

THE RETURN OF MAKHANDA



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THE RETURN OF MAKHANDA

Exploring the legend

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The Wall of Plenty at the Egazini Outreach Project, Grahamstown, is a collaborative effort of the project's artists, invoking the memory of how life was before the wars.

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This book is dedicated to Chief Zwelihlangene Makinana,
whose passion and enthusiasm for understanding the past always
provided the impetus to keep the search moving.

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As is made clear in the Introduction, this book would not have come about if it were not for the massive amount of interest shown by a wide variety of people in the quest to find the historic Makhandla. These include all the artists who formed the Egazini Outreach Project, the amaNdlambe Traditional Council, the Rharhabe kingdom and the many people associated with the Makana Municipality and its Makana Freedom Festival over the years. It was Gugile Nkwinti who first pointed out in 2000 that revisiting this story brought about the decolonisation of minds.

The financial support of the Rhodes University Research Committee made it possible to travel extensively around the Eastern Cape, repeatedly to the National Archives in Cape Town and once to the National Archives in London. It also ensured that all necessary support was available in the form of research assistants, interpreters and translators of text written in Dutch or isiXhosa. My many colleagues in the African Languages Department of the Rhodes University School of Languages have been untiring in answering questions and offering clarity on a wide range of issues.

I am particularly honoured to have been given the privilege of interacting with many of the traditional leaders of the Xhosa people. These include several of the Ndlambe, Rharhabe and Gcaleka chiefs: their own clear pride in their history and their long encounters with the British stand as pillars around which this volume is constructed.

To Mda Mda, I owe a huge debt of gratitude for his clarity on the tendencies towards unification and co-operation within Xhosa traditional leadership. The fact that these qualities still operate so powerfully today confirm the wisdom in this perspective. Indeed, history shows that while the rest of the nations of southern Africa were going through a period of reconfiguration and consolidation into new kingdoms in the early decades of the nineteenth century, the amaXhosa were far less violently consolidating their continuity in leadership.

Thami Tisani's doctoral thesis on early Xhosa writing about their own history provided the missing link in understanding how two quite opposite traditions arose

around the memory of the name of Makhanda. Her insights, clarity and friendship are greatly appreciated.

Finally, I must thank those personal friends and family members who always kept alive the interest in seeing this book move to completion. Though many could be named, those who have been most persistent are Zwelihlangeni Makinana, Mthuthuzeli Makinana, Jacklyn Cock, Brian Sandberg, Angie Thomson, Nomhle Gaga, Lynn Pederson and my mother, Virginia Wells.

For what I have learned along the way, I am truly grateful, especially to all those who played a part in teaching me so many important lessons. My own journey with this study has led me to challenge virtually everything I ever knew about or did as an academic historian. It grew out of a conviction that surely there must be ways to ensure that historical research is made relevant.

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A B B R E V I A T I O N S

ATC	AmaNdlambe Traditional Council
CA	South African National Archives, Cape Town
CL	Cory Library, Grahamstown
LMS	London Missionary Society
MAPPP-SETA	Media, Advertising, Publishing, Printing, Packaging – Sector Education Training Authority
NA	British National Archives, London
SAHRA	South African Heritage Resources Agency
UCT	University of Cape Town
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Discovering applied history

Why should anyone write a book about Makhanda and his role in the battle at Grahamstown? To date, historians have given it at most two chapters in their comprehensive histories of the Eastern Cape and its indigenous Xhosa inhabitants.¹ That has always felt like enough. It is told as a sad tale of the warrior-prophet Makhanda futilely leading ten thousand Xhosa soldiers in a disastrous assault on British army headquarters in Grahamstown on 22 April 1819.² The moral of the story is generally about the inability to mount effective military action based on religious motivations, as preached by Makhanda to rally his forces; with a secondary message about the suicidal price paid for divisions within the Xhosa nation at that time. Admittedly, the numbers involved were rather large for those days. But mostly it is treated as an event that was a little peculiar, or perhaps embarrassing.

In 1993, soon after I arrived in Grahamstown and started teaching in the History Department at Rhodes University, I asked a local black student what he knew and thought about the 'Battle of Grahamstown'. He answered that Makhanda was a fool who led thousands of innocent people to their needless deaths, a disgrace to all right-thinking people. I accepted this as an informed African view and assumed it was shared by many others. Such a story was better swept under the carpet. Who wants to be reminded of an idiot and his conned followers? With time, however, it became clear that two quite different views on the great battle at Grahamstown co-existed in its local black community. There were those who thought it was awesome and amazing as well as those who thought it was a frivolous waste of human life. For some, Makhanda was the heroic prototype of the modern freedom fighter; to others he was an embarrassing fool.

And then, just as the twenty-first century dawned, something like a revival of the heroic view of Makhanda began to build momentum. As it grew, the tragic Makhanda came increasingly to be associated with the inherited colonial textbook version of history, while the heroic Makhanda represented a long-suppressed popular view. This growing differentiation only became clear through a wide range of heritage-related activities, in some of which I was directly involved. My engagement

with these activities triggered the interest, which resulted in an extended research project. The point of the project became something more than just filling in some gaps in the existing body of historical information. Within this task lies a somewhat different kind of quest. It represents a creative exploration into the relationship between a dramatic historical event and the community from which it comes. It arises from the question of how historical knowledge is produced and what its purpose is, particularly in the context of a developing country like South Africa.

Unlike the more conventional forms of history writing, it did not originate in a review of existing sources and then the production of a theory on how to revise that knowledge. Instead, it started with my involvement in a variety of community-based history projects that exposed a strong divergence in views between what people on the ground think and feel about their past and what the books say. Such initiatives fall under the broad label of applied history, providing an alternative methodology, point and purpose for producing historical knowledge. It is a completely different approach, which starts with questions such as 'How is this history going to be useful, and to whom?' It implies placing the issue of relevance at the very centre of the investigations. Applied history also implies history that is used in concrete and tangible ways.

This is a research approach that takes people's participation as the starting point, first allowing a popular voice to emerge and then using that perspective to assess and judge all previous efforts to tell the story. It places the popular view at the centre of the analysis. When this is done, then indeed a major revision of the history emerges. Instead of being a battle based on misguided superstitions, the attack on Grahamstown is understood as one of the best-orchestrated attempts to liberate vast tracts of land seized from the amaXhosa by the British.³ A secondary theme growing out of extensive applied historical participation is a reconsideration of the nature of traditional leadership in the days of Makhanda. This challenges the question of the alleged divisions among the amaXhosa, revealing that despite enormous tensions, the direction of events was always towards securing a much-needed unity of purpose.

Discovering Egazini, the Place of Blood

My journey into the realm of applied history started in 2000 when I was asked to be a historical consultant to a new project, dealing with the 'Battle of Grahamstown'. I answered honestly that I did not know anything special about it, but I had been doing research on missionary history in the area in the same time period, so had a

sense of the context. Apart from that, I agreed because the project sounded like fun. Thirty local artists from all walks of life were to be introduced to the history of the battle at Grahamstown and then produce a single visual image on any aspect of their choice. The collected images, in turn, would form an exhibition at the 2000 National Arts Festival.⁴ The project, designed by fine arts practitioners Giselle Bailie and Dominic Thorburn, was quite correct politically, stressing the need for a new history, new voices and new perspectives. It included training black youth and women who had limited prior experience as artists, as well as some big-name professional artists.

The project started with almost simmering awe and a sense that, even if we did not know the details of this event, at least the broad sweep of what happened was very dramatic. Underlying that drama was an important story and message. Everyone sensed this, giving a foundation of mission that helped define the project. The simple knowledge that the battle was big and that it all happened on our doorsteps fascinated and intrigued participants. Whether it was a tragedy or a symbol of hope remained to be seen.

One of the welcome features of my task was that I was invited to include young township people in doing fresh research, including oral history. A team of four project historians became my special targets for a crash course, in about four lessons, on how to do history in new ways. This proved rather harder than first anticipated. Though we started with a review of the basic available literature and moved from there to pressing hard for fresh questions and meanings, it felt almost impossible to get away from the quest to simply know what really happened.

Though the project historians enjoyed the challenges of trying to identify what was most relevant or not, the artists were grumpy and irascible – ‘just wanting to know the truth’. In all the excitement about rediscovering the past, they went dashing off to the library where they eagerly grabbed every book they could find, but immediately ran into the old version of the story, with its negative connotations. The books acknowledge that it was a big event, but the heroic elements are not only missing, they have been replaced by the embarrassing ones, centred on religious fanaticism. The artists ran directly into the historical accounts that reduced the event in size and significance. Some of the enthusiasts, encased by the weight of the printed word in the libraries, felt they had hit a virtual brick wall contained in the inherited versions of the story.

Then frustration and confusion began to enter the picture. The artists were sullen or angry that sources sometimes contradicted each other and resentful if we

suggested that certain ways the stories were told in the history books might not be totally reliable. The notion of contested, nuanced, and ultimately biased history simply did not fit what the artists thought they should be getting from historians. In a later project, one of the artists produced an image of a gigantic pain reliever tablet sinking into the head of a perplexed person, as a direct statement on how difficult it was to absorb and digest all the implications of doing history.⁵ In retrospect, however, despite all the protestations it feels as if the repeated emphasis on new, fresh and different actually worked.

The images in the art exhibition, which received rave reviews, were indeed varied and nuanced. Some captured the sense of deep despair, fear, suffering and helplessness felt by the Xhosa people as they were expelled from their homes and then shot to pieces by the British. Others captured the spirit of pride, strength, courage and hope that came with the determination to fight back. Still others incorporated aspects of the local landscape, suggesting the primacy of the land. Despite the confusion from encountering the old version of the story, most of the artists ended up creating their own counter interpretations. In fact, it appeared that the less literate the artist, the clearer, more focused and strong were the voices.

The results were exciting, not only for understanding today's views on the battle at Grahamstown better, but also for opening up a whole new way of approaching the question of producing knowledge about the past. Though a few of the artists retained a sense of the tragic rendering of the story, most felt exhilarated by the heroic dynamics. The emotions and awe coming out of the art project were so powerful that many of the participants wanted to find some way of continuing. But how and why and to what end? Basically, the artists enjoyed what they had achieved and wanted to continue to work with their creativity. This was hardly surprising. But they and the project historians also felt that this powerful local history needed to be shared far more widely with their community. They understood full well that those who had participated in the project were only a tiny handful. They wanted the message to be shared. But how? Simple: choose a name, draw up a constitution, develop a plan for an art centre that produces teaching aids and runs workshops on important history, and then look for funds. After more than a decade, the Egazini Outreach Project is still functioning and has established a national reputation for itself. All those things, and much more, happened. My involvement with the Egazini Outreach Project and its many spin-offs provided my own induction into the world of applied history.

The nature of popular history

The artists of the Egazini Outreach Project learned that truth about the past is always elusive and subjective. Academics teaching in the social sciences have long accepted the assertions of post-modernism, that there is no such thing as an absolute truth and all knowledge is subject to contextualising and interpretation. It is an approach that aims for honesty about its own biases, but hopes to provide enough information to allow people to decide how to understand them and how to live with the kind of ambiguity raised. To people outside academia this is a difficult concept to swallow. In its own way, the first Egazini art exhibition demonstrated the point very well. Here was an answer to the post-modernists: go beyond bias and subjectivity in the printed word into the realm of creative, artistic, individual expression in the arts. Let the emotions and personal voices come out. Let artists show what their gut feelings are in relation to the story. Let it all be about how people feel. What else is there? It appeared as if this was now going to be *the* way of doing history: breathe fresh life and creative interpretation into the old tales and come up with what the story means to people. Hence, the emerging heroic treatment of the memory of Makhanda and the battle at Grahamstown must be accepted as highly subjective.

The internal dynamics of a single community project, no matter how energised and inspired, cannot alone account for a popular view of history. How does one assess a popular view of the past? I suggest that it can be measured in part by the frequency with which it is discussed, as well as by some probably rather subjective assessment of the amount of passion, conviction or importance that accompanies those discussions. Further, a popular view cannot be expected to be objective, as it arises from a particular historical context of its own.

In the case of the reputation of Makhanda as a heroic figure, there were many more external affirmations. The return of Makhanda took many different forms. The work of the Egazini Outreach Project itself triggered several direct spin-offs. Makana became the name of the newly formed municipality in 2000, partly as a result of active campaigning on the part of the project historians. In 2001, Andrew Buckland produced a play entitled *Makana*, which ran at the National Arts Festival in conjunction with a second art exhibition from the project. Then in 2003 the municipality started the Makana Freedom Festival, which has since become an annual event. This arose as a response to the inputs of project historians into political meetings called to plan programmes for the Freedom Day holiday, which falls five days after the anniversary of the battle. At this annual event, a host of further

creative outputs in the form of drama, dance, song and poetry always emerges. Each year, thousands gather to hear the story told and retold.

Even prior to the start of the first Egazini art project, the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA), in conjunction with the Eastern Cape Department of Sports, Recreation, Arts and Culture, started an initiative to build a new memorial to those who died at the battle at Grahamstown in 1819. Work on the memorial overlapped with the emergence of the Egazini Outreach Project. Then in 2004, SAHRA nominated Egazini as a national heritage site.

As research progressed, we also learned that the freedom fighters of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the armed wing of the African National Congress, always observed Christmas Day as Makana Day in their camps in exile. This derived from the mistaken belief that Makhanda had escaped from Robben Island on Christmas Day. The same military veterans used the name again when they set up their own development agency, the Makana Trust, launched by President Nelson Mandela in 1996.⁶ Mandela has at times also called for the changing of the name of Robben Island to Makana Island. One of the two boats that ferries thousands of visitors to Robben Island is already named *Makana*. A new heritage route established by the Amathole District Municipality in the Eastern Cape bears the name of Makana, even though it has little geographical relationship to the places where he lived. All of these uses of the name Makana suggest that it carries with it a deep symbolic signal, as the ultimate in commitment and inspiration. These uses imply a buried tradition that has been kept alive in practice, apart from the negative imagery contained in history books.

The Makhanda revival came in the context of a time and place where most members of the African population, and many of the minority populations, were grappling to come to terms with the vast past of injustices done to the indigenous people of South Africa. Few disputed the fact that it could now be understood, better than ever before, that the seizure of the whole of South Africa, first by the Dutch and then British invaders, was an unjust cruelty that imposed hardship on generation after generation, right up to the present time. As the dust began to settle on the new Constitution and the new South Africa, the reputation of an ancient prophet against this injustice could readily be celebrated and honoured. The magnitude of that injustice, and the pain it caused, unfolded and reverberated every time the story of the battle at Grahamstown was told. Each telling confirmed the rightness of the present. What Makhanda fought for, Mandela had at long last won, people said. It felt right, it felt good, and the people were reassured to know

that their kind had always fought and resisted what was so blatantly wrong. Makhanda's failure to drive out the British could easily be seen in hindsight as impossible. But he made the most gallant effort imaginable. He became a hero of a macro tale, of macro importance to a people coming out of their bondage.

In this case the core message was about fighting back, not accepting impoverishment and degradation. An important part of the face-to-face encounters with the people most directly involved was seeing how they came to internalise the main message of what it was all about. One strand of awareness was that the poverty and degradation experienced by so many today was not the way it always was. Telling the story opens the door into the pre-conquest past, the time before the land was claimed by thousands of British settlers. Once upon a time, their ancestors were free, independent and had all their daily needs met. Perhaps they were even happy. When those same ancestors saw that their well-being was threatened, they had the good sense to fight back and resist it with everything that they could. The spirit of fighting back is akin to the spirit that people feel today in the new South Africa. It is a spirit of non-acceptance, of breaking the slave mindset and of working hard to create a world that is safe and good for all the children of future generations. Ultimately, it is an inspirational story that assists in decolonising colonised minds. This is the essence of why it is loved and celebrated in the present.

So this book is in part the by-product of what happens when art and history join hands. It has grown out of a curious blend of many elements. On the one hand, the creativity of the artists opened many new doors. The images collectively provide a chorus of voices about the historic event, giving new life and meaning to it all. Through the images, so many small, hushed, but deeply moving voices speak. In being allowed to express themselves, the artists experienced ownership of the history, as well as becoming participants in constructing a new version of it. We are haunted and nearly overwhelmed by their deep insights and nuanced expressions. But the construction of this book did not stop with simply analysing what the artists said and felt; it only started there.

Moving into developmental history

When a story resonates so deeply, then surely it has value. If it has value, how are the owners of the story going to enjoy it? What will it mean to their lives? In part, of course, the value is intrinsic and intangible. It is the value that comes from knowing deeply where you come from, and assigning a positive and uplifting significance to that knowledge. But in today's South Africa, previously disadvantaged

communities still face endless urgent material needs. Feeling good about your identity will not put food on the table, make the toilets flush or pay the school fees. The hunger and need for much more is a stark reality. This then creates the context in which knowledge that has value can also be channelled into producing tangible returns, over and above the intangible. The possibilities of using the past in a developmental way are considerable and can be seen as a logical extension of the exercise of producing that knowledge in the first place. The experience gained from the Egazini Outreach Project opened up a whole new world of what could be called developmental heritage work. This is the tangible side of applied history, aimed at job creation.

The current social and political context is basically supportive of doing something more with heritage. Government policies, departments and programmes are designed to bring about much-needed transformation. The intentions are there, if not yet the delivery. It is a context full of possibility. Thus a project that starts with the task of decolonising minds and cleansing souls of centuries of oppressive and negative self images can hope to move on to far more concrete issues. The mandate of a refreshing and uplifting heritage project cannot rest on the enlightening message alone. Indeed, such a message could quickly be turned to increased bitterness if it had to stand alone. Developmental heritage work requires making the very best possible use out of the knowledge of the past, in ways that make a profound and concrete difference in the lives of those who care most about it. It was not enough that the Egazini artists should enjoy working on their art for a few special exhibitions at the National Arts Festival. What they needed, and eventually got, was a place where they could work collectively as artists, developing their talents to the full, in all directions – not just sticking with heritage themes. They needed to make a living doing what they love most. Not only do they do this now, but they also assist others to earn incomes from training programmes, educational outreach, drama, and arts and crafts production. Their premises have become a destination for tourists and include an interpretation centre, a shop that sells art prints, textiles and pottery, and a place that has become a community venue for meetings, funerals and accessing basic office services such as photocopying.

Once the way forward for the artists became clear, the next challenge was to find ways to make the experience useful to other, similar kinds of projects. A whole methodology began to emerge, grounded in the basic dynamic of a robust dialogue between community members, government funders, academics and other relevant professionals. Patterns for creative partnerships began to emerge.⁷ In the

heritage sector it goes something like this: find a story, an event or a symbol from the past that has potency and relevance for people today, explore what it means to a small group of the most keenly interested people, do some conventional research to find out as much as possible, engage in further dialogue and allow a community-based narrative or story to emerge. Then it should be asked: what is the potential use of this story; who else would care about it and why? When a target audience is identified, then products that will interest them and that they would be willing to pay for can be identified. Such products might be specialised arts and crafts, performances of all kinds, publications, tours and tourist services, an interpretation centre and the invention of special events, such as festivals. Consumers of heritage-related products are likely to be tourists, art lovers, educational initiatives and ordinary people who see it as a form of entertainment.

Once products can be identified, then jobs can be created. This is easier said than done. A job is most likely to need work space, and special training in both the directly relevant skills and in overall business management. Further, marketing, publicity and distribution of the product are needed before jobs are truly created. Thankfully, in the present context none of this is impossible. Indeed, heritage work is finding its developmental feet. Already, the advice and experience of the Egazini Outreach Project has assisted with the development of numerous other projects around the Eastern Cape. Hence the pay-offs for doing applied history have no boundaries. All of this far exceeds the traditional academic mandate of pursuing history. It also involves a host of varied role players, each with special skills to bring to the mix. Increasing the circles of involvement also assists in widening the sense of ownership and participation.

Turning back to written sources

With the Egazini Outreach Project, the new historical approach developed into an art centre with some aspiring historians attached to it. Its members set out to find ways to serve the original mandate: to communicate effectively the basic story of the battle at Grahamstown to as many people as possible. To our chagrin the proposed happy marriage between art and history was not easily understood or accepted by anyone else. Funders looked only at funding one aspect or another, but never at crossing the lines between the two. This, in fact, led to the start of applying more conventional historical methods to the project. If young historians were to continue working for the project, spreading the word and helping to gather more historical information, primarily from oral history interviews, they needed to be

paid. Only Rhodes University could understand that. But for such funds to be released, I had to craft the tasks into more conventional historical research moulds. Yes, the young people could help with interviews, transcribing them, advising on simple publications and designing and running community workshops, but I had to be the senior researcher, designing the research tasks, managing all things.

I was extremely reluctant to be the one to write a book on Makhanda and the battle at Grahamstown. It would have been politically correct at the turn of the twenty-first century for black people to be writing their own history. I was so sure of this that I held back from doing any serious research for quite a long time. It felt wrong for me to be the one to push ahead when everything else was about new and different ways of doing things. Isn't the white academic from the university acting as the expert authority exactly what we did not want to perpetuate? So I waited for the lucky student I could supervise; but he or she never materialised. When it became clear that funding would only come through quite conventional channels for conventional-sounding objectives, I finally relented. The research design took two forms. The first to be pursued was that of trying to collect oral evidence, using the project historians as research assistants. The second required visits to various dusty archives and libraries, stuffed with written words by old, powerful, arrogant men. This I had to do alone, as the tedious wading through mountains of irrelevant data, searching for useful fragments of information, was not something easily done by volunteers, no matter how eager.

The search for oral evidence opened many unexpected new doors. We soon noticed that people living in Grahamstown had very few oral traditions about the famous battle. From the outlines of the story itself, it was clear that the descendants of those who had fought were not likely to be living in Grahamstown today. Their defeat threw them into a form of exile. Obviously, then, it was the descendants of Chief Ndlambe and Makhanda, living to the east of Grahamstown in the former Ciskei Bantustan, who became the possible source for oral traditions. As if by a grand design, at precisely the same time that the Egazini Outreach Project began to take shape, the chiefs who claim Ndlambe as their definitive ancestor formed themselves into the AmaNdlambe Traditional Council (ATC). At the end of 2001, the two initiatives found each other. The senior Ndlambe chief, Zwelivuziwe Makinana, his most respected historian, Stutu Pawuli, and his most trusted senior councillor, M. Madwanya, all journeyed to Grahamstown on 16 December, the Day of Reconciliation national holiday. They sat at the Egazini Project's new centre (a dilapidated former police station) and explained who they were and how they

understood their own history about the events at the time of the great battle at Grahamstown. Their audience included not only the project's participants, but also local people who had been identified as having interests as well as local government councillors. The project historians felt that inserting a tape recorder into this event would be intrusive. Indeed, it was a sensitive occasion, in which some very tentative first links were made. Later we learned that this date also marked the anniversary of the beheading, on Robben Island, of those who had aided Makhanda in his escape. So, it stands as an encounter rich in symbolic meanings. The expelled Ndlambe chiefs took their first steps to return.

From this initial, fairly formal, meeting the research team arranged to follow up with Pawuli, this time to record what he had to say. We agreed to travel to the traditional Ndlambe Great Place near Tshabo and expected about four or five others to come from the ATC. To our great surprise, twenty came, including most of the Ndlambe chiefs and their senior councillors. This was our first clue that the chiefs have a very robust sense of themselves and their own history, and that they cared deeply about it. This meeting, in turn, led to our team beginning oral history work in the Fish River valley, with the full co-operation and support of Chief Zwelihlangeni Makinana, also a direct descendant of Chief Ndlambe. Over time, this work blossomed into its own fully fledged developmental history project, which included training local young people and the creation of the Mbodla Ecoheritage Experiences tourism initiative.

From this encounter, which originated around oral history collection, an extremely robust exchange and debate arose about the nature of rural development in all spheres, with a focus on the role of traditional leadership.⁸ Out of these discussions, something like the amaNdlambe view on developmental issues was incorporated into a major study by the Kara Heritage Institute for the National Development Agency on the role of traditional leaders in development. Their message, essentially about the gains to be made through well-structured co-operation and partnerships between traditional leaders and local government, was, during the study, shared with traditional leaders in all provinces of South Africa.⁹ At roughly the same time, the King Sandile Development Trust began to roll out a programme, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), to assist its chiefs to set up their own development trusts. This gave the chiefs and their communities a modern tool to guide their own developmental agendas, of which heritage was only one.

The friendship and partnership with the amaNdlambe chiefs also produced many results for the Makhanda research. They have very strong, living traditions of their famous ancestor, Ndlambe, as an early freedom fighter, as heroic bearer of the standard of defending African rights at all costs. Their own sense of him and what he stood for was rock solid. It clearly had nothing to do with what was written in any books. In fact, the Ndlambe chiefs would be very dismayed and surprised if they ever read those books and saw what they say about Chief Ndlambe. Their own sense of themselves is a tradition standing in sharp contrast to what is found in the history books, which portrays Ndlambe as an egocentric, power-hungry failure whose influence ended when he died. There is such a different version of that story among the Ndlambe chiefs themselves. They proudly see him as the one chief in South Africa who fought hardest, longest and with the greatest amount of unwavering clarity about the rightness of his cause. As a contemporary Ndlambe councillor to one of the chiefs put it to me in a casual conversation, 'Ndlambe was our Che Guevara!'¹⁰

In their quest to find ways to improve the lives of their people, they have a strong sense of themselves as innovators and adaptors. The ATC formed itself in 2001 out of this self-understanding. First of all they chose to come together as Ndlambe chiefs, maintaining a distinct identity within the Rharhabe nation, which had survived over nearly two hundred years. They have a sense of pride, a sense of leadership, a sense of their own integrity. As we moved into dialogue about traditional leadership and economic development, it was also clear that part of that sense of pride comes from their own confidence in their capacity and capability to shape and improve the lives of their subjects. It is interesting to note that Chief Ndlambe was the quintessential early powerful chief who had to engage with colonial encroachment over most of his life, from the mid-1700s to the early 1800s. It is notable that the chiefs have such a strong sense of themselves still as innovators, those who can take the best of both worlds for the good of the people.

Creating a dialogue between popular and academic history

The many encounters with the amaNdlambe chiefs deeply enriched my sense of how developmental history could work. On the one hand, the partnership created many opportunities for me to get to know their communities and develop a feel for how they thought and functioned. This allowed me both to continuously learn more about the areas related to my own research and to get a basic introduction to their internal dynamics. If historical information was to be effectively applied, it

surely had to happen within the context and frame of reference of the hosting community. As a researcher, the more I could learn about my partners the better. Participation in the developmental projects related to heritage created the possibility of coming to know and understand the beneficiaries quite well. However, being a participant in designing and implementing various projects was a far cry from being the traditional academic observer, dedicated to non-interference with the content. The classic academic model requires a detached and objective observer to record what others say and do, and interfere as little as possible. This implies there is an unadulterated voice that has simply to be captured and then the researcher alone decides how to interpret it. Such a dynamic constructs a process of othering or treating the informants as objects of study, which is the direct antithesis of the point and purpose of applied history. In applied history, the researcher and the benefiting community co-operate together as partners, each contributing something unique. The end result emerges from an ongoing interaction on many different levels.

As I participated in numerous projects, the various ways that I could both formally and informally learn from my partners became clear enough. But finding ways for me to share with them what I was learning from my engagement with archival, written sources was more complicated. The information I was gathering as a historian was original and highly specialised. Did it have a place in highly developmental projects? What right would I have to withhold that information from them? None. In the academic world, one would write seminar papers to begin to disseminate new information. But in low-income communities with limited literacy levels, this was hardly an option. So, the concept of an ongoing dialogue became central. The information just needed to flow in both directions in as many ways as possible.

The nature of a dialogue is that the two parties engage with each other. It requires discussion, exchange of ideas, disputes, differences and, ideally, some form of conciliation based on mutual understanding as to the outcome. I came to see the goal of applied history as creating as many opportunities for meaningful dialogue as possible. To do this, some of the classic tools of the researcher assisted. For example, conducting oral history interviews opened a direct door to dialogue. However, this is an artificial encounter, totally constructed by the researcher, who sets the time, place and questions. Nevertheless, interviews remain a useful tool, both for gaining information related to the content of the historical research and for creating opportunities to discuss aspects of meaning and interpretation. In

addition to finding the wise community elders who possess especially high levels of historical knowledge, it was also useful to ask questions about how participants in a project felt about what was happening. This was done in the early days of the Egazini Outreach Project, thus allowing their views to shape the analysis of its meaning and value. While the artists spoke subjectively through their images, they were also asked to try to put their feelings into words. Both approaches are highly subjective, but for that very reason they are key components of any assessment or analysis.

