

## 'SOFT' BELIEVERS AND 'HARD' UNBELIEVERS IN THE XHOSA CATTLE-KILLING

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POLITICAL disagreements and hence political factions existed in precolonial Africa, as elsewhere, but they have proved exceptionally difficult to distinguish below the surface of an oral tradition geared to the legitimation of the *status quo* and a written documentation largely recorded by outsiders. Even where historians have identified distinct factions, they have usually been compelled to invent names for them – Yoder's Fly and Elephant parties in Dahomey, for example, or Wilks's War and Peace parties in Asante – thereby running the risk of conflating disparate interests or elevating alliances based on personal ambitions or regional loyalties to parties of principle.<sup>1</sup> But the cleavage caused by the great cattle-killing movement of 1856–7 cut right through the heart of the Xhosa kingdom, dividing the Xhosa into two distinct parties: the majority *amathamba* ('soft' ones) or believers, who accepted the truth of the cattle-killing prophecies, and the minority *amagogotya* ('hard' ones) or unbelievers, who rejected it. The names *amathamba* and *amagogotya* were those used by the people themselves, and every Xhosa homestead, in deciding whether or not to slaughter its cattle, was forced to choose between them. We are therefore afforded a rare opportunity to analyse the factors which influenced people in making decisions, and to penetrate beneath the political and religious surface of party feeling to the social and economic divisions which they reflected.

### NONGQAWUSE AND THE CATTLE-KILLING

In 1800 the Xhosa state was a large decentralized kingdom of perhaps 70,000 people, occupying most of the territory between the Bushmans and Mbashe rivers in what is now the Eastern Cape region of South Africa.<sup>2</sup> Effective political power was concentrated in the hands of the various chiefs, and the power of the king, or head of the royal lineage, over his nominal juniors was, in practice, severely limited. The chiefs ruled their districts as they saw fit but, having no standing armies or permanent bureaucracies, they depended heavily on the co-operation of their councillors, who were mostly men of wealth or senior members of commoner lineages.

This precolonial social order was disrupted long before physical conquest by military pressure, missionary enterprise and commercial temptation

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<sup>1</sup> J. Yoder, 'Fly and Elephant parties: political polarisation in Dahomey, 1840–1870', *J. Afr. Hist.* xv (1974); Ivor Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1975), esp. 479–81.

<sup>2</sup> For the early history of the Xhosa, see J. B. Peires, *The House of Phalo* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1981).

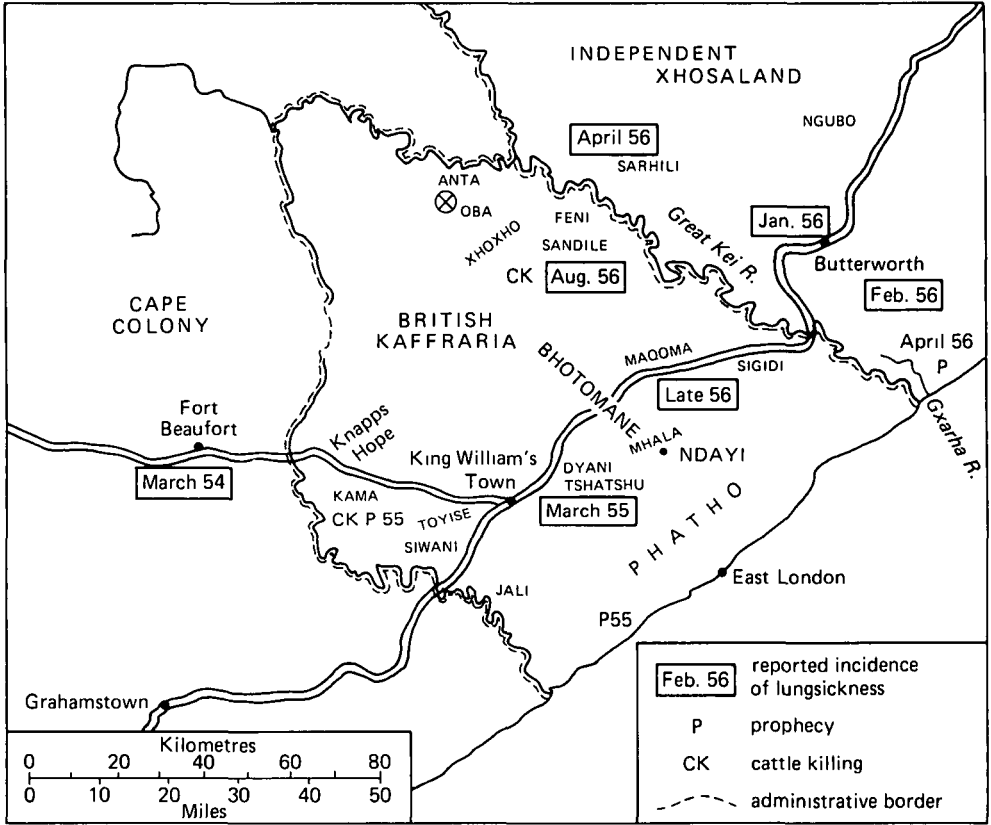


Fig. 1. The spread of lung sickness in Xhosaland, 1854-6.

emanating from the Cape Colony. Large tracts of Xhosa territory were lost in the Frontier Wars of 1812 and 1819, and in 1847 about half of Xhosaland was annexed to the British Empire under the name of British Kaffraria. The Ngqika Xhosa who lived in this territory rose in revolt in the War of Mlanjeni (1850-3), named after the diviner who doctored the Xhosa armies. The scorched-earth policy of the Imperial troops, developed in response to the Xhosa style of guerrilla war, systematically devastated Xhosaland, burning all the crops and capturing all the cattle which could be found. After the fighting was over, many Xhosa were left without a calf or a bag of seed corn. As the old networks of mutual assistance collapsed, men and women were forced into migrant labour on white settler farms. Absolute deprivation was aggravated by relative deprivation, for contact with colonial commerce had created new wants, so that imported manufactures such as blankets, tinder-boxes and iron hoes had become socially necessary to most Xhosa.

The grandiose plans of Sir George Grey, who arrived at the Cape in late 1854, were designed to accelerate the disintegration of the Xhosa way of life. Grey appointed British magistrates over the heads of Xhosa chiefs to break their authority and usurp their political, judicial and fiscal prerogatives. Vast public works were instituted to teach the Xhosa the value of labour, and schools and missions were founded to inculcate the values of Christian

Europe.<sup>3</sup> Grey's schemes were still in their infancy when the cattle-killing erupted, but they thoroughly alarmed the Xhosa, especially the chiefs, who were the most immediately affected. The influence of the great lung sickness epidemic which struck down Xhosa cattle from 1854 onwards was even more pervasive. There was no cure for the disease, and no telling where it would strike next. As many as 100,000 cattle, painfully preserved through three years of war or wearily earned in farm labour died a lingering and horrible death. Losses of 80 per cent or even 100 per cent per stockowner were not uncommon.<sup>4</sup>

The experience of defeat, the memory of thousands of brave young men wiped out by superior military technology, and the sight of the collaborators enjoying the fruits of their ancestral lands overwhelmed the Xhosa with depression and a sense of great loss. They clung ever tighter to the reassuring and comforting beliefs of the old cosmology, while at the same time casting about for some new but complementary element of belief which would make the universe logical once again, and provide the Xhosa with a God who was the equal of the God of their colonial enemies. At the same time, rumours of British defeat in the Crimean War greatly excited Xhosa hopes of some external intervention which might free them of the British yoke. It was in this context that a number of prophets appeared in various parts of British Kaffraria, and announced that if the people killed their cattle and destroyed their corn, the dead would rise and the 'Russians' would drive the whites into the sea.<sup>5</sup>

The most important of these prophets was a teenage girl named Nongqawuse, who lived just outside British Kaffraria in the politically independent part of Xhosaland under the direct rule of the Xhosa king, Sarhili (1809-93). Assisted by her uncle Mhlakaza, Nongqawuse took enquirers to certain reedy and cavernous places on the Gxarha river, and 'showed' them the 'new people', black shapes in the water, waiting to rise when the last head of cattle was finally slaughtered. Not all Nongqawuse's visitors were convinced, and some who came prepared to believe departed as committed unbelievers. But many were convinced, most important among them King Sarhili himself, who threw the full weight of his enormous moral authority behind the order to slaughter cattle, to destroy stores of corn, and to refrain from cultivation during the sowing season. The majority of Xhosa believed in Nongqawuse's prophecies and did as they were ordered, but a steadfast minority of unbelievers refused to kill their cattle.

