementing projects beyond the capabilities of a Dutch business firm. First, divide and rule was pursued. AmaXhosa were to be segregated in their 'own' country. The possibility of a broad anti-colonial alliance, emergent in the third frontier war, was to be averted. Second, since Boers were forbidden to employ Xhosa labourers, and blocked from buying new slaves, their labour shortages were addressed. The colonial state lent its weight to criminalising the free movement of 'Hottentots', in order to immobilise them on farms, as bonded labour.

Attention was first turned to Xhosa farm workers and outlying peasant settlements. By the end of 1809, thousands had been herded east of the *de facto* border, the Nqweba River. Like Nolutshungu, many were long-standing Cape residents. 'To my country?' said one man to his Boer employer. 'This is my country. I have been fourteen years in your service, you are my father, your wife is my mother, I have never been in [Xhosaland] except to bring back your cattle; I will have no other country' (MacLennan 1986: 61). He was flogged and forced to leave.

The vulnerable were targeted: not dense peasant settlements. Rather than risk war with Xhosaland, in the midst of global bloodshed, authorities preferred to cede occupation rights up to the Nqweba River. But a cycle of masculine violence had begun. As farm workers were extruded from the west, so peasant communities aggressively settled around Boer farms in the east. *Imfazwe yeMida* (War of the Boundary Lines) effectively began in 1809: not on battlefields, but in domestic arenas, involving intimidation, personalised violence, theft, murder, arson. By late 1811, only one house occupied by whites existed east of Uitenhage. Some 500 farmhouses had been burned.

The question had arisen, declared outraged British officials, as to who was to possess about a third of the Cape Colony. Boers, with their dismal history of defeat, were not acting in 'a manly manner' (Giliomee 1966: 336). '[U]nless a sufficient force is immediately sent to the aid of this part of the colony it must fall, and I shall not be surprised to see the Kaffre Nation extend itself within a short distance of Cape Town' (1966: 334). In 1811–12, almost 2 000 men were mobilised, two-thirds being soldiers (mostly brown men hustled into the Cape Regiment, deemed useful allies against their historic enemies). These exemplars of imperial manhood lined the Nqweba River to drive a guesstimated 15 000 women and children, and 5 000 men, back to their heartland.

This time, the local men at the cutting edge of violence were backed by the colonial state and resources, commanded by a veteran of global warfare, and ordered to target civilian spaces. They were to descend on all homesteads, such as that in the image on page 62, and eradicate them from the face of the earth. After a couple of weeks, after frontline peasants had lost 2 500 cattle and their *inkosi* had been assassinated while asleep, Ndlambe led his followers in precipitate flight back to the heartland. Their crops and homes were destroyed. The guerrilla war of *bittereinders* (remaining militants) was crushed: 'burnt all their Kraals, their plantations cut down and destroyed, many of their people shot, several Hundreds of their women and children taken and sent prisoners to Colonel Graham' (CO 2613, G Fraser to Colonial Secretary, 31 July 1818). The expropriated terrain was placed under military occupation. At its heart lay new military headquarters, with new homes, named Graham's Town, after the victorious British commander.

Imfazwe yeMida (1809–12) was a turning point in Xhosa and frontier history. On colonial estimates, half the nation had been uprooted. The entire Cape had been placed out of bounds. No longer were amaXhosa expanding towards sun-setting, as they had been doing for centuries. They were now retreating, towards sun-rising. No longer were their menfolk the terror of surrounding nations. They had met their match, in brown soldiers and 'Witte zeemenschen (*Engelschen*)' (de Kock 1965: 80). More precisely, they had barely attempted to confront 'white sea people', since protection of patriarchal property had loomed larger than valour. Having shifted from martial towards pastoralist definitions of masculinity, men had chosen to protect their herds rather than fight over land.

The first mass forced removals in South African history culminated in the creation of two distinct countries, divided by a porous Berlin wall: the Fish River, guarded by 27

military posts. Women were permitted to cross this border. Any Xhosa man found west of it risked being shot. What had altered, summarised one Englishman, was this: 'Under the Dutch they were plundered, and oppressed by the boors; under the English by the Government itself' (Pringle 1827: 69).

The sun, then, had turned. Due, ultimately, to revolutions in Europe, the balance of power had swung against Africans on a distant frontier. But reversing this trend remained possible. Millenarianism had been exported along with militarism. This new religious weapon, capable of inspiring commitment far greater than that associated with secular ideologies, was about to be deployed.

Emalanga

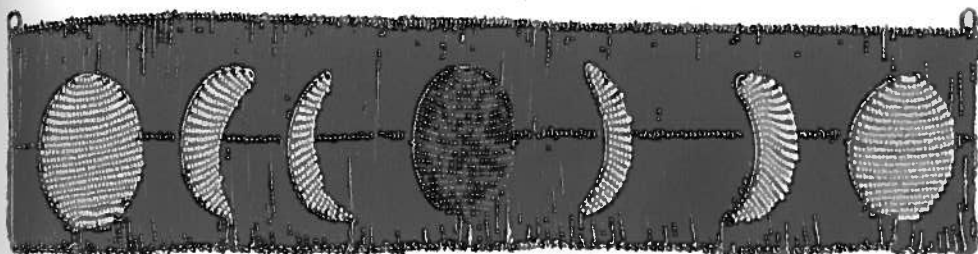
In the afternoon

In 1814, a millenarian wind began gusting through the frontier, lasting for five years, until 1819. It originated at 'schools', after their secular attempts to limit murderous colonial violence had largely failed. When 'school people' were then squeezed economically, to drive them onto farms, they intensified their own spirituality and, armed with missionary documents giving them right of movement, criss-crossed the eastern Cape. Unless they ran for refuge to Christ, black audiences were warned, they would perish. This had resonance. A 'great awakening' swept through desolate terrain.

This had three significant features. First, at a time of intensified bondage, many favoured spiritual treasures which masters were unable to touch. As one convert informed her baas (male employer), 'You have now...my body, but not my Soul, that belongs to me, or rather to Jesus, my Saviour' (CWMA, Read to LMS Directors, 24 August 1815). Second, almost any male (including a nine-year-old boy) could summon public meetings and preach. Democratisation enhanced accessibility: she now realised, reported a joyous Xhosa woman, that Christ understood isiXhosa. It also fuelled innovations. According to one soldier-preacher, polygyny was permissible; reading from the Bible was not; the 'born again' should hop.

Third, this 'great awakening' had strong millenarian overtones. 'Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him,' ran the biblical text favoured by one evangelist (CWMA, Report of the Mission at Bethelsdorp for 1815). Visions of the crucified Christ burgeoned. Startled people, confronted with midnight processions of hymn singers, leapt out of their homes, thinking the Last Day had come. 'Beggars' Village' was termed Paradise, where inhabitants awaited God's return. Millenarianism had been successfully transplanted, from war-ravaged Europe to a war-ravaged African frontier.

...



Multiple deaths and rebirths – in domestic, environmental, cultural, military and international domains – surround Makhanda's rise to fame. These are symbolised by Eddie Dube's 'Inyanga idliwe (The moon was eaten up)'.

The name of one preacher was soon on many lips: a man *unesithunzi* (with an aura). He had an imposing masculine presence. Burly, handsome and well over six feet tall, he towered over everyone but Boers. He possessed remarkable liver (courage). Eloquent, speaking at least one African and one European language, he had wide-ranging intellectual interests, extending to Britain's Constitution. Men often had a dozen praise names commemorating their characteristics. His included Langa (Sun) and Mntwana (Child, Prince).