Perhaps the ideal opportunity for dialogue comes in the form of workshops. The advantages include the fact that people are compelled to focus on issues in depth, information can flow in two directions (from presenter to discussion groups and back to plenary), and these pursuits serve as exercises that consolidate and build consensus. A workshop is often a concentrated educational experience and an activity that is widely understood and accepted. Even better than workshops are strategic planning sessions, which generate collective goals and plans of action.

My experience showed that both of these techniques of constructing occasions for information sharing had limitations. Their very formality stifled the kind of spontaneity that was preferred. Traditional leaders always want interview questions in writing ahead of time so that they can collectively, with their councils, consider the best official answer. Workshops too easily replicate the classroom dynamic, where the expert speaks and the learners listen – absorbing, or not, what is being offered. Often the pace is too fast and time is limited to go far in depth. Many workshops become simply a platform for public reporting from a variety of stakeholders.

More often, semi-structured occasions for exchange of ideas and information proved quite useful. For example, conducting numerous tours to the sites connected with the battle at Grahamstown opened up the time and space for a couple of hours of intense and highly personalised dialogue. Talking to tourists, who are from all over the world, added a dimension that helped us to identify and clarify basic universal issues embedded in the story. Such dialogues tested the internal logic of a storyline centred on the land issue rather than on religious distractions.

Less focused than workshops, but still useful for the creative exchange of ideas, are meetings with team members involved in the implementation of aspects of historical research or community outreach. Discussions on how to design booklets, mini-exhibitions, planning workshops and so on all play a role in constructing the meaning of a project. It is part of the developmental imperative that projects should

always have a training component. Those who are carrying out the mandate of the project, through direct interface with their communities, need to participate as fully as possible in dialogues that both help them to learn the basics and allow them to become active participants in constructing and creating the meanings of it all.

In a somewhat more watered-down way, just participating in planning meetings dealing with the nitty-gritty of implementation of a developmental history project creates some room for dialogue. Though most of the attention is on mundane operational issues, such meetings are the times when participants sit in a focused way to address themselves to what it is all about. The researcher probably learns more about community and organisational dynamics than anything else, but may also see how new events conducive to dialogue on deeper levels can be designed. This is important, as such events need to be fully grounded in what a community values and how they meet and interact. Routine planning meetings might also provide an occasion for short written input, which allows the researcher to share in a modest way.

Despite all the techniques devised by researchers to open space for dialogue, one of the most meaningful ways to elicit information remains the casual, informal, unplanned everyday conversation. Such conversations also allow for two-way inputs from the researcher. Among oral historians, it is common knowledge that the most valuable information often comes after the tape recorder is turned off, in the casual afterglow of an interview. Similarly, meetings with formal agendas dealing with matters rather far removed from the history being researched may provide a natural gathering point for people who share a special, strong interest in the research side of things, and as such they offer opportunities for rich and enlightening discussions. But these generally take place after the formal business is concluded.

Indeed, in every heritage project there are generally a few people who have an almost insatiable appetite to explore the hidden meanings and implications of the story at hand. Such people can become invaluable informal consultants for the researcher, serving as sounding boards for even the most innovative of ideas. All these encounters form part of the applied history dialogue, and must be understood as embedded in the context in which a project unfolds. The details of such sharing are generally far beyond the range of standard footnotes and will never be quantifiable. Readers must simply understand the basic ingredients that have informed the dialogue and accept them as part of the tapestry of meaning that emerges from such exercises.

An applied history text

Since this book stands as an attempt to reconcile both the popular and the written histories surrounding Makhanda and the battle at Grahamstown, what can it claim to achieve? Where does applied history take us, compared to where we were before? Viewed as a whole, it makes the story of a big event stretch to become much bigger. This dynamic of endless discovery of the enlarged significance of many parts of the story kept surfacing throughout the research. It started with the initial Egazini art project.

Similar kinds of plunges into new levels of understanding characterised much of the research. There is a strong sense that this is a story much, much bigger and ultimately more important to the understanding of the South African past than was ever imagined at the outset. As each piece of the story surfaces and comes under fresh scrutiny, it then blossoms into larger, and often unexpected, implications. But then this is what should be expected as a suppressed history is liberated, as silenced voices begin to find themselves and to speak again.

One of the most striking outcomes of the research was the discovery of what one informant dubbed the demonisation of Makhanda by unsympathetic colonial writers. The differences between the style and tone of those Europeans who actually met Makhanda and represented him in a positive light, compared to that of the next generation of missionary writings, are truly startling. The first chapter attempts to consolidate what is reliably known about the historic figure, Makhanda. The evolution of what various writers and historians have said over the years about both Makhanda and the very nature of the battle at Grahamstown is covered in Chapter 2. This demystification of the generations of writing serves as a necessary starting point for the re-examination of the written records. All previous writers put Makhanda's supposed religious eccentricity centre stage in accounting for the battle. This view overshadowed by far the sense that the amaXhosa had an extremely strong claim to the land they had once occupied as their own. If the supposed religious factors are stripped from the story, it stands firmly as an early chapter in the liberation struggle, thus confirming the sentiments always contained in the popular version.

Another unexpected discovery from reconsidering all aspects of the fifth frontier war is to uncover the serious British desperation as they struggled to hold onto their newly claimed territory. Chapters 3 to 5 cover the events that preceded the fighting at Grahamstown. They establish the context and the complexity of the contestation. First, the multicultural melting pot nature of the frontier is explained.

This is followed by an in-depth examination of the volatile relationship between two other key figures of the era, Chief Ndlambe and King Ngqika. The events of the two years preceding the battle at Grahamstown document the steady slide into confrontation, keeping the perspective of the amaXhosa people central to the analysis.

From this retelling of the story, the amaXhosa emerge as much stronger, more effective and better organised than in previous accounts. Not only did the British government have to muster every possible resource within its reach to hold back the full force of Xhosa anger, it only succeeded in holding onto its tenuous military victory by flooding its newly secured territory with thousands of British settlers. The direct link between the Xhosa resistance and this massive emigration of Europeans now becomes clear.

The dramatic events of the day on which the battle at Grahamstown was fought are covered in Chapter 6. Though this day has been subjected to rigorous scrutiny by many military historians, the fresh perspective of the popular view sheds new light on several details. In particular, the alleged role of the feuding chiefs is re-examined in the light of the questions raised about underlying unity among Xhosa royalty. A few myths are dispelled and some new theories put forward.

The immediate aftermath of the battle is explored in Chapter 7. Whereas most historians treat this part of the story as the relatively easy and unrelenting march of the British to consolidate their victory at Grahamstown, the new evidence reveals the ingenuity and resilience of the amaXhosa in the face of a militarily far superior enemy. This suggests that the frontier remained far more unsettled than has commonly been assumed, and for much longer.

In Chapter 8, we see how Makhanda's escape from imprisonment on Robben Island has indeed become a potent symbol of the true freedom fighter's commitment even to die fighting for the cause. What might be surprising is the evidence that shows how this dramatic escape was carried out by a whole host of prisoners who also came from the tradition of fighting for freedom on the eastern frontier. Makhanda was not alone, but in the company of many others who all shared the same vision.

Once the story has been retold, where does that leave us? Clearly, if we look for gallant freedom fighters, using every resource at their disposal to prevent the theft of their land and their freedom, there is more than enough evidence to confirm that. The amaXhosa's struggle to defend their land deserves more recognition that it has received to date.

Like all historical studies, this project gives birth to a new round of questions which fall beyond its scope and may well await the attention of future researchers. For example, if we are to talk about the popular views of a historical event, much more could be documented about the variety of ways that event is portrayed in today's cultural life. In the case of *imfazwe ka Makhanda* (the war of Makhanda), the variety of cultural representations is enormous. The speeches, songs, dances, poetry and dramas that crop up at the annual Makana Freedom Festival would be a rewarding mine of information. Similarly, a critical analysis of major dramatic productions such as Andrew Buckland's play on Makana and other dramatisations would also offer rich material. The declaration of Egazini as a national heritage site and the way that it evolves as an attraction for visitors will also extend the telling of the story.

Another line of further inquiry would be to dig deeply into the nature of traditional leadership, to understand further the complex relationship between Chief Ndlambe, King Ngqika and King Hintsa. This book tries to show how the emphasis on Makhanda's alleged religious beliefs served as a major distraction to the central story of the struggle for land. However, a more nuanced study of the relevant texts might be able to tease out what can be taken as fact from what must be dismissed as fiction. And finally, the laborious task of finding oral tradition could perhaps still be undertaken with greater rigour. Experience has shown that the more the contested history is publicly debated, the more chance there is of obscure informants coming forward with new evidence.

From this study, the popular view of the heroic Makhanda and all that he stood for emerges as a nearly silenced but not forgotten people's voice, while the more pessimistic views of him can be clearly seen as the product of the biased ways in which colonial histories were written. When the confusion over religion is stripped away from the account, then the deeper elements of the story come into sharp focus, placing control of land and of the freedom to ensure the prosperity of the people at the centre of the account.

By entering into the popular spirit of the story, one cannot help but be moved by the core dynamics of conquest, theft and immiseration. One of the strongest images coming out of the artwork of the Egazini project is that of the deep pain and suffering that is still experienced. The freedoms that were lost in 1819 have only been nominally regained, starting in 1994 with the first democratic vote. When we reconsider the story of Makhanda, Ndlambe and Grahamstown, we can appreciate afresh the full nature of what was lost, and how long ago that happened.

The consequences will take further decades, but hopefully not further centuries, to overcome.

Notes

1. See N. Mostert, *Frontiers: The Epic of South Africa's Creation and the Tragedy of the Xhosa People* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992); B. MacLennan, *A Proper Degree of Terror: John Graham and the Cape's Eastern Frontier* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986); J.B. Peires, *The House of Phalo: A History of the Xhosa People in the Days of Their Independence* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1981).
2. Throughout this book the name of the central historical figure is spelt as Makhanda, which is believed to be the most correct and authentic. A range of other spellings has been used at different times by other writers and for other purposes. The most common in the twentieth century is Makana. Many of the historical sources cited here use the name Nxele, said to be the name given to him when he was initiated as a diviner. Its literal translation means left-handed. The Dutch used their own word for left-handed, Links, which the English then adapted as Lynx. Original wording and spelling are maintained in all direct quotations from original sources. At times this may cause offence: terms such as Kaffir or Hottentot are not acceptable today.
3. The term amaXhosa is used to refer to the people who speak the Xhosa language, isiXhosa. It captures the name of the collective people in their own language.
4. 'Egazini – The Battle of Grahamstown: Recasting History Through Printmaking' an exhibition held at the Albany Museum, Grahamstown as part of the 2000 National Arts Festival.
5. S. Mamani, 'The New Struggle' in 'Rebellion and Uproar: The Escape from Robben Island of Makana and the Eastern Frontier Rebels, 1820' an exhibition held at the Recreation Centre, Grahamstown as part of the 2001 National Arts Festival.
6. The Makana Trust, created for the benefit of ex-political prisoners, has changed its name several times and has been called Makana Investment Corporation, Global Makana Strategies and Ifula Holdings.
7. In addition to my own research methodology described here, Giselle Bailie, the originator of the Egazini exhibition (see note 4 above) founded a learnership programme entitled 'Product Development for Heritage Tourism' run by the MAPPP-SETA (Media, Advertising, Publishing, Printing, Packaging – Sector Education Training Authority) in various parts of South Africa.
8. In part, this dialogue arose from the fact that I was also a local government councillor in the Makana Municipality.
9. M. Motshekga, O. Ntsoane and J. Wells, 'Report to National Development Agency on the Incorporation of Traditional Institutions into Poverty Eradication Programmes in Rural Areas: A Concept of Co-operative Community Governance and Rural Development', compiled by Kara Heritage Institute, 2004.
10. Mthuthuzeli Makinana, interview on 27 December 2006 at Gompo Rock (unless otherwise stated, all interviews were with the author).

Searching for Makhandanda

Trying to determine the real Makhandanda is a tricky task. As one historian put it, ‘Makana seems to have been a controversial figure even among his own people and there existed many traditions about him’.¹ How does the contemporary sense of him as the quintessential freedom fighter stand up to the recorded details, both written and oral? What was the actual man like? What can we really know about him? Friends and foes alike agree that he was an extremely charismatic figure who played a leading role in shaping the dramatic historical events on the frontier between 1816 and 1820. He was a traditional spiritual practitioner who rose to extraordinary power and influence among Xhosa royalty. He also boldly claimed to be extending the pioneering work of the Reverend Johannes van der Kemp in introducing Christianity to the amaXhosa. Chief Ndlambe accepted him as his closest adviser in political and military matters, blended with a spiritual dimension. However, his nephew King Ngqika, the hereditary head of the Rharhabe people, feared Makhandanda’s intensely sharp criticism.

Because Makhandanda lived nearly two hundred years ago, sources about him are severely limited. Generations of oral tradition confirm his solid reputation as a unique and powerful leader. But these traditions are weak on detail and hard to test for accuracy. Any claims about him as a person have to rely heavily on written records, kept almost exclusively by people who would not have been his friends. There is only a handful of original sources either to support or deny his reputation. Historians who wrote about Makhandanda in the twentieth century had only the finite sources of the nineteenth century to consult. Hence the same information has been regurgitated over and over again, with only a few variations in interpretation coming from each writer.

When looking at the available sources, it is necessary to differentiate between those that are considered fairly reliable and those that are not. What constitutes reliability? People who met him face-to-face and recorded their experiences and observations can be considered fairly reliable; though we must bear in mind that all those who could write down their impressions were white and likely to have carried their own biases with them, ones that would have been inevitable in a

frontier environment. Second, historians always look for independent information from other sources to confirm an event or an assessment. Generally, three independent accounts that concur are taken to offer reliability. But where resources are scarce, two will do.

African society recorded its history through word of mouth, one generation telling the next what happened. Though subject to some distortion, such oral traditions could be quite reliable and at times captured great detail, right down to the exact words spoken. Starting about twenty years after Makhandá's death, literate white people began to write down what they were told by African people, but it took until roughly sixty years after his death before Africans acquired the means to write and publish for themselves in their own words and their own language. By that time, fixed schools of thought had developed, containing their own biases and opinions. What later generations made of the traditions they inherited, both oral and written, will be the subject of the next chapter.

The people who met Makhandá

The search for the historical Makhandá will start by looking at the written works of those who actually met him or who lived at the same time that he did and would have had access to direct information. The most important source for people who actually met him face-to-face is the London Missionary Society (LMS). Their missionaries usually wrote very near to the time that events happened, so the chances that they described things as they experienced them are strong. Their memories would not have been influenced by subsequent events. They tried to be honest in what they described, but they certainly had their own biases. They came to Africa from Europe with the sole purpose of converting African people to Christianity. Everything they did, saw, described and interpreted has to be filtered through that package of expectations. They struggled to understand and describe this new world that was strange and very different from the one from which they came. In part they were self-consciously writing as the first Europeans to have access to certain people and places, so they saw themselves as reporters sending dispatches home. Their audiences were first and foremost the missionary sending societies who sponsored them, but they also knew that their travels and observations were likely to be published, thus informing a wider European audience. These missionaries will be introduced first and then the details of what they recorded will be discussed.

One of the most useful missionary sources is the journal of the Reverend John Campbell, an official sent out by the LMS in November 1819 to investigate several

issues of concern to the Society.² Upon arriving in Cape Town, he learned that Makhandu was imprisoned on Robben Island and succeeded in getting permission to visit him there. Though he only devotes a few paragraphs to this visit, he gives rich details not available from any other source. Campbell asked Makhandu not only about his background and his life, but also about his views and understanding of recent events and the war that had been concluded the previous month. He also gave a detailed description of Makhandu's appearance at that time, less than a year before his death.

Clearly Makhandu met and was deeply influenced by the first LMS missionary in the frontier area, the Reverend Johannes van der Kemp, probably in 1799, about twenty years before Makhandu's death. Van der Kemp's own writings did not reflect any such meeting, leaving room for a good deal of speculation. Makhandu himself confirmed the importance of his encounter with Van der Kemp on several occasions and claimed that many of his actions were influenced by him. To prove his knowledge of Van der Kemp, he pointed out to Campbell that he himself was now bald, just as the missionary had been.³ Events would prove the pivotal nature of this meeting, even though the details of it cannot be confirmed.

The next recorded encounters between Makhandu and a clergyman were his visits to the Reverend A.A. van der Lingen, who by 1813 had become an army chaplain stationed with British forces in Grahamstown. Though Van der Lingen did not leave any record of these meetings, friends who knew him well conveyed a fair amount of detail about Makhandu's visits, as in this claim:

He was frequently in the habit of visiting the British head-quarters in Graham's Town; and had evinced an insatiable curiosity and an acute judgment on subjects both speculative and practical. With the military officers he talked of war, or such of mechanical arts as fell under his observation; but his great delight was to converse with Mr Vanderlinger the chaplain, to elicit information in regard to the doctrines of Christianity, and to puzzle him in return with metaphysical subtleties and mystical ravings.⁴

The missionary James Read stands out as our single most reliable source for information on the historic Makhandu. He arrived in South Africa in 1801, where he joined the famous Johannes van der Kemp in Graaff-Reinet at a time when he was giving up on his mission to amaXhosa because of great instability and

intensifying warfare in the region. At that time the LMS mission efforts then turned to the Khoikhoi,⁵ the people whom the colonial settlers referred to as Bushmen and Hottentots. In fact, Read arrived in South Africa in the middle of what is sometimes referred to as the third frontier war, which for the most part took the form of a rebellion of Khoi people against the harsh treatment from their Dutch-speaking employers. Much like the biblical Moses, Read and Van der Kemp led a group of Khoi people out of Graaff-Reinet in 1803, to settle near Algoa Bay, 260 kilometres away. They named their new mission station Bethelsdorp and soon built it into a unique community of former farm workers, some of whom still had strong living memories and cultural practices from their days as independent herders or hunter-gatherers.

Read's contact with Makhanda appears to have started in 1816. Since Van der Kemp's abandonment of his first mission to the amaXhosa, the LMS had steadily sought government permission to return to that task. That permission came only in 1816, at a time when the tensions in the Zuurveld area were rising.⁶ The government felt that having missionaries present among the amaXhosa would not only work towards redirecting their spiritual life towards Christianity, but that the missionaries would also serve as a direct source of information, opening up new lines of communication with the powerful chiefs. Their re-entry into Xhosa territory came after a sixteen-year gap in direct contact.

From Bethelsdorp, near present-day Port Elizabeth, James Read and an entourage of Bethelsdorp people of Khoi background travelled across the Fish River into the land of the amaXhosa, where they promptly met Makhanda and stayed in his home as his guests. Given Makhanda's friendship with the Reverend van der Lingen, it is likely that together they had worked out the arrangements for the missionary visit. Read kept a journal, which was subsequently published by the LMS.⁷ In it, Read was fully conscious of the importance of recording day by day the historic journey through what had previously been territory forbidden to the missionaries. In addition to this, he wrote letters to Jacob Cuyler, the magistrate of Uitenhage,⁸ explaining what he had learned and replying to allegations of misconduct about some Xhosa leaders, including Makhanda himself.

Read found that Van der Kemp's work had made a lasting impact and that the amaXhosa could not believe he was not Van der Kemp's son because he was also going bald. Read asked the LMS to consider sending four new missionaries, one each for Makhanda, Chief Ndlambe, Chief Chungwa and Chief Tshatshu.⁹ Ultimately, however, the LMS agreed to send one missionary, Joseph Williams, to

reside near King Ngqika on the Kat River. Williams arrived there with his wife and young son in June 1816, starting what would be a short-lived but very influential mission. After his early death in August 1818, Williams was accused by government officials of being weak and only semi-literate, suggesting that his wife, Elizabeth, is the more likely author of most of his accounts.¹⁰ This mission station was closer to Ngqika's Great Place than to where Makhandu lived, so written communication from Williams is most valuable for shedding light on the relationship between Ngqika and the colonial government. However, Makhandu paid a visit to the mission village at Kat River on one occasion, which was recorded in great detail by the Williamses. The writing from this mission is particularly useful since it came at a time when tensions were escalating between Ngqika and Ndlambe, giving valuable details of the context in which Makhandu operated as Ndlambe's key adviser.

Central to the Williams couple's ability to carry out their work was the presence at the mission of Dyani Tshatshu, who served as Williams' interpreter with King Ngqika. The young Tshatshu had lived for ten years at the Bethelsdorp mission as part of James Read's household. His father, a chief who lived near Bethelsdorp in its early years, had agreed to have his son educated by the missionaries, so that he could teach his people about them. The young boy, however, had to watch his father and his people being expelled from their homes in 1812 when the British cleared the Zuurveld of all African people. By the time of the new mission to the amaXhosa in 1816, Tshatshu was a particularly effective preacher, described as being very animated and moving his audiences to tears, especially upon hearing the Gospel message in their own language for the first time.

Tshatshu accompanied Read on his first exploratory journey across the Fish River, where he joyfully reunited with his father. His presence as both a Christian and a chief's son was critical to the success of the missionaries in moving into unfamiliar territory. Before his departure for the Kat River, he married Sanna Ourson, a Bethelsdorp Christian, who accompanied him there. So it should be understood that Tshatshu's views and perspectives are likely to permeate the Williamses' correspondence. He himself testified before the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements) in London in 1836 at the conclusion of the next frontier war. This gives a record of how he remembered those events twenty years later, in his own words.

In addition to the missionaries, a handful of written records exist from people who were involved in the colonial enterprise in one way or another. The most important source comes from Thomas Pringle, who arrived on the eastern frontier

as an 1820 settler. At that time, Makhanda was imprisoned on Robben Island. Though the two men never met, Pringle claims that he undertook extensive research into the new world in which he had just arrived, questioning black and white alike about recent events. The land he received in Tarkastad was close to the area where Van der Kemp first journeyed and not far from King Ngqika's Great Place. Pringle is best known as a creative writer of poetry and fiction and for his interest in journalism. He wrote with flair and passion; a man of words, but also a man of research. One of his obvious sources on Makhanda was James Read, who also conveyed what he had learned from Van der Lingen, who left no written memoirs or letters of his own of his encounters with Makhanda. Pringle also befriended Robert Hart, who ran the military farm at Somerset East, Magistrate Andries Stockenström and John Brownlee, the missionary who took up Williams' mission work in 1820. Pringle published his material on Makhanda in 1827 in the *New Monthly Magazine* and then incorporated the same text into his book, *Narrative of a Residence in South Africa*. Pringle's research produced the most detailed and comprehensive description of Makhanda available. He was quoted, generally verbatim, at length by both Charles Lennox Stretch and the later LMS missionary superintendent the Reverend John Philip, in their accounts. His work also stands as the most quoted source by subsequent generations of historians. It can be taken as reasonably reliable, given its proximity in time to actual events. However, Pringle's flair for creative and entertaining embellishment must be taken into consideration.

Pringle, like Philip, can be placed squarely in the camp of early nineteenth century British humanitarians. Both were very active in the campaign against slavery and the overall mistreatment of indigenous peoples by the British the world over. Though his family became direct beneficiaries of the conquest of Xhosa land, he raised questions about justice and the treatment of the original owners. In practice, what this meant was that he wrote as one who did not question the fundamental dynamics of colonial settlement, but who wished to see it done in a fair and ethical way.

Stockenström gave an account of Makhanda's surrender to him in August 1819. He was magistrate of Graaff-Reinet and commanded one of the invading columns into Xhosa territory in 1819. The account, however, was written and published several years afterwards and could well have been coloured by subsequent events on the frontier in which Stockenström was a key player.

Less detailed, but still of interest and valuable, is a memoir from Charles Lennox Stretch, a soldier who fought at Grahamstown when it was attacked in April 1819.

He was also part of the British military force that took Makhanda prisoner and he described a personal visit made to the infamous captive. Like Stockenström, Stretch also wrote many years after the event, late in his own career as a military man on the unsettled frontier, so his accounts would be influenced by distortions in memory. Stretch relied rather heavily on Pringle's publications. Both of them were participants in the whole colonial exercise, but critiqued it from within. Stretch is perhaps best remembered by the amaXhosa as the person who donated the land on which Lovedale College was eventually established as one of the first secondary schools and teacher training centres for Africans. He, too, writes from a perspective that is fairly sympathetic to the amaXhosa, but does not question the right of the British to have occupied their land.

A source often overlooked is what could be called the Great Speech, delivered by Makhanda's head councillor at the time of his surrender to the British. The speech was so eloquent that it moved most of the listeners to tears and was written down by a British officer. It was included in Pringle's original 1827 article on Makhanda.¹¹ The late nineteenth-century Xhosa writer Isaac Williams Wauchope notes that councillors underwent long training in oratory skills, which are clearly evident in this document.¹² It should be taken as a direct reflection of Makhanda's own understanding of the events that led up to the war.

These are first-generation written sources that help us to understand who Makhanda was and how those who met him responded to him. The details provided by these sources will inform the rest of the book. Other written sources, produced at later dates, are considered less reliable and subject to careful textual criticism.

Memories and knowledge of Makhanda among the amaXhosa abound, but are so widely scattered that it is difficult to access them. Makhanda's general reputation among the amaXhosa is impossible to quantify, but numerous oral sources convey a consistent portrait. After a few years of working at Lovedale in the 1870s, the historian George McCall Theal had spoken to a number of informants on a wide range of subjects. His own publications provide access to oral traditions that had survived for several decades since Makhanda's death in 1820. Of note is his assessment that it would be a mistake to think of Makhanda as an average Xhosa *inyanga* (traditional healer) who became prominent in times of war. Instead, he stressed:

One who has listened to the glowing language in which scores of old men have described the conduct of him who had gone from them forty years

before, who has studied the effect of his teaching even in distant parts of Kaffirland, and who has collected his maxims and his predictions from those who revered his memory, must think differently.¹³

The traveller George Thompson, who published his account in 1827, had similarly observed that Makhanda's rise to power came from the great respect he earned 'by his humane and popular conduct' through which he 'became the chief councillor' of the hereditary chiefs associated with Ndlambe. Thompson picked up that when King Ngqika tried to counter the influence of Makhanda, he 'ended up only making himself less popular'. Indeed, he noted, Makhanda was one of the few commoners who rose to such high status in the history of the Xhosa people, commanding even greater power and influence than many hereditary chiefs.¹⁴ From the time Xhosa Christians started writing their own histories, they referred to the three great prophets of their nation: Makhanda (war of 1819), Mlanjeni (war of 1850–3) and Nongqawuse (prophetess of the cattle killing movement starting in 1856).

What did they see?

All those who met Makhanda describe him as striking in both appearance and demeanour. James Read found him to be 'a stout handsome man' who 'commands respect'.¹⁵ The British soldiers who visited him after his surrender were 'surprised at his lofty demeanour and appearance'.¹⁶ The most detailed account of Makhanda comes from Campbell, who recorded: 'We found Lynx a fine figure of a man, measuring six feet two inches in height . . . He had many marks of old cuts, or wounds, on different parts of his body, especially behind his shoulders . . . He had a kind of tattooing in the form of a cross, under his breast.'¹⁷ Bracelets made of coarse hair hung from his arms, but he especially valued his ivory arm-band, the insignia of a very great man among the amaXhosa. Stretch estimated his height to be six foot and four inches.¹⁸

All these descriptions directly contradict one that arose by the early twentieth century, describing Makhanda as 'a very ugly man of middle stature, with a head shaped like a boer-pumpkin, high cheek bones, quick, restless eyes, and a big mouth'.¹⁹ Such statements became typical of the anti-Makhanda school of thought that arose in the course of the nineteenth century among Christian Africans and which will be discussed in the next chapter. The accounts of eyewitnesses who met Makhanda are taken as more reliable, painting a picture of a man whose physical presence matched his reputation.

It is difficult to define with certainty Makhanda's background and origins. Family traditions give his birthplace as near present-day Willowvale, after which his parents and their children moved westward.²⁰ The one thing that all writers agree on, however, is the fact that he was a commoner by birth, and had no claim to leadership other than his own charisma and force of personality. Makhanda told Campbell that his father was Xhosa, but his mother was not. This suggests that she may have been of Gona Khoi background, the most populous group in the region after the amaXhosa. Such a mixed cultural heritage would not have been unusual in those days.