This disobedience enabled Nongqawuse and Mhlakaza to blame the failure of their prophecies on the stubbornness of the unbelievers since the new cattle would not rise until the old ones had all been slaughtered. With every failure, therefore, the pressure of the believers on the unbelievers increased to the point almost of civil war as the believers attempted to kill the cattle and raze the gardens of the unbelievers. More important, the continued

<sup>3</sup> J. Rutherford, *Sir George Grey* (London, 1961), chs. 21-3.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, the list enclosed in G. Grey to H. Labouchere, 3 Oct. 1856, *Imperial Blue Book* 2352 of 1857, 35.

<sup>5</sup> For the early prophets, see Cape Archives (all following references are from the Cape Archives, unless otherwise specified): BK 70, C. Brownlee to J. Maclean, 11 May 1857. This paragraph and the next draw on my forthcoming book on Nongqawuse and the Xhosa cattle-killing.

resistance of the unbelievers delayed the inevitable discovery that the prophecies were false. Nongqawuse initially fixed the date of the general resurrection for mid-August 1856, but she was able to keep the movement going through disappointments in November 1856, January 1857 and February 1857 until its final extinction with the disappointment of May 1857. By that time, some 80 per cent of the Xhosa people were either dead of starvation or homeless wanderers seeking food.

This is not the place to explain the origins of the cattle-killing idea.<sup>6</sup> It must suffice to say that cattle-killing was probably first suggested by the lungsickness epidemic, that cattle slaughter was inextricably linked in Xhosa religion with the idea of sacrifice, and that sacrifice must have seemed an appropriate response to the condition of military defeat and economic devastation to which Britain had reduced Xhosaland. The idea of the resurrection of the dead was first introduced by Christian missionaries, but it fitted in well with existing Xhosa concepts regarding the life in death of their ancestors, the creation of the world, and the cyclical regeneration of the seasons and the fruits of the earth. The idea of cattle-killing and resurrection were not therefore inherently implausible as far as most Xhosa were concerned. The question which confronted them related less to the credibility of the concept than to the validity of the particular set of prophecies uttered by Nongqawuse.

Most Xhosa did not personally visit the prophetess but depended on rumour and reports from others. The information they received was ambiguous and contradictory. The Xhosa homestead-head had to weigh the accounts of those who had seen miracles against those which dismissed the prophecies as fraudulent. Even though the Xhosa king sided with the believers, the unbelievers included some of the most influential and far-sighted men in the kingdom. Given the conflicting nature of the information received, it seems fair enough to suggest that most people would have decided whether or not to slaughter on the basis of pre-existing attitudes. It is the purpose of this paper to identify and assess what such predispositions might have been.

#### THE EFFECTS OF LUNGSICKNESS

Almost everywhere lungsickness travelled in Xhosaland, cattle-killing followed. This was partly because of the Xhosa theory of disease and its remedy, and partly because of 'the desire of the natives to make the most of their cattle'. The meat of lungsick cattle could not be eaten, and it was illegal to sell the hides of cattle which had perished from the disease.<sup>7</sup> Lungsickness arrived in southern Africa aboard a Dutch ship carrying Friesian bulls which reached Mossel Bay in September 1853. By March 1854, it had reached Uitenhage, whence a Mfengu, travelling with five cattle, brought it to Fort Beaufort on the borders of Xhosaland. From Fort Beaufort, it passed through Chief Kama's territory on its way to King William's Town, the capital of British Kaffraria, which it reached in March 1855. From King William's

<sup>6</sup> See J. B. Peires, 'The central beliefs of the Xhosa cattle-killing', *J. Afr. Hist.*, xxviii (1987).

<sup>7</sup> GH 8/49. J. Maclean to G. Grey, 21 July 1856; G. Grey to H. Labouchere, 3 Oct. 1856, Imperial *Blue Book* 2352 of 1857, 34 ff.

Town, lungsickness spread through the coastal territories of Chiefs Mhala and Phatho, and along the wagon road to Natal, reaching Butterworth in King Sarhili's country in January 1856. Last to be affected were the Ngqika Xhosa under Chiefs Sandile, Feni, Xhoxho and Anta, recently banished to an out-of-the-way location north of King William's Town.<sup>8</sup>

It was in those areas first affected by lungsickness that the first prophecies of cattle-killing were heard. By October 1855, there were five prophets operating in the districts of Chiefs Kama and Phatho, ordering the people not to cultivate and to slaughter their cattle. The situation in these areas, where drought and crop failure had aggravated the effects of lungsickness, was described as follows: 'The utmost destitution prevails throughout the country we traversed; they have lost nearly all their cattle... Those who have a few cattle left are slaughtering them rather than run the risk of losing them by lungsickness.'<sup>9</sup> Across the Kei, the spread of lungsickness was directly linked to prophecies of resurrection. 'The Galekas [Sarhili's people] firmly believe that Umlanjani [the wardoctor of 1850] has risen from the dead – that the sickness among the cattle was predicted by the prophet and that he can bring all their cattle to life again.'<sup>10</sup> Sarhili put more than twenty people to death for witchcraft or for breaking the quarantines established on the movement of cattle, but he could not check the spread of the disease. By 1856, it was reported that many cattle had died of lungsickness in the lower part of Sarhili's country, where Nongqawuse lived, and in April 1856 she began to prophesy. In that very month, lungsickness broke out among the homesteads bordering Sarhili's own Great Place.<sup>11</sup> It is small wonder, therefore, that the king was receptive to a prophecy which predicted that 'a fresh stock of cattle free from lungsickness' would arise.

Chief Sandile's Ngqika Xhosa were located off the wagon roads and took strenuous precautions against lungsickness, burning the pasturage on their perimeter and forbidding the introduction of strange cattle to their district.<sup>12</sup> Sandile received Sarhili's orders to kill without enthusiasm, and Chief Commissioner Maclean reported that the Ngqika Xhosa generally remained indifferent to the prophecies, 'the excitement being confined to those districts in which from the prevalence of the lungsickness the people have lost their wealth and chief means of subsistence'.<sup>13</sup> Very few Ngqika killed their cattle during the early phase of the movement prior to the first failure of the prophecies on 15 August 1856. Unfortunately, we have no evidence

<sup>8</sup> On the spread of lungsickness, GH 28/70, J. Jackson to G. Grey, 5 Feb. 1856; GH 8/28, C. Brownlee to J. Maclean, 6 Feb. 1856; E. Robertson to J. Maclean, 30 July 1856; Acc. 793, J. Gawler to F. Reeve, 7 July 1856; *Grahamstown Journal*, 24 March 1855; MS 7639, Cory Library, Grahamstown, B. Ross to J. Ross, 8 May 1854; N. J. Merriman, *The Cape Journals of Archdeacon Merriman* (Cape Town, 1957), 215.