After being forcibly returned to Xhosaland, Nolutshungu had entered a female-dominated profession, becoming a renowned *igqirha* (shaman), while Makhanda underwent rebirth, becoming an adult man. Having been circumcised by a spear-wielding man, and given his first spear, he abandoned her. He refused to eat food she or others prepared: it was defiled with their sins. His relationships with men were also fraught. This newcomer from farms, now wandering through the veld, was unable to use a spear, it was said.

Then he, too, saw the crucified Christ. He appeared 'under the name of the nations father' (CWMA, Read to LMS Directors, 24 August 1815). Otherwise expressed, an isolated outcast had found an almighty Father. Bloodshed should end, said the bleeding patriarch. Men must lay down their spears. A sign was promised, as confirmation. The moon, announced Makhanda, would be eaten up. As new year began and Europe's wars finally ended (June 1815), the full moon collapsed into a crescent, turned the colour of blood, and was totally eclipsed. Then a reborn white sliver burgeoned into a full moon.

This echoed many other deaths and rebirths, and was the latest in a series of disturbing phenomena since the start of *Imfazwe yeMida*. Almost unprecedented earthquakes had rocked the Cape's capital and military headquarters in 1809 and 1811. Amid terror of annihilation, racially oppressed soldiers had flocked towards missionaries. Then the sun was eaten up (1811). An 1813 great flood swept away at least one Fish River military post; vicious storms the following year ruined many more. Now the full moon had died. Disturbances in the natural world are classic catalysts of millenarianism – and Makhanda, from the first, was tightly linked to them.

A bloody moon did not, however, win immediate acceptance for his condemnation of spears. He was instead deemed mad, and threatened with incineration. Christ, he declared, had delivered him. He sent a message to Bethelsdorp, begging for a white teacher and for Dyani Tshatshu, who was being groomed as Xhosaland's first black missionary. There was no response. His request was being directed to the pinnacle of the colonial state, since it breached cold war principles.

To the astonishment of his compatriots, Makhanda then crossed into the forbidden land. In Graham's Town he found, as his visions foretold, a servant of Christ who lacked two teeth. Where was his spear, asked military authorities. His 'Lord had taught him that it was a bloody weapon, and that he must throw it away', he replied (CWMA, Read to LMS Directors, 5 January 1816). He was allowed to receive instruction from Christ's toothless servant: an ex-painter who, as army chaplain, was baptising racially oppressed soldiers flocking into the 'great awakening'.

After spending some four months in this Dutch chaplain's home, Makhanda became known as a convert. He may have been among the first baptised Xhosa Christians – and had certainly undergone the requisite ecstatic conversion and instruction. On walking home, soldiers ordered him to cross the border early. He had first, said Makhanda, to ask his *Inkosi* for grace for the day. A white sergeant ordered him to be shot. You 'may kill my body but cannot take my soul that will have a most glorious place', he responded. But, were the sergeant now to die, 'your soul will go to the burning flames' (CWMA, Read to LMS Directors, 5 January 1816).

Having displayed a hallmark of his entire career – fearless resistance, rooted in religious conviction – Makhanda began preaching. '*Yizani nonke, dinixelele indaba zoyihlo wenu*' (Come ye all, that I may tell you news of your father) (Bennie 1839: 93). Their Father, he said, wanted the land to be put right before it could prosper. Bloodshed, theft and fornication – including royalty's sexual practices, like multiple wives, mistresses, seizure of maidens – were taboo. When the first man had been created, he explained, God 'took a Rib from him, and made for him one wife, and if he had seen that more was necessary he would have made him more' (CO 2603, Read to J Cuyler, 18 May 1816). The army chaplain's pupil, claiming to be following in van der Kemp's footsteps, was popularising a patriarchal deity familiar to Europeans.

Women, the mainstay of all teachers, found his message appealing. They were being invited into a world where the sexes mingled, subject to rules which curbed male privileges and gave women opportunities. A Bethelsdorp woman was among Makhanda's disciples; she read God's book to them. Called 'Praying amaXhosa', they continued to bombard Bethelsdorp with requests for teachers. Female disciples walked some 200 miles, to Uitenhage and back, praying *en route*.

...



'Refugees' (anonymous)

In this eastern outpost of a 'great awakening', evangelists addressed a particular audience: refugees from the country of Christians. Crammed into a narrow belt in south-western Xhosaland – and separated by blood from the head of Xhosaland's Right-Hand House, Ngqika kaMlawu, whose subjects in the north epitomised traditional martial masculinity – their fortunes had plummeted. Their political 'fathers' were shadows of their former selves; commoners were restlessly shifting from one overlord to another. Famine prevailed for a year after their exodus. For the rest of the decade, crippling drought occurred once every two years. Game was almost non-existent. Many wore sheepskins, ate a meatless diet. For about eight months of every year, the exceptionally sour pastures to which they were confined had the nutritional value of sawdust, or worse, since cattle sickened and died. The scarcity of pastures, the lack of water, the paucity of cattle and game, astonished an 1816 observer. He wondered how large numbers survived.

Theft and beggary constituted men's solutions, but women were intensifying agriculture. As crippled masculine legs gave way, women were expanding back-breaking work, for nine months each year. Yet the dry heavens undercut their efforts. In the heart of every homestead, beneath the cattle kraal, lay a subterranean granary. But while this echoed the cosmic womb, it was frequently empty. Moreover, as intensive

agriculture was added to pregnancy and domestic drudgery, overloaded women were inducing abortions by poisoning themselves.

Then a charismatic outsider appeared. He was communicating with everyone's Father. He was bending colonialism and the heavens to his will. He was brushing aside lethal weapons. '[U]mkontw' awungeni' ('the spear does not pierce him') ran his praises (Ntsikana 1888a: 13). Commoners flocked to his meetings; a thousand people might attend a Sunday service. When investigated by Ndlambe, his chief, the preacher revealed the source of his powers. He was not to be called the son of Balala; he was the son of the Great Lord of Heaven and Earth.

So popular was this prince, and so weak were rulers, that the elderly Ndlambe and his embattled allies adopted him into their own circles. Commoners saluted him as a chief, with a praise name capturing the ambiguities: *A! Nxele!* (Hail! Left-handed Man!) By mid-1816, he was deemed one of the four most powerful rulers in all Xhosaland. Certain aristocrats denounced him as an upstart, but he asserted superiority over them all. '[Z]onke inkosi mazibambelele kum, ukuze zibe nobukosi' ('let all rulers cling to me, so that they retain the power to rule') (Bennie 1839: 94).