Wauchope learned from his grandmother that the powerful King Rharhabe, on settling to the west of the Kei River, ordered the intermarriage of ten Khoi women with ten Xhosa men and vice versa to secure harmony between the people.²¹ Theal confirmed Nxele's mixed background from his informants:

His mother was held in repute as a wise woman, who was acquainted with mystical uses of plants, and who was skilled in divining events. Her son inherited her ability, and to the knowledge possessed by his countrymen added a good deal which he acquired from white people with whom he came into contact, especially from Dr. Van der Kemp.²²

The fact that Makhanda spoke at least some Dutch, as confirmed by eyewitnesses, suggests that he indeed spent part of his life living among Dutch-speaking people. Read claimed that '[w]hen a boy, he was among the farmers', but significantly does not suggest where.²³ Later sources claim that he grew up as a boy on a Dutch farm near Uitenhage, while other oral traditions name his place of birth as Qhagqiwa River at Uitenhage.²⁴ Apparently his father, Gwala of the amaCwerha clan, died while he was still a boy and his mother journeyed with Makhanda, his elder brother and two sisters into Xhosa country, where she then lived with Balala, who is often mistakenly named as his father.²⁵

Makhanda's early life among the boers proved to be formative to his thinking and actions in the final years of his life. According to his councillor, the African people felt a strong sense of ownership and attachment to the area of the Zuurveld: 'The Boors made commandoes on our fathers. Our fathers drove them out of the Zuurveld; and lived there because we conquered it. There we were circumcised; there we got wives. There our children were born. The white men hated us but could not drive us away.'²⁶

A significant feature of boer culture was that the Dutch called themselves Christians, as a kind of tribal name, and also assumed superiority over Africans because of their religion, no matter how superficially it was practised. Workers on their farms might have been introduced to Bible reading and other aspects of Christian worship, but efforts to convert them to Christianity were never made, lest the sharp cultural hierarchy be disturbed. The young Makhanda would have been exposed to the idea that it was Christianity that gave the boers their power and claims to superiority. It has been noted that one of his driving aims was to make the Africans equal to the Europeans in every way.²⁷

Makhanda's descendants claim that the family residence was in the vicinity of present-day Glenmore, very near the Committee's Drift crossing in a part of the Fish River valley in which many traditions about events relating to Makhanda still abound. This is probably the area to which his mother came after losing her husband. According to Xhosa custom at the time, her late husband's brother or other male relative would have had an obligation to take the family in.²⁸ James Read learned that Makhanda had exhibited unusual behaviour as a child, indicative of the spiritual calling he eventually received.²⁹ This theme was picked up and put forward in highly exaggerated form by Makhanda's detractors many decades later.

Like all African traditional healers, Makhanda's spiritual growth was guided through dreams and visions. The available sources give no indication how his spiritual practice grew. Ezra Tisani speculates that Makhanda was one of the *inyangas* who officiated at the installation of Chief Ngqika in 1795, but there is little direct evidence to confirm this.³⁰ A little more is known about his exposure to the missionary version of Christianity. In his 1819 meeting with the Reverend Campbell, Makhanda claimed that he had met the Reverend van der Kemp, received a gift from him and given him a cow in return.³¹ Although many sources claim the two met at Bethelsdorp, where Van der Kemp settled in 1803, this appears unlikely. Indeed, Read's own journal of his 1816 journey suggests indirectly in many ways that Makhanda was not a known figure at Bethelsdorp. First, neither Read nor Makhanda claimed any prior meetings with each other. This stands in sharp contrast to Chiefs Habana, Chungwa and Tshatshu, who were all described warmly with details of all their prior meetings with Read and visits to Bethelsdorp. Read, like all other missionary writers of his time, was always eager to point out when a person of any note or standing might have been influenced by the prior work of the missionaries. In this regard, he refers only to the influence of Van der Kemp over Makhanda, but is silent about any possible contacts with Bethelsdorp.

The implication of this revision is that it makes Makhanda much more of a self-made man, already established and mature by the time the missionaries started their work in the region. From this, it appears that he lived in the vicinity of the great Rharabe royals, Ngqika and Ndlambe, when they were still on amicable terms in 1800. Wauchope claims that Van der Kemp lived in the Debe Nek area, in 'the valley of the Hottentot women'.³² If Makhanda was old enough to give the gift of a cow, then he would have been well established and into his adulthood, giving some hints about his age. It also removes some of the stigma of being a subservient farm worker, which might well have been an experience confined to his childhood.

His reputation today among amaXhosa is that of an *inyanga*. Of all the historians who have tried to explain who Makhanda was, only Ezra Tisani takes this role seriously and tries to put it in its fullest perspective. Writing in the turbulent years of the mid-1980s as a proponent of black theology, Tisani was a clear champion of the view of Makhanda as 'the pioneer of the spirit of black consciousness among the black people of South Africa'.³³ If Makhanda is seen as a traditional *inyanga*, then it becomes much easier to understand how hard it was for Western writers and observers to explain who he was or to account for his beliefs and behaviour. What he said and did was always contrasted with Christianity and found wanting.

Tisani explored the roles, behaviour and expectations placed on the *inyanga*, who was seen as a critical mediator between ordinary people and their deceased ancestors, whose spirits lived on. The Xhosa spiritual hierarchy puts Qamata (God), to whom only the spirits of the ancestors have access, at the top. The ancestral spirits are seen to have a direct interest in and impact on all aspects of the daily lives of the living, from harvests to sicknesses and other forms of good or bad fortune. As a Western observer in the 1820s put it: 'They believe in the immortality of the soul . . . of a superintending Providence they have some notion; and sometimes pray for success in their warlike or hunting expeditions . . . and in sickness for health and strength . . . and in great emergencies, and especially in going to war, invoke their aid.'³⁴

Tisani also stresses the strong relationship between ancestors and the land: living people seek the goodwill of the ancestors through special rituals associated with harvest, drought and rainmaking. Indeed, the ancestors are seen as the rightful owners of the land. Ordinary Xhosa people today still seek out the services of diviners who mediate for them and the sacrifice of an animal for ritual purposes to influence the ancestors is commonplace.

In Makhandá's days, there were different types of *inyangas*, some schooled in the ways of the forests, some in the ways of water and others who earned the title of war-doctor. Every chief, both then and now, has his own special *inyanga* who is highly trusted and works closely with the chief as his adviser. The title given to this specialist role was *itola*, 'whose charge was two-pronged: He was both the advisor and protector of the chief and of the people'.³⁵ Both Ezra Tisani and Mda Mda view Makhandá as just such a highly placed *itola* among the amaRharhabe royalty.³⁶ By the time Makhandá became known to Europeans, he occupied exactly this prominent role in relation to Chief Ndlambe. Further, an *inyanga* is understood to have ongoing communication with ancestral spirits, informing all official duties and actions. Messages are delivered through a highly ritualised style of speaking and dancing, similar to that practised by praise singers. If this was the nature of Makhandá's role, then it can hardly be surprising that Western observers found it difficult to see him as a model Christian.

Most of the negative views of Makhandá derive from allegations that his teachings were millenarian by nature, proving to be more destructive than constructive. In promising supernatural deliverance from grievances, he inspired people to take illogical actions. The first such incident is associated with a mass gathering of people at Gompo Rock, and the attack on Grahamstown is often viewed as a second millenarian event. This study argues that such interpretations detract from more fundamental issues. However, a fresh interpretation of the Gompo Rock story helps to add clarity to an understanding of the attack on Grahamstown.

Gompo Rock is on the Indian Ocean seashore just west of present-day East London. At this spot, two huge rocks project from the sea, about 14 metres high, with a channel between them. The breaking surf in the grotto at the bottom makes a thundering sound, giving the place an air of mystery and awe. At first glance it might appear that the stories of Gompo Rock were a pure fabrication of Ntsikana, the man who clearly emerged as Makhandá's arch-rival and spent a good deal of energy denouncing him (details of Ntsikana's life will be provided in the next chapter.) Today's generation of amaNdlambe living in the vicinity of Gompo Rock have no oral traditions that remember this event, suggesting that for them it represented nothing out of the ordinary.³⁷ Gompo Rock is better known as a sacred site associated with ancestors whose spirits are believed to reside in the waters, which no doubt was highly significant even in the days of Makhandá. But legends associated with the place speak only of underwater mermaids living beneath the

thundering surf, rather than describing it as the scene of a failed prophecy. However, two additional sources that can be taken as fairly reliable help to confirm the nature of an event that actually happened.

Apart from Ntsikana, the earliest recorded account of it comes from the pen of the Reverend William Shaw in a journal entry of February 1828. On passing this notable sight, his Khoi interpreter David Boesak told him of the event, which he claims took place ‘ten to twelve years earlier’. Makhandanda had informed Chiefs Ndlambe and Phato that if people gathered at this place he had the power to make their dead ancestors rise from the sea, whilst those who were guilty of witchcraft would be ‘seized and placed in a cavern under the rock’. Accordingly, ‘thousands gathered’ and waited eagerly overnight, but when Makhandanda

ordered them all to enter into the water and wash . . . as they entered the water en masse they could not refrain from bellowing forth the usual war yell. Makhandanda now informed them they ought not to have done so and, since they had thought proper to follow their own headstrong will & not to listen to his directions, all was now over, & every man might return to his home.³⁸

This basic description is fundamentally consistent with Ntsikana’s version. Allegedly, Makhandanda exacted a fee of one cow from every household that wanted to participate in the ritual. He was accused later, by his detractors, of unkindly demanding this cow, even from the poor. Ntsikana claimed that he had also paid the fee, but then changed his mind and took his cow back. After the event, Ntsikana loudly denounced Makhandanda as a fraud, saying to the people around him, ‘You only go to wash yourselves with seawater at Gompo, Nxele is misleading you’.³⁹ Writing in the early twentieth century, Isaac Wauchope confirms that his own grandfather had been one of those who went to Gompo Rock.⁴⁰

While most historians repeat the views of Shaw and Ntsikana that this event marked a failed prophecy on the part of Makhandanda, Ezra Tisani alone makes an effort to understand the happenings in the light of Xhosa spiritual practices. He classifies it as *ukunqula izinyanya*, a time of making the people’s needs known to the ancestors in which the solidarity of the crowds assembled for feasting would be important. For Tisani, the value of such a ritual ‘would not depend on the alleged “resurrection”’.⁴¹ He could have gone even further to point out that bathing in the sea to make connection with the spirits of the ancestors and as a time of

personal renewal lies deep in Xhosa tradition. Even now, the beaches of the Eastern Cape fill with bathers every New Year's Day to act out this belief. Similarly, there would be nothing unusual for people to be asked to slaughter a beast for an important ritual opening up contact with the ancestors, which is still commonplace among amaXhosa, whether Christian or not.

What is perhaps especially significant is the fact that 'Makanna's credit did not suffer greatly thereby'.⁴² When reconstructing the events of Ntsikana's life, it appears that the Gompo Rock event must have predated Makhanda's rise to power as Chief Ndlambe's *itola*, which was firmly in place by 1816. Rather than viewing it as a millenarian event that exposed the flawed and superstitious thinking of its leader, it could be taken as an event which helped turn Makhanda towards more temporal and less spiritual ways of dealing with the problems faced by his people. In so doing, he secured his place as a leader of highest rank.

The fact that Makhanda made a point of seeking out the army chaplain Van der Lingen, between 1812 when Grahamstown was established and 1817 when Van der Lingen departed, is stated consistently by all the primary sources. This significantly places Makhanda's most extensive search for information about Christianity as coming from his own initiative in the period following the 1812 expulsion, which was a major turning point in frontier dynamics. He directed his attention to Grahamstown, the seat of British military power and close to the proclaimed Fish River border. It is not possible to determine if his visits to Van der Lingen predated the Gompo Rock affair or not. However, it is highly probable that these visits opened the way for the journey of James Read in 1816.

Makhanda is widely acclaimed as having the gift of prophecy: 'a person who could see things that were going to happen'.⁴³ From his discussions with people living near Lovedale in the 1870s, Theal concluded: 'On many occasions he announced events that would shortly take place; and these announcements often – thousands of his countrymen believed always – proved correct.'⁴⁴ His prediction of the annihilation of the Ngqika people came true with the 1818 battle at Amalinde. Nxele's descendants today claim that members of the family still practise healing arts passed down by him using traditional herbs and that it would be quite wrong to describe him as a witch doctor.⁴⁵

Though nowhere recorded in detail, it appears that Makhanda had developed something like a package of beliefs and practices for his people to follow. A few years after his death, the missionary William Shaw reported that he had been unable to get any response from the people of the Jonga clan in Zinda's kraal in the

Chalumnqa area because they ‘preferred the kind of worship introduced by Makanna’.⁴⁶ The chief of the area had long been accustomed ‘to pay much deference’ to Makhandanda’s sister. Part of the spiritual practice included singing a special song, called Tabhu.⁴⁷ Nothing else is known about the customs, except that they bore many resemblances to Christianity but faded out over time, according to Shaw.⁴⁸

James Read’s journey into Xhosa territory in 1816 revealed many things about Makhandanda’s personality and social standing at the time, particularly about his relation to Xhosa royalty. Read reported that Makhandanda had recently been made a chief, which was accepted by all the other chiefs with the exception of the two kings, Chief Ngqika and King Hintsa.⁴⁹ Technically, Makhandanda should be understood as a very senior councillor or *phakathi*, rather than as a chief.⁵⁰ The British at the time accepted Makhandanda as a chief and always treated him as such. In practice, it appears that this was never made an official designation, but was effectively honoured in day-to-day practice. Although Makhandanda’s descendants are known and respected, they are not accorded chiefly status today.

Other incidents during Read’s journey offer insight into just what that special status meant. On first crossing the Fish River, the mission entourage met three different chiefs, who were all consulted about the quest to find a place to set up a new mission station among the amaXhosa. All of them said that the matter would have to be referred to Makhandanda. Chief Chungwa pointed out that this was a decision that could only be made by Ndlambe, Ngqika and Makhandanda. Indeed, once all the Ndlambe chiefs had gathered to deliberate on the issue, Ndlambe directly instructed Makhandanda to choose a site.

Within the context of Makhandanda’s prominent leadership role, it is interesting to note that he and Chief Ndlambe disagreed sharply on at least one thing. Makhandanda preached that having more than one wife was against God’s wishes. To this, Ndlambe answered flatly that he was not willing to put aside his young wives. Apparently this difference in opinion between the two was not a major stumbling block. Within a few months Makhandanda himself would take a second wife. Perhaps Makhandanda’s call for monogamy was more to impress his missionary visitors than a central tenet of his preaching.

Read’s journal also gives some insight into Makhandanda’s relationships with Kings Hintsa and Ngqika, both by hereditary right the superiors of Chief Ndlambe. Makhandanda was familiar with the future plans of King Hintsa but showed very little willingness to co-operate in helping the missionaries make contact with Ngqika, leading Read to suspect ‘that Makanna and Slambie wished to act

independently of Geika, first perhaps from a principle of superiority; and secondly fearing that Geika might oppose the coming of the missionaries'.⁵¹ Read had to find other ways to communicate with Ngqika.

During his visit to Makhandanda, Read encountered his distinctive blending of Christian and Xhosa beliefs and customs. This left Read perplexed as to how to respond. As Read put it, the preaching of Makhandanda 'although very defective, and, in some things inconsistent, has had a wonderful effect, and prepared the minds of the Caffres'.⁵² On several occasions, people burst into tears of joyful emotion upon seeing the missionaries among them. The joyous reception that the mission party received everywhere confirmed a positive attitude towards Christianity. Even as Read and his people were still on their knees rejoicing in prayer at being across the Fish River, they were surrounded by one hundred warriors who identified themselves as being from Makhandanda.

Exactly what Makhandanda preached is difficult to determine and has been much distorted over time. However, when Read first met some of his followers, they told him that Makhandanda had taught them 'to abstain from blood-shedding, theft, witchcraft and adultery'. Read reported that Makhandanda's preaching against adultery met with outright rejection from Chief Ndlambe.⁵³ The theme of the resurrection of souls was also one of Makhandanda's favourites, in which he reflected the Christian teaching that good souls would thrive, whereas bad people would be condemned to eternal punishment.

Makhandanda himself placed his efforts in the context of Van der Kemp's attempt to introduce Christianity sixteen years earlier, urging the amaXhosa to 'drink from the water of life'. He claimed that when the amaXhosa refused to listen to Van der Kemp, he then went to the Khoikhoi, 'the despised nation'.⁵⁴ The achievements of the Bethelsdorp mission since its inception are likely to have made a big impression on the amaXhosa who had been removed from its neighbourhood in 1812. The Khoi converts to Christianity had learned to read and write, and to run their own businesses in the frontier economy, mastering numerous skills and trades. The visit now of the missionaries, Makhandanda claimed, proved that God had not given up on the Xhosa people. First he sent Makhandanda, of humble birth, and now he also sent Read and Tshatshu as confirmation of his intentions.⁵⁵ Hence, the missionaries were well received and the chiefs argued over where a new mission station should be placed. Dyani Tshatshu's father said it should be near him, since he had sent his son to learn from them. Both Makhandanda and Ndlambe also wanted it near them. Read, however, eventually chose a spot on the Kat River nearest Ngqika's Great Place, so as not to alienate the Rharhabe king.

In a private conversation with Read about how he went about his business, Makhanda indicated that the people had been slow to respond: 'For notwithstanding Makanna had made known to them the word of God, he feared that, through the corruption of their hearts, just as little as they had attend to Jankanna's message, so little would they heed his.'⁵⁶ He viewed Read's offer of a mission station as a form of reinforcement and assistance in what he had already been trying to achieve. He further confided that he tried to introduce his message gradually: 'He said that he never made long discourses to the Caffres; for they would forget the first part by listening to the last; he said a little to them at a time, and bid them go think of it, and come again . . . that although the Caffres would not at first listen, he felt it his duty to continue preaching.'⁵⁷

From all this, it is clear that spirituality had become an important issue among the amaNdlambe in the few years since their expulsion from the Zuurveld. Makhanda's rise to power cannot be seen apart from his efforts to provide his people with some kind of guidance to understand their fate in spiritual terms. For example, Chief Habana claimed he used to visit Bethelsdorp only to beg for beads, buttons and copper, but to Read he said he now understood the importance of their message and wanted it for himself. In part, Makhanda's message was that they were to be blamed for wrong habits, which could yet be corrected to improve things. As recorded by Read, 'Makanna then addressed the assembly with great boldness, saying that what he said was the truth; and that if they would not leave sin, they might expect the consequences.'⁵⁸ But perhaps Makhanda's confessions to Read about his slow progress with his people referred to the difficulty in making the basic teachings of Christianity known to them. It was his way of saying that even he did not expect them to embrace fully something so new and radically different.

Yet clearly his own rise to power did not depend on the introduction of proper Christianity alone. Like Van der Lingen, Read found Makhanda to have an insatiable curiosity, not only about spiritual matters, but also about temporal ones. He plied Read with questions about 'the king of England, his father and the English Constitution' in addition to theological questions. Read observed that he was uncomfortable with aspects of Makhanda's style, saying 'he makes the Caffres believe he is a very great man; and seems under the temptation to be pleased that the Caffres think there is something miraculous in his doings'. When he asked Makhanda how he had come to know the word of God, he told Read of a dream in which evil people were about to throw Makhanda into a fire, but Jesus (Taay to

the amaXhosa) came and saved him, telling him to carry forward Van der Kemp's message. Makhanda also claimed that he was the brother of Jesus, born of the same mother. Both of these things perplexed Read and he tried his best to interpret them in a traditional Christian way saying, 'I sometimes thought that, when he should gain more light, he would find that this is the new birth, through which he might call Christ his brother.' Read believed that Makhanda had only a partial knowledge and understanding of the Gospel message, including the Fall, Deluge, motion of the Earth, crucifixion of Christ and eternal punishment, 'but was deficient in a real knowledge of himself, and of the gospel'.⁵⁹ The mixture of Xhosa and Christian spiritual elements and practices posed a challenge to Read, even as he exulted in the astonishing reception his travelling group received. The dreams and revelations of a traditional Xhosa *inyanga* were clearly puzzling to him, but he duly recorded what he heard from Makhanda. Future generations of historians would take these as literal tales, confirming Makhanda's unreliability.

Apart from his prominence as a spiritual leader, Makhanda commanded considerable temporal powers and was deeply involved in all dynamics of frontier society. Read noted that Makhanda presided over several villages and commanded a large contingent of soldiers. After the missionary journey ended, some of the Khoi participants from Bethelsdorp informed the British commanding officer in Grahamstown, Major George Fraser, about having seen large amounts of stolen livestock and guns, as well as runaway slaves, servants and army deserters. When Read was called to account for what he had seen, he staunchly defended Makhanda as guilty of no wrongdoing. He did not see stolen guns, horses or cattle at Makhanda's kraal, but reported that

Makanna told me that he was busy in collecting cattle and horses to bring to Graham's Town and while I was with him two men arrived from the Mandankian kraals where they and others had been as spies to seek for stolen cattle . . . He however some time ago nearly sacrificed his life to secure a stolen horse.⁶⁰

One of these messengers, a well-known runaway slave named Damon, said he was coming from beyond Chief Ngqika's kraals, where he lived with two army deserters, with a complaint for Makhanda to address.⁶¹ Read added that he personally would not have been able to identify stolen goods or runaway people as readily as his Khoi companions, who recognised and noted every stolen cow and

its probable owner back in the Colony. At the time, some form of branding made it easier to determine cattle ownership.

Apart from his focus on the prospects for establishing a new mission station, Read unwittingly added his own prophetic voice. He is often quoted as shrewdly observing that 'Makanna may be very useful or very injurious'.⁶² Indeed, at the time of his visit the war to come was not inevitable. Members of Chief Ndlambe's family expressed their hopes that the coming of the missionaries among them would bring peace to the country. Ndlambe himself said that he welcomed the word and was willing to go along with an end to bloodshed, theft and witchcraft. The amaXhosa had good reason to place such hopes in these missionaries. As the historian Noël Mostert puts it, 'Van der Kemp and Read . . . postulated absolute equality between the races that was never to be equalled in quite the same way by any other missionaries in the 19th century.' And 'James Read . . . was to remain until mid-century as the main, and often only, example of pure, uncompromised conscience on the frontier.'⁶³

When the new mission station first started in June 1816 under Joseph Williams, the amaXhosa expressed great curiosity to learn more about the teachings of Christianity. In August, King Ngqika, some of his wives and sons visited the mission station for seventeen days to take instruction. By early November, Williams reported great turmoil among the people as to whose message should be believed – his own, or Makhandanda's. Though Ngqika professed to support Williams, he admitted that few from his kraals agreed with him. Ngqika's eldest son, Maqoma, was in the forefront of championing Makhandanda. In the midst of frightening rumours of threats to his safety, Williams was taken by surprise one day to learn that both Ngqika and Makhandanda were heading to the mission station. Ngqika arrived first on foot, 'in a great perspiration and alone . . . in a great haste'. He warned Williams of Makhandanda's great hostility towards the missionary effort, but then coached him on how best to appease this anger. When Makhandanda arrived the next day with twenty armed guards, Williams greeted them with some anxiety, only to be surprised: 'He was much more free than when Read and I were at his place and finding this to be unexpectedly so, I asked him if he were angry with me, he replied, no: why should I be angry?'⁶⁴

The two great Xhosa leaders stayed for nearly a week. Williams' account does not explain the main purpose of their visit, but it appears that they came to receive instruction on the basic tenets of Christianity. One of the agendas of the visit was to teach the guests how to read. Williams reported that Makhandanda 'learned the

alphabet in one day' whereas Ngqika and one of his wives also mastered it, but had presumably been under instruction for longer. His detailed reports of private conversations with each of the leaders reveal aspects of what was discussed and give important clues as to the nature of Makhanda's own beliefs, as well as Williams' relationship with King Ngqika.

One of the central issues was the lack of rain, which was causing much suffering among humans and cattle. The amaXhosa believed that missionaries had special rainmaking powers superior to their own *inyangas* because of an incident when Van der Kemp's prayers for rain appeared to be more successful than the traditional methods.⁶⁵ In fact, the belief in the capacity of missionaries to make rain might well account for the intensity of interest at the outset of all the Xhosa people in Christianity. At the time of this visit to Williams' mission station, a man and a woman had recently been cruelly killed for their alleged role in holding back the rain. When confronted by Williams, Makhanda denounced such practices and placed the blame on King Ngqika, who claimed he knew nothing until after they were dead. Later, in a private conversation, Makhanda queried whether the current drought might be due to the fact that he had just taken a second wife. When quizzed about this, he tacitly admitted that he might have impregnated the niece of Chief Ndlambe, who had been deviously given to him as a companion in a hut one night.⁶⁶ They subsequently concluded a marriage, although Makhanda already had another wife. Since he had previously been advocating monogamy, this deed troubled him. He told Williams, 'I am verily guilty and a part of my object in coming here is to let you know how it is with me.' He admitted that he did not know how to 'stand before God undefiled' and so came to Williams 'as a child . . . that you might set me right'.⁶⁷

In another conversation, Makhanda reproved Ngqika for professing interest in Christianity while still marrying further wives. Williams roundly upbraided them both for not honouring the Christian teachings on monogamy. Makhanda's response was to preach to all the Xhosa people visiting the mission station, advising them that the word of God was the truth and that they should stick to it like the 'roots of the grass stand against the beast while they are plucking at the blade'.⁶⁸ This enthusiasm for the message of Christianity, however, did not extend to firm endorsement of the call for monogamy.

The time spent at the mission station had little to do with the burning political issues of the day – rising tensions with the British and boers around cattle thefts and desertions. As Makhanda was preparing to depart for home, Ngqika asked

him for news. At this, a full meeting of all the people present at the mission station was called by Makhanda. After opening prayers and hymns, Makhanda launched forth on a heated tirade that lasted fifteen minutes:

How is it that you are yet enquiring after news? What news would you hear? Are you not yet satisfied now you have good news? . . . And how is it you go on to steal now you have God's word among you? How is it that on my way here I took 10 beasts which were stolen by your caffers? Are you not yet satisfied that you enquire after news?⁶⁹

The discussions that followed between the councillors of both Makhanda and Ngqika revealed deep simmering tensions between them. The public meeting concluded with Ngqika's councillors saying, 'They were very furious against those who steal' and that they would 'make war' against anyone who did so. Williams felt that the conclusion of the meeting was a full triumph for Makhanda, who received many praises over Ngqika, who had not fully absorbed the missionary teachings on this or any previous visits.⁷⁰

Once the gathering broke up, however, Makhanda privately blasted King Ngqika for his hypocrisy, with only Ngqika's interpreter, Hendrick Ngcuka, present as a witness. According to Williams, 'the ridicule was begun in an indirect and ended in a direct manner'. Makhanda accused Ngqika of being a man who 'always cries while he is here under the word' but acts otherwise as soon as he leaves. After long discussions to clarify rumours that Ngqika had received permission from Makhanda to marry two further wives since his first visit to the mission station, Makhanda forced him to confess that this was untrue. At the end of this conversation, Ngqika 'sat speechless' before turning to Williams and asking, 'What shall I do?' On Williams' advice, he agreed to send back the second wife he had just taken. The missionary concluded his report by observing that Ngqika indeed gave the impression 'that God was working mightily on him' when present, but 'begins to covet nearly everything he sets his eyes on' when he leaves. He also noted that Ngqika appeared to be very gullible in believing every rumour that came to his ears.⁷¹

This very lengthy and detailed account from Williams offers insight into not only the nature of Chief Ngqika and Makhanda's early engagement with missionary teachings, but more importantly, it offers a rare view of the quality of the relationship

between Makhanda and Ngqika. In a touchingly candid moment, Ngqika asked Williams quietly if he ‘had questioned McKanna respecting his beliefs’. Williams said that he had not, prompting the chief to reply, ‘I wish to know but I am afraid and ashamed to enquire.’⁷² Just then Makhanda walked through the door and Ngqika signalled Williams to drop the matter. The account shows Makhanda as firmly occupying the moral high ground, with direct powers over Ngqika. He used public events to consolidate his domination over the inconsistent king, but also did not hesitate to harangue him mercilessly in private. He used Williams as a judge to incriminate Ngqika for his hypocrisy. However, the fact that they could spend a week together learning how to read and to receive instruction from Williams also suggests an underlying sense of common purpose and mutual understanding.

The sharp tensions between Makhanda and Ngqika would remain with them for the rest of their lives. When he eventually surrendered to the British, Makhanda’s greatest fear was that he would fall into Ngqika’s hands and be killed. Many years after Makhanda’s death, Ngqika still enquired of newly arrived missionaries about any news of Makhanda’s possible return.⁷³ Undoubtedly their troubled relationship shaped the course of events which plunged the amaXhosa first into a civil war that rallied most of the Xhosa nation against Ngqika in late 1818 and then the war against the British with its apex as the battle at Grahamstown in 1819.