<sup>9</sup> GH 20/2/1, 'Information received from a shrewd and trustworthy native', 14 Oct. 1855; GH 8/28, J. Ayliff to J. Maclean, 26 May 1856.

<sup>10</sup> GH 8/27, C. Canham to B. Nicholson, 30 Sept. 1855, enclosed in J. Maclean to J. Jackson, 16 Oct. 1855.

<sup>11</sup> Merriman, *Journals*, 216; *Grahamstown Journal*, 4 Aug., 8 Sept. 1855; GH 8/49, J. Maclean to G. Grey, 31 July 1856; GH 8/28, C. Brownlee to J. Maclean, 5 April 1856; GH 28/70, J. Jackson to G. Grey, 5 Feb. 1856.

<sup>12</sup> BK 70, C. Brownlee to J. Maclean, 18 Aug. 1856.

<sup>13</sup> BK 373, J. Maclean to W. Liddle, 4 Aug. 1856.

on the crucial question of when lung sickness became general in the Ngqika district, but it is tempting to ascribe the increasing tempo of Ngqika cattle-killing after the second wave of prophecies, in September 1856, to the slow spread of the disease. Important support for this hypothesis comes from the case of Chief Feni, who opposed the movement from its inception in May 1856 right through the Great Disappointment of February 1857 until April 1857, when lung sickness broke out among his own cattle and he too began to slaughter despite the palpable failure of the prophecies.<sup>14</sup> Conversely, lung sickness never reached the herds of Chief Anta high up in the Windvogelberg in the far north of the Ngqika location, and this probably explains why, alone of all the Xhosa chiefdoms, Anta's was the only one which entirely refused to participate in the cattle-killing.

Lung sickness was thus a necessary cause of the Xhosa cattle-killing. Where there was no lung sickness, the words of Nongqawuse fell on deaf ears. On the other hand, lung sickness is not a sufficient cause which completely explains the entire cattle-killing movement. The Cape Colony's Mfengu allies suffered extensively from lung sickness with reported cattle losses of 90 per cent and more. Yet virtually all Mfengu, even those resident in Xhosaland under the orders of Xhosa chiefs, refused to kill their cattle.<sup>15</sup> The Christian chief Kama and his son Samuel opposed the movement, even though their district had suffered heavily from the epidemic. Chief Toyise, resident near the centre of infection at King William's Town, refused to kill and carried the majority of his people along with him, even though in their district 'the lung sickness had made such ravages that but comparatively few [cattle] were left'.<sup>16</sup> Clearly, lung sickness alone cannot account for the pattern of division between believer and unbeliever.

#### ATTITUDES TO THE CAPE COLONY

At first glance, it might seem that the cattle-killing was primarily supported by those hostile to the Cape Colony and primarily opposed by those well disposed towards it. Certainly, many of the leading believers had been in the forefront of the War of Mlanjeni, which had ended a mere three years previously. Sarhili, Sandile, Maqoma and other lesser chiefs had been strong fighters and now turned strong believers. Chief Mhala, another strong believer, though outwardly neutral had secretly aided the belligerents with supplies and refuge. Conversely, the unbelieving Mfengu and the majority of chiefs on the unbelieving side – Kama, Toyise, Siwani, Jali – were either allies or clients of the colonial government.<sup>17</sup> But any attempt to equate attitudes towards the cattle-killing with attitudes towards the colonial government breaks down in a rash of exceptions. Chief Anta had shot one of his brothers to prevent him surrendering during the War of Mlanjeni and he had been deprived of his ancestral lands, yet he remained on the unbelieving side. Chief Sigidi, the leader of the Gcaleka Xhosa unbelievers

<sup>14</sup> BK 71, C. Brownlee to J. Maclean, 1 May 1857.

<sup>15</sup> *Grahamstown Journal*, 29 Sept. 1856; BK 24, J. Douglas to J. Maclean, 21 Oct. 1856.

<sup>16</sup> GH 8/34, J. Ayliff to J. Maclean, 23 Jan. 1858.

<sup>17</sup> Acc. 793, J. Gawler to J. Maclean, 28 July 1857; H. Smith to Earl Grey, 10 May 1851, *Imperial Blue Book* 1380 of 1851, 19; CO 4386, Information received from Toise, 18 March 1852.

Table 1. *Known dispositions of Xhosa chiefs*

| Chief         | Cattle-killing     | Land*         | Religion           | Lungsickness    |
|---------------|--------------------|---------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Sarhili       | Strong believer    | Unchanged     | Strong precolonial | Heavy           |
| Mhala         | Strong believer    | Unchanged     | Strong precolonial | Heavy           |
| Phatho        | Strong believer    | Unchanged     | Strong precolonial | Heavy           |
| Maqoma        | Strong believer    | Severe losses | Strong precolonial | Heavy           |
| Bhotomane     | Strong believer    | Severe losses | Precolonial        | Heavy           |
| Sandile       | Waverer            | Severe losses | Precolonial        | Delayed arrival |
| Feni          | Waverer            | Severe losses | Precolonial        | Delayed arrival |
| Kama          | Strong unbeliever  | Gainer        | Christian          | Heavy           |
| Dyani         | Strong unbeliever  | Unchanged     | Christian          | Heavy           |
| Tshatshu      |                    |               |                    |                 |
| Toyise        | Strong unbeliever  | Gainer        | Strong precolonial | Heavy           |
| Anta          | Strong unbeliever  | Severe losses | Precolonial        | Light           |
| Mfengu chiefs | Strong unbelievers | Large gains   | Christian leanings | Heavy           |

\* Refers to effect of Frontier Wars on land holdings.

in British Kaffraria, had openly defied his newly appointed magistrate just before the cattle-killing, and remained under threat of arrest throughout. Conversely, Chief Phatho had been a faithful ally of the Cape Colony and had protected Imperial supply routes to the great detriment of the Xhosa war effort. Yet he was a great believer in Nongqawuse.

Although land loss in war led to material deprivation and thereby contributed to the tensions which exploded in the cattle-killing, it is impossible to make a direct correlation between land loss and cattle-killing. If land loss had been an immediate cause, we would expect those chiefdoms which lost most land to slaughter most cattle. Instead, it was Sarhili, Mhala and Phatho, who lost no land whatever in the 1850-3 War, who took the lead in killing cattle, while the Ngqika, who lost most, lagged behind and Anta, a Ngqika chief, slaughtered not at all.

The lack of congruence between political attitudes towards the Cape Colony and belief in Nongqawuse's prophecies is even more marked in the case of commoners. Soga, a leading unbeliever in Sandile's chiefdom, played a leading part in the 'Tyhume valley massacres' of military settlers in 1850. Mjuza, the son of the war-doctor Nxele, led the attack on Butterworth mission in 1851 and was later shot in the stomach by British troops. When he heard that the Russians were coming, he prepared to place himself at their head. Yet he became one of Nongqawuse's most determined and effective

opponents.<sup>18</sup> Political commitments may, of course, have influenced the decisions of many individuals during the cattle-killing, but they clearly cannot fully explain the division between believers and unbelievers.