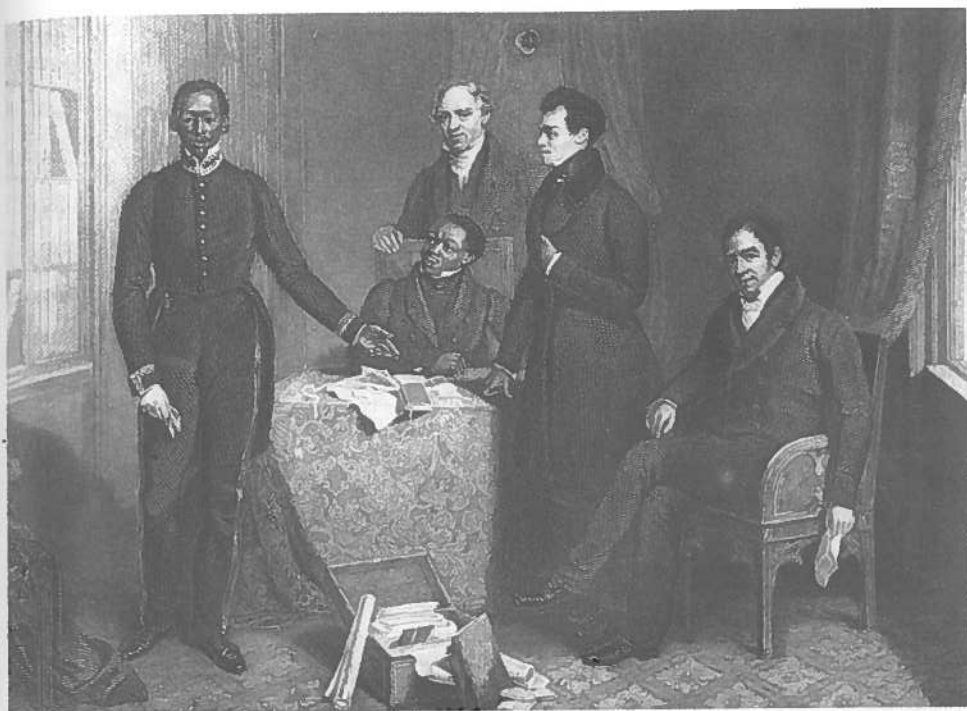
Within a year of his vision, an ex-farm labourer had experienced gravity-defying upward mobility. Makhanda, in his patchwork kaross, had been borne upwards by popular acclaim, as he demonstrated startling powers in a chaotic world: over colonialism, the heavens, royalty. What participants in the broader 'great awakening' would make of this son of God, however, remained to be seen.

...

A missionary-cum-spy, decided officialdom in 1816, would be useful in Xhosaland. Bethelsdorp evangelists, including Andries Stoffel (seated in the centre of the image opposite) and Read (standing in the centre), were permitted to cross the border. Initially, they were rapturously welcomed as the fulfilment of Makhanda's prophecies. Sixteen years earlier, Xhosaland's first teacher had struggled to make a single convert. Susceptibility to Christianity, noted Read, had soared due to defeat, poverty and Makhanda.

Christianity, however, was open to different interpretations. Makhanda's preaching, in missionary eyes, was defective. He had 'a most strange notion of his birth, as derived from the same mother as Christ' (Read 1818: 283). Christ's younger brother was beyond the missionary pale. The new house of God was erected in enemy terrain, near Ngqika, under a British carpenter (suspected of spying) and Dyani Tshatshu (standing on the left.)

Political antagonisms were promptly overlaid with religious hostility. Makhanda, too, found his competitors defective. '*Babetela ubawo abelungu*' ('whites nailed down our father' [to the cross]). God's Book proved whites' predilection for blood. '*Tina maxosa asinatyala enkosini; abelungu benetyala, bafuna ukusulela kuti numhla*' ('we amaXhosa are not guilty before the lord; whites being guilty, they now want to defile us') (Bennie 1839: 100). Trying to atone for their crime, they placed their heads on the



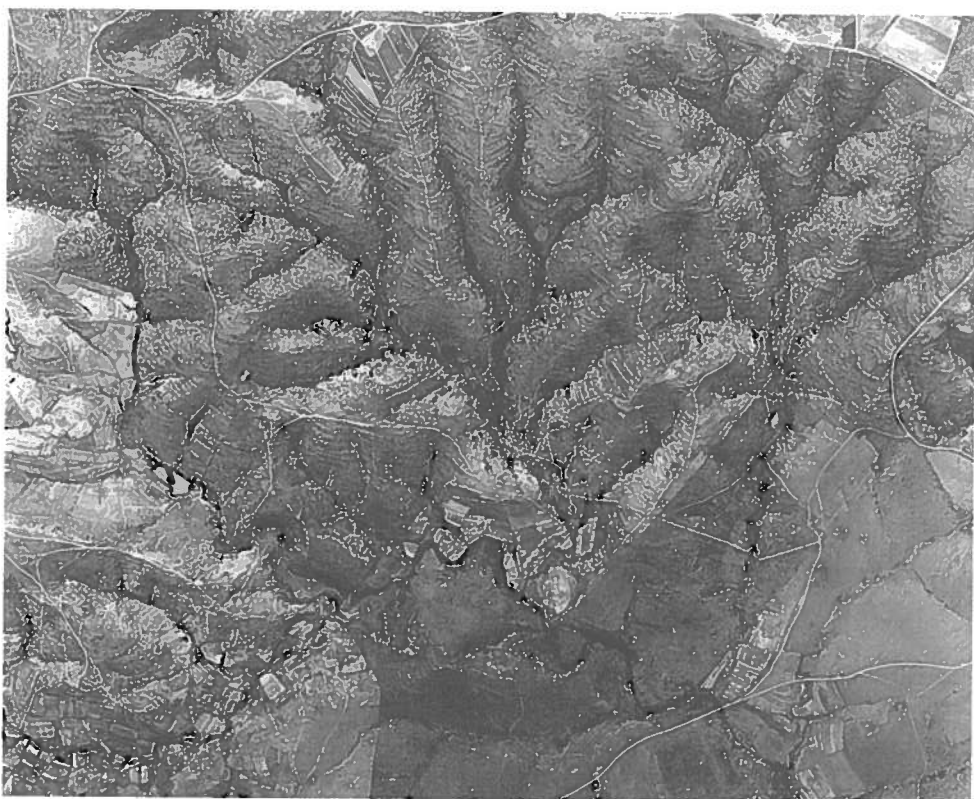
This depicts leading evangelists giving evidence in London in 1835–36.

ground and uttered meaningless words. But their liturgy made the innocent physically sick. God should rather be worshipped by dancing, beautification with cosmetics (ochre), making love and multiplying, so that innocent blacks filled the world. This politico-religious controversy was of great interest, and even royalty swung towards a son of the soil. He embraced Makhanda's religion, declared Maqoma, Ngqika's influential son, since prayer was unnecessary and seizure of maidens permissible.

Makhanda's new-found enthusiasm for male sexuality and female fertility had personal roots. He, a married man, had impregnated Ndlambe's niece, and been coerced into marriage. Initially, such was his distress that he visited the 'school', saying he had come as a child to be set right, having broken his Father's ban on multiple marriages. There was now starvation, he glumly declared. God's wife lived in heaven's reservoir. When she turned her face from sinners, no rain fell (CWMA, J Williams to LMS Directors, 7 August 1817).

In the eyes of westernised men, a bigamist was constructing an extravaganza. Moreover, not only was he forced to wed a princess, he also married two aboriginal women. The mission establishment surveyed a man who broke their rules, denounced whites as murderers, spoke of 'the despised nation (the Hottentots)' – and abandoned him to his own resources (Read 1818: 283).

...



This is a bird's-eye view of one side of the watershed on which Makhanda lived.

Makhanda's Great Place was located on a watershed, near the Mgwangqa River and today's Ngqushwa (Peddie). He overlooked a curvaceous, feminised landscape, through which sinuous streams wound towards the sea. His patriarchal status was enhanced by councillors. His chief councilor, who rivalled Makhanda in masculine appearance and oratory, was the Zuurveld refugee who revered fathers as *men*.