After the first-hand missionary accounts of engagements with Makhanda in 1816, the written records offer no detail of his role in unfolding events. The rest of his story must be constructed from circumstantial evidence gleaned from the context in which he is known to have functioned. As Chief Ndlambe’s top adviser, and wielding the kind of power he has been seen to have held over King Ngqika, Makhanda was indeed at the centre of all the major developments from 1816 until the war ended in 1819. Fragments of information suggest that he was not personally present at the Kat River meeting with Governor Somerset in 1817, nor at the intensive fighting of the battle at Amalinde in late 1818. His role in this great war against Ngqika, however, should not be underestimated. Wauchope claimed that messengers were keeping Makhanda informed of developments during the battle.⁷⁴ Another oral tradition claims that Makhanda organised the relentless pursuit of Ngqika’s people as far west as Khobonqaba (present-day Adelaide), a distance of about 140 kilometres from the battle site. This pursuit included looting houses and confiscating all cattle.⁷⁵ While it is Makhanda’s role as the mastermind behind the battle at Grahamstown in 1819 for which he is best remembered, there is virtually

no direct evidence of the role he played other than his widespread reputation to that effect. Only Theal elaborated somewhat when he said:

Makana was the leading actor in this movement. His messengers were everywhere in Kaffirland, calling upon all true Xhosas to take part in the strife against the Europeans and the Gaikas, in thrilling language promising victory to those who would do their duty, and denouncing the wrath of the spirits against those who would hold back.⁷⁶

Tradition has it that Makhanda personally led the attack on Grahamstown and commanded the fighting at the East Barracks. Afterwards, the British identified him as one of their primary enemies, offering a reward to anyone who would hand him over, dead or alive. By all accounts, he remained with the amaNdlambe fighting forces who battled in the Fish River bush to the bitter end, but no eyewitness accounts surface until the time that Makhanda surrendered himself. Thereafter, his imprisonment on and escape from Robben Island again offer clear details of the man and his treatment. The active belief that Makhanda would return to resume the struggle against British domination remained among the amaXhosa for another two generations.

Since Makhanda's name has become equated with the major events in the fifth frontier war, often referred to as *imfazwe ka Makhanda* (the war of Makhanda), the rest of this book will look at the context of the times in which he lived. But before that, it is important to consider what other historians have said about him, as their views and biases so heavily shape his reputation. This is the task of the next chapter.

Notes

1. N. Tisani, *Continuity and Change in Xhosa Historiography during the Nineteenth Century: An Exploration through Textual Analysis* (Ph.D. thesis, Rhodes University, 2000), p. 266.
2. J. Campbell, *Voyages to and from the Cape of Good Hope with an Account of a Journey into the Interior of South Africa* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1820). This was Campbell's second visit to South Africa. He had first come in 1813, travelling to Bethelsdorp and then into the far northern interior: J. Campbell, *Travels in South Africa Undertaken at the Request of the Missionary Society* (London: Black & Parry, 1815, reprinted 1974).

3. Campbell, *Voyages*, p. 209.
4. T. Pringle, 'Letters from South Africa, No.2: Caffer Campaigns: The Prophet Makanna' *New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* January 1827, p. 71. This information was probably conveyed to Thomas Pringle by James Read as Van der Lingen had returned to Utrecht in 1817, three years before Pringle's arrival. Van der Lingen and Read had sailed from England together as LMS missionaries in 1801 and remained close friends after Van der Lingen left missionary service to work as an army chaplain.
5. By 1800 many of the Khoikhoi had become familiar with European culture through the experience of working as labourers for Dutch-speaking farmers. In some cases, this acculturation might have already extended over several generations. In other cases, people of Khoi descent could have shifted back and forth between periods of service on farms and periods of living their indigenous lifestyle as independent pastoralists. Still others avoided becoming farm labourers altogether, preserving their own lifestyles as far as possible when land was increasingly used by people of European descent.
6. The Zuurveld refers to the area between the Fish River in the east and the Gamtoos River in the west. The name means sour grass in Dutch, referring to the prevalent grass type.
7. J. Read, 'Letter from James Read, Written Immediately After his Return from Caffraria, Dated Bethelsdorp, May 31, 1816' *Quarterly Chronicle 1815-1820 (LMS)*, pp. 14-39.
8. Under Dutch administration, magistrates were called *landdrosts*, a title that appears in some quotations in this book. For simplicity's sake, the word magistrate is otherwise preferred.
9. Read, 'Letter', p. 15.
10. B.F. Holt, *Joseph Williams and the Pioneer Mission to the South-Eastern Bantu* (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, 1954).
11. Pringle, 'Letters', pp. 74-5.
12. I.W. Wauchope, *Isaac Williams Wauchope: Selected Writings, 1874-1916*, edited by J. Opland and A. Nyamende (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 2008): 'They had to spend many a long year in training, and it was only when they had grown to be old men that they were recognized as eloquent men', p. 313.
13. G.M. Theal, *History of South Africa from 1795 to 1872*. Vol. 1 (London: Allen & Unwin, 1897), p. 329.
14. G. Thompson, *Travels and Adventures in Southern Africa* (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1967) Appendix 1 'Account of the Amakosa, or Southern Caffers', pp. 197, 201.
15. Read, 'Letter', p. 29.
16. C.L. Stretch, 'Makana, and the Attack on Grahamstown, in 1819' *Cape Monthly Magazine* Vol. 12, January-June 1876, p. 303.
17. Campbell, *Voyages*, p. 209.
18. CA A378C: Diary of C.L. Stretch.
19. Wauchope, *Selected Writings*, p. 63.
20. Monde Mkungwana, interview on 22 January 2012 at Kidd's Beach.
21. Wauchope's grandmother was the daughter of one of these marriages and among the original group of converts who attached themselves to Johannes van der Kemp in 1799.
22. Theal, *History*, p. 329.
23. Read, 'Letter', p. 29.
24. Stutu Pawuli, interview on 10 March 2002 by Z. Sakata and S. Ntleki at Tshabo.

25. W.K. Ntsikana, 'Imbali ka Makanda Ogama Limbi Lingu Nxele' (History of Makhandanda Known as Nxele) *Isigidimi Samaxosa* 1 February 1888; reprinted in W.B. Rubusana (ed.), *Zemk'Inkomo Magwalandini* (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, 1966). Mkungwana interview.
26. Pringle, 'Letters', p. 74 quoting from the Great Speech.
27. T. Pringle, *African Poems of Thomas Pringle*, edited by E. Pereira and M. Chapman (Durban: Killie Campbell Africana Library, 1989), p. 71.
28. E. Tisani, Nxele and Ntsikana: A Critical Study of the Religious Outlooks of Two Nineteenth Century Xhosa Prophets and their Consequences for Xhosa Christian Practice in the Eastern Cape (M.A. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1987), p. 165.
29. Read, 'Letter', p. 29. In Xhosa spiritual practice, one is called by the ancestors through vivid dreams or through a series of otherwise inexplicable events or diseases. Such dreams and events are interpreted by established practitioners.
30. E. Tisani, Nxele, p. 108.
31. Campbell, *Voyages*, p. 209.
32. Wauchope, *Selected Writings*, p. 51.
33. E. Tisani, Nxele, p. 153.
34. Thompson, *Travels*, p. 203.
35. E. Tisani, Nxele, p. 113.
36. Mda Mda, interview on 12 August 2005 at Hamburg.
37. Chief Mthuthuzeli Makinana, N. Ntlebi and Haig Ndabane, visit on 28 December 2006 to Gomo Rock.
38. W. Shaw, *The Journal of William Shaw*, edited by W.D. Hammond-Tooke (Cape Town: A.A. Balkema, 1972), p. 103.
39. J.K. Bokwe, *Ntsikana: The Story of an African Convert* (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, 1914), p. 15.
40. Wauchope, *Selected Writings*, p. 66.
41. E. Tisani, Nxele, p. 117.
42. Shaw, *Journal*, p. 103.
43. Z. Hoboshe, interview on 12 March 2002 by O. Ntshebe at KwaNdlambe.
44. Theal, *History*, p. 330.
45. T. Mjuza, interview on 15 November 2002 by Z. Sakata at Tshabo.
46. Shaw, *Journal*, p. 110.
47. S. Pawuli, interview on 19 November 2003 by J. Wells and S. Ntleki at Tshabo.
48. Shaw, *Journal*, p. 110.
49. CA CO 2603: Letters Received: Graaff-Reinet and Uitenhage, 1816: J. Read, Bethelsdorp, 2 July 1816 (marked as a mistake; should be 2 August) to Cuyler. Although the British treated Ngqika as a king, his status always remained ritually subordinate to that of Hintsa, who was the senior-ranking king of the amaXhosa.
50. At a seminar conducted by the author at the Rharhabe Kingdom's Great Place at Mngqesha on 21 April 2006, today's royalty explored this question in depth. It was said that it would be unprecedented to make a commoner into a chief. The fact that Makhandanda treasured his ivory arm-band, often associated with chiefly status, was not an indication that he was a chief, but rather a man of extremely high rank. Second, if such a thing had happened as a rare exception, there would still be evidence and consequences today. No matter how brief Makhandanda's life, his sons would have been heirs and treated equally as chiefs through all subsequent generations.

51. Read, 'Letter', p.22.
52. Ibid., p. 28.
53. Ibid., pp. 18, 20.
54. Ibid., p. 19. Not only did the amaXhosa militarily conquer the indigenous Khoi people, but they also looked down upon them for not practising circumcision.
55. Ibid., p. 19.
56. Ibid., p. 20.
57. Ibid., p. 19.
58. Ibid., pp. 18, 20.
59. Ibid., pp. 19, 20, 29.
60. CA CO 2603: J. Read, Bethelsdorp, 2 July 1816 (marked as a mistake, should be 2 August) to Cuyler.
61. CA CO 2603: G. Fraser, 26 July 1816 to Cuyler.
62. Read, 'Letter', p. 29.
63. Mostert, *Frontiers*, p. 356.
64. CL Council on World Missions, Box 6, Williams Report, 15 June 1816 and 7 August 1817. The reason for rejecting missionary teaching was that it was viewed as too strict when it came to 'taking the girls where and when they please'.
65. Mostert, *Frontiers*, p. 427. Van der Kemp was given credit for having successfully prayed for rain which was so heavy it nearly washed away the homestead of King Ngqika. In 1804, Chief Ndlambe sent a white ox to Van der Kemp, who was then residing at Bethelsdorp, asking him to pray for rain (J.T. van der Kemp, 'Annual Report of the Missionary Establishment Bethelsdorp, Near Algoa Bay, South Africa, 1804' *Transactions of the London Missionary Society* 1804, p. 242).
66. The woman in question was the daughter of Mnyaluza, Ndlambe's younger brother. The marriage should be viewed as a gesture towards consolidating Makhanda's high status among the amaNdlambe.
67. CL Council on World Missions, Box 6, Williams report.
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid.
70. Ibid.
71. Ibid.
72. Ibid.
73. S. Kay, *Travels and Researches in Caffraria: Describing the Character, Customs, and Moral Condition of the Tribes . . .* (London: John Mason, 1833), p. 44.
74. Wauchope, *Selected Writings*, p. 65.
75. Hoboshe interview.
76. Theal, *History*, p. 336.

The demonisation of Makhanda

This chapter digresses from the events related to the fifth frontier war to review the way that thinking about the personality of Makhanda evolved from the time he lived up to the present. As stated in the previous chapter, a positive and heroic view of Makhanda emerged from the writings of the people who met him face-to-face and this reputation was preserved in Xhosa society through oral traditions. Many viewed him as highly intelligent, charismatic, effective as a seer, interested in the teachings of Christianity and extraordinarily influential over the most powerful of chiefs. The opposing view, however, that he fraudulently promoted himself by making preposterous predictions about the future clearly dates back to his own lifetime and emanates from Ntsikana. The intense rivalry between Makhanda and Ntsikana reverberates through all the historical writings about Makhanda. From the beginning, Ntsikana denounced Makhanda on the basis of his religious teachings, trying to prove that he himself was the more credible spiritual leader. The ramifications of this rivalry extended over centuries due to the fact that Ntsikana's descendants all had access to, if not an outright monopoly over, the mission-controlled press in the Eastern Cape during the 1800s and early 1900s. Since Ntsikana's followers and family descendants were the founders of the first Christian community within Xhosa territory, their views became popularised by subsequent generations of missionaries, whose writings in turn were eagerly embraced by historians. The Xhosa historian Mda Mda introduced the term *demonisation* to capture the intensity of the tirades against Makhanda that accumulated over the years.¹ As will be made clear in later chapters, the focus on religion and spirituality as the measure of Makhanda's reputation obscured the compelling issue of the Xhosa loss of land and military defeat at the hands of the British.

Ntsikana as Makhanda's rival

The mixed messages about Makhanda's character began to appear soon after the deaths of both men; Makhanda in 1820 and Ntsikana in 1821. From the available sources, it appears that the key factor in their relationship was simply one of personal

rivalry for power and influence in the period from roughly 1815 to 1820. Makhandanda became associated by the missionaries and their followers in the Eastern Cape with African religious fanaticism, evil and a warlike attitude towards Europeans. By contrast, Ntsikana came to embody the model first Christian convert, whose every deed was blessed and who preached peace as people looked forward to a better afterlife.² Until the early 1950s, the day after Easter was celebrated as Ntsikana Memorial Day by Christians in the Eastern Cape.³



Sketch of Ntsikana made by Elizabeth Williams and published in B.F. Holt, *Joseph Williams and the Pioneer Mission to the South-Eastern Bantu* (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, 1954).

The strong dichotomy between the two men, created by those who wrote about them, obscured many commonalities. Both suffered the absence of their fathers from an early age. Ntsikana was born at the family kraal of his mother Nonaba, where she had fled from her husband Gaba after being accused of witchcraft by his first wife. But the young boy, aged about twelve, was called back to his father's kraal to undergo initiation. At this stage in his life, he encountered the itinerant missionary Johannes van der Kemp while herding his father's cattle.⁴ This would have been in 1799 or 1800, thus placing Ntsikana in his early to mid-thirties by the time he died. If Makhandanda also met Van der Kemp during his journey into the country of King Ngqika, this then gives an indication of their age difference. Makhandanda was sufficiently well established to make the generous gift of a cow, and was quite possibly acting as a prominent *inyanga* for the Rharhabe royal house while Ntsikana was still a herd boy.

Gaba was a senior councillor to Ngqika and left Ntsikana a large herd of cattle, enabling him to marry two wives. At some point after the amaNdlambe had been expelled from the Zuurveld in 1812, Ntsikana went to live under Chief Ndlambe, settling in the Fish River valley at Qhora, a small stream feeding into the river.⁵ The oral traditions of the Ndlambe descendants living in that valley today confirm his home in the area, which is only about 20 kilometres from where Makhandanda's family lived.⁶ Ezra Tisani and Janet Hodgson speculate that Makhandanda was actually Ntsikana's teacher, inducting him into the arts of a diviner.⁷ The proximity of their homes would certainly make this possible.

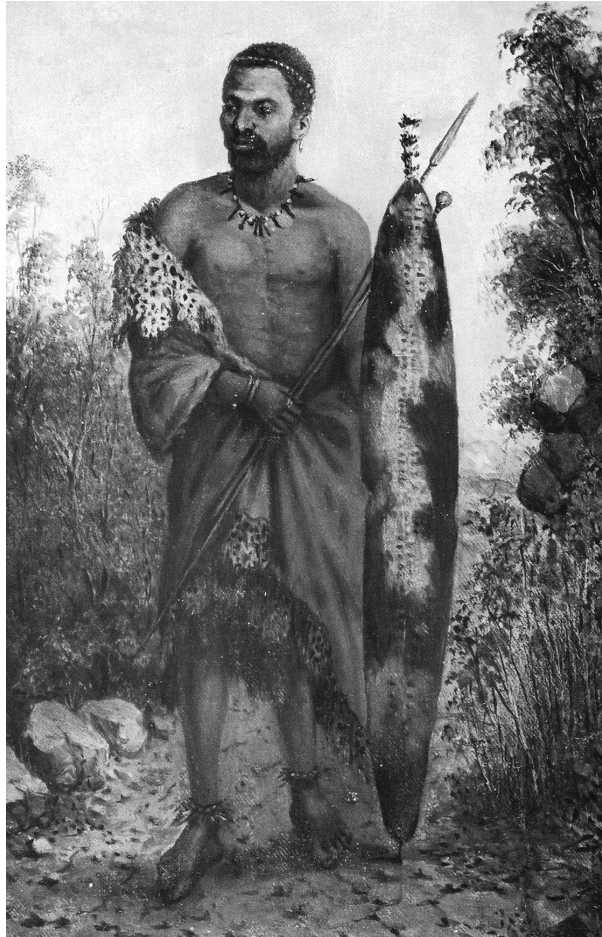
The written records indicate three sources of discord between them, all dating to roughly 1815. Most famous, and perhaps most controversial, is the event that took place at Gompo Rock, described in the previous chapter. Clearly, Makhandanda's lead was consistent with his status as an *inyanga* of great influence and power. It is alleged that he also claimed that God had instructed him to call the people forth. This gives us a glimpse into the way he took a few elements from his exposure to Christianity and blended them with his traditional belief system. However, Ntsikana, also having been exposed to a smattering of Christian teaching, took exception, proclaiming Makhandanda a fraud. What is interesting is that both, living among the post-expulsion amaNdlambe, felt it appropriate to incorporate aspects of Christianity into their spiritual practices. This should be taken as an indication of interest and curiosity in the foreign religion; but not, as Hodgson and Jeff Peires have stated, as a wholesale rejection of their own ways or a desperate search for spiritual explanations of their defeat.⁸ The fact that the missionary group travelling

with James Read met such a warm reception indicates that spiritual concerns were in people's minds, but not that they had abandoned their own belief systems. Understanding Christianity was more likely to have been seen as something that would enhance their ways of relating to the colonial powers next door. The accounts from missionary Joseph Williams portray King Ngqika as the most ardent early seeker after Christian teachings. He would not have been among those who were dispirited and confused by the miseries of their expulsion from the Zuurveld. The king told Williams that Chief Ndlambe preferred to have the missionaries start with himself (Ngqika), as he needed their teachings more.⁹

The second well-documented event in Ntsikana's life while among the amaNdlambe is his own description of a vision he experienced one morning as he rose. A bright shining light nearly blinded him and left him feeling like a changed person. Later that day, he attended a coming-out ceremony for recently initiated boys, where he was expected to dance. However, every time he got up to dance, a strong wind blew, forcing him to sit down. Whenever he sat, the wind stopped and he attempted to dance again. This happened three times, before convincing him to take his family home. On the way he stopped to wash off the red ochre that he traditionally wore, saying that he was now a different kind of person.¹⁰ Ntsikana's Christian followers tell this story as proof that he was called by the Christian God to give up his heathen ways. The people of the KwaNdlambe area, however, who now take visitors to see the pool at Qhora where their oral traditions say Ntsikana washed himself, view his inability to dance as evidence that his ancestors rejected him.¹¹ In either case, it is also said that around this time Ntsikana approached Chief Ndlambe, seeking a higher position for himself, but was turned down in favour of Makhanda. According to Ntsikana's grandson, 'The Ndhlabes said, "Hold your peace. Do you be quiet, Ntsikana. We are now listening to Nxele [Makhanda]. We shall be confused if we listen to both of you at the same time." The Ndhlabes all credited Nxele.'¹² The amaNdlambe viewed Ntsikana as 'afflicted with insanity' with which the amaNgqika disagreed.

After this change of heart Ntsikana moved his entire family to the area along the Kat River, roughly 80 kilometres to the north, into what was clearly Ngqika's territory. Historians place this move around 1815, which is plausible since Read met him in that area in April 1816. It is surprising that no previous historians have noticed the account in Read's journal which states that while in Ngqika's kraal he met two men who had travelled two days to meet them. One was sickly, but said he was sick of heart, hungering after their word; he described falling in a dance

THE RETURN OF MAKHANDA



Painting by Frederick Timpson I'Ons, *Nxele (Makana)*. I'Ons arrived in Grahamstown in 1835 and Makhandu died in 1820, so this cannot be regarded as a portrait. Similarities in posture and composition, such as the feet, suggest that I'Ons imitated Elizabeth Williams' sketch of Ntiskana.

near a big fire and 'that a glorious Person had been presented to him'. He knew this person could help him: 'He said that the Caffres could not understand him, but supposed him to be bewitched; that he felt now that we were the people he had been looking for.'¹³

This description fits Ntsikana perfectly; and Ntsikana in turn claimed that the only person in the country who could understand him was Ngcongolo, James Read.¹⁴ The implication is that Ntsikana was trying to project himself as an inherently Christian messenger by 1816.

Ntsikana's biographer, John Knox Bokwe, describes how once in Ngqika's country Ntsikana started a chant saying, '*U-Nxele ubukuqekile, ubalahlekisela-nina abantu?*' (Nxele is thrown off his balance, why does he mislead the people?)¹⁵ He kept up this chant all day long, prompting those around him to ask whom he meant by Nxele. At the same time, Ntsikana expressed his rejection of Makhandanda for not preaching genuine Christianity. He also denounced Makhandanda for allowing himself to be treated like a chief.

The third episode from Ntsikana's life that illustrates his rivalry with Makhandanda has to do with two prophecies. Essentially, the two prophets forecast the same thing, the defeat of King Ngqika's army in battle, using similar imagery. Ntsikana's version is taken as proof of his special gifts while Makhandanda's is regarded as evidence of his personal greed and aspirations for even higher power. Makhandanda forewarned that the followers of Ngqika would become firewood and ants and rocks. Bokwe takes this simply as war talk between military rivals. However, the message caused great fear and anxiety among the followers of Ngqika, who began to gravitate towards Ndlambe and accept Makhandanda's teachings by saluting Jesus and God whenever crossing a river, saying 'AAh! Tayi, AAh! Dalidepu'.¹⁶ Makhandanda's strongest denunciations of Ngqika must have started some time after their fairly amicable visit to Williams' mission station in November 1816. It could well have been in the period following the Kat River meeting of April 1817 when Ngqika agreed to co-operate with the British in the enforcement of the stringent spoor law for returning stolen cattle.

In October 1818 the combined Xhosa forces virtually annihilated Ngqika's people at the battle of Amalinde, giving Makhandanda's prophecy an eerie ring of truth. Much more widely known is Ntsikana's own warning to Ngqika of his impending destruction in the approaching battle: 'I see the heads of the Gaika being devoured by ants.'¹⁷ Soon afterwards, the first news that the amaNdlambe were indeed preparing for a massive battle began to reach Ngqika's ears. However, he and his councillors did not heed Ntsikana's direct warning and marched off to their ultimate defeat. Ntsikana had also warned of a trap that the enemy would lay, which also proved to be true. Details of this battle are dealt with more fully in Chapter 5.

Though these and other prophecies are taken by Ntsikana's supporters as evidence of his genuine calling as a chosen one of God, they also expose his marginal status in Ngqika's country as his prophecy was ignored. Ezra Tisani echoes other historians such as Peires and Hodgson, who frame Ntsikana as being to Ngqika what Makhandla was to Ndlambe: the ultimate councillor and *inyanga*.¹⁸ Bokwe, though, describes a special visit that Ngqika made to Ntsikana to learn more about his prophecies, coming with a large entourage and staying for several days.¹⁹ This followed an exploratory visit by his head councillor, Soga, who took an interest in Ntsikana's message. The account suggests that Ntsikana was viewed by his chief not as a leading spiritual adviser but rather as an oddity, albeit an interesting one. A few years later, King Ngqika personally tried to assassinate one of Ntsikana's followers, confirming the overall impression that his small community of new Christians was not in good standing with Ngqika.²⁰

Despite all the efforts by the supporters of Ntsikana to portray him as the first real Xhosa Christian, they are remarkably silent on where he allegedly learned about Christianity. Readers are left to surmise that he had regular contact with the LMS station of Joseph Williams. One of the early converts, Matshaya, described in some detail his own residency at Williams' station, but then explained that after Williams' death in 1818 he and his family moved to be nearer Ntsikana, who then became their leader.²¹ When Ntsikana died in May 1821, his followers joined the newly arrived John Brownlee, who was setting up a mission station at Gwali.²²

Clearly, the demonisation of Makhandla began with his arch-rival, Ntsikana. Their differences might have been forgotten if it were not for the fact that Ntsikana's followers and family enjoyed access to the written word for the next one hundred and fifty years, which allowed them to tell and retell the stories they had heard about Makhandla from Ntsikana himself. Ngqika's esteemed councillor, Soga, took an interest in Ntsikana's teaching and his son Tiyo Soga became the first ordained African minister. John Knox Bokwe, also an ordained minister, was descended from grandparents who were part of Ntsikana's small following. He translated Ntsikana's popular hymns in 1876 and published a short biography of him in 1904 and again in 1914. Dukuwana, Ntsikana's son was helping the missionaries with their printing by 1839 and his grandson Nkhola Falati was a translator who left a lengthy manuscript about his grandfather. Matshaya lived with Ntsikana in his last years and Makapela Noyi Balfour attended his services as a boy. Both were often enlisted by the missionaries of the Glasgow Missionary Society for a variety of services and championed as being among the early faithful followers.²³



Makana, produced for Dakawa Arts and Craft Project, Grahamstown and used with the permission of Jonathon Comerford. The artist based his image on the F.T. P'Ons painting in the Albany Museum, Grahamstown.

If both Makhanda and Ntsikana can be taken as traditional *inyangas* who grafted a few Christian messages into their work, the nature of their relationship can be better understood. Both responded with curiosity to the preaching of Johannes van der Kemp in 1800. It appears their rivalry started over which of them was to hold higher rank with Chief Ndlambe as his *itola*. When Ntsikana failed in his bid to overtake Makhanda, possibly his teacher and mentor, he then removed to Ngqika's area in 1815 where he soon had an opportunity to learn much more

about Christianity from the newly arrived missionary, Joseph Williams. From then on, he used Christianity as the yardstick by which to measure, judge and condemn Makhanda. Through the eyes of Western Christians, who had little concept of the role of an *inyanga*, it was not hard to portray Makhanda as errant, eccentric and dangerous.

The English humanitarians

The first written account of Makhanda and his influence was published in 1827 by Thomas Pringle.²⁴ Starting in 1820, he collected information from British military officers, missionaries and the Xhosa Christians and former followers of Ntsikana who lived at John Brownlee's mission station at Gwali. After a sojourn in Cape Town for a few years, he returned to the frontier in 1824 where his inquiries continued. His writing combines the two themes that would later become sharply divided by subsequent generations of historians. On the one hand, he put forward a strongly humanitarian approach to frontier issues, which was to emerge as a powerful school of thought in the mid-1830s. This line of thinking sharply denounced the British policy of conquest and land acquisition as immoral. He viewed the amaXhosa's response of all-out warfare as fully justified. He saw Makhanda as a truly charismatic leader who rose to the challenge in a stirring and dramatic way, thus starting his heroic reputation, even among the English.

Pringle, however, also laid the foundation for viewing Makhanda as acting out of religious superstition. The story that Makhanda told his followers in the lead-up to the attack on Grahamstown that British bullets would turn to water was to become the cornerstone of Makhanda's ongoing demonisation by Western historians. Over time, the attack on Grahamstown would become reduced by them simply to the folly of people who had been tricked by false millenarian prophecy. A closer look at Pringle's early writings, however, suggests that this detail may well have been a later embellishment, arising from frontier myths that emerged not long after the events. No mention is made of the bullets-to-water motivation in Pringle's first publication in 1827. It appears, however, in the 1835 reprint of the original article.²⁵

The bullets-to-water myth is not hard to deconstruct. The earliest published source alleging this appeared in George Thompson's *Travels in Southern Africa* in 1827. This was the same year as Pringle's version without it. Thompson learned about the battle at Grahamstown from Captain W.W. Harding, a British officer who had fought there. They met near Cradock during Thompson's travels in 1826.

One would then have to ask where Harding could have got the story. As a British officer, what access would he have had to insider stories from Makhanda's soldiers? The answer is probably very little. Like Pringle, he was far more likely to have been brought into contact with the followers of Ntsikana living with the missionary John Brownlee who were highly critical of Makhanda. Negative tales, exaggerations and distortions thrived amongst them, emanating from Ntsikana's own relentless denunciations of Makhanda.

Pringle's first account of Makhanda was published in January 1827 and was followed later that same year by Thompson's travel memoirs, including Harding's account. Since he edited Thompson's text for him, Pringle would have been fully aware of this version. This could well explain why he inserted the story into his own book a few years later. One can only surmise that after he left Africa for good, his life in London made him familiar with the ideas and information that most intrigued British readers. His biographers have noted that he was 'a magpie writer', readily borrowing bits and pieces from any source.²⁶ Also, he was chronically broke, doing his best to eke out a living through writing and editing. It seems likely, therefore, that he simply added the embellishment to enhance sales of his book.