#### RELIGIOUS FAITH

Perhaps, it may be argued, we are mistaken in looking for material causes when the decisions must have been taken on the basis of personal faith. Most Xhosa remained orientated towards the precolonial religious tradition, while a few leaned towards Christianity. Some Xhosa were credulous of diviners and prophecies, while others were frankly sceptical. Should one not, perhaps, see the decision to slaughter as an individual act of conscience explicable only in religious terms?

Once more, this is an approach which seems reasonable enough at first sight but fails to stand up to detailed analysis. Certainly, Kama and Dyani Tshatshu, the only professedly Christian chiefs, vigorously opposed the cattle-killing and the mission stations seem to have retained their adherents, with the exception of three old ladies who deserted Knapps Hope.<sup>19</sup> But it would be a grave mistake to perceive a sharp dichotomy between the precolonial tradition and Christian religion. The cattle-killing incorporated many Christian elements which the believers themselves recognized and used as arguments in favour of the truth of the prophecies. 'All that was done [in the cattle-killing],' wrote one missionary, 'was in the name of God, or that His Word says so. It was as profusely as it was vainly used.' Sarhili himself was much taken by a picture of Christ walking on the sea, and startled the local missionary by his knowledge of the story of the raising of Lazarus.<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand, many of the chiefs on the unbelieving side displayed little affinity for Christianity. Toyise was the last chief in British Kaffraria to execute a man for witchcraft, and at his trial he and his councillors 'declared to the last their firm belief both in the power of those who used bewitching matter and in the power of "smelling out" the offender'. Mjuza, the son of war-doctor Nxele, believed that his father would return from the dead, and was prepared to believe the prophecies of Nongqawuse until he visited her in person and concluded that she was a fake. Chief Ngubo, another strong unbeliever, burned a woman to death for witchcraft several years after the cattle-killing. Soga, who refused to believe Nongqawuse, had trusted in the powers of the war-doctor, Mlanjeni.<sup>21</sup> If indeed most Xhosa made their choice according to their existing predispositions it

<sup>18</sup> CO 4386, Statement by Manquidi, 17 Dec. 1851; interview with M. Soga, Kobonqaba Location, Kentani District, 25 Aug. 1983. Sarhili's unbelieving councillor, Gxabagxaba, was also a leading hostile during the war. BK 431, J. Maclean to G. Mackinnon, 21 March 1851.

<sup>19</sup> London Missionary Society Papers, School of Oriental and African Studies, London: F. G. Kayser to L.M.S., Oct. 1856.

<sup>20</sup> MS 3236, Cory Library, J. Ross to A. Thomson, 24 Nov. 1856; United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Microfilms, Cory Library, 172/2 Reel 1, Journal of H. T. Waters, 1 Jan. 1856, 7 July 1857.

<sup>21</sup> Merriman, *Journals*, 218; BK 14, Statement of Umjuza, 24 Feb. 1857; 1/KWT, W. Fynn - Colonial Secretary, 15 March 1873; Interview with M. Soga (note 18 above).



is clear that neither Christianity nor precolonial religion *per se* was a determining factor.

#### KIN, AGE AND GENDER

The bonds of kinship were not lightly set aside in Xhosa society, and during the cattle-killing they were stretched to the limit to rally the waverers. Many Xhosa killed their cattle unwillingly, according to W. W. Gqoba, 'but they were threatened by the stabbing-spears of their relatives'. On the other side, Moto Kantolo remembers that his unbelieving great-grandfather was supported by all his brothers. Ngcuka, Soga's younger brother, was killed defending the family herds.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, the Ngqika Commissioner seems not to have exaggerated when he wrote that 'the differences arising in this matter caused estrangement between parents and children, between husbands and wives, and for the time severed all the ties of kinship and friendship'.<sup>23</sup>

Cleavages were most pronounced in chiefly families where the quest for political power was added to the other stakes involved. Makinana, Chief Mhala's great son, stood by his believing father although he personally doubted the truth of the prophecies. Smith, Mhala's second-ranking son, used his unbelief to ingratiate himself with the Magistrate and was consequently recognized as chief of the Ndlambe Xhosa. Chief Maqoma's sons split along similar lines. Chief Sandile wavered throughout the movement, with his two full brothers taking strong stands on opposite sides.<sup>24</sup> Similar divisions appeared in commoner families, although documentation is lacking. Nkonki, an unbeliever, begged cattle from his believing elder brother to prevent them being slaughtered. Ndayi, the leader of the Ndlambe Xhosa unbelievers, was unable to convince his cousin Tshisela, who killed all his cattle. The Quluba family was likewise split with father and some sons believers, while another son and his cousins preserved their cattle. The most curious case was that of a husband and wife, both mutes, who 'took different views about the cattle killing, but how they came to understand the subject, I do not know'.<sup>25</sup>

It is not possible to trace any consistent pattern in these family divisions. It might seem probable that the older generation, with their greater herds of cattle accumulated over a lifetime, might be more resistant to the movement than younger men, whose expectations of wealth and inheritance were frustrated or had perished in the lungsickness epidemic. Certainly, there was no shortage of 'old counsellors' among the small number of

<sup>22</sup> Interview with M. Soga (note 18); Interview with M. Kantolo, Kantolo Location, Kentani District, 22 Aug. 1983; W. W. Gqoba, 'Isizatu sokuxelwa kwe nkomo ngo Nongqause', part 2, *Isigidimi samaXosa*, 2 April 1888. Gqoba's actual word for 'relatives', *imizalwana*, means 'people of the same descent'.

<sup>23</sup> C. Brownlee, *Reminiscences of Kafir Life and History*, 2nd ed. (Lovedale, 1916), 170-1.

<sup>24</sup> BK 81, J. Gawler to J. Maclean, 23 Nov. 1856; BK 71, C. Brownlee to J. Maclean, 4 May 1857; GH 8/49, J. Fitzgerald to J. Maclean, n.d. (Dec. 1856); Brownlee, *Reminiscences*, 134.

<sup>25</sup> CO 3122, C. Brownlee to J. Warner, 24 Jan. 1867; U.S.P.G. Microfilm, Cory Library, 172/2 Reel 8, Journal of W. Greenstock, 30 May 1859; Interview with R. Tshisela, Mncotsho Location, Berlin District, 23 Aug. 1982; Interview with A. Nkonki, Ngcizele Location, Kentani District, 7 Jan. 1976.

unbelievers, and the magistrate Gawler observed that since the believing chief Mhala had been abandoned by his old councillors he had surrounded himself with 'a number of young second rate counsellors ambitious of distinction and ready to take their chance in forwarding any of the current nonsense'. On the other hand, advancing age may also bring with it increased fear of death, and many believers, including Mhala himself, were certainly motivated by the hope that they would be 'made young again'.<sup>26</sup> Sometimes it was the young heirs who resisted their fathers' desires to slaughter their inheritance. Futshane, one of Mhala's old councillors, resisted belief for over a year but something snapped at the very end, and he began killing furiously to the alarm of his son, who fled with his own herds as fast as he could. Similarly, Feni, a councillor of Chief Xhoxho, violently persecuted his son for the latter's unbelief, and Qongo, a councillor of Sandile, attempted to kill his son for the same reason. William Mtoba of the Ndlambe district is remembered as opposing the cattle-killing while still a *rwala*, that is a young man recently circumcised and not yet married.<sup>27</sup>