Location in an African environment accelerated convergence with popular spirituality. Where did his Lord live, people asked. '[I]*semhlabeni zantsi*' ('in the earth below and also in water') he replied (Bennie 1839: 94). This accorded with indigenous knowledge of the underworld and river people. Once a life-giving womb had been incorporated into sacred geography, Christian ideas about the afterlife became comprehensible. Long were Makhanda's words remembered: '*nina niso abantu bayafa abafi baya kulonkosi*' (you yourselves say people die, they do not die, they go to the Lord's natal home) (Kaye nd: np). '*Abantu bapantsi komhlaba, bayakuvuka*' ('the people are beneath the earth, they will arise') (Ntsikana 1888a: 13). These Christian precepts had previously made little headway, but a patriarch with four wives and five infants, promoting fertility as a form of worship, disseminated them with ease. He linked them to a cosmic womb, used the familiar 'Hlanga' as a god-name, allowed it to be thought

that he had risen from the underworld, and insisted on people being buried underground, with key possessions, linking them spatially to the female Source.

If deities were increasingly diverging from those of Europe, god-names widened the gap. Missionaries favoured unfortunate nomenclature. 'Thixo' (God) was largely used in Xhosaland as an exclamation when sneezing. By contrast, Makhanda's names underlined creative powers: 'Dal'idipu' (Creator of the Deep) was particularly favoured. God's Great Son also had praise names. 'You call him Jesus Christ. I call him Taay,' Makhanda informed a missionary (Mostert 1992: 432). A particularly masculine name for Christ also circulated: Sifuba-sibanzi, the Broad-Chested One.

'Dal'idipu' (*dali + diep*) was a crossover name symbolising some of Makhanda's most significant contributions to Xhosa religion and history. Linguistically, it stitched an African to a European language. Semantically, it drew the fearsome ocean, mastered by 'sea people', into a landed world. Makhanda was an outstanding *bricoleur*, creating memorable syntheses from elements previously deemed separate. He sutured, in particular, the cosmos to the cross. The sea, sun, moon, storms, cliffs, rivers, cattle, trees, grass, shells: all were accorded sacred significance. Lightning was to be averted by crying 'zulu lika Tayi!' ('lightning of Christ!'). When crossing rivers, his converts saluted their underworld Lords: 'A. Tayi! A. Dalidip!' (Ntsikana 1888a: 13). Sacrifices and purification rituals were welded onto these practices. Van der Kemp's most memorable achievement had been to demonstrate that prayer could produce storms, but Makhanda's cosmology extended far beyond this.

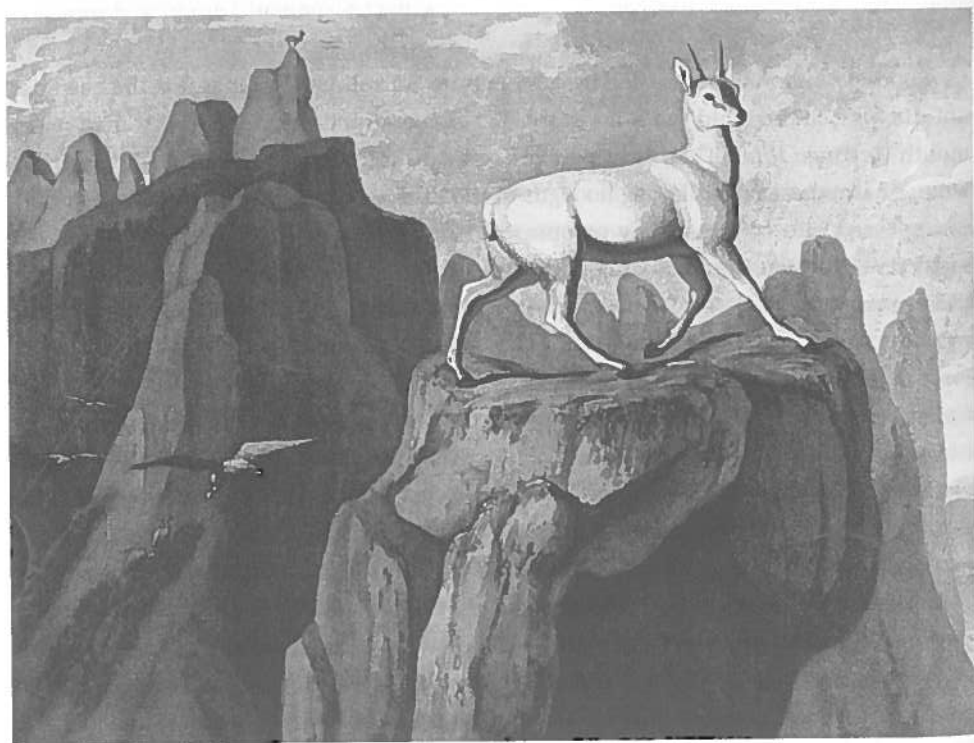
Rooting religion in nature and broader culture consolidated tidings that the dead did not die – since they told the same story. The moon structured calendars; it died every month (*inyanga ifile*). Then it was reborn, grew to fullness, and again died. In spring, women buried seeds displaying no signs of life. If rain fell, crops sprouted. Caterpillars disappeared into cocoons; they reappeared with wings; one such creature structured maidens' initiation into womanhood. Rooted in nature's subsoil, peasant culture was permeated with themes of death, metamorphosis, rebirth – and Makhanda, himself recently reborn, was but adding another strand to common knowledge.

He also continued energetically to enforce an Africanised version of the Ten Commandments. '[L]athlani ubuti, lathlani igazi ezonto zobini zibulala abantu' ('forsake poison, forsake bloodshed, those two things kill people') ran his prime command (Kaye nd: np). Men were forbidden to enter his Great Place if armed; only for hunting were weapons permissible. 'Forsake poison' had a corollary: search homesteads for weapons of sorcery. Theft was not merely banned: Makhanda and his disciples descended on homesteads, wresting away stolen stock. For many impoverished peasants, inhabiting a world where cattle sickened on pastures, where thieves, violence or sexual crimes could inflict grievous losses, religion assisted economic survival. Blood, *ubuthi* and incest, explained Makhanda to a wealthy ruler, were disliked among his people because 'ingakutulwa inkomo' ('the cow can be erased by them [through fines]') (Bennie 1839: 100).

These prohibitions were gendered: they weighed far more heavily on men than on women. The shifts that masculinity had already undergone were to be extended: men were to become upright peasant patriarchs, respecting property, renouncing violence, displaying filial obedience to Fathers outranking all secular rulers. Makhanda sought new men for new times. He encountered life-threatening opposition – pious policemen were not high on everyone's agenda. But since the son of God bowed before no man, brushes with death simply confirmed his key tenets: a ban on weaponry, the significance of the afterlife, and the centrality of superhuman forces.

...

Makhanda's hostility to spears and poison coexisted with his relish for weapons of mass destruction. He popularised the Flood. His Father would return, he prophesied, incinerating sinners with heaven's fire. He himself could bury all unbelievers, by making heaven and earth meet. A memorable fate was predicted for subjects of Ngqika. Makhanda denounced one of Xhosaland's greatest rulers as a thief who '*wahlal' epet'igazi*' ('always handled blood'), and who was so promiscuous that he slept with a woman deemed his mother (Ntsikana 1888a: 13). His followers would become firewood and ants. During one such confrontation with Ngqika, ran tradition, a storm suddenly



A mountaineering antelope (the *klipspringer*, rock-leaper, *igogo*), depicted here by Samuel Daniell, lent its attributes to a shamanic speciality. A human *igogo* was deemed capable of seeing far beyond mortals.

erupted. '[B]angcangcazela...bati, "Kubetwa un-Gqika gu-Nxele gezulu"' ('People tremble with fear...and say, "Ngqika is struck by lightning by Nxele" ') (Bennie 1839: 102).