It is interesting to note that none of Ntsikana's direct descendants ever echoed this story in their writings, despite their dedication to proving Makhanda's fraudulent character. For the most part they avoided any reference whatsoever to the frontier wars, in keeping with missionary writings of the time. But it also suggests that the bullets-to-water myth was not something they could defend within wider Xhosa society.

While there can be no doubt that Makhanda used all his skills as an *itola* and orator to inspire and motivate his soldiers as they prepared for their attack on Grahamstown, the allegation that he claimed that bullets would turn to water stretches the boundaries of credibility. Calling for the assistance of the ancestors in the coming crusade would be expected. Even the help of higher powers, assisting in rectifying grievous wrongs, would not be an unreasonable part of his exhortations. In this sense, Makhanda's role as a Xhosa war-doctor would in essence be no different from that of any army chaplain, blessing and inspiring the troops about to engage in brutal conflict. As an *itola* with a proven track record of prophecies, his expectation of a certain victory would have been shared by his followers. Over time, the bullets-to-water allegations served the colonial agenda to obscure the central issue of the conquest of Xhosa land.

Sensitivity to the land question resurfaced sharply when a new frontier war

broke out fifteen years later. In late 1834, the amaXhosa launched a massive attack on isolated farmhouses all along the borders, demolishing the belief that black and white were co-existing peacefully. This next frontier war, fought mostly in 1835, triggered an investigation in the British House of Commons the following year. Sharp lines emerged over how to understand the roots of this most recent war. The investigation was undertaken at the urging of Dr John Philip, head of the LMS in South Africa and included testimony from leading role players on the eastern frontier.²⁷ Large portions of the investigation included recalling and recounting the events of the previous frontier war in 1819. The testimony focused far more on issues of British policy than on the personalities of the African leaders. Makhandá scarcely featured in the evidence.

An obscure and little-known historian, apparently a resident of the eastern frontier, Dr Ambrose George Campbell, used the pen-name Justus to publish a vitriolic diatribe against colonial policies in 1837.²⁸ The book drew heavily on Pringle's previous works and from the *Report to the Select Committee*. In trying to explain why the frontier remained unsettled, Justus went beyond Pringle on several counts. Whereas Pringle, when trying to explain the attack on Grahamstown, relied heavily on personality profiles of the prominent men and dated the origins of the problem to the 1818 Brereton raid that removed 20 000 head of cattle from the amaNdlambe, Justus saw much deeper roots. Blame for all unrest is placed squarely on the shoulders of British policy, dating back to the beginning of their colonial presence in South Africa. The author traces the beginnings of the conflicts back to the first frontier commando sanctioned by the then Dutch East India Company government in 1780, which established the principle that the Dutch-speaking farmers were entitled to plunder Xhosa cattle as well as endlessly expand their claims to land.²⁹ The British, on taking full control of the Cape Colony in 1806, perpetuated the policy, but carried out ever-larger commandos, due to their superior firepower and weaponry. Lashing out at the practice, Justus charged that

every spectator not under the influence of colonial feeling must adopt [the view] that the commandos were appointed not to punish but to commit robberies, and that the idea of Caffre depredations was set up, to conceal the cupidity and rapine of the colonists . . . Thieving and lying have been the two great characteristics of the conduct of the colonists to their neighbours for the last thirty-five years.³⁰

Justus offers the earliest challenge to the notion that black and white arrived simultaneously in the Zuurveld, often used to justify colonial claims to the land, by carefully documenting early efforts by the Cape Colony to set boundaries far to the west of the Fish River. This argument, in turn, renders the 1812 expulsion of the amaXhosa across the Fish River as one of the first British outrages on the frontier and as the foundation for both the 1819 war, centred on Grahamstown, and the subsequent war of 1835. Justus stresses the great lengths the British colonial authorities went to in order to get people of European descent to reside in what was clearly Xhosa land. The increasing reliance on military force, often in the form of commandos, led to a situation where 'the remedy increased the disease'. Justus highlights the futility of the whole policy: 'an army of forty thousand strong would not have been sufficient for the purpose . . . In vain did the drums beat and the soldiers march, for cattle still disappeared in spite of these elaborate and costly precautions.'³¹

In the account of the causes of the battle at Grahamstown, Justus mostly reiterates what Pringle said, placing a good deal of emphasis on Makhandá's spiritual leadership. However, he expands on his suggestion that the loss of the battle was due to Makhandá's over-reliance on his own misguided beliefs in supernatural powers, blaming him for trusting too much in his 'power to work miracles'.³² So, while the biggest contribution of Justus' work lies in the resounding condemnation of colonial policy on land issues, the book also enhances the view that Makhandá's actions were at least partially informed by unrealistic spiritual motives. Like Pringle, Justus combines elements of both the heroic and the foolish reputations of Makhandá.

The Select Committee's inquiry created an opportunity to speak out for many people sympathetic to the humanitarian approach to colonialism. Old frontier hands, like the Reverends John Philip and James Read of the LMS, put on record their views regarding not only the frontier wars but also the mistreatment of Khoi people and the lingering negative effects of slavery. The LMS was so proud of its first African convert, Dyani Tshatshu, that it raised funds from its supporters to commission a painting of him giving his testimony. As the Christian-educated son of a Xhosa chief, his evidence 'was heard with breathless attention'.³³ Similarly, Andries Stockenström, always a fairly progressive force on the frontier, spoke boldly about the shortcomings of British policy, firmly blaming the folly of the 1818 Brereton commando for the war that followed, saying, 'So sure as we take Caffre cattle . . . so sure most of those from whom they are taken plunder or starve.'³⁴

These views are quoted at length because they soon became obscured by a much more defensive stance towards colonial policy.

Missionary demonisers

The humanitarian thrust of the early nineteenth century, which laid the foundation for historical interpretations of Makhanda and the battle at Grahamstown, was soon overtaken by a damaging assault on Makhanda's reputation and integrity. Just as the next frontier war in 1835 caused the British to pause and rethink their entire policy towards the indigenous people, it also signalled a turning point in the attitudes of missionaries towards their host communities. Winning converts had gone slowly and none of the early enthusiasm of chiefs to host missionaries endured. The Xhosa attack on the settlers within the boundaries of the Colony in 1834 had sent shock waves across a region that had been presumed to be quiet and provided evidence that little headway had been made in bringing the two cultures closer together.

The Glasgow Missionary Society brought the first printing press into Xhosa territory in 1824. Its first publications were tracts on the Christian faith, including a few translated into isiXhosa. The first effort to print a history of the Xhosa people did not come until 1839 when the missionary John Bennie produced a small textbook for the use of the children attending his school. His first topic ever published in isiXhosa was a comparative history of Nxele/Makhanda and Ntsikana. In this, he portrayed both as early Christian converts, but claimed that Nxele had erred from true Christian teachings by allowing the amaXhosa to continue using red clay to decorate their bodies for traditional dancing.³⁵ Makhanda also proclaimed Xhosa innocence in killing Jesus, unlike the whites. But his greatest offence, according to Bennie, was that he had claimed he had the ability to raise people from the dead and collected large amounts of cattle from people as fees for this intended service.³⁶

Ntsikana, by contrast, denounced these things, kept closer to mainline Christian thinking and became renowned for composing moving and theologically correct hymns. In short, Makhanda was a bad example of African uses of Christianity, while Ntsikana provided a positive role model. When the same text was republished in 1845, the tone had become 'openly hostile towards Makana/Nxele' while Ntsikana 'was shown to have been a brave and committed Xhosa convert'. Nomathamsanqa Tisani, writing on the evolution of published Xhosa history texts, speculates that the fuller version of Ntsikana's life story may have come from his

son Dukwana, who was at that time a printer at the Tyumie mission station and who had been ordained a church elder in 1841. Tisani's analysis claims that in the 1840s, particularly following the seventh frontier war in 1846, the tone of missionary writing in general turned towards more strident denunciations of Xhosa customs, as well as a general denigration of the chiefs. In their eyes the amaXhosa were no longer 'noble savages', but were now more often described as 'irredeemable, bloodthirsty, plundering Kaffirs'.³⁷

By far the most damaging input to the construction of a history of Makhandanda came from the missionary sector following the eighth frontier war, which ended in 1853. This war was the longest and most threatening to British control. At its conclusion, Sir George Grey became Governor of the Cape Colony. Arriving fresh from instituting various reform programmes in colonial New Zealand, he set about trying to collect documentation on the cultures, history and traditions of the people he now ruled over in South Africa. He built up a collection of documents which is now housed at the South African State Library in Cape Town, relying mostly on missionaries to provide him with information.

A special part of that collection entitled 'Kafir Legends and History' is assumed to have been written by William Kekale Kaye. Although his full identity is unclear, Nomathamsanqa Tisani believes Kaye was an Mfengu Christian interpreter for the British authorities.³⁸ Among other topics, he submitted a long document claiming to give a full life history of Nxele/Makhandanda. However, his text is riddled with clear flaws, historical impossibilities, repetitions and flights of fantasy. Tisani points out that he uses a metaphorical style popular among Xhosa *iintsomi* story-telling traditions, where impossible things are portrayed as if they really happened. If all his allegations were to be believed, Makhandanda would have been a deeply neglected, mentally disturbed illegitimate child, who spoke like a wild man and mostly told lies to enrich himself.³⁹ Chief Ndlambe is portrayed as a foolish old man who fell for these tricks and lies. The attack on Grahamstown was simply the product of his inflamed ego and his capacity to trick everyone except Ngqika's wiser followers. The incident at Gompo Rock is represented as a millenarian response to the defeat at Grahamstown. Kaye expands the story by claiming that Makhandanda promised that he would be empowered to fly from one giant rock to another by the ancestors rising from the sea.⁴⁰ No mention of colonial land seizures or debilitating commando raids is made. In this document, the quintessential Makhandanda-as-fool emerges.

This document's usefulness as a reliable historical source is highly doubtful. Perhaps the most blatant falsehood in it is the claim that Makhandanda's grandparents

were refugees from the amaZizi. Such refugees did not exist until the late 1820s, after Makhanda's death. The account of Gombo Rock also appears to be a wild exaggeration of the event, which took place prior to 1816 if the accounts of Ntsikana's descendants are to be believed and if James Read met Ntsikana in Ngqika's territory. The document claims that Makhanda spent 'many years' on Robben Island before escaping 'at night', neither of which are true.⁴¹ The story of Makhanda's alleged fatherless and miserable childhood, Nomathamsanqa Tisani points out, is a familiar literary device used to enhance the mysterious nature of many prominent leaders, such as Shaka. In critiquing this document, she also claims that it shows many African motifs, but that 'chronology, or "western temporality"' are not 'essential features of the text'.⁴² It must be judged as a highly unreliable source.

Colonial critics

While this inflammatory document rested quietly in Governor Grey's collection, a number of historians who essentially supported British colonial endeavours also began writing their histories of the eastern frontier region. Though not having access to the Kaye document, they developed their own perspective on the events of the early decades of the century. Common themes in this writing include the simultaneous arrival of white and black in the Zuurveld in the late eighteenth century, the inherently thieving nature of the amaXhosa and the folly of Makhanda's superstitions.⁴³

Writing from his home base at Grahamstown in 1883, Thomas Sheffield offers one of the clearest and earliest pro-settler versions of events surrounding the early decades of the town. For him, the amaXhosa fully deserved to be expelled from the Zuurveld in 1812 due to their uncontrolled theft. Chief Ndlambe had been dealt with 'too generously' in the previous war (ending in 1803) by being allowed to remain at his place of residence near present-day Alexandria. The 1819 attack of the amaXhosa on Grahamstown was because 'their old predatory and thieving habits were too strongly infused into their natures to be resisted'. Both Chief Ndlambe and King Hintsa are faulted for not respecting the higher authority of King Ngqika, who was viewed as a genuine friend of the British. The devastating impact of the Brereton raid leaving the amaXhosa without cattle is not viewed as problematic, so Makhanda's call to battle is taken as coming solely from superstition. Sheffield refers to Makhanda as 'a witchdoctor with great persuasive force', offers his own guess as to what Makhanda might have said on the morning

of the battle and then reproduces Pringle's admittedly fictitious poem on 'Makanna's Gathering' as evidence of his strange hostility, making sarcastic comments about the effect of the commandos.⁴⁴

While Sheffield sees the expulsion of the amaNdlambe in 1812 as a matter of 'fighting only for glory', the fighting at Grahamstown in 1819 was 'the greatest danger by which it [the Cape Colony] has then, or has since, been menaced . . . The struggle now was for dear life.' Fortunately, the British were spared because of Makhandanda's foolishness: 'if the attack had come at night there would be no town left at all' and his own followers quickly gave up when they saw they were deceived. Finally, Makhandanda's unsuccessful escape attempt from Robben Island is sarcastically dismissed: 'He proved to be as unsuccessful a boatman as he was a warrior and a prophet.'⁴⁵ Sheffield also registered a number of inaccuracies about the battle, such as which British regiment was involved. His work might be dismissed as early settler propaganda, if it were not for the fact that it is still used as an authoritative source for contemporary events commemorating the battle at Grahamstown.

George McCall Theal can be considered the first serious historian of frontier developments. A Canadian journalist by training, he arrived in South Africa in 1858. Nomathamsanqa Tisani describes his evolution as a writer of history in two main stages.⁴⁶ The first was grounded in his experiences as a journalist and editor in the Eastern Cape, which included a stint at Lovedale College in the 1870s. At the time, Lovedale was the leading mission educational institution, servicing amaXhosa who had come through the various stages of primary education at mission stations in the region. Situated in the heart of what had once been King Ngqika's territory, most of the people at Lovedale considered themselves to be amaNgqika and were second- or third-generation descendants from Ntsikana and his embryonic Christian community. Theal's second stage of writing coincides with his departure from Lovedale and his full immersion in white South African society. He then embraced all of the colonial outlooks and attitudes and became their champion through his historical work.

Theal makes a valuable contribution to an understanding of the years in which Makhandanda lived on several counts. Most important is his gathering of information through collecting oral testimony from African informants. At Lovedale, he was close to descendants from both the amaNgqika and amaNdlambe communities. This becomes evident in his *History of South Africa from 1795 to 1872*, in which he constructs a profile of Makhandanda quite unlike any other source previously published. Although his account of events places Chief Ndlambe directly at the

centre of all activities, he adds, 'Of even greater importance was the friendship of Makana, a man of enormous influence in the country.'⁴⁷

But Theal wrote in the style of late nineteenth-century historians, conforming to the Rankean school of thought, which believed that simple facts were all that was needed and these could be presented in an objective way. Hence he tends simply to describe events, often without offering interpretation or meaning. His detailed descriptions of Makhandanda, capturing the essence of his enduring charisma and influence nearly three-quarters of a century after his death, are offered without much explanation. Significantly, he does not incorporate the bullets-to-water allegations in his account of Makhandanda, even though they were prevalent at the time that he published. Though Theal conveys the spirit of a heroic Makhandanda, he stops short of saying exactly what it was that made him so deeply revered.

Sadly, Theal's failure to analyse the oral traditions he encountered leaves him unable to transcend the prevailing settler stereotypes of his day. Like many others around him, he did not question the value of the colonial enterprise, assumed that African people were thieves by nature and denigrated traditional leadership as inherently greedy and self-serving. He never questioned the morality of British-instigated commandos depriving the amaXhosa of cattle. He devoted much of his historical writing to trying to prove that black and white arrived simultaneously in the Zuurveld, often ignoring or suppressing any evidence to the contrary.⁴⁸ This debate lay at the root of the question whether the amaXhosa had a legitimate claim to the contested Zuurveld or not. Theal's racially biased views of the frontier have been avidly embraced or rejected by subsequent generations of historians. But his intimate glimpse into the character and reputation of Makhandanda has become submerged and ignored in the face of strong countervailing historical discourses.

One of the early beneficiaries of Theal's work was George Cory, a historian based in Grahamstown and collector of documents. Writing in the early twentieth century, he made use of a variety of sources, drawing on government archival documents as well as oral interviews with white people with relatives who had been present during the fighting at Grahamstown. He also travelled around the outlying countryside, collecting oral testimony from elderly Xhosa informants, although these generally came through mission establishments, maintaining the bias towards the Ntsikana versions of early nineteenth-century events. His account gives a good sense of where and how events happened during the battle itself. For the most part, however, he maintains the pro-colonial stance in his writing, freely offering his subjective opinions. He states, 'It is impossible to conceive a fairer line

of conduct and one calculated to convince any but determined thieves and murderers that the only desire of the Colonists was to live in peace and friendship with their neighbours.' For him, all that the British did was brave and justified, and Ndlambe deserved to be punished and should have been killed if taken alive.⁴⁹ Like Theal, however, he shifts much of the blame for events to Ndlambe's leadership, relying rather less on the notion of Makhandá's peculiar personality. This approach tends to place more emphasis on the rivalry between Ndlambe and Ngqika than on shortcomings in British policy. However, the inevitable rivalry of ambitious men stands at the centre of his explanation of events.

Literate African voices

African writers only started articulating their own views of their past in writing from roughly the 1880s onwards. As the missionaries broadened their publishing efforts to include newspapers with an African readership, the better educated among them found a new outlet to express their views. Most notable for historical writing was the African History Series published between 1885 and 1888 in *Isigidimi*, a Xhosa-language newspaper. Nomathamsanqa Tisani, in her analysis of the contributors to this series, stresses the ways that these mission-educated African Christians combined their own original information about their past with some of the then current trends in mission thinking.⁵⁰ Now, however, the writers were committing their words to public scrutiny, unlike William Kekale Kaye, writing a generation earlier only for Governor Grey.

All of the contributors to the African History Series were amaNgqika and had direct family ties with followers of Ntsikana. Thus, it is not surprising that they used their skills to promote the virtues of their famous ancestor. An 1888 article by W.K. Ntsikana, a grandson of his namesake, focused again on the histories of both Makhandá and Ntsikana.⁵¹ Like other writers in the series, he provided important details not previously recorded elsewhere, but this has to be used with some caution as he continued the tradition, already well in place, of contrasting Ntsikana as the model first Xhosa Christian with Makhandá, his traditionalist rival.

In 1904 the Reverend John Knox Bokwe pulled together the earlier writings on Ntsikana from the nineteenth century to produce a booklet entitled *Ntsikana: The Story of an African Hymn*. It was later expanded into a larger volume, in both English and isiXhosa, in 1914 under the title *Ntsikana: The Story of an African Convert*. Bokwe drew on an article he had published in 1879, using a missionary-generated account from 1845, as well as the subsequent articles appearing in the

African History Series.⁵² His work is the most accessible for researchers because it is written in English as well as isiXhosa, so he has exercised considerable influence over the information most frequently cited in writing about Makhanda and his times. He passed along the accumulated misinformation and distortions that had developed over the previous hundred years. For example, he put forward the claim that Makhanda heard Van der Kemp's preaching at Bethelsdorp while he himself was employed on a farm at nearby Uitenhage.⁵³ This contradicts both Makhanda's own testimony to Campbell and Read's accounts of his meetings with Makhanda.

Bokwe puts the Gompo Rock story at the centre of the feud between Makhanda and Ntsikana. He uses it as evidence of Makhanda's fraudulent character and of conning gullible people.⁵⁴ Time, however, has confirmed that hardly anyone else shared this memory of Makhanda. The fact that the amaNdlambe people have no oral traditions recalling the event suggests that it was within the bounds of normal Xhosa spiritual practice, and not as represented by Ntsikana and his followers. Makhanda's reputation in no way suffered and his influence continued to grow long after Gompo Rock.

From Bokwe, it also becomes clear that the differences between the two *inyangas* seem to have been more along the lines of whose forecasts proved to be more accurate; in other words, one man wanting to outdo the other in a competition of prophetic skills. By all accounts, it was Makhanda who won hands down, securing a place of highest possible rank, power and influence, whilst Ntsikana moved away to settle for his next best option under King Ngqika. However, Bokwe and his predecessors construct the competition as one determined by adherence to Christian teachings. This makes Ntsikana the clear winner since he lived near a missionary for the last few years of his life, formed a small community of followers based on their shared acceptance of Christianity, and then had his family and friends settle with the missionary John Brownlee after his death. There they became the frontrunners of Xhosa society in the full adaptation to Christian values and Western education.

In Bokwe's account, both Ntsikana and Makhanda exhibit prophetic skills and describe visions and revelations that come to them. However, these are treated in blatantly differential terms. Makhanda's spiritual guidance is taken as evidence that he was a false messenger from God, whereas for Ntsikana it is the opposite. Even the most traditional African symbolism, such as a glowing cow, is taken as a true sign of Ntsikana's blessings from God. Indeed, Ntsikana's greatest claim to fame appears to be the vehemence of his denunciations of Makhanda.⁵⁵ Makhanda

is repeatedly charged with simply trying to promote his own interests and power, while Ntsikana's failed efforts to do the same are taken as unfair and justification for his leaving the territory of Chief Ndlambe altogether.

Significantly, Bokwe and his sources reduce the entire story of the two rivals to a theological debate. Ntsikana shines because he composed moving and beautiful hymns and had the courage to put aside one of his two wives. No reference is made to the context of land appropriation, devastating commando raids, alliances with the enemy or defiance of the Xhosa Great House. In this, Bokwe appears to have fallen under the shadow of missionary thinking – an unofficial silence on all frontier wars and their causes.

An appendix to Bokwe's book giving the life story of Matshaya, an early convert at Joseph Williams' mission station and subsequent follower of Ntsikana, captures an altogether different spirit. Matshaya makes it clear that the wars and upheavals in which he took part in 1818 and 1819 were due to colonial interference in the lives of the Xhosa people. He further goes on to give examples of how he was persecuted both by white Christians and King Ngqika.⁵⁶ This appears to be a far more straightforward account, given to a missionary in the early 1840s and relatively free of subsequent layers of editorialising.

Isaac Williams (Citashe) Wauchope made a significant contribution to Xhosa history writing with *The Natives and Their Missionaries*.⁵⁷ Much of his information came from his work, at the turn of the twentieth century, as a minister of the Congregational Church in the area previously inhabited by Ngqika and in which Van der Kemp had lived a hundred years earlier. Hence most of his information is presented from a pro-Ngqika and pro-Ntsikana point of view. However, his grandmother and grandfather were followers of Chief Ndlambe in his lifetime and passed on significant oral traditions about their personal experience of the main events. Wauchope's information about Makhanda comes almost entirely from previously published sources, so offers little that is original. His writing, however, makes many valuable contributions on relevant issues from Makhanda's life, such as Van der Kemp's experiences, the relationship between Ngqika and Ndlambe, and the battle at Amalinde.

John Henderson Soga reiterated much of Bokwe's views in his book *The South-Eastern Bantu*. As the son of the first African ordained minister, Tiyo Soga, and the grandson of Soga who was greatly influenced by Ntsikana and a leading councillor to King Ngqika, he falls clearly into the anti-Makhanda camp. However, Soga takes some of the themes popular among the missionaries to new extremes. He

views all of the conflicts between Ndlambe and Ngqika as due to Ndlambe's own ambitions to lead the Rharhabe nation. This stands in opposition to numerous written records that document Chief Ndlambe's acceptance of Ngqika's selection as heir to the Rharhabe kingship. These will be identified in subsequent chapters. Soga also alleges that even King Hintsa experienced petty jealousy over Ngqika's powers, motivating him to side with Ndlambe to try to secure Ngqika's downfall. Throughout, Ngqika is consistently portrayed as the innocent victim of other people's avarice. Soga compares Makhandla to 'Simon Magus of scripture story' who preached garbled Christianity so that 'he could profit by it and add lustre to his name'. Ntsikana, by contrast, is described as a good prophet whose greatest strength lay in warning the people about the false prophet Makhandla. Ndlambe is cited as being behind the attack on Grahamstown, which was done purely to spite Ngqika, with no mention of revenge for the aggressive Brereton raid; while Makhandla's alleged speech about bullets turning to water is given as the final proof of his charlatanism.⁵⁸ Perhaps more than anything else, Soga's rendition of events reveals that elements of the Ngqika people still felt defensive about events at the beginning of the nineteenth century, turning to their subsequent progress in Christianity as an important source for collective pride and identity.

The amaNdlambe had to wait until early in the twentieth century before they could claim an African writer who projected their point of view. Walter Rubusana, noted as an editor and politician, maintained friendly relations with the Ndlambe royal house and is remembered fondly by its members for representing their interests whenever he could. Rubusana's main literary contributions, however, involved compilation of volumes of documents written by others. Very little in his own writing sheds any direct light on amaNdlambe interpretations of their own past or their oral traditions.

Far more useful as an Ndlambe spokesperson was Samuel Edward Krune Mqhayi, best known for his praise poetry and literary writing in isiXhosa in the 1920s and 1930s. Mqhayi's father was the highest-ranking councillor of the senior Ndlambe chief, Chief Soleni (aahSilimela) Makinana in the early twentieth century. Mqhayi himself married one of the great chief's daughters, making him a virtual member of the royal family. From all these connections, he was steeped in the traditions and values of the amaNdlambe, who claim that he always articulated their perspective.⁵⁹ In his writing, he made it perfectly clear that the feud and eventual fighting between the historic royals, Ndlambe and Ngqika, should be viewed as a power struggle over how to handle the British invasion of their land.⁶⁰

Mid- to late-twentieth-century historians

The protracted struggle between Africans and Europeans in the part of South Africa now referred to as the Eastern Cape continued to attract the attention of historians of all types throughout the twentieth century. As the study of history itself matured as an academic field, so too did the approaches to this hundred-year war. One of the characteristics of the newer history was to try to achieve a greater sense of balance and detachment, looking at matters from both sides and accepting that there might be good and bad in all camps. A series of articles written by the University of Cape Town historian H.A. Reyburn in the 1930s broke new ground in doing just that. In reviewing events before and after the fighting at Grahamstown, he placed a good deal of blame for poor management and bad judgement on the Governor, Lord Charles Somerset, and his right-hand man on the frontier, Jacob Cuyler, the magistrate of Uitenhage. The magistrate of Graaff-Reinet, Andries Stockenström, he considered to be far more sensible in his response to unfolding events.⁶¹ In his assessments, Reyburn echoes the early nineteenth-century humanitarians Pringle, Philip and Justus in blaming short-sighted officials for bungling and creating unnecessary messes. Mostly, however, he criticises the spoor system of recovering stolen cattle, set up in 1817, and the need for large-scale military action. He does not question the foundation of the colonial presence, but rather how efficiently and reasonably it was managed. Making good use of the government archives in Cape Town, he nevertheless appears to embellish his accounts with odd bits of information without stating their sources.

Two histories of the frontier wars were written by amateur historians, Frederick Charles Metrowich (1968) and John Milton (1983).⁶² Both primarily reiterated earlier settler views. Metrowich, however, excels in ridiculing Makhanda's high regard in the African community, stating that he is 'still regarded by the Africans themselves as the outstanding witch-doctor in the annals of Bantu history'; and that '[a]lthough Makanna may appear just another of the mystic charlatans who periodically arose among the Africans to lead them to their doom, in the eyes of his superstitious compatriots he was a divinely inspired Messiah.' The amaXhosa are still described as 'countless savage hordes'.⁶³ His work stands as a telling example of what happens when the amaNgqika demonisation of Makhanda, which reached its height in the writings of John Henderson Soga, meets racially based settler stereotypes. The land issue or humanitarian concerns are totally absent. Milton attempted to reconcile the two different inherited schools of thought, saying: 'One of the recurring themes of the history of the Xhosa struggle for their land is that of

the emergence, in times of acute stress, of a charismatic prophet, a figure who stirred the people and gave them the spirit and the will to fight and die . . . Makana is the archetype of these prophets.’⁶⁴

This neatly admits to the magnitude of the land problem as a crisis, but still ends up with the amaXhosa coping only through their quest for spiritual solutions. The superstition factor is not diminished, as he repeats the description of Makhanda as ‘short and ugly’ and as ‘a mystic, a practitioner of the Xhosa arts of beneficent magic’. In a slight acknowledgement that Makhanda’s positive reputation in African circles might have some advantages, Milton credits him with awakening a sense of ‘black identity and consciousness’.⁶⁵

One of the earliest efforts to take a more pro-African stance was the *Oxford History of South Africa* (1969). Monica Wilson and Leonard Thompson acknowledged that African people might have had more of a claim to the Zuurveld than had generally been accepted. For example, they cite a claim that Chief Chungwa had lived as far west as the Long Kloof before 1800.⁶⁶ However, they generally accept that the area was subject to parallel claims by white and black.