The idea that women's oppression in male-dominated societies such as that of the Xhosa predisposes women to participation in ecstatic religious movements has become a dubious cliché, but one that will not go away.<sup>28</sup> Certainly, there is plenty of evidence that Xhosa women overwhelmingly supported a movement which promised that 'nobody would ever live a troubled life' and that 'people would get whatever they wanted'.<sup>29</sup> Nongqawuse herself, her cousin Nombande and Nonkosi, a cattle-killing prophetess in British Kaffraria, were all young girls. Our only first-hand description of the prophetess seems to indicate that she was in the early stages of *thwasa*, the mystical experience which marks a person as a diviner. 'Nonqaule, a girl of about sixteen years of age, has a silly look, and appeared to me as if she was not right in her mind. She was not besmeared with clay, nor did she seem to take any pains with her appearance.'<sup>30</sup> The view that there was something peculiarly feminine and adolescent in Nongqawuse's behaviour was one shared by many Xhosa men, as this oral tradition indicates:

[The unbelieving Chief Anta] had a councillor named Nombhaca, who...said to Anta when they were in the court, when the other chiefs had agreed [to kill their cattle] and he said, 'Take a bite of *qaqqa* grass, and see if you can swallow it nicely.' Anta listened to these words...[Then] Nombhaca said they must bring that girl for him to lie with, and then she would stop telling such lies.<sup>31</sup>

The implication, quite clearly, is that Nongqawuse's visions were the result of the unconscious sexual frustrations of an adolescent girl. Many Xhosa men, asked to explain Nongqawuse's visions, simply assert that she was a

<sup>26</sup> GH 8/29, J. Gawler to J. Maclean, 14 Aug. 1856; U.S.P.G. Microfilm, Cory Library, 172/2, Reel 8, Journal of W. Greenstock, 6 Oct. 1858.

<sup>27</sup> BK 81, J. Gawler to J. Maclean, 20 June 1857; GH 8/32, C. Brownlee to J. Maclean, 23 May 1857; 'Nzulu Lwazi' (S. E. K. Mqhayi), 'Umfi Wm. C. Mtoba', *Umteteli waBantu*, 28 Jan. 1928.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion* (Harmondsworth, 1971), esp. chs. 3 and 4.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Masiphula Ngovane, Mahlahlane Location, Willowvale District, Oct. 1975.

<sup>30</sup> BK 89, Information communicated to the Chief Commissioner, 18 Oct. 1856.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Bomvane Fikile Anta, Teko Location, Kentani District, 8 Jan. 1976.

*binqa*, a female, and that was the sort of behaviour one expected from a *binqa*. According to a regrettably brief report, the unbelieving Chief Ngubo visited Nongqawuse, 'beat her and called her an impostor'. The image is one of an indignant father chastising his daughter for causing trouble. One cannot imagine Ngubo confronting an adult male in this manner.<sup>32</sup>

Because of their own inferior position in Xhosa society, women were probably more inclined to welcome change than men. Widows, in particular, fallen from their high social position, might be expected to hope for the resurrection of their late husbands. Chief Sandile's mother urged him to kill his cattle, saying, 'It is all very well for you, Sandile. You have your wives and children, but I am solitary.' Chief Mqhayi's widows 'cried and howled' in their attempts to get his young heir Jali to kill his cattle. The widow of Sandile's brother Tyhali was likewise incessant in demanding that her son, Feni, should kill.<sup>33</sup> Another of Tyhali's widows, the mother of Chief Oba, together with all his wives, fled to their paternal homes to force Oba to kill. The mother of Kona Maqoma was so angry with him for working in his gardens that she left him – until hunger forced her back. The wives of the unbeliever Ndayi fled out of terror at his unbelief. Commissioner Brownlee reported that 'The women are now the strongest supporters of the delusion, most of the men who have cultivated, have had to break up their ground themselves, and when the husbands have insisted that their wives should take a part, they have left and gone to their parents.'<sup>34</sup> Clearly women had everything to hope for from a future in which they might recover their lost status and become free at last of the burden of wearisome and oppressive labour for their husbands.

Even so, there seem to have been many women who were sceptical of Nongqawuse's prophecies. Noposi, the Great Wife of Sandile, worked her gardens with Sandile's permission until she was stopped by the pressure of her co-wives. A Mfengu woman (almost the entire Mfengu ethnic group refused to slaughter) was murdered when she attempted to turn her Thembu husband against killing his cattle. At least one young woman was critical of her father's cattle-killing beliefs:

I used to laugh at my father, and he would call me a mad English Girl and say he could not call me his child if I was so foolish a Girl...

My father scolded me and said... 'Can you not see the things on the side of that hill?' 'No; I can see nothing but thorn bushes.' He said that it was not bushes but I thought that the men had eaten too much corn and meat, and drank too much of the Kaffir beer to know what they saw... So my father got very angry with me: he told me if I dared to say it was bushes again he would kill me. But I saw nothing else<sup>35</sup>.

In this case, the full patriarchal authority of the male homestead-head was engaged on the side of the believers, and it was the 'foolish young girl' who

<sup>32</sup> GH 8/49, J. Maclean to J. Jackson, 30 Oct. 1856.

<sup>33</sup> BK 71, C. Brownlee to J. Maclean, 1 May 1857; BK 82, H. Vigne to J. Maclean, 1 Feb. 1857; Brownlee, *Reminiscences*, 134; GH 8/49, F. Reeve to J. Maclean, 9 Nov. 1856; BK 71, C. Brownlee to J. Maclean, 25 Jan. 1857; BK 81, J. Gawler to J. Maclean, 17 Nov. 1856.

<sup>34</sup> GH 8/30, C. Brownlee to J. Maclean, 7 Dec. 1856.

<sup>35</sup> GH 8/30, C. Brownlee to J. Maclean, 7 Dec. 1856; CO 2949, J. Warner to R. Southey, 7 April 1857; J. Goldswain, *The Chronicle of Jeremiah Goldswain*, ed. U. Long (Cape Town, 1946-9), II, 192-3.

resisted wishful thinking. Clearly, the believer/unbeliever divide followed no set pattern of kinship, age or even gender.

#### THE HARD AND THE SOFT

We have yet to consider the effects of social class which seems to deserve special attention inasmuch as it lies at the root of the names which the Xhosa themselves gave to the two contending parties. To understand this fully, however, we must pause for a closer look at the structure of Xhosa society in the 1850s.

The effects of fifty years of colonial pressure had fatally wounded but not yet killed the old structure of precolonial Xhosa society. This had revolved around the relationship between chiefs and commoners, in which the chief as guarantor and nominal owner of the land and cattle of the commoners had exacted tribute from them and collected judicial fines in his court. The scale of exactions had, however, been very limited since there was rivalry between the chiefs and infinite land available for exploitation. In order to maintain their authority, the chiefs were forced to win the favour of influential commoners ('councillors') by redistributing most of the tribute and judicial fines they received. Nevertheless, the chiefs retained the right, which they exercised as often as they dared, to bring their subjects to court and to confiscate their possessions for real or imaginary offences.<sup>36</sup>

The colonial presence afforded wealthy councillors new opportunities to escape the restrictive powers of the chiefs. Ironically enough, old forms of sociability broke down less because of the impoverishment of the many than because of the enrichment of a few. Before the advent of an open market for food, rich men had invited their neighbours around when they slaughtered a beast or opened a grain pit. But now meat could be sold by the portion (*thengisa isimausi* – to sell like a trader)<sup>37</sup> and corn could be sold by the bucket in exchange for colonial money, a form of desirable wealth which the chiefs could neither provide nor control. At the same time, the chiefs' capacity to regulate the wealth of their councillors was limited by the decisive action of the colonial authorities against witchcraft accusations, accurately described at the time as the 'Kaffir state engine for the removal of the obnoxious'.<sup>38</sup> Prosperous commoners were thus partially liberated from the rapacity of their chiefs, and, shortly before the cattle-killing, Governor Grey held forth the prospect of total liberation in the form of magistrates who would take over the chiefs' judicial duties and employ the councillors directly and independently of the chiefs.<sup>39</sup>

A new disposition of social forces was thus emerging on the very eve of the cattle-killing. On the one hand, the chiefs, formerly the rulers and economic exploiters of their subjects, now stood forth bravely as the

<sup>36</sup> See Peires, *Phalo*, ch. 3, where this view of precolonial Xhosa society is argued at length.