Politics, prophecies and weapons of mass destruction interested men far more than attacks on male privileges. Makhanda's fearless confrontations with the powerful provided frisson; so did his pursuit of thieves, using clairvoyance. '*Lomntu makarunywe, ade abonakale into ayiyo*' ('let this person receive religious offerings, until he reveals who he really is') said pragmatists (Ntsikana 1888a: 13). Throughout Xhosaland, patriarchs warded off potential danger by propitiating him with cattle.

As an *igqirha*'s son accumulated religious offerings, so many decided who he was: an *igqirha eliligogo*, a shaman-who-is-a-*klipspringer*. As the image opposite indicates, this buck has an uncanny ability to race up and down precipices and perch on pinnacles. Its human counterpart was similarly deemed to live high above mortals, bounding over obstacles, seeing into distant space and time. Deemed the supreme *igqirha eliligogo* in Ndlambe's domain, Makhanda occupied an elevated position. Such a seer outranked all shamans, and was consulted on every important occasion. Political sanctions bolstered prophetic authority. Drawing upon the tradition that all cattle ultimately belonged to rulers, the seer sometimes told men which particular beasts the Lord required. Those resenting such exactions risked losing their cattle to Ndlambe.

How should one conceptualise a patriarch operating as a leading shaman, a powerful politician, a nationalist preacher, a son of God? Makhanda, scholars have claimed, rapidly returned to Xhosa traditions. He made claims 'unacceptable to Christianity', 'had never been a Christian' and 'met with minimal response' as an evangelist (Hodgson 1985: 17, 21, 18).

Another formulation is possible. An ex-farm labourer, deeming himself a follower of Christ, was transplanting a world religion into virgin African soil, in the overarching context of imperialism and a bloodstained frontier. Receiving little but rejection from his missionary brothers, he was showered with traditional honours by his constituency. Yet in 'left-handed' ways, he continued to disseminate central Christian tenets: an Almighty Father and Great Son; prayer, preaching, the key Ten Commandments and the lessons of God's Book; a great awakening of the departed and an apocalyptic Day of Judgement; the resurrected Christ, who occupied centre stage from start to end. Makhanda was far more successful in spreading these novel ideas than westernised rivals operating in Xhosaland simultaneously. The new 'school' acquired no converts. On its disintegration, those settled around it fell under the leadership of the aristocratic Ntsikana kaGabha, whose congregation consisted of about 100 people. By contrast, Makhanda possessed 'almost unlimited influence' (Philip 1969: 163). He achieved this by promoting Christianity, noted a superintendent of the London Society's mission institutions. Makhanda 'professed (though after a peculiar fashion of his own) to be a disciple and apostle of Christianity' (1969: 164). Another mission assessment was tarter: '*Lo ndoda yazenza u-Tixo gesiqu*' ('This man made himself God incarnate') (Bennie 1839: 93).

If placed in historical perspective, within the array of congregations under African control that emerged after missionaries' advent, the Left-Handed One occupied the lowly *amaZiyoni* (Zionist) end of the spectrum. As an archetypal prophet-chief, projecting divinity, he headed a syncretic movement of the poor, welding older traditions onto the possibility of miracles – as in Christ's time. Ntsikana represented the 'Ethiopian' pole: his tiny congregation adhered closely to nineteenth century missionary doctrines. Tshatshu, the educated son of royalty, was completely within the teachers' fold. From this perspective, lowly Zionism was far and away the most influential form of Christianity making inroads into an African society during its early encounters with a world religion. Makhanda might also be hailed as a pioneer in the African Reformation which continues to this day, worldwide. He has seldom been recognised as such, but perhaps scholarship heavily weighted towards elite versions of Christianity needs rethinking? Zionist congregations, after all, are 'part of a second global culture; a culture, lying in the shadow of the first, whose distinct but similar symbolic orders are the imaginative constructions of the resistant periphery' (Comaroff 1985: 254).

Another ex-farm labourer, also deemed a Black Christ, expressed it more poignantly:

*IVangeli silibone elisha selishis' intaba,
Kwathi abefundisi nabashumayeli baliphika.
Bathi akuseliyona iVangeli ekade silishumayela,
baphenya amaDastamente namaBhayibheli abavumela,
athi, 'Kubhaliwe kanjolo!'
Uhlamuka simuke...*

The New Gospel which we saw setting the mountain on fire,
and preachers and evangelists denied it.

They denied that we had just preached the Gospel.

They brandished their Testaments and Bibles in unison.

They said, 'It is written *thus!*'

Breaker-away, let us leave... (Gunner 1988: 220)

...

The religious divide was rapidly widened by blood. In 1817, during retrenchments after Europe's wars, the Cape Governor disbanded the Cape Regiment and turned to new black allies. The colonial state would support the unpopular Ngqika as supreme ruler over all Xhosaland, if he aided their coercive projects, including raids on thieves.



Inkosi Ngqika kaMlawu wears the leopard skin kaross of royalty.

When Ngqika compounded his sins by seizing land, and violence erupted, he routed the Great House. The seer had a vision appropriate for an opponent of spears and a proponent of Christ's lightning:

'[A]ma Ngqika uyakuwawisela ngezulu' ('he will strike down Ngqika's people with lightning'); *'[A]nikulwa ngazikali, uyakusizila ngezulu'* ('you will not fight with weapons,

he will crush with lightning') (Ntsikana 1888b: 32).

Less than fully convinced, regiments representing the entire country gathered in October 1818, beneath Ntaba kaNdoda, the Mountain of Man, to annihilate Ngqika's army, the bastion of martial masculinity. Some balked. 'Those men...have eyes full of blood; we are like boys to them...I am going to fetch Nxele (Makanda) to bring down "heaven" upon them' (Wauchope 1908: 36). Men went into battle with spears in their hands and Makhanda's prophecy on their lips – and shattered their opponents. Their enemies were tossed into bonfires; their womenfolk were looted, put to flight. The house of Ngqika became fire-wood and ants, as the seer had predicted. Thereafter, Ntaba kaNdoda stood at the heart of many Xhosa prophecies of the end of the world.