By the late 1970s an entirely new type of historian began to emerge in South Africa. Stimulated by the growth of international Marxist historiography and its concomitant concern with rewriting the history of oppressed peoples everywhere, young historians at South African universities began to probe into regional histories, deliberately seeking African perspectives and experiences. Jeff Peires served that function well for the Eastern Cape, eventually producing two highly acclaimed books, *The House of Phalo* (1981), a general history of the Xhosa people, and *The Dead Will Arise* (1989) on the 1856 cattle killing. However, one of his earliest publications compared Nxele/Makhanda with Ntsikana.⁶⁷ As this generation of historians began searching for neglected African sources, what they found were pro-Ntsikana publications written by the mission-educated amaNgqika. Such sources, combined with the well-established tradition of blaming the battle at Grahamstown on Makhanda’s spiritual fanaticism, led three University of Cape Town (UCT)-based researchers to pursue the history from a religious point of view. In addition to Peires, who did his Honours thesis at UCT on the lead up to the battle at Grahamstown, Janet Hodgson wrote prolifically on Xhosa religion, focusing on Ntsikana’s hymns from her base in the Religious Studies Department, from which Reverend Ezra Tisani also produced his M.A. thesis on Makhanda and Ntsikana in 1988.⁶⁸ All three did far more extensive original research than any of their predecessors, incorporating new archival work and oral testimonies. However,

the very nature of the way they framed their research topics held them within a paradigm that viewed the frontier conflicts of 1816–20 primarily from a religious point of view. Tisani's valuable contribution on Makhandanda as a traditional *inyanga* only came after the other two writers' works had been published. Rather than follow the full logic of his own findings, however, Tisani tried too hard to reconcile them with the views of Hodgson and Peires, reproducing many of their limiting assumptions.

Hodgson's work contributes to the understanding of these past events in a number of important ways. She did exhaustive research, identifying obscure texts written in isiXhosa and clearly traced the connections of all the writers to Ntsikana himself. She also made a serious effort to relate the tales about Ntsikana to traditional Xhosa spirituality, showing how the new Christian beliefs were adapted and integrated in a coherent way in his teachings. Her careful textual analysis of the hymns composed by Ntsikana shows maturity and insight. However, as Nomathamsanqa Tisani points out, Hodgson used the seriously flawed Kaye material in the Grey Collection extensively.⁶⁹ Rather than seeing the accumulated denunciations of Makhandanda as symptoms of a strongly felt spirit of rivalry from a biased faction, she took all that was written as absolute truth. From this, she painted a vivid picture of Ntsikana as a man of peace who preached submission to the British and the full assimilation of Christianity, in sharp contrast to Makhandanda as a prophet of war and resistance who abused Christian principles. Although this may have been a clear difference between them by 1819 and 1820, it would be an error to read it back into their earlier feuds or as the essential and most important difference between them. This dichotomy of peace versus war has become the widely accepted understanding about the two men and is consistently quoted in recent texts.⁷⁰

Peires started publishing at the same time as Hodgson and draws heavily on her assessments, especially in contrasting the two prophets. Although he is one of the first historians to rate the expulsion of the amaNdlambe from the Zuurveld as the beginning of a serious crisis, he rather simplistically defines it as primarily a crisis about belief systems, which led to the great chiefs handing over their power to the rising prophets. He believed the amaXhosa needed an entirely new world view to explain the power of the Europeans and so turned to the prophets. These men, Peires alleges, could 'interpret a world which had suddenly become incomprehensible'.⁷¹ In dealing with Ntsikana, Peires does not develop a logical sense of the chronology of events, failing to understand the implications of

Ntsikana's having left Ndlambe prior to 1816. This was clearly before Ntsikana had any prolonged exposure to Christianity when he was most certainly grounded in African spirituality rather than Christian theological correctness.

Peires took at face value the allegations coming from the settler school of thought that Makhanda sought to become king of all amaXhosa himself. The possibility of an *inyanga* replacing the royalty he or she served is totally alien to Xhosa thinking and should be taken as a myth generated by Europeans. Like Hodgson, Peires relied heavily on the Grey Collection materials, failing to make any assessment of the biases contained in them. As Nomathamsanqa Tisani points out, the wild and incoherent stories about Makhanda were the only parts of this source that Peires used, taking them as literal truth.⁷² In his analysis of the two prophets, he also used arguments common among missionaries who denounced African customs, such as the assumption that all diviners were quacks 'who told their clients what they wanted to hear'.⁷³

Peires made much of the alleged fascination of the amaXhosa of Makhanda's time with concepts of the resurrection of the dead, but failed to acknowledge the entire system of communication with ancestors which permeates Xhosa beliefs, even among ardent Christians today. Peires speaks of 'the necessity of fusing Xhosa religion with Christianity in order to formulate a new world-view capable of comprehending the irruption of the Europeans,' but fails to take into account other examples of Xhosa responses to Christianity, such as Dyani Tshatshu, who was indeed the first fully fledged Xhosa Christian convert, and King Ngqika's own curiosity about the new religion.⁷⁴ In bending over backwards to portray Makhanda as anti-Christian, he claims that he was heavily threatened by the arrival of missionaries who might encroach on his spiritual terrain. However, the records give no evidence of this. On the contrary, all of his encounters with missionaries, right up until the end of his life, are recorded as friendly and amicable, as outlined in the previous chapter. If Makhanda played the role of the leading *itola* to Chief Ndlambe, he is unlikely to have felt threatened by a tiny handful of friendly Europeans appearing on the doorstep.

Even the most violent developments in the lead-up to the attack on Grahamstown are portrayed by Peires not as generating a crisis over sovereignty and land use, but as creating theological crises. In fact, Peires was often puzzled by coming across the two contradictory representations of Makhanda. Rather than enter into serious textual analysis of them, he tried to reconcile them both into one plausible narrative, in which changes of mind are given as the best explanation he

can offer. Peires portrays Makhanda as a failed Christian convert, who then found that he gained more power 'as he moved away from Christianity towards more comprehensible patterns of magical behaviour'.⁷⁵ Peires leaves no room for Makhanda's role as a trained Xhosa diviner who grafted parts of the Christian message into his work.

In closing his analysis of the two men, Peires admits that the pendulum of thinking about them appeared to be swinging back in Makhanda's favour as the struggle to overthrow apartheid gained momentum. Makhanda's ability to inspire people in their thousands in 1819 had, in the interim, been overtaken by Ntsikana's veneration as a virtual saint of Xhosa Christianity. But now the heroic Makhanda was re-emerging as a galvanising force to today's generation.⁷⁶

At virtually the same time as the outpouring of new information from UCT, two journalists were also conducting extensive research into the history of the Eastern frontier. In 1986 Ben MacLennan published his in-depth account of the 1812 war that resulted in expulsion of the amaNdlambe people from the Zuurveld. This was followed by Noël Mostert, who published his voluminous *Frontiers* in 1992. As journalists, both are experts at telling clear and plausible stories. They did impressive amounts of research, starting from the premise that the way the history had been written in the past suffered from far too much pro-settler bias, which stood in dire need of correction. Their approach was to re-read the existing texts and add fresh research, culminating in a new version of the history. In their intentions, they are pro-African. They make efforts to portray African actions sympathetically, to quote African speakers as much as possible and to understand their motives. They assumed that the cause of the African people was a just one in the face of rapacious intruders from overseas. The shortcomings and weaknesses of colonial attitudes and writings are mercilessly exposed and discussed in a fashion reminiscent of the Pringle and Justus humanitarian school of the 1820s and 1830s.

However, they did not go much further than trying to show sympathy with the African experience. Neither collected evidence using oral sources or referred to publications in African languages. They made no effort to consult the descendants of Ngqika, Ndlambe or Hintsa to get a sense of how they remember their own histories, or to find their grassroots oral historians. Also, they did not have access to useful academic theses which have emerged subsequently.

Because they wrote outside academic circles, they do not make reference to the vast body of literature that now roundly condemns colonialism in all its subtle manifestations. Nor do they operate within the framework of post-modernism,

which rests comfortably with complexity and ambiguity. Rather they write as the final voices of authority, which no doubt makes them readable and enjoyable to their audiences, who for the most part still simply want to know what happened. They detect the overt racism in colonial documents and deeds. Ultimately, however, they simply patch up old sources, using an anti-colonial and pro-African perspective. The remaining chapters in this book attempt to integrate all available sources in a more comprehensive way than has been used previously.

Notes

1. Mda interview.
2. J.B. Peires, 'Nxele, Ntsikana and the Origins of Xhosa Religious Reaction' *Journal of African History* Vol. 20, No. 1 (1979), p. 51.
3. E. Tisani, Nxele, p. 132.
4. Bokwe, *Ntsikana*, pp. 2, 5.
5. CL MS 9063: N. Falati, 'The Story of Ntsikana, a Gaika Xhosa' (1895) translated from isiXhosa by C. Mpaki and C. Falati assisted by S. Marks, p. 2.
6. James Madase, interview on 12 March 2002 by Z. Sakata at Pikoli.
7. E. Tisani, Nxele, p. 137; J. Hodgson, *Ntsikana's Great Hymn: A Xhosa Expression of Christianity in the Early 19th Century Eastern Cape* (Cape Town: Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 1980), p. 3.
8. See general arguments of Hodgson and Peires as discussed later in this chapter.
9. CL Council on World Missions, Box 6, Williams report, 7 August 1817.
10. Bokwe, *Ntsikana*, p. 11.
11. Discussions with members of Mhala Development Trust heritage project; and Madase interview. Bokwe claims that Qhora was near present-day Fort Beaufort. However this appears to be an error as several places in the Eastern Cape share the same name. While Ntsikana's strange vision is seen as a legitimate mystical experience by historians, Makhanda's comparable description of his calling is taken as if it were literal truth, confirming his eccentricity (Bokwe, *Ntsikana*, p. 13).
12. CL MS 9063: Falati, p. 6.
13. Read, 'Letter', p. 24. Hodgson only consulted missionary sources referring to the life and time of Van der Kemp, thus missing Read's reference. In this account, Read later stated that he had met only one sickly person, apparently Ntsikana, in all of Xhosa land.
14. Bokwe, *Ntsikana*, p. 13.
15. Ibid., p. 12.
16. Ibid., p. 15. W.K. Ntsikana, 'Imfazwi KaThuthula' in W.B. Rubusana (ed.), *Zemk'Inkomo Magwalandini* (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, 1966).
17. Bokwe, *Ntsikana*, p. 20.
18. E. Tisani, Nxele, p. 114.
19. Bokwe, *Ntsikana*, p. 17.

20. Bokwe, *Ntsikana*, Appendix 1, 'Charles Henry Matshaya: A Follower and Convert' as dictated to Rev. James Laing and published in the *Glasgow Missionary Record* (1842), p. 35.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
22. B.F. Holt, *Greatheart of the Border: A Life of John Brownlee, Pioneer Missionary in South Africa* (King William's Town: South African Missionary Museum, 1976), p. 23. Other first-generation Christians from Williams' mission station sought employment in the Colony, but were sent to Robben Island as trespassers. See Chapter 8 for more details.
23. Hodgson, *Ntsikana's Great Hymn*, pp. 9, 11, 13.
24. Pringle, 'Letters'.
25. T. Pringle, *Narrative of a Residence in South Africa* (London: Edward Moxon, 1835, reprinted 1966), p. 282.
26. Pringle, *African Poems*, p. xxi.
27. CL Great Britain, *Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements) together with Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index, ordered by the House of Commons, 5 August 1836*. The committee's terms of reference were '[t]o consider what measures ought to be adopted with regard to the native inhabitants of countries where British settlements are made, and to the neighbouring tribes, in order to secure to them the due observation of justice, and the protection of their rights, to promote the spread of civilization, and to lead them to the peaceful, voluntary reception of the Christian religion.' See CL Council on World Missions, Box 9, engraving of Jan Tzatzzo giving evidence at the House of Commons.
28. Justus, *The Wrongs of the Caffre Nation* (London: James Duncan, 1837).
29. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 82.
33. CL Council on World Missions, Box 9, 'Jan Tzatzzo and the African Witnesses before a Committee of the House of Commons', p. 108.
34. CL Great Britain, *Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines*, evidence of Sir Andries Stockenström, p. 100.
35. N. Tisani, *Continuity*, p. 84.
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 85, 87.
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 123–4. The Mfengu were people whose descendants had entered the area occupied by amaXhosa around 1828 as refugees from the Zulu wars instigated by King Shaka. Similarities between isiZulu and isiXhosa allowed them to integrate fairly easily into Xhosa society. As refugees, they were inclined to attach themselves to mission stations where they embraced Western education and Christianity.
39. W.K. Kaye, 'Kafir Legends, and History' (South African State Library, Grey Collection 172C 9, manuscript).
40. *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
42. N. Tisani, *Continuity*, p. 132.
43. W.C. Holden, *The Past and Present of the Kaffir Races* (London: Paternoster, 1866), p. 142.
44. T. Sheffield, *The Story of a Settlement With a Sketch of Grahamstown As It Was, and Grahamstown As It Is* (Grahamstown: T. & G. Sheffield, 1884), pp. 86, 95, 98, 103.

45. Ibid., pp. 9, 115, 118.
46. N. Tisani, *Continuity*, p. 210.
47. Theal, *History*, p. 329.
48. N. Tisani, *Continuity*, p. 207.
49. G.E. Cory, *The Rise of South Africa: A History of the Origin of South African Colonisation . . .* Vol. 1 (London: Longmans Green, 1910), p. 382.
50. N. Tisani, *Continuity*, p. 271.
51. Ntsikana, 'Imbali'.
52. Bokwe, *Ntsikana*, Preface. The author states that his first edition must have been accurate because there were so few criticisms of it.
53. Ibid., p. 13.
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid., pp. 14–19.
56. Ibid., pp. 32–5.
57. Wauchope, *Selected Writings*.
58. J.H. Soga, *The South-Eastern Bantu* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1930), pp. 160, 161, 163, 166.
59. Chief Zwelihlangeni Makinana, interview on 24 June 2007 at Ilitha.
60. S.E.K. Mqhayi, 'Imiyolelo Yokwe 1931 Umnyaka' (The Last Words [The Dying Wish] of 1931) in *Imibengo*, edited by W.G. Bennie (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, 1935).
61. H.A. Reyburn, 'Studies in Cape Frontier History: Part 5 Reprisals' *The Critic* Vol. 4, No. 1, October 1935, p. 52.
62. F.C. Metrowich, *Frontier Flames* (Cape Town: Books of Africa, 1968) and J. Milton, *The Edges of War: A History of Frontier Wars, 1702–1878* (Cape Town: Juta, 1983).
63. Metrowich, *Frontier*, pp. 31, 33.
64. Milton, *Edges*, p. 65.
65. Ibid., pp. 65, 66.
66. M. Wilson and L. Thompson (eds.), *Oxford History of South Africa, Vol. 1, South Africa to 1870* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 236.
67. Peires, 'Nxele'. The text of this article was incorporated by Peires into *House of Phalo* (1981) as Chapter 5: Visions and Interpretations.
68. E. Tisani, Nxele.
69. N. Tisani, *Continuity*, p. 147.
70. 'Nxele was a war-doctor and his cosmology was one of battle between good and evil. Ntsikana was a man of peace and submission, and his cosmology was one of peace and submission.' (Peires, 'Nxele', p. 60).
71. Ibid., p. 61.
72. N. Tisani, *Continuity*, p. 147.
73. Peires, 'Nxele', p. 55.
74. Ibid., p. 61.
75. Ibid.
76. Ibid.

The long struggle for the Zuurveld

The history of South Africa is dotted with myths about white and black converging simultaneously on empty land, a process that resulted in intensive disputes over ownership. The struggle for the Zuurveld was a protracted period of conflict lasting roughly forty years, in which European colonisers and the Xhosa people each tried to assert their claims to the land lying between today's city of Port Elizabeth and the Fish River, nearly 200 kilometres to the east.

Colonial versions of the history claim that Europeans and amaXhosa arrived in the area at roughly the same time in the 1780s. Advocates of the British colonial agenda insist that the land was theirs since Dutch settlers, who later fell under their rule, arrived at the same time as the amaXhosa. Colonial officials and historians claim that the amaXhosa agreed to let them have the land, but then failed to honour their agreement. This in turn justified all the first five frontier wars between 1781 and 1819.

Xhosa people, however, bluntly refuse to consider the issue. How could there be an empty piece of land in the middle of Africa, which is one of the most geographically desirable places, full of rivers, springs, forests and plains, and home to abundant game? How could any Europeans claim they got there first when they had to arrive in ships? As indigenous people of the continent, the amaXhosa presume they have an automatic claim to the land. Regardless of legalistic claims as to who was there first or who had rights over the land, the area became hotly contested in the early 1780s. Over the next forty years, the amaXhosa maintained their claim through armed action. Over and over again they overpowered their European rivals, nearly driving them all away. Once the British took over from the Dutch as colonisers in 1806, however, the balance tipped in favour of the Europeans, who commanded superior military technology. The ultimate outcomes of the fighting included the expulsion of the amaXhosa from the Zuurveld in 1812 and then the full invasion of Xhosa territory in 1819, leading to a second expulsion, this time from previously undisputed lands, and the creation of a neutral territory. The British portrayed this as self-defence of their territory and their citizens. It was only the all-out war that included the battle at Grahamstown that brought this long dispute to an end. Full

British control of the Zuurveld could not be implemented until the end of 1819, when Makhandá's war was concluded. This victory was then sealed only by populating the area with thousands of British settlers in 1820.

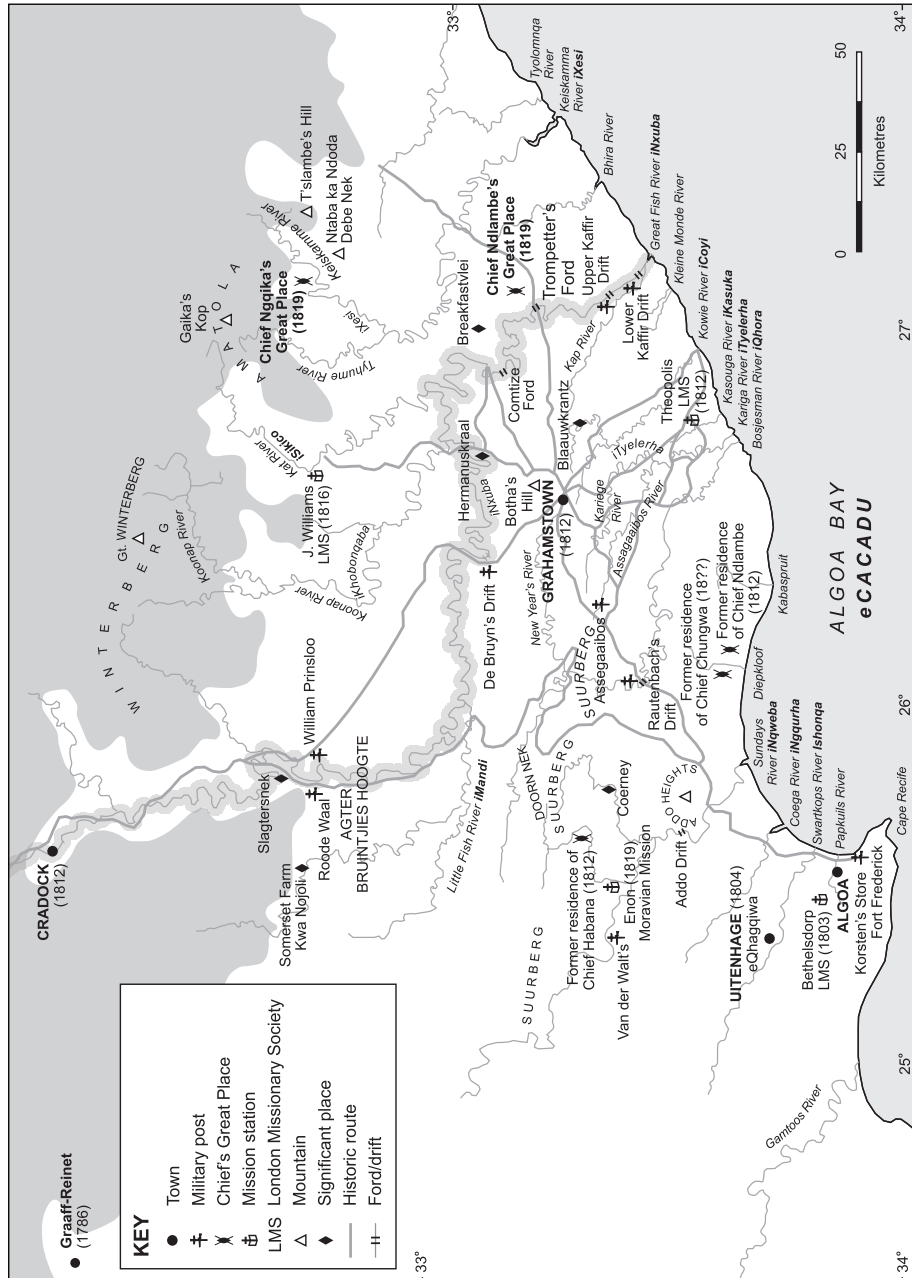
This chapter explores the competing claims to first arrival and then goes on to investigate how the contested space was shared over the forty-year period. It explores how the sense of ownership was multifaceted, based on a number of factors including military strength, population numbers, inter-group relations, economic uses and governance.

The elusive boundary

There can be little doubt that the earliest eighteenth-century European observers of the Zuurveld witnessed a significant influx of large numbers of Xhosa people. Both the amaNdlambe oral historian Stutu Pawuli and the historian Nomathamsanqa Tisani concur that this should be understood as the extension of the domination of the Xhosa royal house over existing isiXhosa-speaking chieftaincies, rather than as the first arrival of the amaXhosa as a whole.¹ The Imidange, an isiXhosa-speaking people, claim to have settled as far west as Graaff-Reinet by 1700, but later accepted the sovereignty of Prince Rharhabe when he arrived.² Even pro-colonial historians mention that the expulsion of the Xhosa people from the Zuurveld in 1812 meant removing people who had been there for a century.³

Samuel Mqhayi provides a detailed account of the early westward movements of Xhosa royalty. King Phalo journeyed extensively with his two sons, Gcaleka and Rharhabe, along with a sizeable retinue of followers in the years around 1740. The king decided on the trip following a visit to the Great Place of some Europeans, as he 'wanted to see for himself what lay beyond the known'. They left behind their home base near present-day Butterworth and travelled as far west as today's Uitenhage, near Port Elizabeth. Their style of travel was slow, as they stopped along the way, built houses, and planted and harvested crops before moving on again. After returning home, Rharhabe, the junior of the two brothers, secured his father's blessing to travel westward again with some of his followers.⁴ He eventually settled at Mngqesha, near today's King William's Town.

The westward move required the establishment of relationships with all the occupants of the new area. Rharhabe fought bitterly with San people who plundered his cattle, eventually driving them into the Amathole Mountains. After initial fighting with Khoi cattle keepers, he made peace by offering their female ruler, Hoho, a large payment in cattle for ownership of the forests in which her people had taken refuge.⁵ In order to further secure the peace, he ordered the inter-marriage of Xhosa



The Zuurveld, 1811–19.

and Khoi men and women. The great-grandmother of Isaac Williams Citashe Wauchope was one of the Xhosa brides in this arrangement. She had been an orphan, working as a servant of Rharhabe's eldest daughter Ntsuza.⁶ According to Mqhayi, Rharhabe earned the acceptance of the existing Xhosa chiefs in the area and further west into the Zuurveld through his sound governance policies: 'Rharhabe was a very wealthy, generous and courageous king. Because of these three attributes many people flocked to him and lived well under him. AmaNtinde, amaHleke, amaMbalu and imiDange all of these settled well under him and regarded him as their king.'⁷

Rharhabe enjoyed a long rule until 1785 when he died in a skirmish defending the honour of his daughter Ntsuza. His eldest son Mlawu preceded him. Throughout his reign he always deferred in serious matters of state to the higher house of his brother Gcaleka, maintaining an important sense of the royal hierarchy despite his distance and autonomy.⁸

According to oral traditions gathered in the 1820s at some unknown time in the past, before any boers (as the Dutch-speaking farmers called themselves) arrived in the Zuurveld, two Xhosa chiefs of the Kucha and Tinde clans entered into an agreement with the Gonaqua chief, Gola. Since the amaXhosa were pressed for room, 'they purchased the area between the Fish and the Sunday's River along the coast for 800 head of cattle'.⁹ The Gonaqua then moved northward toward the area of present-day Bruintjies Hoogte, where not long afterward the first of the boer settlers began to appear.

The first colonial effort to make a claim to the same land came in 1777 when the Dutch Governor, Joachim van Plettenberg, visited the area, primarily in the northern regions. He claimed to have made a treaty with Xhosa chiefs, agreeing to the Fish River as a boundary between them and the Colony. This allegation was to form the foundation of the next forty years of contestation over ownership of the Zuurveld. Witnesses claim, however, that he sent for and met his chiefs in the space of about half a day, whereas the most powerful and relevant Xhosa king, Rharhabe, and his adherents were several days' ride away.¹⁰ From that time onward, both sides ardently defended their claims to the territory and left no room for negotiations.

Escalation of tensions

The emergence of boer settlers as a factor began about the time of Van Plettenberg's visit. In 1780, Ndlambe, acting on behalf of his father, killed Mahota, a rebellious

chief whose followers took refuge in the mountains of Agter Bruintjies Hoogte. The incoming boers, in turn, killed Jalamba, Mahota's son, and then later his grandson.¹¹ Without the protection offered by the Rharhabe royal house, it was hard to maintain independence as frontier dynamics began to change with the influx of boers. Jalamba's people then left the area, giving it the appearance of being unoccupied. One early occupant claimed that '[n]ot a Caffre lived here, when I first came into it, nor yet within a great many miles beyond the Great Fish River'.¹² But the amaXhosa quickly began to fill the space again and soon conflict threatened the security of the new boer settlers. A southern boer migration into land along the coast across the Gamtoos River also took place in 1778 at about the same time.¹³

The first two frontier wars took place in the eighteenth century during the period of Dutch East India Company rule. George Cory claims: 'Towards the end of 1779 matters had become so serious that the farmers had to abandon their holdings in the Zuurveld and Bushman's River district and seek safety in other parts.'¹⁴ From a Xhosa point of view, this could be seen as their first clearance of the Zuurveld. From this time onward, the amaXhosa signalled their non-acceptance of the new settlers through frequent thefts of cattle. The theft of property should be seen as an act of aggression, designed to convince the European intruders that they were not welcome. As Wauchope puts it, 'the theft of property belonging to an enemy was looked on as a brave act'.¹⁵ Throughout the forty-year struggle for the Zuurveld, the amaXhosa learned how to evict neighbours who caused them trouble. They developed tactics best described as a form of harassment, rather than warfare. In the early conflicts, raids on boer farms and theft of livestock were sufficient to scare them off. Those boers who were willing to submit to the domination of local African chiefs remained behind and enjoyed spells of peaceful co-existence. Escalations in cattle theft could be taken as a form of low-grade warfare, whereas in times of peace the chiefs assisted those who were robbed to find, recover and retrieve the stolen cattle.

The Xhosa aggression prompted the boers to start the use of commandos in self-defence. Groups of armed farmers gathered and rode on horseback into Xhosa territory, indifferent to any sense of boundaries, and raided for cattle. The commandos were notoriously brutal. Besides raiding Xhosa kraals for cattle, they also often functioned as virtual slave raids. They captured Xhosa women and children and distributed them to farmers as labour. Those on the commando got first preference, but if they did not want the captives, then they could be distributed to the neediest farmers in the area.¹⁶ In one case, a captured Xhosa woman was

murdered by the Khoi workers at the farm where she was sent, making it easier to distribute her children among local farmers. Runaway servants were also harshly dealt with: members of a commando shot in cold blood three Khoi men and two women who had voluntarily agreed to return to their masters after having taken refuge with the amaXhosa.¹⁷

By 1781, the amaXhosa had settled so densely in the same area occupied by boers that a more concerted effort was needed to drive them out. On 20 July 1781, an aggressive boer farmer, Adriaan van Jaarsveld, tipped the balance in the settlers' favour by throwing tobacco on the ground in front of a gathering of Mandake Xhosa who had come for peace talks and then shooting most of them when they stooped to pick it up.¹⁸ This tobacco trick took place at the De Bruyn's Drift crossing of the Fish River and was long remembered by the amaXhosa with the greatest bitterness.¹⁹ It also formed part of a conflict that resulted in most of the amaXhosa being sent over the Fish River in the northern part of the Zuurveld. But the few survivors of the massacre 'sought refuge in the Zuurveld with the Chief Congo, and their countrymen of the Tinde tribe'.²⁰ The next Xhosa clearance of the Zuurveld took place in 1789, when

with terrible suddenness a number of chiefs, among whom were Langa and Cungwa . . . probably resenting the treatment they had received from Van Jaarsveld, crossed the Fish River early in 1789, with hundreds of their adherents, and, scarcely before the farmers had time to escape with their families, were in complete possession of the Zuurveld. Farming operations were at an end.²¹

This time, the chiefs remained, showing disdain for all colonial efforts to get them to negotiate their occupation of the land. They insisted that their purchase of the area years before gave them every right to be there.²² The colonial government at the time was too weak to support any military action to contest the situation. This provoked bitter resentment among the displaced boers, who felt they should be left to handle things in their own way. According to one of Makhanda's councillors, it was the sheer greed and envy of the boers that destroyed any sense of a possibility of a shared existence in the Zuurveld:

The herds of the Caffers increased so as to make the hearts of the boers sore. What those 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. They began to hate the colonists, who coveted their all, and aimed at their destruction.²³

Only another three years passed before a new war, often referred to as the second frontier war, broke out. This was again largely a war of aggression of the amaXhosa against the colonists, based on their perception that they were being cheated in cattle deals and by boers trespassing on their territory for illegal hunting activities.²⁴ The war started with the boers enlisting the help of Chief Ndlambe as their ally in attacking Chungwa, then the most powerful chief in the Zuurveld.