<sup>37</sup> A. Kropf and R. Godfrey, *A Kafir-English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Lovedale, 1915), 230. Gqoba, 'Isizathu', part 2, refers to the phrase as having been used by Nongqawuse herself.

<sup>38</sup> H. H. Dugmore, 'Rev. H. H. Dugmore's Papers', in *Compendium of Kaffir Laws and Customs*, ed. J. Maclean (1858) (Grahamstown: J. Slater, 1906), 38.

<sup>39</sup> Rutherford, *Grey*, 330-4.

champions and defenders of the old order, which, with all its faults, had guaranteed land and cattle to all. On the other side stood the 'many well-disposed persons' described by the missionary Niven, 'who would be glad... to be relieved of feudal servitude and be subject to British authority'.<sup>40</sup> It is only fair to the unbelievers to point out that many of them were courageous and patriotic individuals who had fought hard for their country and people in the earlier frontier wars. It was only with the crisis of the cattle-killing that they came to realize that their interests lay unambiguously on the British side.

The literal meaning of the word *amathamba*, used by the believers to describe themselves, is 'the soft ones'.<sup>41</sup> Alternatively, it might be translated, 'those who drill like soldiers'. The two translations are not as incompatible as they might seem. 'Soft' does not have the same connotation of weakness in Xhosa as it does in English. Rather, 'soft' indicates the abnegation of self and willing submission to a greater duty than self-interest. One of A.-I. Berglund's Zulu informants gave him an excellent description of the concept, which is equally valid in Xhosa: a successful diviner 'must never think of himself. He must learn to kill his thoughts and desires and just think of the shades [ancestral spirits]. He must do what they tell him. That is to have a soft head'.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, when the historian S. E. K. Mqhayi refers to Chief Maqoma as being 'soft' (*ethambele*) to the orders of King Sarhili, he means this as a compliment.<sup>43</sup> This renunciation of self lay at the heart of the old Xhosa ethic of mutual aid and communal solidarity, now under threat.

Kaffirs are hospitable by custom more than by nature. It is considered disgracefully mean to eat in the presence of any one not provided with food, without offering them some;... Should a person be found dead from the effects of hunger near a kraal the headman or master thereof is held responsible, and has to pay the 'isizi' [death dues]. Children are taught habits of generosity as far as food is concerned from their infancy; and little creatures of two or three years of age may be seen handing their morsel from one to another, so that each may have a taste.<sup>44</sup>

It was precisely such behaviour, itself a manifestation of the deeper dependence springing out of the communal division of labour, which was under threat from the new market-orientated behaviour which chose to sell cattle and corn rather than share them out in community feasts. From the historical perspective, therefore, it is entirely appropriate that cattle and corn were the

<sup>40</sup> GH 8/25, R. Niven to J. Maclean, 17 Jan. 1854.

<sup>41</sup> Kropf and Godfrey, *Dictionary*, 402-3.

<sup>42</sup> A.-I. Berglund, *Zulu Thought-Patterns and Symbolism* (London, 1976), 162.

<sup>43</sup> S. E. K. Mqhayi, *Ityala lamaWele* (Lovedale, n.d.), 113. Another example of 'softness' in this sense is supplied by the unbeliever Gxabagxaba, who eventually agreed to kill his cattle saying, 'that the wealth and cattle which he possessed were obtained from [Sarhili] and his father, Hintsu, but as they were now determined to deprive him of all he had, he could do nothing but yield. He would kill his cattle in compliance with the orders of his chief, and not because he believed in the announcement made by the prophets.' This 'softness' cost Gxabagxaba his reason, and he died insane shortly thereafter. (Brownlee, *Reminiscences*, 157-8.)

<sup>44</sup> South African Library, Cape Town, Uncatalogued Manuscripts, Rough Notes on Kafir habits, customs, etc., presented to Sir George Grey by J. C. Warner, 1859.

battlefield on which the struggle between the old and the new was finally played out.

The strength of the cattle-killing movement undoubtedly lay in its appeal to the ordinary homestead heads, reeling as they were from the blows of drought and lung sickness on top of the social pressures generated by military defeat and increasing landlessness. Commissioner Brownlee wrote at an early stage that 'the movement seems peculiarly to have been one of the common people'. The missionary Bryce Ross reported that 'when the people are reminded that their chiefs disapprove of this work, their answer is that they don't care for their chiefs'.<sup>45</sup> Chiefs who took a strong stand against the cattle-killing found that the majority of their subjects effectively deserted them in favour of pro-Nongqawuse members of the royal lineage. Thus Chief Kama lost most of his followers to his nephew Mate, Chief Siwani lost his to his nephew Bangayi, and the young chief Jali was challenged by his genealogically junior brother, Tabayi. Vadana, the disgruntled ex-Regent of the Thembu, recovered a prominence lost for over twenty years, as hundreds of Thembu abandoned their unbelieving chiefs and rallied to his leadership.<sup>46</sup>

The chiefs were more divided than the people because of their greater exposure to the pressures and temptations of the colonial government, but with the exceptions of Anta and Sigidi, every strong-willed, intelligent chief who perceived the threat which British Kaffraria and Governor Grey posed to the old order in Xhosaland finally backed the cattle-killing. Reliable figures from the seven most affected chiefdoms in British Kaffraria show that at least 85 per cent of Xhosa males adhered to the *thamba* party.<sup>47</sup> It is thus no exaggeration to describe the cattle-killing as a popular mass movement of a truly national character, uniting both chiefs and commoners, the major social classes of the precolonial social order, in a communal defence of their way of life.

There is a sharp contrast between the *amathamba*, with their ethos of receptive submission to the common good, and the unyielding self-interest of the unbelieving *gogotya* party. *Gogotya* means 'hard', just as its opposite *thamba* means 'soft', but, significantly, *gogotya* is usually translated as 'stingy' or even 'disloyal'.<sup>48</sup> The *amathamba* regarded the *amagogotya* as selfish, greedy men, whose miserly refusal to risk their own cattle prevented the entire nation from enjoying the fruits of the resurrection. Even those

<sup>45</sup> GH 20/2/1, C. Brownlee to J. Maclean, 25 Aug. 1856; GH 8/49, J. Maclean to G. Grey, 10 July 1856; MS 7666, Cory Library, B. Ross to J. Ross, 9 Aug. 1856.

<sup>46</sup> BK 83, H. Vigne to J. Maclean, 27 Feb. 1857; BK 86, F. Reeve to J. Maclean, 27 Nov. 1856; GH 8/31, R. Hawkes to J. Maclean, 17 March 1857; CO 2949, J. Warner to R. Southey, 2 June 1857.

<sup>47</sup> This figure is calculated from the 'Population Returns for British Kaffraria', enclosed in Maclean, *Compendium*. It is derived from the difference in male population between January 1857 (the height of the cattle-killing) and December 1857 (by which time most of the believers had left their homes in search of food). The seven chiefdoms in question are those of Sandile, Mhala, Phatho, Maqoma, Botomane, Xhoxho and Feni. Figures from the other chiefdoms, which experienced an influx of refugees from the core believer districts, were not considered. The precise figure for those who remained is 16.6 per cent, but this would include the believing chiefs and their close associates, as well as believers who found refuge on mission stations.