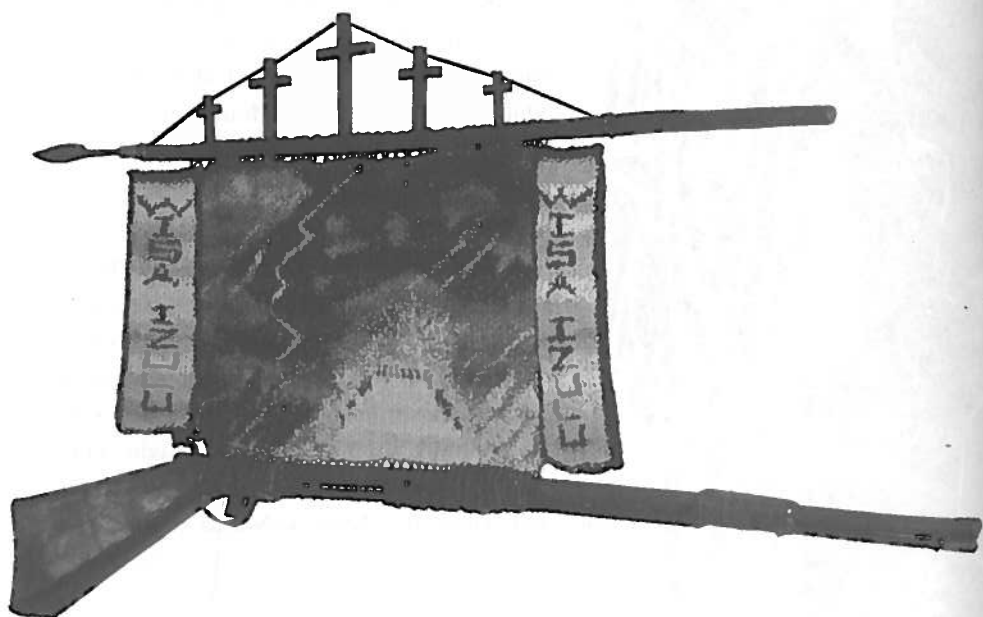


Lord Charles Somerset, Cape Governor in 1817, wears the military attire characteristic of his own aristocracy.

Apocalyptic scenes continued. When Englishmen rushed to the aid of their ally, cannons bombarded the bushveld. '*Isasazekile imikosi kungalwanga, ngokoyika inkununu, kwatiwa balwa ngezulu*' ('regiments were scattered without fighting, due to fear of the cannon, it was said they fought with lightning') (Umhlab' unotuli 1898: 3). Cattle were lost almost in their entirety; starvation stalked homesteads.

Then drought finally broke. Storms lashed the region incessantly. A tidal wave of starving men poured into the Cape, pursuing stock. Almost the sole barrier was the 'City of God' (the Theopolis mission station), with its expert sharpshooters. Boers fled. British soldiers were unable to defend property, unable to maintain their posts, unable to save their own lives. '[W]e destroyed your soldiers. We saw that we were strong,' crowed Makhanda's chief councillor (Pringle 1827: 75).

Amid torrential storms, and the mobilisation of colonial forces from further afield for renewed invasion, the seer provided a different interpretation. He singled out ammunition and arms as the keys to victory. He predicted endless wars if spears continued to confront a maritime empire. And he offered weapons from his own arsenal. The English, having been condemned to citizenship of the great deep for the crime of murdering God's Son, were now emerging from the sea, with fire, under a petty chief, Thixo. '*u-Thixo asinto yaluto, ayakutshiswa gu-Dalidepu*' ('Thixo, who is of no consequence, will be burnt by



Nomsa Zamela, *Ndiya kukuwisa izulu pezu kwabo* (I shall let heaven fall upon them). Depicting one of the most significant battles in South Africa, this image singles out two forces: men's weaponry, and powers transcending those of men.

Dal'idipu') (Bennie 1839: 100-1). '[L]ati igogo (u Nxele), liya kuliwisa nalo izulu, liwabulale ngalo amangesi' ('the igogo (Nxele) said, he too will throw lightning down, and kill the English with it') (Umhlab' unotuli 1898: 3).

In April 1819, as colonial forces marched eastward towards the ammunition depot of Graham's Town for their invasion, some 14 000 people marched westwards on the same village. The presence of several thousand children and women signalled that this was no ordinary confrontation. The great crowd was journeying 'ezilweni': to the place of wild animals, as the English had been redefined (Ntsikana 1888b: 32). As hunters, men possessed the right to kill 'wild animals' with weapons. They did not expect to do so. English guns, prophesied Makhanda, would harm no one. '[A]ye esithi amaXhosa akayi kulwa ngezikhali khona, aya kulwa ngokuwisela amaNgesi ngezulu' (He was saying amaXhosa will not fight with weapons there, they will fight by striking the English with izulu) (Bennie 1935: 2). Any survivors would flee to the sea - 'and then,' prophesied the seer, 'we will sit down and eat honey!' (Pringle 1827: 72).

At the start of a day called after Graham, the 1812 victor, a literal as well as figurative turning of the sun was awaited: afternoon was the standard time for storms. Preceding its advent, military commanders and Makhanda gravely weakened the tiny garrison through bloodless tactics. Capturing the British commander, however, narrowly failed. Around noon, pursued by the crowd, he galloped into a village where fewer than 350 men were making frantic preparations. Their seven artillery pieces were not in readiness. As the Xhosa vanguard poured in, about 1 000 veterans peeled away, targeting the magazine and barracks over a mile from the village. Most inexperienced men rushed down the hills, aiming at the cannons, typically with their spears tied up. A vanguard reached two cannons and attempted to overturn them.

At this critical moment, 130 hunters from the 'City of God', accidentally in the village, rushed into the fray. They picked off leaders. British troops rallied. Xhosa men were forced back 35 yards from the troops, where they knelt on the hillside. Every time the cannons flashed 'lightning', they covered their eyes and prayed, calling upon Nxele and Christ to strike with lightning: 'O Wisa izulu Nxele! wisa!! wisa Nxele!!!' (Umhlab' unotuli 1898: 3); '[W]isa Tayi! wisa Tayi!!' (Ntsikana 1888b: 32); 'Teta Nxele! bapela abantu!' ('Speak Nxele! the people are perishing!') (Wauchope 1908: 36).

To British bewilderment, fusillades did not dislodge some 5 000 praying men. The couple of hundred soldiers were ordered to advance. When the trumpet sounded, the prophet's men began to flee. The veterans were exposed to brown-skinned sharpshooters - and Graham's Town was soon free of all but dead amaXhosa.

...



Thomas Baines depicted (for a later war) a common method of carrying the Xhosa dead and wounded.

During a century of eastern frontier warfare, no greater loss occurred in any one battle. The village stream was renamed *egazini* (place of blood). The British had lost three men. Fifty times as many Xhosa men expired at the site. Many more died while being dragged homewards. There were preferable ways of carrying the incapacitated, as the illustration suggests. This, combined with acute hunger, contributed to events that night, as Graham's Town lost all its cattle.

When about 14 000 people marched towards the promised land – children, women, many subjects of both Great and Right-Hand Houses, royalty – they were riding on the crest of successes during torrential storms. When they fled, an explanation emerged. Sorcery was responsible. Three days beforehand, sorcerers had been at work. This, declared Makhanda, was blacks' only sin. It had urgently to be addressed. This, after all, 'was the most significant battle of the nineteenth century in South Africa, for had Nxele succeeded, the history and character of frontier South Africa indubitably would have been quite different' (Mostert 1992: 479).

...

After this bold attack, invasion of Xhosaland was delayed for three months. Ships prowled the coast, searching for a potential harbour, to land in the enemy's rear. Xhosaland in its entirety was now the target.

As scouts kept watch, peasants followed normal practices during lulls: purifications, feasts, dances, for tomorrow we die and cattle are lost. The seer proposed a great hunt, with much food. He required many of the looted cattle: all of which were black, or red, or yellow, or dun-coloured, or pregnant. The hunt was to culminate near the sole potential harbour (modern East London), at a giant rock which peasants called Gompo, and sailors termed 'the Coffin'.