However, it soon turned into a combined Xhosa attack on all things colonial. Magistrate Maynier of Graaff-Reinet did not pursue the war to drive the amaXhosa out of the Zuurveld, but simply to regain stolen cattle. At one point, he led a boer commando deep into Xhosa territory to attack the Gcaleka king, Khawuta, only to find that the western amaXhosa poured into the Zuurveld behind his back: 'In one overwhelming wave these hordes swept across the country, almost completely depopulating it of white inhabitants.' When the fighting ended, only four out of one hundred and twenty boer farmers remained in the Zuurveld and the amaXhosa had acquired 65 327 cattle, 11 000 sheep and 200 horses.²⁵

This war also ended with the Colony constrained from taking decisive action against the amaXhosa, who secured their right to live in the Zuurveld once again, marking their third clearance. Out of sheer exasperation with the inability of the government to assist them, frontier boers took matters into their own hands and increased their commandos in what George Theal describes as an ongoing 'guerrilla contest'.²⁶ At virtually the same time as the amaXhosa exerted their strength in the Zuurveld, the San on the northern borders of the Colony also launched a massive invasion in 1792, driving sixty boer families out of the Graaff-Reinet district.²⁷

What is often referred to as the first British occupation of the Cape started in August 1796 when the Dutch surrendered the Cape Colony after a strong show of British naval force. The frontier they inherited was in chaos, with the boers doing as they pleased and a fresh influx of amaXhosa arriving in the Zuurveld as a result of infighting within the Rharhabe royal family. Two officials, dispatched in 1797 to visit the Zuurveld and report on conditions, met a number of Xhosa chiefs living near the coast near the Bushman's and Kariega Rivers.²⁸ From Graaff-Reinet, the closest town to the Zuurveld, they hastened to meet the newly installed King

Ngqika. They tried to persuade him to urge all amaXhosa to move east across the Fish River, leaving the Zuurveld for colonial occupation. Though Ngqika claimed he would welcome any chiefs who wanted to return from the Zuurveld, he also stated that as they were independent he had no control over them.²⁹ This was in vain as the chiefs had no regard for the colonial concept of the Fish River as a boundary. Despite this failure to gain any concurrence from the Xhosa chiefs, the British Governor, Earl Macartney, issued a proclamation in 1798 declaring, once again, that the Fish River was to be considered the official colonial boundary. He admitted that 'hitherto no exact limits have been marked out respecting the proper boundaries between this colony, the Caffres and the Bosjesmen'.³⁰ Convenient as this might sound from the distance of Cape Town, it had no significance on the frontier itself.

The military restraint imposed by Maynier on the white farmers near Graaff-Reinet drove them into a state of rebellion against their new British overlords by 1798. If they could not defeat the Xhosa, at least they hoped for independence from ineffective remote control from Cape Town. However, the rebellion was short-lived, as a relatively minor show of military force by the British convinced them to give it up. By 1799, when Maynier was officially dismissed, about sixty families had left the Graaff-Reinet area and 'the Kaffirs had established themselves in the whole southern part of the district'.³¹

The year 1799 marked the beginning of what was to be the longest and most devastating war for the colonists to date, the third frontier war. Just as it started, Chief Ndlambe moved wholesale with large numbers of followers into the Zuurveld, joining his brother Mnyaluza, who was already living there. In this war, the amaXhosa joined in supporting disgruntled Khoi labourers who sought to overthrow their white masters. After more than three years of bitter fighting from 1799 to 1802, the war was concluded by negotiating better terms and conditions for the Khoi servants and by agreeing to allow the amaXhosa to remain in the Zuurveld. At that time there were virtually no Europeans in the area and Ndlambe's people had 'flooded the area near the coast'.³² As Andries Stockenström later recalled:

[T]he Colonists were driven out of the Zuurveld, their houses burnt, many lives lost, and the Kaffirs settled down between the Bushman and Sundays Rivers, and even to the westward of the latter; whilst the territory between the former and the Fish River was, according to Kaffir custom, left free for the game to accumulate and to be hunted.³³

Once again, the colonial government in Cape Town was not willing to invest resources in militarily bringing about a different conclusion to the war. Even before the war ended, the British had learned that negotiations in Europe were heading in the direction of handing the Cape Colony back to the Dutch. This time the newly formed Batavian government replaced the Dutch East India Company. With the change in colonial control, only minimal efforts were made to bring about peace on the frontier. For the amaXhosa, this war marked their fourth clearance of the Zuurveld.

The new Dutch Governor, Jan Willem Janssens, visited the frontier in 1803. Like his British predecessors a few years before, he met separately with Chief Ndlambe and King Ngqika in an effort to persuade them to acknowledge the Fish River as a boundary. Ndlambe, who lived near the coast in the Zuurveld, showed no interest, whereas Ngqika repeated that he was willing to have the other chiefs come and live under him, but could not compel them.

Of more direct significance to the fluid frontier dynamics was the restructuring of Johannes van der Kemp's pioneering missionary work away from Ngqika's area. When the wartime conditions compelled him to move into Graaff-Reinet, he was joined by James Read. Their preaching quickly attracted large numbers of Khoi people. By agreement with British authorities, as we have seen, they moved in 1802, along with over two hundred followers, to a new location near Algoa Bay to set up their own new village, named Bethelsdorp. This placed them on the western edge of the Zuurveld, which inevitably embroiled them in disputes over occupational rights.

The new mission station acted as a magnet to the Khoikhoi, as Read explained: 'nearly the whole of the Hottentots of the Zuurveldt, etc. joined us, and became peaceable and good subjects'.³⁴ Van der Kemp diplomatically tried to not 'interfere with politics', but admitted that he had information which was not known in Cape Town.³⁵ He stated that 'we are happy to be placed in a situation where numbers of Caffres are daily passing and repassing'. However, he felt obliged to comply with a government decree at the end of the war stating that all Xhosa people should relocate east of the Fish River. This meant that when 'Xhosa Chief Gola with one wife and four men came asking to stay at the mission and learn about God' they had to be turned away.³⁶ Van der Kemp, however, appeared to be the only one on the frontier paying any heed to this decree: as for everyone else, nothing had changed. From their location near Algoa Bay, the missionaries often heard of the destructive

behaviour of boer commandos inland, leading Van der Kemp to comment in 1802 that if they 'proceeded in this manner and were not recalled in time, it would occasion its own destruction, and that of all the colony'.³⁷

Co-existence in the Zuurveld

Between the periods of fighting, a variety of forms of peaceful co-existence flourished. The area defined as the Zuurveld served as a great melting pot of cultures and economies in the decades of the late eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century. Gonaqua Khoi, San, amaXhosa, Dutch farming settlers, missionaries of several European nationalities, slaves from far and wide, English colonial administrators and military officials all jostled together in a fluid and complex society. Xhosa royalty ruled within their own hierarchy side by side with colonial magistrates and veld cornets. But diversity does not necessarily imply conflict and many sources cite periods of peaceful co-existence.

Makhanda himself was the quintessential product of that creative mixture of cultures, having stated that his father was a Xhosa, but his mother was not.³⁸ Born of a Xhosa father and a Khoi mother, raised on a Dutch farm but inspired by English missionaries, he fully embodied all that the frontier offered. A clear sense of how he viewed the unfolding struggle was articulated by his head councillor soon after Makhanda's surrender to the British authorities in August 1819. Unfortunately, neither the person who gave this speech nor the person who recorded it in emotive, passionate English prose, are known.³⁹ Given the anonymity of the authors, it is perhaps best referred to simply as the Great Speech, which will be quoted extensively in further chapters. The opening lines of the speech set a haunting tone, describing the context in which the final war was understood by the amaNdlambe: 'When our fathers, and the fathers of the boors, first established themselves in the Zuurveld, we then lived together in peace. Their flocks grazed on the same hills; their herdsmen smoked together out of the same pipes – they were brothers.'⁴⁰ It conveys a strong image of a time when black and white lived in harmony, co-existing in the same territory.

Similar images of peaceful co-existence also come from some of the first European observers in the area. When the LMS missionaries set up their new station at Bethelsdorp in 1801, they described the amaXhosa as their near neighbours. James Read, one of those pioneering missionaries, claimed, 'There was not a boor in what is now called the Uitenhage, Albany, great part of Somerset, and part of Graaf Reinet.'⁴¹ Within a few years, both Chief Chungwa of the amaGqunugkwebe

and Chief Tshatshu of the amaNtinde asked the missionaries to take in a few of their sons to be educated in Western ways and learn about Christianity. Dyani Tshatshu, one of the chosen royal sons, took up residence with these missionaries in 1804.⁴² At the time his father, the chief of the amaNtinde, lived on the Coega River about 25 kilometres away, though he had asked Van der Kemp if he could move his kraal next to the mission station.⁴³ Xhosa people dropping by the station for visits were commonplace. Van der Kemp expressed his satisfaction, saying, 'We are happy to be placed in a situation where numbers of Caffres are daily passing and repassing.'⁴⁴

The Batavian magistrate of Uitenhage, Ludwig Alberti, noted in 1805 that 'the chiefs and the boors are living peacefully with each other and there is nothing to fear'.⁴⁵ Similarly, Sir Andries Stockenström, a dominant force in British frontier administration for many decades, recalled a period when '[f]or some time the greatest harmony prevailed between white and black'.⁴⁶ Both also noted that if any thefts of cattle took place, the Xhosa chiefs allowed European officials to search their kraals to find the stolen animals, leaving the chiefs to enact their own punishment against the culprits. With the Xhosa polity accepted as the dominant one, all other groups fell into line with them, finding their own ways of co-existence. The few Dutch farmers were scattered among dense Xhosa settlement. For example, a resident of Uitenhage recalled a boer farm at Coernie, about 50 kilometres away, adjacent to nine kraals.⁴⁷

Indeed, between hostilities the two cultures interacted with each other in a variety of ways. The arrival of Dutch-speaking farmers gradually changed the nature of the dynamics on the eastern frontier. At first they came as family units, spreading gradually eastward from the Cape, as younger sons sought ever more pasture for their livestock. In a few cases, soldiers of the Dutch East India Company opted to settle in the frontier zone on finishing their contracts in Cape Town.⁴⁸ Living far from the centre of European culture in Cape Town, they developed a reputation for both their itinerant nature and their disregard for the laws of the Colony. From the start, they introduced the long arm of the Cape trading economy, mostly involved in providing the Cape with meat, both for its own consumption and for export.

A largely pastoral lifestyle, however, required assistance in the form of labour to watch over the widely dispersed livestock. This labour was obtained either by kidnapping San people, most often women and children, by employing Khoi people whose land and independent way of life had been usurped, or by hiring independent Xhosa individuals who enjoyed the opportunity to earn cattle, a common form of

payment for their services. Xhosa workers, however, demanded better terms of employment, since they could easily leave to rejoin their people if conditions became unfavourable. Also, they were known to call in the armed assistance of their chiefs if disputes were not reasonably resolved.⁴⁹

The people of European descent also introduced a number of commodities into the local economy. Itinerant traders and small shops offered 'iron and tin-ware, cloth, muslins, silks, pots and pans, and even tobacco and snuff'.⁵⁰ The arrival of the boers involved interaction with the indigenous people in ways beyond simply sharing the land.

White men who generally travelled alone found themselves safe and treated with hospitality in African societies. One witness, who arrived from Europe in 1771, described how he travelled everywhere among San and amaXhosa 'by whom he had always been treated with the greatest kindness and regard'.⁵¹ Several individuals chose to inter-marry with both local Khoi and Xhosa women, often having more than one wife, starting large families of their own and living among their African host communities. To his white peers, Coenraad de Buys was the most notorious of these. He was a principal adviser to King Ngqika when the first LMS missionary, Van der Kemp, arrived in 1799. But several others have been noted in the written records, including Klaas Liebenberg, a German, and an Irishman named MacDaniel who was a deserter from the British army. Both lived near the coast and had Khoi wives and many children.⁵² Some individuals simply drifted between Xhosa and Dutch society, not fully grounded in either. Two Dutch colonists, Bezuidenhout and Faber, were described by Stockenström as men 'who have never submitted to any authority, have been the greater part of their lives more among the Savages, than among the Christians, and are men of most depraved morals'. Both became ringleaders of a boer rebellion against the British in 1815.⁵³

Xhosa society also provided a safe haven for people whose behaviour was considered criminal by the Cape Colony. In addition to army deserters, runaway slaves could be found integrated into Xhosa life. In 1799, Van der Kemp encountered former slaves from many distant countries. Some of the runaway slaves found refuge in the households of the European transfrontiersmen. An example is a slave named Damand, who had run away from his master David Botter, to settle eventually with Leibenberg deep in Xhosa territory.⁵⁴ At times, runaway slaves set up their own kraals and lived together.⁵⁵ Colonial authorities viewed the sheltering of runaway slaves as a serious threat to their economy, representing a considerable loss in property. But the former slaves, as well as the army deserters, also posed a

special threat due to their knowledge of the use of firearms and horses, which they conveyed to their Xhosa hosts.⁵⁶ Such additions to Xhosa society helped to offset the imbalance in military capacity, which had significantly shifted by the time the forty-year struggle for the Zuurveld ended.

During this period, the Gonaqua Khoi occupied a unique position in relation to the contending societies of the Zuurveld. Viewed by all as the original inhabitants of the Zuurveld area, the majority had either moved away to the mountains to the north or had become largely integrated into Xhosa culture. Some had attached themselves to the Gqunugkwhebe chief, Chungwa, whose roots lay in the territory east of the Kei River but who settled in the Zuurveld prior to any Dutch boers. His people were of primarily Khoi background, but had been partially assimilated into Xhosa culture.⁵⁷ The Gonaqua could be found in all quarters of frontier society, living with the Dutch, the missionaries, the amaXhosa or as independents. They often acted as interpreters, due to their inter-cultural skills.

However, most of the Khoi people resident in the Zuurveld, in contrast to the amaXhosa, had lost their independence over the previous 150 years of Dutch settler expansion. Many of those who came to the Zuurveld had experienced colonial society from areas to the west, even as far as Cape Town. Driven out of their ancestral homes, impoverished, they saw their men butchered while women and children were taken as captives. They were forced to work for the farmers, often under extremely harsh conditions. Alternatively, they took refuge in remote mountains and deserts. As Botoman, one of the chief Xhosa councillors, said, they had 'disappeared from the world'.⁵⁸

Frontier society, however, also had an extremely brutal side. By the time the first LMS missionaries arrived in 1799, they heard endless stories of inhumane treatment of Khoi workers employed by the boers. A few examples illustrate this, each one touching the life of someone who played a key role in the unfolding of the final resolution of the Zuurveld struggle. Perhaps the most extreme case of all was that of Kwaade (Angry) Martha, a boer woman who lived in the Langkloof about 160 kilometres west of present-day Port Elizabeth. This is a wide valley, well watered and suitable for agricultural purposes, forming the most logical route of inland travel between Cape Town and the eastern frontier. She was accused of repeatedly assaulting her female workers, leaving one to drown in a pond after having her head smashed, another to die of 'putrid' arms after they had been mangled, another burnt alive locked inside a hut that was set ablaze, and another beaten to death in front of her child for allowing a baby to cry.⁵⁹ So ferocious was her reputation that

at least one Xhosa man came and took his wife away from her for safekeeping, while another offered shelter to runaways from her farm.

One of the Khoi workers who witnessed these activities first hand and testified in court was Jan Boesak.⁶⁰ During the peak of the fighting at Grahamstown in 1819, he would perhaps single-handedly bring victory to the British through his interventions. He is an example of a part of the Khoi community who believed the British offered them a much better alternative than the Dutch. Benefiting from the court cases that the missionaries brought against Dutch farmers for their extremely harsh treatment, he went on to become an ambivalent convert to Christianity, stating on his baptism that he had two hearts, one loving Khoi songs, the other loving Christ.⁶¹ Regardless of the sincerity of his faith, he found a niche in colonial society as both a leader of the Khoi people at the mission station of Theopolis and as a hunter who sold meat to the British military. Several of his family members became stalwarts of the fledgling Christian village at Theopolis and served the British as soldiers in the Cape Corps from the 1810s to the 1830s.⁶²

David Stuurman, our second example, chose a rather different path. He had been subjected to ruthless treatment by a Dutch master, Hendrik de Bruyn. Accused of an offence, Stuurman was tied to a wagon, beaten with a sjambok and then 'salted and left in the burning sun of some hours'. His cousin Jan Valentine, who had refused orders to shoot him outright, then found an opportunity to untie Stuurman, who then 'crept into the bushes on his hands and knees'.⁶³ Despite his cousin's efforts to help him escape, he was returned by the authorities to the same master.

This kind of experience led him to become one of the stalwart military leaders of the Khoi rebellion against their masters in the third frontier war of 1799 to 1802. Briefly enjoying a special homeland for his family along the Gamtoos River as part of the settlement of that war, he was tricked in an ambush that led to his imprisonment on Robben Island in 1809. He successfully escaped that same year and returned to the eastern frontier to live among the amaXhosa as one of the Colony's most wanted men. Colonial officials desperately feared that he had enough influence to trigger another rebellion of servants. He lived among the chiefs near Makhanda and later distinguished himself as one of those who helped Makhanda escape from Robben Island, where they were both imprisoned in 1820 (Stuurman for the second time).⁶⁴ Unlike Boesak, he chose to align himself with the amaXhosa, with whom he lived and co-operated for many years. Due to his mediating role,

sparing the lives of hostages during the Robben Island escape, he was deported to Australia, where he died in 1827.

A third case study is that of Hannes Trompetter. After living for some time as part of 'a horde of plundering Hottentots', he decided in 1804 to join the missionary institution at Bethelsdorp. His sister had been the first to take this step, followed by his father. His four brothers had also made the same decision, 'but the rest were killed by Xhosa and he alone escaped'.⁶⁵ He, too, was eventually imprisoned on Robben Island, where he later became one of the ringleaders in assisting Makhanda to escape. For his energetic efforts, he was beheaded on 16 December 1820.⁶⁶ These stories exemplify the ability of the Khoi people to join either the British or the amaXhosa as the frontier conflicts deepened. All three men had experienced the destruction and humiliation of their people and of themselves in the earlier years of their lives.

On the other side of the equation, boer men grew up in a world where such brutalities were commonplace and expected of them. The court records also name individual boers who took part in atrocities. During the third frontier war, Ignatius Muller participated in the brutal massacre of a Khoi family. First fortifying himself with brandy doctored with 'some herbs to strengthen them for the murder', he confronted his victims directly. Ourson, the husband, was first knocked down with the butt end of a gun and then had his throat slit. When his wife cried out and begged for her life, Muller said, 'No, you must die.' He threatened to cut her eyes out if he saw another tear and then proceeded to throw her to the ground and slit her throat. Her child had its 'brains beaten out on anthill', after which it was 'cut to pieces'.⁶⁷ Muller went on to become a junior-level colonial official who often took part in commando raids against the amaXhosa. Although there are many other accounts of the violence that existed on the frontier between masters and servants, amaXhosa and Khoikhoi, these few examples are given because the people involved became role players in the struggle for the Zuurveld.

British takeover in 1806

The orator of the Great Speech described the Xhosa sense of domination over the Zuurveld during this period:

Now their kraals and our fathers' kraals were kept separate. The Boors made commandoes on our fathers. Our fathers drove them out of the Zuurveld; and lived there because we conquered it. There we were circumcised; there

we got wives. There our children were born. The white men hated us but could not drive us away.⁶⁸

From 1806 until 1812, the British and amaNdlambe co-existed in the same territory, each insisting on equal claims to rule. As the speaker indicates above, the Zuurveld had become home to even the most recent of the Xhosa arrivals. Their sense of ownership derived in part from the fact that no colonial force had been able to dislodge them, despite many attempts.

Justus asserts that the frontier problems only started seriously when the British took over the Cape Colony in 1806, giving the frontier boers a sense that a new and mighty power could now be invoked to force the African inhabitants of the Zuurveld to move out. The British chose to keep stretching the boundaries of the Colony to keep up with the endless boer expansion, instead of curtailing them and forcing them to stay within their own limits.⁶⁹ When the British regained the Cape Colony in 1806 due to treaties concluded in Europe, they found the ideal man to handle matters on the troubled eastern frontier. Jacob Cuyler was a loyal British subject who had been born and raised in the town of Albany in the New York Colony and was fluent in Dutch. Though an army colonel, he took the post of magistrate, based in the small administrative town of Uitenhage. He provided a combination of firm bureaucratic efficiency with an ability to communicate readily with the majority of white inhabitants in the district. He was also a fussy, garrulous man, who meticulously carried out his duties, but had a hard time keeping his personal interests at bay. Over the years he would often be accused of overstepping his functions. He was viewed as slightly eccentric for keeping a pet lion and a pet monkey.⁷⁰

He accepted the British claim to the Zuurveld as his mandate and made no allowance for any Xhosa claims to rights on the western side of the Fish River. He defined the Zuurveld as strictly 'ours' and the territory beyond the Fish River as strictly 'theirs'. As the first British magistrate based in Uitenhage, he used a special colonial vocabulary that left no room for doubt, always conveying his utter commitment to make the ideal into a reality. For him, the amaXhosa were always intruders while the white colonists were the inhabitants. AmaXhosa found in the Zuurveld were described as wandering, strolling trespassers. In every encounter, Cuyler requested them to go back to their country. Further contrasts were highlighted in the use of the term Christians to describe whites and savages to describe Africans.

Upon meeting Chief Ndlambe in 1808, Cuyler's first request was that he and all his chiefs and their people should simply remove themselves across the Fish River and leave the Zuurveld to the British. To this, Ndlambe gave him a long lecture about how his people had both bought and conquered the land over time. Consequently, they had no interest in moving. Cuyler then pressed him to assert greater control over his subordinate chiefs. Chungwa in particular had moved quite close to the British administrative headquarters at Uitenhage village. Further, he often undertook long rambles around the countryside, soliciting gifts of cattle and other items from unsuspecting boers. What was not given to him as a gift was frequently taken by force. This included Khoi women who worked for the boers, causing much distress to both their masters and their families.⁷¹

Similarly, Chief Habana, living in the Zuurberg mountains, had become notorious for cattle theft. 'You must call him to come from the Hill and order him to live near the sea shore, Habana stands under you and you must do it,' Cuyler told Ndlambe. After all, wasn't Habana his nephew? To both queries, Ndlambe replied that his subordinate chiefs were free to do what they chose. He had no problem with the colonial government's decision to allow thieves who were caught in the act to be shot. However, in a veiled threat to Cuyler, Ndlambe stated that he himself was contemplating relocating closer to Uitenhage as the grazing in that area was better.⁷² In short, Cuyler could expect no changes in the behaviour of either him or his chiefs. The encounter with Cuyler reveals that the amaNdlambe were in full occupation and control of the Zuurveld right up to Algoa Bay in the west and extending northward into the interior mountains.

In addition to the land issue, Cuyler tried to negotiate with Chief Ndlambe about runaway slaves. 'A slave is worth as much to a farmer as 100 head of cattle is to you,' he said, pointing out that such a loss would not be taken lightly by any Xhosa cattle owner. Cuyler had a personal interest in retrieving such slaves. Three of his prison guards, who were slaves, had run away and one of them was said to have started cohabiting with a runaway slave woman from Plettenberg Bay. Also, Manual, 'slave of the Government's Service', who was a specialist stonemason, had disappeared, leaving Cuyler's spacious new house half finished. To these urgent requests, Ndlambe answered coolly, 'I don't know of any slaves being among my people. I once sent several to Veld Cornet Erasmus. Since then I have not known of any.'⁷³

Ndlambe's followers exhibited none of his diplomacy or patience when dealing with Cuyler. In one such encounter, when he came upon a large Xhosa settlement

containing five thousand head of cattle, Cuyler informed the headman that he had come to reclaim the verdant land. 'No,' he was told, 'that place belongs to Slambie,' with the whole extent of Ndlambe's territory from the Sunday's to the Bushman's Rivers being pointed out.⁷⁴

When it became clear that diplomatic requests for the amaNdlambe to leave the Zuurveld voluntarily were getting nowhere, the British began to consider other options. In 1809, the colonial authorities sent Colonel Richard Collins on a six-month journey through all the frontier areas to assess conditions, make a comprehensive report to his superiors and recommend an appropriate course of action. During his journey he spent a good deal of time with Cuyler and consulted him extensively. The main recommendations of this report became the foundation of British frontier policy for years to come. First, the report called for a sharply increased military presence designed to forcibly expel all the Xhosa people over the Fish River. Second, it suggested that the newly vacated land should be filled immediately with settlers of European descent. Any boers who had formerly lived there should be given attractive incentives to return and a massive immigration scheme for new settlers from Britain should be planned. They should be required to live in small clusters for defensive purposes, it having been proven that a few armed men on horseback could achieve almost anything against their Xhosa rivals.⁷⁵ Collins' journey had also served as a reconnaissance mission to ascertain the economic potential of the frontier area, a matter that would influence the amount of military expense the British would be willing to invest in securing and expanding the borders of their new colony. His glowing report of hills, forest and adequate water supplies offered sufficient justification.⁷⁶ Collins's report articulated quite aggressive, hawkish views that were not immediately supported by Governor Caledon, described by Noël Mostert as 'conscientiously prudent and humane'.⁷⁷ However, when he was replaced in 1811 by Sir John Cradock, processes were set in motion to follow through on the recommendations to clear the Zuurveld of all Xhosa people within a month.