<sup>48</sup> Kropf and Godfrey, *Dictionary*, 122-3.

Xhosa who recognized that the *amagogotya* were correct to dismiss the prophecies had little positive to say about them. The historian W. W. Gqoba, himself a Christian and an eyewitness of the cattle-killing, defined the verb *ukugogotya* as 'to sit still, not doing anything [for anyone else], to stand on one's own side'.<sup>49</sup>

We may take two leading *amagogotya*, Soga and Ndayi, as exemplars of their party. Soga, the son of Jotelo, was a man of about sixty at the time of the cattle-killing. He was a convert to the form of Christianity preached by the early Xhosa prophet, Ntsikana (d. 1822), but he did not see this as incompatible with the magic of the war-doctor, Mlanjeni. Soga was a spearmaker and a smelter of iron, one of the few crafts practised in precolonial Xhosa society, and this may have paved the way for his enthusiastic adoption of mercantile principles of exchange as soon as contact with the colonial economy made this possible. The traveller James Backhouse provides us with this description of Soga fourteen years before the cattle-killing:

The common custom among the Caffers was to share their provisions with those who were not supplied; and by thus allowing the idle to live upon the industrious, exertion was paralyzed; but Soga had had moral courage enough to break through this bad custom as well as some others; he would not allow the other Caffres to work for him without wages, and when they came to beg of him, he told them, that he paid them for his work, and they must pay him for his corn. In case he slaughtered an ox, he also sold its flesh, and refused to give it away, according to the common custom of his nation.<sup>50</sup>

It is here, perhaps, that we see the origins of selling meat *isimausi*, that antithesis of communal slaughtering and feasting. Soga had eight wives, a sure sign of wealth during a period when only about 20 per cent of Xhosa men had more than one.<sup>51</sup>

We know comparatively little about Ndayi's early life, but he may have been the 'Undai' arrested in 1850 for killing two women whom he suspected of bewitching him. Ndayi was a wealthy man, married to several wives. His praises, fortunately preserved, provide us with a vivid insight into his character.

Here is the great one of Tsora.  
 The wearer of the armband, the ox of Ziya.  
 The one who struggles for his home.  
 Here is the forest of the cowards who fear hunger.  
 The bird of prey which carries water in its wing.  
 The thing as large as the plough of Simpkins,  
 The great plough which cultivates potatoes.  
 Great pot, which cooks with salt water,  
 Why do you cause confusion among the people of your chief?  
 You are aiming to scold them.  
 You are aiming with a rough blanket.  
 He is like a snake of the river,  
 The thing of the old village with *imituma* bushes

<sup>49</sup> Gqoba, 'Isizatu', Part 2, 2 April 1888.

<sup>50</sup> J. Backhouse, *Narrative of a Visit to the Mauritius and South Africa* (London, 1844), 211. For more on Soga, see Peires, *Phalo*, 108.

<sup>51</sup> J. Lewis, 'The rise and fall of the South African peasantry: a critique and reassessment', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, xi (Oct. 1984), 4.

He wants to see the place where the sun rises,  
 Where it shines its rays and disappears.  
 He smokes from a pipe made of ox's horn.  
 He does not eat the cattle of another's homestead.  
 He eats the beast of his own home.  
 They are striped, those oxen like springboks.  
 The horns of the harrow are pointing upwards.  
 The rhinoceros are following one another.  
 The one who does not flinch crosses even through rock.  
 The great one of Tsora.<sup>52</sup>

If we except a few local references and conventional praises, it is apparent that the poem revolves round three themes: Ndayi's independent and self-sufficient spirit, his relationship with the commercial world, and his relationship with his fellow Xhosa. Ndayi is presented as a strong man in a dubious cause. He is a great provider, but he provides for the *amagogotya*, the 'cowards who fear hunger'. He does not demand food from others, but – a very double-edged compliment this – he eats by himself. He is thirsty for knowledge, but he wants to know everything, even what the sun is doing, more than he has any right to know. References to trade goods and agricultural implements recur constantly: ploughs, harrows, blankets, potatoes (not an indigenous crop) and salt (not used by the Xhosa before traders commercialized it).<sup>53</sup> There is no direct reference to the colonists, but the term 'rough blanket' (*ingub'eximarwexu*), ordinarily a simile meaning 'abrasive personality', may be a pun on the war-doctor Mlanjeni's use of the word *amarwexu* (smallpoxed Satans) to refer to the British troops.<sup>54</sup> Ndayi's actions sow discord among those who adhere to the old ways, namely 'the people of the chief'. He stands accused of wanting to exalt himself above his fellows, and order them around.

Ndayi's character stands out in even sharper relief if we digress briefly to consider the praises of Tobi, Chief Sandile's father-in-law, one of the highest-ranking believers in the Ngqika district.

The great pot of Zimela.  
 The child of a chief who is truly a great loafer.  
 He never milks the beasts of his home at Zimela's.  
 The son of Qelo, who sews the rough blanket.  
 The child of a chief, who avoids meetings at the chief's place.  
 The one who never carries anything difficult to grasp.<sup>55</sup>

Like Ndayi, Tobi is a 'rough blanket', but there the resemblance ends. Whereas Ndayi is ambitious of power and prestige, Tobi tries to avoid public gatherings. Whereas Ndayi will press on even through rock, Tobi will not undertake anything risky or unusual. Whereas Ndayi is a great provider, Tobi cannot even make the most of his inherited cattle. Although it would be unfair to suggest that the indolent Tobi is typical of all believers, the contrast between the driving activity of Ndayi and the unenterprising

<sup>52</sup> Merriman, *Journals*, 98–9. The praises are printed in W. B. Rubusana, *Zemk'iinkomo Magwalandini* (London, 1906), 270–1. Translated with the help of D. L. P. Yali-Manisi.

<sup>53</sup> J. T. Van der Kemp, *Transactions of the London Missionary Society*, 1 (1804), 438.

<sup>54</sup> Kropf and Godfrey, *Dictionary*, 377–506.

<sup>55</sup> Rubusana, *Zemk'iinkomo*, 275. Translated with the help of D. L. P. Yali-Manisi.



passivity of Tobi probably does reflect the real difference in outlook between the *amathamba*, hoping for the regeneration of an old world, and the *amagogotya*, grasping eagerly at the new.