There they come!...only one river more, the Nxuba (the Fish River), and they will be in our land...Let us combine, and be one powerful nation, that we may drive the *Umlungu* into the sea...Dal'idipu appeared to me and spoke to me saying, 'Tell my people to...kill all dun-coloured cattle.' He will cause all the dead to rise from their graves. They will come out of the sea, ready and armed to the teeth...Go to the sea, you will hear a wonderful sound, *Gompo, Gompo*. When you hear the sound sing aloud and dance, calling the name of Ta-ee – the broad-breasted (*Sifubasibanzi*) son of Dal'idipu – whose name is a charm against witchcraft and all manner of evil. Then you will hear a big sound Gompo! and then the resurrection of the dead. (Wauchope 1908: 34–5)

His vision was an Africanised version of ships possessing soldiers hidden in their hulls. It was revealed to desperately hungry people with great gaps in their ranks, facing imminent loss of whatever cattle they possessed. They owned little, except



Part of the spectacular hollow within Gompo's cleft.

forefathers who were *men*, a prophet offering abundant beef and venison, and a promise that they 'would soon be strong as the time was now come for the Resurrection of their Fathers' (Brownlee nd: np). Ndlambe (who had lost three sons *egazini*) and his leading allies ordered their subjects to participate. Motley cattle poured in; subjects of the Great and Right-Hand Houses participated.

From a distance, Gompo ('Plunge-In-and-Disappear') resembled an island. Two curvaceous mounds, separated by a cleft, were sprayed with foam. On closer viewing, a sandy promontory linked it to the shore – and, at the base of the cleft, itself seven-storeys high, lay a hollow into which breakers roared, carving out caverns, shooting up through chimneys, cascading over smooth slabs in the sea. Sexual symbolism saturated the site. 'Plunge-In-and-Disappear', declared a poet, was his wife: water contained within walls with a gap (Rubusana 1911: 489). The pool was also an archetypal entrance to the underworld.

At this intersection of heaven, sea, earth and cosmic womb, of masculine death and feminine birth, ecstatic worship occurred. Hunters, having deposited carcasses, were instructed by Nxele, the husband of two descendants of those present at creation. He had developed purification rituals to counter sin and instil immortality; men purified themselves in the sea. They prayed, calling on 'the broad-breasted (*Sifubasibanzi*) son', who would protect them against sorcerers, who (it was said) were about to descend into a cavern beneath the rock. To the drumming of the waves, thousands thumped down upon Gompo's sandy belly, leaping, hopping, dancing, assisting it to yield its riches through the birth canal. Their shaman was elevated; he was to make a superhuman leap, the leap of a buck, plunging from a rock near the shore onto one in the sea. Darkness would descend, as the sun similarly plummeted, returning to its birthplace. The breaking of the waters would make the 'big sound *Gompo*!' – and those who had never died would emerge, as in the days of Creation.

Yet as the sun traversed the sky, and the seer followed its trajectory while calling on Christ, and hunters finally yelled at him to leap, he failed to do so. Men, he declared, had been told to purify themselves in the sea. They had instead bellowed war cries. Consequently, they were not permitted intercourse with the nation of the Broad-Chested One.

'[I]nto *mna endiyibonayo, niyakubuya senizingela inyamakazi*' ('The thing that I myself see, you will return and by that time be hunting a buck') Ntsikana had prophesied (Ntsikana 1888a: 14). Yet if failure were due to male militarism, and starving people could feast on beef, might not other attempts be more successful? There were 'pilgrimages to Gompo' (Wauchope 1908: 35). Tidings spread further afield: of a great prophet, who could guarantee victory, make departed warriors visible, restore cattle to life as well. Refugees fleeing Shaka were among those who sent messengers to Nxele and fulfilled orders: to kill red cattle and goats, to get rid of grain. Many were the hungry paupers who feasted on what their enemies eyed – and awaited a 'great awakening', as fathers more potent than sons were reborn.

...



Simthembile Mamani's 'The Black Christ' was originally produced for a 2001 Grahamstown exhibition, 'Makana Remembered'.

In August 1819, a fortnight after the invasion finally began, two emaciated women walked into a military camp. Makhanda, they said, wished to negotiate peace. He would be jailed, they were told. The next day, accompanied by these women, his aboriginal wives, the Lord's Child delivered himself into captivity. '[P]eople say that I have occasioned the war: let me see whether my giving myself up will restore peace' (Pringle 1827: 74). He spoke little, beyond asking that war on cattle ceased; his people were starving. He was sent over the sea. The war machine rolled on, inflicting devastating defeat and dispossession. In August 1820, Nxele joined a mass escape from Robben Island – and, claimed whites, drowned.

Messiahs do not die that easily. Nxele's martyrdom, like that of a more famous son of God, enhanced his reputation. His disappearance into the sea, it was said, occurred on 25 December, the anniversary of Christ's birth – and he was accorded a similar future. The prophecy he had made upon departure was carved upon hearts: whatever power white men used against him, he would return. His disciples disseminated his teachings to remotest Xhosaland; subsequent European teachers were judged against the son of God. Entering terrain which had already experienced a 'great awakening', they made little impact. Until the late nineteenth century, peasants instead awaited the one who would come from over the sea, with the attributes suggested by the image on page 85: the leopard skin of royalty, the crown of martyrdom, the ability to transcend men's militarist games. '[K]usitwa uyeza, uyeza, inanamhla' ('it being said he is coming, he is coming, to this very day') (Ntsikana 1888b: 32).

These were millenarian expectations – of an Africanised Second Coming. Their intensity increased every time bloodshed attained new heights. When the ugliest of all frontier wars erupted in the 1850s, intersecting with seismic anti-imperialist wars over the sea, the return of the black Christ, the black Sifuba-sibanzi, lay at the heart of a millenarian tidal wave.

Conclusion

I began with stories about a teenager, who allegedly murdered her nation by promising that buried men would become visible, led by the Broad-Chested One. She, we are told, was very different from a man who made similar promises. He was a 'giant prophet and wardactor'; she was deceitful, promiscuous, sexually frustrated (Peires 2003: 23, 196). Such double standards, in both scholarly and popular accounts, have fuelled segregated histories, where Nxele's and Nongqawuse's millenarianism is assessed very differently. Yet gender bias has divorced mass movements which can profitably be considered together. Both were millenarian upsurges within the same imperialist epoch; both can be analysed using similar tools. Moreover, re-investigating the headwaters of millenarianism contributes to our understanding of the subsequent flood, in four key ways.

First, I have attempted to indicate the benefits of broader geographical visions than normal. The Nongqawuse story is typically crammed into a narrow space: Xhosaland, or Xhosaland-and-the-Cape. Yet this is at odds with preceding history. The Xhosa polity was embedded in broader frontier dynamics, and transformed by forces global in scope: imperialism, international warfare, a world religion. Nolutshungu, who travelled widely, lived on farms where *izi-alam* of different ethnic origins mingled, and was uprooted because Europe was undergoing revolutionary transformations, led a life which cannot be squeezed into many latter-day maps. Similarly, spiritual gales blowing through war-ravaged Europe, and a 'great awakening' among South Africa's first casualties of colonial advance, were linked to a new religion sweeping through

amaXhoseni. During first-wave millenarianism, underclass spirituality crossed the rivers and seas that men defined as political borders; during the second, it poured over seven southern African countries and was linked to warfare in Russia, India, and Europe. To focus on Xhosaland alone is to miss the awesome force of one of the largest anti-imperialist movements ever to erupt in southern Africa.

Second, I have tried to show the advantages of a longer historical perspective. When a 1752 expedition traversed the frontier, traumatic disintegration of a way of life – an archetypal cause of millenarianism – was already evident among female pastoralists and their menfolk. When their incorporation into bonded labour intersected with an influx of lowly European missionaries, millenarian ideas in an African accent began to be popularised. But only in a particular era did these resonate in Xhosaland. I have spoken metaphorically of a red dawn, milking time, high noon, afternoon, and of *ukujika kwelanga* ('the turning of the sun'). Wilma Cruise's image on page 66 is juxtaposed to my summary of the 1809–12 turning point: an ominous image, chosen to signify the impact of British imperialism and its gender dimensions. Rhili kaHintsa, born in 1809 into a dominant frontier power that had attained its greatest extent ever, had lived through two devastating defeats and spectacular contraction of his country by the time he was ten. His was an archetypal background for a man who, as Xhosa paramount ruler, commanded obedience to millenarian anti-imperialist visionaries.

He was also born at the cusp of gender transformations. At the time of his birth, hegemonic masculinity was shifting: The images on pages 53 and 57 were giving way to those on pages 58 and 62. Hunting and 'elephants' were yielding to pastoralism and domestic patriarchy; intimidation on home fronts was more important than war in adding Boers to the list of those complaining of Xhosa oppression. But when 'sea people' put pastoralists to flight, the very possibility of becoming 'men' in older ways was called into question. Patriarchal power was eaten away by irreversible economic losses in the fourth and fifth wars of dispossession; by defeat, which feminised men; by further loss of rulers' legitimacy, allowing visionaries from a female-dominated profession to flow into the vacuum; by men's descent into theft and beggary; by women's forced march into breadwinning roles. In half the nation, homesteads once dependent on male prowess as colonisers, hunters and pastoralists were giving way to the back-breaking cultivation and weak leaders of defeated refugees (see the image on page 71). In such circumstances, a Father commanding weapons of mass destruction proved appealing – but *amaXhosa* also looked backwards, to their own golden age, before the horns of the bulls were shortened. When Nxele's chief councillor spoke longingly of pastoralist fathers who were *men*; when Nxele promised rebirth of patriarchs armed to the teeth; when Nongqawuse told of the arrival of the warriors of whom Nxele had spoken, wearing antelope karosses, all were invoking pre-1812 days. If erosion of a way of life underpins much millenarianism, erosion of once hegemonic masculinities was central in Xhosaland. And the irreversible blow, subsequently reinforced, was delivered by British imperialism in the 1809–12 War of the Boundary Lines.

Third, I have tried to show that if gender and changes in the gender order are key concerns, then new themes emerge, neglected in literature which takes patriarchy and machismo for granted. War, for example, is critical for understanding southern African millenarianism. The intimate links between death of the land and hunger for cosmic rebirth pervade my analysis. But this connection is hard to discern in much secondary literature. Accounts focusing on clashes between armed men – that is, accounts privileging machismo – are many. Accounts investigating religious responses to unspeakable horrors are few. This bias towards machismo impacts on analysis. Nongqawuse's era, for instance, fits with the broader pattern: the build-up of military forces and threats to unleash the dogs of scorched earth warfare, were the single most important factors influencing refusal to cultivate crops, and rhythms of feasting on cattle. Yet this build-up and these threats are almost invisible in analyses: militarism is deemed significant only when men began shooting. Similarly, Nxele, the so-called wardocor, strides through secondary literature virtually free of numerous 'feminine' features. These include his single mother and her background; his rise to fame during a 'born again' movement; the importance he attributed to nature and a cosmic womb, thereby making resurrection plausible; ecstatic worship at an opening to the female Source during war; and, above all, his hostility to weaponry and male militarism. If these aspects are accorded greater prominence, then a 'son of no one' searching for an apocalyptic Father becomes visible. He headed a mass movement promoting the divorce of masculinity from militarism, and led an attack on military headquarters while denouncing male weaponry. This is unthinkable within scholarship. It has been ignored, together with 5 000 men kneeling before cannons invoking *izulu*, Christ, the black son of God. Visual and vernacular sources illuminate this better than scholarship (see the image on page 80). Constructions of gender affect themes, concepts, periodisation, sources deemed significant, representations of both sexes – and are of considerable import in the stories ultimately told.

Finally, first-wave millenarianism contributes directly as well as indirectly to our understanding of the second wave – because the past did not die when Nxele sank into the sea. It was not even past. In 1850–57, when many who had known him had risen to leading positions and were battling to survive similar crises – hunger, aggressive colonialism, looming and actual death of the land, a chaotic natural world – the black Christ returned. He spoke through mouthpieces, including a man deemed the son of his chief councillor (who became perhaps the pre-eminent visionary of the era), and his own son, born of the impregnation drama. Themes evident in the 1810s surged back into prominence. The second wave cannot be adequately understood without constantly revisiting (a revised version of) the first, because the messiah's return was, of course, accompanied by the return of his teachings.

The past's ongoing vitality also affected the teenager conveying the orders of men who had arrived from over the sea. When Xhosa contemporaries honed in on a female seer active for nine months (a significant period in societies pivoting around female fertility); when they accorded her very different treatment from all other visionaries; when they

spoke of her in the same breath as a male messiah; when they insistently told of his virility and her pregnancy, they were not merely exercising poetic licence. These Xhosa historians must be taken very seriously indeed, as I have underlined by drawing on their genre and language. They were singling out Nongqawuse not for her prophecies, which were commonplace, but for being impregnated by an other-worldly messiah.⁴

Her story echoed that of Nolutshungu. It helps explain the photograph taken when Nongqawuse was a political prisoner (see the image on page 45): the ostentatious beadwork is not that of a maiden, but of an extremely unusual wife. The importance ascribed by contemporaries to her pregnancy aptly symbolises the problems of latter-day analyses which construct a scapewoman while bypassing reproduction, masculinity, the vernacular voices of male contemporaries – and a past which lived on. When the history of this millenarian era is rewritten, narrators will need to grapple with the cosmic cataclysms anticipated when birth occurred, as *izulu* travailed in labour, and the waters of the great deep broke. To this should be added the trauma of a teenager, who failed to fulfil the hopes invested in her life-giving capacities. If extracted from its historical context, the tale of tens of thousands of people, who positioned a pregnant maiden as a link to a messiah, might be deemed the true Nongqawuse story, in all senses of the phrase. But it was far from singular, in comparative terms. And it rested on all that had preceded it: peasants' forced march into a harsh new world, from which little but a virile black Christ could offer deliverance.

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NOTES

- 1 Many African languages can encode a locative in the noun. IsiXhosa does so by adding an 'e' prefix and a suffix. So 'amaXhoseni' means 'in Xhosaland'.
- 2 Some sources allocate Makhanda a father. But they contest who this father was, offering at least three candidates. Others pointedly note his base-born origins, and their inability to identify a father. The most plausible explanation is Kaye's (nd): impregnation by an unknown man.
- 3 Under the impact of missionaries and colonialism, this meaning of *uhlanga* was supplanted by 'nation' or 'race'.
- 4 The most illuminating sources discussing this pregnancy, and the Nongqawuse–Nxele connection, are praise poems. These are best read not as individual poems, but as a corpus, deploying standard metaphors for key actors, places and events. The single best-published collection of such poems is Rubusana (1911).

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