Not all of the rich and prominent councillors were to be found on the unbelieving side. Much of the wealth in pre-capitalist Xhosa society was distributed by chiefly patronage, and its recipients quite naturally attached themselves strongly to the fortunes of their chief. In the case of Sandile's chiefdom, it would seem that the younger Great Councillors, such as Vena (who was circumcised with Sandile) and Baba, were strong supporters of the cattle-killing, while Soga, Tyhala, Neku and Nxokwana, the leading members of the *gogotya* faction, were all sons of the councillors of Sandile's father and hence inheritors of wealth accumulated independently of the chief. Commissioner Brownlee informs us that 'in many cases, the indigent adherents of heads of kraals have been either compelled to destroy their little stock or quit'.<sup>56</sup> The point is not, however, that all wealthy councillors were *amagogotya*; but only that wealthy councillors made up the backbone of the *gogotya* faction. Of this there can be little doubt. Tyhala and Soga, the two leading unbelievers in Sandile's chiefdom, had thirteen and eight wives respectively.<sup>57</sup> At least 6 out of the 28 second-ranking councillors were unbelievers, a high percentage (21 per cent) when one considers that only 5-10 per cent of the Xhosa in Sandile's chiefdom opposed the movement.<sup>58</sup>

In Mhala's chiefdom, Magistrate Gawler predicted that 'all large cattle owners will be of opinion that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush', and, initially at least he seems to have been right. The 'old counsellors' and the 'big swells' opposed Mhala's orders to kill, and the chief was forced to turn to 'young, second-rate counsellors'. Later, however, the enormous pressures brought to bear by the believers caused seven out of ten great councillors to slaughter, though one of these only succumbed in the final months of the movement. Another strong unbeliever in Mhala's chiefdom, Bulungwa, is described as 'a great beggar, and over-ambitious'.<sup>59</sup> Makaphela, the leading unbeliever in Feni's chiefdom, was a wealthy man with eight wives. Koka, an unbelieving councillor of Chief Oba, had six. Gxabagxaba, one of the old unbelievers among Sarhili's councillors, was possessed of 'large flocks'. Mgwagwa, the old councillor who kept young chief Jali out

<sup>56</sup> 'Nzulu Lwazi', 'Utyala Nteyi, *Umteteli waBantu*, 22 Nov. 1930; GH 8/31, C. Brownlee to J. Maclean, 4 Jan. 1857. The 'indigent adherents' mentioned by Brownlee had possessed four head of cattle, and were not therefore as indigent as all that.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with M. Torha, Ngede Location, Kentani District, 24 Aug. 1983; Interview with M. Soga (note 18 above).

<sup>58</sup> There is a list of Sandile's headmen ranked according to status in BK 70, C. Brownlee to J. Maclean, 4 Sept. 1856. Of the 28 second-class headmen, six can be firmly identified as unbelievers, and only three as believers. The figure of 5-10 per cent is calculated as follows: According to the 1857 returns, there were 14,000 adults in Sandile's chiefdom in January 1857. If we assume that 47.7 per cent of these were males (this figure is calculated from the eleven chiefdoms in which male:female ratios are known), this would give us a figure of 6,681 adult males. There were only 798 males left by December 1857 (11.95 per cent of the January total), including Chiefs Sandile and Dondashe and other believers. Elsewhere (BK 71, C. Brownlee to J. Maclean, 11 Aug. 1857), Brownlee refers to 250 (3.7 per cent of 6,681) unbelievers in his district.

<sup>59</sup> GH 8/29, J. Gawler to J. Maclean, 14 Aug. 1856; GH 18/6, J. Gawler to J. Maclean, 15 Aug. 1856; Acc. 793, J. Gawler to J. Maclean, 14 July, 29 Oct. 1856.

of the cattle-killing, owned fourteen cattle and ten calves. 'A considerable number' of Chief Siwani's old councillors ended the cattle-killing period 'well-off'. Like Sandile's unbelieving councillors, they invested their capital in ploughs, waggons and oxen.<sup>60</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

It was the great lungsickness epidemic which initially suggested cattle-killing, and the first chiefdoms to be affected by lungsickness were also the first chiefdoms to kill. But lungsickness alone was not enough to drive people into the movement as the examples of the Mfengu and of Chief Toyise demonstrate. Political commitments played their part, but while these were enough to ensure that heavily implicated colonial clients such as Chiefs Siwani, Toyise and Kama adopted the colonial line against cattle-killing, they were not enough to carry the vast middle ground, and men like Anta, Mjuza and Soga, who fought with the believers during the War of Mlanjeni fought against them over Nongqawuse.

The cattle-killing split every chiefdom and, indeed, many homesteads from within. It is with assessing the nature of this division that the present paper is mainly concerned. Religious attitudes which might seem to have been the dominant factor are difficult to disentangle, as the believers clearly accepted significant elements of Christianity while the vast majority of unbelievers remained fully convinced of the validity of divination, prophecy and magic. Inter-generational conflicts between fathers and sons pulled sometimes one way and sometimes the other, and produced a thorough mix of young and old on both sides. Women, however, seem overwhelmingly to have supported the believers.

This leaves the factor of social and class attitudes, which the Xhosa themselves used to characterize the two parties as 'soft' and 'hard'. The 'soft' party of believers saw themselves as properly loyal and submissive adherents of the old order, who put their nation first in giving up their cattle for the good of all. They viewed the *amagogotya* as selfish and even despicable 'cowards who fear hunger'. The unbelievers probably thought of themselves as sensible men, who realized that one could not eat grass, but their unbelief was probably sustained by a deep unwillingness to slaughter their cattle.<sup>61</sup> Their sense of priorities was aptly expressed by Mhala's unbelieving son Smith, when he said, 'They say I am killing my father [by refusing to slaughter] – so I would kill him before I would kill my cattle.'<sup>62</sup>

The little evidence we have strongly suggests that the *amathamba* were a party of the common people, whose material subsistence was largely eroded by conquest, drought and lungsickness, and for whom Nongqawuse's prophecies were probably the last chance to avoid migrant labour and the final disintegration of the old way of life. The *amagogotya* were largely a party

<sup>60</sup> T. Soga, *The Journal and Selected Writings*, ed. D. Williams (Cape Town, 1983), 48–9; GH 8/41, J. C. Kayser to J. Maclean, 20 June 1860; GH 8/49, R. Tainton to J. Maclean, 29 Dec. 1856; Brownlee, *Reminiscences*, 158; Personal communication from Mr M. V. S. Balfour of Idutywa, a descendant of Makaphela.

<sup>61</sup> This was the usual argument of the unbelievers according to oral tradition. Interviews with Tshisela (note 25) and Anta (note 31).

<sup>62</sup> BK 81, J. Gawler to J. Maclean, 4 Dec. 1856.

of men who had benefited from the new opportunities offered by the colonial presence, and whose anti-social behaviour stemmed from the fact that they had broken free from the trammels of the precolonial order. Certainly, the division between *amathamba* and *amagogotya* ran much deeper than the division between belief and unbelief, and the Xhosa, in conferring these names, seem to have recognized the fact.

#### SUMMARY

A substantial minority, perhaps 15 per cent of all Xhosa, refused to obey the prophetess Nongqawuse's orders to kill their cattle and destroy their corn. This divided Xhosaland into two parties, the *amathamba* ('soft' ones, or believers) and the *amagogotya* ('hard' ones, or unbelievers). The affiliation of individuals was partly determined by a number of factors – lungsickness in cattle, political attitude towards the Cape Colony, religious beliefs, kinship, age and gender – but a systematic analysis of each of these factors in turn suggests that none of them was sufficiently important to constitute the basis of either party.

The key to understanding the division lies in an analysis of the indigenous Xhosa terms 'soft' and 'hard'. 'Softness' in Xhosa denotes the submissiveness of the individual to the common will of the community, whereas 'hardness' denotes the determination of the individual to pursue his own ends, even at communal expense. Translated into social terms, the 'soft' believers were those who remained committed to the mutual aid ethic of the declining precolonial society, whereas the 'hard' unbelievers were those who sought to seize advantage of the new opportunities offered by the colonial presence to increase their wealth and social prominence. The conflict between the social and personal imperatives was well expressed by Chief Smith Mhala, the unbelieving son of a believing father, when he said, 'They say I am killing my father – so I would kill him before I would kill my cattle.' Certainly, the division between *amathamba* and *amagogotya* ran much deeper than the division between belief and unbelief, and the Xhosa, in conferring these names, seem to have recognized the fact.