Expulsion in 1812 and its aftermath

As efforts to negotiate any compromise regarding the Zuurveld failed to make headway, the amaXhosa escalated their efforts to assert their sovereignty. By the time Colonel John Graham arrived as the newly appointed commanding officer on the frontier with orders to expel all African people over the Fish River, 'scarcely a farmer was to be found' between Bethelsdorp and the Fish River.⁷⁸ For the

amaXhosa, this would have marked their fifth clearance of the Zuurveld. Right up to the end, Chief Ndlambe had continued trying to persuade his colonial counterparts that his claim was fully justified. In 1810 he met Anders Stockenström, the magistrate of Graaff-Reinet, whose son Andries described the encounter:

The Kaffir Chief received us with civility, but expressed great annoyance at being so repeatedly disturbed in the peaceful possession of land, which he again protested he had purchased and paid for. He said it had cost him 800 oxen, with great emphasis, backed by the Councillors, describing the colour, shape of the horns, etc. of many of the cattle thus paid.⁷⁹

Stockenström was with a commando that Ndlambe had allowed to search his kraals for stolen cattle. Though ‘many hundred’ were found, little effort was made by Ndlambe to curtail the thefts or punish the perpetrators.⁸⁰

While the British seemed indifferent to Ndlambe’s claims, Stockenström had serious doubts and was willing to give the matter serious consideration. His young son Andries recalled sitting around a campfire one night with his father and his men, discussing this issue. This was at the time that Graham was commencing his campaign. According to young Stockenström, they had a heated discussion about whether they had a moral right to drive out the amaXhosa given the claims of payment. The elder Stockenström proposed that the ‘mighty’ British should repurchase the Zuurveld, paying Ndlambe eight hundred oxen as proof of their sense of justice.⁸¹ Another participant in this discussion also claimed that Chief Ndlambe had paid boers four thousand head of cattle as a bribe to keep them quiet during the Collins tour.⁸² Placing too much faith in his own diplomatic skills, Magistrate Stockenström was murdered during negotiations with the amaXhosa the next day when they learned that Graham had commenced hostilities in the valley below. Decades later, Andries Stockenström still maintained that ‘some kind of bargain . . . certainly did take place between the Xhosa Chiefs and Gonaqua’.⁸³

By June 1812 Graham could report the completion of his assignment to clear the Zuurveld of all its African inhabitants. His actions are said to have introduced a kind of warfare never before encountered by the amaXhosa. Not only did he chase people away at gunpoint, he also burned their villages and the crops ready for harvest in their fields, and shot any and all stragglers including women and children.⁸⁴ Ten years later, Thompson found the amaNdlambe still bitter over what they felt had been a gross injustice, reporting that ‘[t]here is little doubt that the

Caffers felt reluctant to leave a country which they had occupied the greater part of a century' and for which they claimed to have paid for twice, once to the Gonaqua and again, only a few years earlier, to Europeans.⁸⁵

The expulsion marked a major turning point in Xhosa relations with their colonial neighbours. Continuing the Great Speech, the orator said:

But he [King Ngqika] was your friend: and you wanted the Zuurveld. You came at last like locusts. We stood: we could do no more. You said, 'Go over the Fish River – that is all we want.' We yielded, and came here. We lived in peace. Some bad people stole, perhaps: the nation was quiet – the chiefs were quiet.⁸⁶

Apart from the above statement made by Makhandá's councillor, suggesting that the chiefs and their people adapted quietly to their new conditions after the expulsion, the written records are totally silent on the full impact of this momentous event on their lives. Numerous observations made on the colonial side of the Fish River, however, offer some insights into the immediate consequences. A Uitenhage resident since 1793 described how households were rent apart, as long-time faithful servants were forced to move across the Fish River.⁸⁷ With orders for any African person to be shot on sight if they came back, there was little hope of restoring the previous working relationships. Not all of the master-servant relationships were harsh, as many of them had been entered into voluntarily, especially by people of Xhosa descent who had alternative places to live. In some cases, genuine friendships were put asunder. As one old Xhosa man put it:

[W]e have been with you for fifteen or twenty years, we are your friends, we have watched your cattle, when they were taken away by our countrymen we have followed them and brought them back; our wives have cultivated your gardens; our children and yours speak the same language; if the chiefs receive us it will only be till we have a number of cattle, when they will kill us and take them to themselves.⁸⁸

Others who had previously worked for farmers or in the towns, felt deprived of the commodities to which they had become accustomed, such as tobacco, iron, beads and bread. Justus claimed to have heard such stories 'a hundred times repeated to me'.⁸⁹ For some, the expulsion meant going to a place they had never seen. In

one case a Xhosa servant hid in the forest rather than leave the only home he had ever known. His former employer maintained him secretly for a time, but eventually after being caught and beaten by the magistrate, the fugitive reluctantly left.

Another consequence of the expulsion was that many of the Khoi residents of Bethelsdorp became fully integrated into supporting the British military at this time. Colonel John Graham quickly befriended the missionaries there, taking a keen interest in the ways that religion, learning and European values were being taught to the Khoi converts. As the commanding officer of the Cape Corps, a regiment made up solely of Khoi men, he was pleased to see how well this experiment was working. Before the fighting started, he promised the Bethelsdorp people that they would be given large pieces of additional land of their own if they took part.⁹⁰ According to James Read, when Graham had finished his destruction of the Xhosa villages, 'he gave the people of our institution full permission to fetch the pumpkins, Caffre and Indian corn, from the abandoned Caffre kraals, which was of great importance to the Hottentots'.⁹¹ This would indeed be a special bonus. In the ruined villages, as one soldier described it, 'the gardens are very large and numerous; and here also are the best garden pumpkins, and the largest Indian corn I have ever seen: some of the pumpkins are 5½ feet round, and the corn 10 feet high.'⁹² Although the Bethelsdorp people were not granted large areas of land, they were given a new village of their own, named Theopolis. Located on the Kariega River, not far from the sea, it was designed primarily as a protective outpost closer to the Fish River border.

The Reverend John Campbell, sent out by the LMS in 1813 to look into possible further missionary activities, described the Zuurveld as he found it a year after the expulsion of the amaNdlambe. He saw a land consisting only of small military posts and the ruins of former homes, but otherwise virtually devoid of inhabitants. The military could only send out sporadic patrols to look for evidence of Xhosa raids, which Campbell described as continuous, suggesting that the terms of the expulsion were hardly accepted by its victims. He passed many places where he heard stories, no doubt from his Khoi guides and wagon drivers from Bethelsdorp, of ambushes, skirmishes, failures and successes of both sides in not only the recent war but also events dating back twenty years earlier. At one spot, he was told of an ambush in which the amaXhosa had totally surrounded and disarmed a band of boers. When the captives begged for mercy, it was granted and they were released, only to return with reinforcements who killed their generous Xhosa adversaries.⁹³

Describing the land in the Zuurveld as 'beautiful in the extreme, much resembling a nobleman's park in England', Campbell also observed a wide valley about 6 kilometres wide, where

the sides of the mountains were covered with Caffre gardens, among the trees, from whence they had lately been driven by the military. The skeletons of many of their houses remained and some tobacco was still growing; but the whole of their corn fields were destroyed . . . Formerly the whole was covered by Caffre villages, but now there is not a living soul, but stillness reigns everywhere.⁹⁴

This destruction, he noted, was necessary to prevent the amaXhosa from returning. Campbell also encountered a human tragedy from the recent war, when he discovered a small, five-year-old girl whose mother had been killed and father deported. She was being cared for 'with great humanity' by Mr Bogle, a military post commander, but had little hope of being reunited with her family soon due to the continuing hostilities.⁹⁵

Both Campbell and Christian Ignatius la Trobe, another missionary who travelled in the north-western parts of the Zuurveld three years later, described the ruins of former farmhouses. The few remaining boer residents described lives of constant fear of fresh Xhosa attacks, often themselves hanging on to the last remnants of their former lives, having lost family members and seeing their property destroyed.⁹⁶ One family living near Grahamstown had to bid their strong, grown son farewell when he refused to remain after a recent Xhosa raid that deprived them of many sheep. They lived in a constant state of alert and readiness.⁹⁷ Mrs Scheper explained to La Trobe why they did not bother to improve their buildings and gardens, saying, 'Before we are aware, the Caffres push through the wood, set all on fire, and murder those who cannot save themselves by flight.' Also harassed by elephants, who trampled and ate everything put into a garden, she said, 'the less we have to lose, the less we have to regret'.⁹⁸ Rumours of Xhosa avengers lurking in every wooded area were normal fare for travellers throughout the Zuurveld. If anything, the expulsion had only increased anxieties and tensions for the Europeans trying to make a life in the Zuurveld. For the amaNdlambe, their eviction meant that they now had to live in an area under the direct rule of their long-time rival, King Ngqika. The next chapter examines in great detail the complex course of the ever-evolving relationship between the powerful uncle and his nephew, which played a major role in the flow of events over the coming decade.

Notes

1. Pawuli interview, 10 March 2002. See N. Tisani, *Continuity*, pp. 37–74 for a full discussion.
2. CL B. Nqezo, J. Peires and W. Tabata (eds.), 'Imidange, History of an African Chiefdom', Self-published booklet, Grahamstown, 2005.
3. Thompson, *Travels*, p. 197.
4. Mqhayi, 'Imiyolelo Yokwe'. The account claims that Rharhabe and his councillors were uneasy about the fact that his senior brother, Gcaleka, had become a traditional healer, fearing this might cause dissension between them.
5. Ibid.
6. Wauchope, *Selected Writings*, p. 51.
7. Mqhayi, 'Imiyolelo Yokwe'.
8. Ibid.
9. Thompson, *Travels*, p. 192.
10. R. Collins, 'Journal of a Tour to the North-Eastern Boundary, the Orange River and the Storm Mountains' in D. Moodie (ed.), *The Record: Or a Series of Official Papers Relative to the Condition and Treatment of the Native Tribes of South Africa*, Part 5, 1808–1819 (Amsterdam: A.A. Balkema, 1960; reprint of 1840 original), footnote pp. 9–10.
11. Ibid., p. 9.
12. C.I. la Trobe, *Journal of a Visit to South Africa in 1815 and 1816* (New York: James Eastburn, 1818), p. 233.
13. Collins, 'Journal', p. 10.
14. Cory, *Rise*, p. 36.
15. Wauchope, *Selected Writings*, p. 43.
16. Cory, *Rise*, pp. 36–7.
17. CA CO 4443: Letters and Papers Received: Specified Subjects: Correspondence Relative to the Allegations Made by the Missionaries Read and Van der Kemp, 1811: 21 May 1811, Case NNN.
18. Cory, *Rise*, p. 39.
19. Read, 'Letter', p. 29.
20. Thompson, *Travels*, p. 193.
21. Cory, *Rise*, p. 40.
22. Ibid., p. 41.
23. Pringle, 'Letters', p. 74.
24. Collins, 'Journal', p. 11.
25. Cory, *Rise*, p. 45.
26. Theal, *History*, p. 139.
27. Cory, *Rise*, p. 43.
28. J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa, 1801–1804*, Vol. 1 (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 2nd ed., 1806), p. 180. Making allowances for spelling, these chiefs were Tshatshu, Mnyaluza (Ndlambe's brother), Chungwa and Habana.
29. Theal, *History*, p. 193.
30. CL Great Britain, *Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines*, John Philip evidence, p. 676.

31. A. Stockenström, *The Autobiography of Sir Andries Stockenström* . . . Vol. 1, edited by C.W. Hutton (Cape Town: Juta, 1887, republished 1964), p. 26.
32. Collins, 'Journal', p. 14.
33. Stockenström, *Autobiography*, p. 46.
34. CL Great Britain, *Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines*, James Read evidence, p. 598.
35. J.T. van der Kemp, 'History &c. of Caffraria' *Transactions of the London Missionary Society* Vol. 3, 1804, p. 467.
36. J.T. van der Kemp, 'Annual Report of the Missionaries at Bethelsdorp, South Africa, for the year 1803, from the Missionaries Vanderkemp and Read' *Transactions of the London Missionary Society* Vol. 2, 1803, p. 164.
37. J.T. van der Kemp, 'Extracts from the Journals of Dr Vanderkemp and Mr Read, After Their Settlement at Bota's Place' *Transactions of the London Missionary Society* Vol. 1, 1802, p. 84.
38. Campbell, *Voyages*, p. 210 describes events in the early 1820s.
39. The earliest published version of this speech was in 1827 in Pringle, 'Letters', pp. 69–76. Both Pringle and Andries Stockenström published the same speech later, in 1834 and 1887 respectively, claiming that it was Stockenström who had written down its contents. However, the earlier version published by Pringle refers to Stockenström in the third person, implying that the author was someone else. Speculation would suggest it might have been Robert Hart, who is also known to have written detailed and emotive accounts of the 1811–12 expulsion under Colonel John Graham and who was likely to have been present in the camp of the then commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Willshire. However, this can only be speculation. Minor editorial changes in the later versions are all in the direction of diluting allegations of wrongdoing on the part of King Ngqika.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
41. CL Great Britain, *Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines*, James Read evidence, p. 597.
42. J.T. van der Kemp, 'Transactions of Dr. Vanderkemp in the Year 1800' *Transactions of the London Missionary Society* Vol. 1, 1800, p. 424.
43. CL Great Britain, *Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines*, Jan Tzatzhu evidence, p. 576; Van der Kemp, 'Transactions', p. 424.
44. Van der Kemp, 'Annual Report 1803', p. 164.
45. Justus, *Wrongs*, p. 40.
46. Stockenström, *Autobiography*, p. 46.
47. Justus, *Wrongs*, p. 47.
48. Cory, *Rise*, p. 39.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
50. La Trobe, *Journal*, p. 229.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 232.
52. Stockenström, *Autobiography*, p. 43.
53. H.A. Reyburn, 'Stockenström and Slagters Nek' *The Critic* Vol. 3, No. 3, April 1935, p. 156.
54. CA CO 2603: letter from Fraser to Cuyler, 26 July 1816.
55. CA CO 2563: Letters Received: Swellendam, Uitenhage and Tulbagh, 1808: Conversation between Major Cuyler Pro. Landdrost of Uitenhage and the Caffer Chief Slambie on 25 February 1808.

56. CA CO 2603: letter from Fraser to Cuyler, 26 July 1816.
57. Mostert, *Frontiers*, p. 226.
58. Stockenström, *Autobiography*, p. 45.
59. CA CO 4444: Letters and Papers Received: Report of Inquiry into Charges Made by the Missionaries Van der Kemp and Read, 1812–13.
60. Ibid.
61. Van der Kemp, 'Annual Report 1803', p. 167. Due to his frequent drunkenness the missionaries doubted his sincerity, but described him as 'a great buffalo and elephant shooter'.
62. The Theopolis mission station was founded by the LMS in 1813 on the Kariëga River as an outpost of the Bethelsdorp mission.
63. CA CO 4443: Letters and Papers Received: Correspondence Relative to the Allegations Made by the Missionaries Read and Van der Kemp: 21 May 1811, Case GGG.
64. V.C. Malherbe, 'David Stuurman: "Last Chief of the Hottentots"' *African Studies* Vol. 39, No. 1, 1980, pp. 57–8.
65. J.T. van der Kemp, 'Annual Report 1804' *Transactions of the London Missionary Society* 1804, p. 238.
66. CA CO 125: Letters Received: Fiscal's Office 1820, List of Criminal Prisoners for September 1820.
67. CA CO 4443: 3 May 1811.
68. Pringle, 'Letters', p. 74.
69. Justus, *Wrongs*, p. 36.
70. La Trobe, *Journal*, p. 205.
71. Ibid.
72. CA CO 2563: Conversation between Major Cuyler Pro. Landdrost of Uitenhage and the Caffer Chief Slambie on 25 February 1808.
73. Ibid.
74. CA CO 2563: 8 May 1808.
75. Collins, 'Journal', p. 60.
76. Justus, *Wrongs*, p. 37.
77. Mostert, *Frontiers*, p. 377.
78. J. Read, 'Annual Report of the Missionary Institution at Bethelsdorp for the Year 1812' *Transactions of the London Missionary Society* Vol. 4, No. 25, 1812, p. 18.
79. Stockenström, *Autobiography*, p. 52.
80. Ibid.
81. Ibid., pp. 58–60.
82. B. Le Cordeur (ed.), *The Journal of Charles Lennox Stretch* (Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman, 1988), pp. 9–12.
83. Stockenström, *Autobiography*, pp. 50, 58.
84. MacLennan, *Proper Degree*.
85. Thompson, *Travels*, p. 195.
86. Pringle, 'Letters', p. 74.
87. Justus, *Wrongs*, p. 47.
88. Ibid., p. 45.
89. Ibid.

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90. CL Great Britain, *Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines*, James Read evidence, p. 598.
91. Read, 'Annual Report 1812', p. 18.
92. Justus, *Wrongs*, p. 43, citing an unpublished diary of Robert Hart, a participant in the 1812 fighting.
93. Campbell, *Travels*, pp. 131, 132, 135–6.
94. *Ibid.*, pp. 137–8.
95. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
96. *Ibid.*, p. 157; La Trobe, *Journal*, p. 218.
97. Campbell, *Travels*, p. 157.
98. La Trobe, *Journal*, p. 218.

The love-hate relationship of Ndlambe and Ngqika

In the events leading to colonial subjugation, no historian could possibly dispute the fact that the two leading Rharhabe royals, Ndlambe and Ngqika, were locked in an enormously destructive power struggle. They went to war against each other three times over a twenty-year period. Their final battle at Amalinde in 1818 is considered one of the most damaging wars ever fought among amaXhosa. This has led historians with colonial sympathies to point to the inevitable African propensity towards violence and bloodshed. On the other hand, even the most pro-Africanist historians see it as a tragic object lesson of the dangers of falling into the colonial trap of divide-and-rule. At times the volatile relationship left historians simply confused. As Noël Mostert puts it, 'In the quarrels between Ndlambe and Ngqika power shifted frequently from one to the other. It is sometimes difficult to trace the course of it.'¹

However, a more comprehensive review of the history suggests that there is another dimension to the relationship. Though the tensions between the uncle and nephew cannot be denied, there was simultaneously another dynamic operating, which was far more co-operative and supportive. Indeed, the documentary evidence gives us glimpses into this other side of the relationship during the intervals of peace. It should be viewed as a particularly African dynamic of maintaining cohesion among leaders. By reading carefully between the lines and finding the odd fragments of supporting evidence, it is possible to construct another aspect to this relationship; one that helps us understand why, despite all the animosity, they never killed each other. This dimension looks deeply into the practice of a particularly Xhosa-style of traditional leadership.

The institution of traditional leadership

The Xhosa attorney and historian Mda Mda believes that few published histories have come close to understanding the nature of the tensions between King Ngqika and Chief Ndlambe.² Rather than viewing their strife as a contest for personal

power in which first one and then the other tried to annihilate his rival, the conflicts should be seen as an attempt on the part of the older royal leaders to discipline Ngqika to bring him back into line with traditions whenever he erred. Mda views Ngqika as having been young and rebellious, often testing the limits of his authority. By contrast, Ndlambe represented an older generation that was soon to die out, still trying to maintain a familiar social order. Traditional leadership functioned as an institution, whose rules and guidelines were widely understood by its members, and had the capacity to correct itself in times of threat.

It was generally said by British sources that the problems between Ngqika and Ndlambe started when Ngqika completed his circumcision rituals, attained manhood and was inaugurated as the king of the Rharhabe nation. Ndlambe had been serving as regent since the death of his brother Mlawu, who died while Ngqika, his heir apparent, was still very young. These sources claim that Ndlambe refused to hand over the reins of power, wishing to maintain himself as the ruler.³ However, others such as Colonel Collins and Magistrate Jacob Cuyler, who interviewed Ndlambe in person, consistently portray him as acknowledging the senior rank of his nephew Ngqika;⁴ and a variety of sources hint at an amicable and appropriate form of co-operation between the two on many occasions. Before looking more closely at the tumultuous ups and downs of their relationship, it is useful to look at how traditional leadership functioned as an institution.

First, the possibility that two related men from royal families could amicably co-rule is amply borne out by Xhosa history, particularly that close to the time of Ndlambe and Ngqika's lives. Mqhayi's history of the epic journey of King Phalo and his two sons, Gcaleka and Rharhabe, and their long-term amicable relationship stands as an important example.⁵ Years later, European travellers and writers were impressed by the high levels of co-operation between Chief Phato and his older brother Chungwa,⁶ who had acted as his regent for many years. George Thompson, from his 1826 visit, noted: '[T]hough Pato has now come of age, he generally deposes Congo to act on all important occasions, such as holding conferences with the other chiefs, or the British officers on the frontier, etc. The two brothers seem to live in a very good understanding, and to act with great unanimity.'⁷ The younger brother became chief of the amaGqunugkwhebe because his mother held higher rank than his older brother's mother. At the time of Thompson's writing, they lived near the coast in the area between the Keiskamma and Buffalo Rivers.

Similar accounts of high-level co-operation, trust and respect describe the rule of King Hintsá, the senior ruler of the Gcaleka house, and his brother Bhurhu. In

the years following Ngqika's death, his own sons also followed the traditional pattern of co-operation, as the elder Maqoma nurtured his younger brother Sandile and then gracefully saw him installed as chief when he came of age.⁸

Second, when conflicts arose between chiefs, animosities were resolved and not maintained. Justus described the amaXhosa as people who 'pass over grievous provocations as soon as a wish for conciliation is manifested'.⁹ Though wars were fought between chiefs, they were never intended to destroy, but rather to establish a hierarchy of one over the other. Writing in 1799, Johannes van der Kemp described how chiefs under Phalo and Gcaleka of an earlier generation had often fought with each of them at one time or another. However, whatever was won was always returned to the loser in order to 'restore him to his dignity'.¹⁰

A third notable quality within the institution of traditional rule is the important role played by councillors to the chiefs. No chief rules as an individual, but rather through the advice and deliberations of a carefully chosen group of wise men. Xhosa traditions frequently credit the councillors of Ngqika in particular for often intervening in poor decisions. This form of collective rule is also sensitive to the interests of the chief's followers, thus reducing the solo focus of leadership more familiar to Western traditions. Nomathamsanqa Tisani points out that the European obsession with kings, chiefs and other male leaders left out the important roles played by advisers and queen mothers.¹¹ Royal women of high rank such as Princess Ntsuza, Ndlambe's elder sister, also played a powerful advisory role, though seldom acknowledged. Her name appears as assisting both Ndlambe and Ngqika as circumstances changed.

Finally, tensions and conflicts between chiefs were often resolved by contracting marriages between royal rivals. This made the women, who moved to their new husband's home, important diplomats and ambassadors between royal families. In theory, a husband was expected to treat his wife well, showing due respect to both her and her family. A marriage was never seen as simply a personal matter between two individuals. A failure to treat the daughter-in-law well could be grounds for going to war, making the woman's life a barometer of the relationship between two chiefs and their communities.

These are specific practices designed to offset tensions and rivalries. In addition, the institution of traditional leadership was founded on a complex set of rules and regulations about appropriate conduct in all sorts of affairs. Both the honour and prosperity of the followers of a chief were seen as very important and the people in turn defended their chiefs. 'They are much alive to national honour, and deeply feel

an injury to the tribe as an insult to their chiefs,' explains Justus.¹² All these dynamics were at play as Ndlambe and Ngqika interacted with each other.

Mda's views on the unifying, disciplinary principle at work, expose previous attempts to explain this strained relationship as all too typical of the Western 'great man' school of thinking. Until the late twentieth century, this approach dominated all forms of history writing from Europe. Male historians traditionally wrote about male political leaders who contested power. Such contestations were understood to be motivated by self-centred ambitions of individuals to achieve personal power, rank, status, control and authority over others. This heavily masculinist approach to the past leaves little room for the subtler nuances of African collective leadership. The differences between Ndlambe and Ngqika have always been interpreted within the Western framework as simply a rivalry to see who would win the top leadership position of the Rharhabe nation.

The contrasting personalities

With all these checks and balances, what then went wrong between the nephew and uncle? Why was there so much friction? Following the line of thinking proposed by Mda, the blame falls squarely on the shoulders of Ngqika, the rebel, seeking new levels of independence. Evidence from the written sources makes it abundantly clear that he had a unique personality that often jarred the expectations of even his European observers. In particular, his unabashed greediness for small and large items of personal gain flabbergasted those who met him. For example, at a critical meeting with the Governor of the Cape Colony in 1817 at Kat River, Ngqika's behaviour was described as follows:

The conduct of Gaika was remarkable while receiving the presents. So greedy was he that he could not wait a moment to examine separately what was presented to him, although Colonel Cuyler was at the pains of opening each parcel for that purpose: the articles were no sooner put into his hand than they were laid on the ground, and his hand stretched out for more.¹³

In this account, Ngqika then retired for the night but came back the next day to confront Joseph Williams, the missionary who assisted him in communicating with the Cape officials, with a long list of further desires: 'Not being content with all that he had received, he sent next morning to ask me for a knife, tinder-boxes,

looking-glasses, handkerchiefs, and food.¹⁴ The historian Jeff Peires makes perhaps the most scathing judgement of Ngqika, who by the end of his life in 1829 had become a chronic alcoholic: 'Alcohol was a logical consequence of his moral capitulation. He purchased it, danced for it, "sold" his wives for it, and ultimately died of it. He would do nothing unless he was paid for it, and even took to receiving his presents in private to avoid sharing them with his councillors.'¹⁵

He simply did not conform to the kind of behaviour and bearing that was expected of a king of such high standing. By contrast, Chief Ndlambe is consistently described as maintaining at all times a sense of dignity, calm power and command of every situation. Mostert captures this sense of Ndlambe as a chief of an entirely different order when describing his encounter with Colonel Collins in 1809: 'After dealing with two young men who were both still in their twenties [Ngqika and Hintsá] Collins was to meet an elderly chieftainly figure of great experience and presence, confident in his power and authority, and possessed of all the considerable Xhosa diplomatic gifts in blank-faced parley, circumvention and subtle disdain.'¹⁶

Ndlambe had, after all, been in the forefront of engaging with Europeans since the 1780s. Mostert goes on to paint a vivid picture of how Ndlambe dramatically stage-managed the encounter in a way that left Collins feeling he had been treated as a small boy. First refusing to go to Collins's own camp, Ndlambe forced him to come and meet him on his own turf. When the Collins entourage arrived:

A scene of great power confronted them. The moon was full but bright behind heavy clouds, and its shifting light helped to dramatize the solemnity of their reception. Ndlambe was seated at the edge of his kraal surrounded by a host of his warriors and people. More of his army were known to be hidden from view inside the kraal itself. But his power and the force it brought to this encounter were symbolised by the forest of uplifted spear shafts that stretched in a wide curve around him, their shiny blades gleaming fitfully, menacingly in the restless moonlight.¹⁷

This level of controlling encounters with colonial authorities was not an art Chief Ngqika commanded. Eight years later, when Governor Somerset met him at the Kat River, it was Somerset who meticulously stage-managed the event. Ngqika, with his uncle Ndlambe beside him, sat on a grass mat in front of the impressive marquee that the governor had set up to house his own entourage. Although Ngqika was acknowledged by all as the king over others, he came dressed as 'the commonest

Caffre, except that he had a handkerchief tied around his head' while Ndlambe, by contrast, wore 'a handsome tiger skin, and he had round his head a bandeau of about an inch in breadth, made of very small beads'.¹⁸ The tiger skin here would refer to the traditional leopard skin worn by royalty alone as a sign of their rank.

If Ngqika struck outside observers as strange, how much more did his unique personality challenge his own family and people? His unkingly behaviour cost the amaXhosa dearly on many occasions. He showed disrespect for both Hintsa, the highest ranking of all Xhosa chiefs and Ngqika's superior, as well as his uncle Ndlambe, by taking them by surprise in military attacks and then holding them prisoner. He was emotionally volatile, at times terrifying his own people, while at other times blubbing his deepest fears to European visitors. Sometimes, he evaded his councillors and acted and spoke compulsively and alone. In the Great Speech, Makhandu's people repeatedly pointed to Ngqika's character as the source of most Rharhabe woes. The son of one of Rharhabe's councillors recalled, 'Gaika was considered cruel and quarrelsome by his people and Ndlambe an easy man.'¹⁹

Emotional insecurity, greed and jealousy appeared to shape his every deed. How could the other members of Xhosa royalty not see him as someone who needed to be handled with care? Such concerns led to what Mda sees as the disciplinary actions they felt compelled to take against Ngqika on various occasions.

Early relationship

Ndlambe grew up in a world in which the Xhosa nation had amicably divided itself into two. His father, Rharhabe, moved his headquarters to the west of Gcaleka's headquarters, settling in the breathtakingly beautiful Tyumie River valley at the foot of the Amathole Mountains. His followers extended as far west as the Gamtoos River towards the coast and the Camdeboo, further north where the town of Graaff-Reinet was founded in 1786. The area, which came to be called Agter Brintjies Hoogte by the Dutch, about 100 kilometres to the south and east, was used by the amaXhosa as a hunting ground.²⁰ All of this took place between the 1740s and 1760s, prior to the arrival of Dutch-speaking farmers, the boers.

Rharhabe's eldest son and heir, Mlawu, was reputed to be even more powerful than his father.²¹ But when he died in battle against the Thembu, to the north and east of their home, Rharhabe named his younger son Ndlambe to fill Mlawu's place. According to oral traditions, he instructed Ndlambe to marry one of Mlawu's wives, to raise seed in his late brother's name. As Nomathamsanqa Tisani explains, 'Vimbe's claim that Rharhabe instructed Ndlambe to *ngena* Mlawu's wife elevated

the status of Ndlambe from being a younger brother of Mlawu to father of Ngqika.²² This would have given him stronger claims to seniority and leadership than has generally been recognised. The wife he married was already mother to the very young Ngqika, thus securing Ndlambe's role as mentor and father figure for the small boy. Peires believes that Ngqika was born in 1779 and that his father Mlawu died in 1782. When Rharhabe died soon afterwards, Ndlambe was left clearly as the senior chief of the western Xhosa nation, a position he held by 1783.²³ From that time until 1796, Ndlambe acted as regent of his nephews, Ngqika and his brother Ntimbo.

Only a few hints exist about the early relationship between Ndlambe and his young ward. Ndlambe was once recorded as having referred to Ngqika as 'a boy whom I have nursed'. Clearly, the elder chief played a crucial teaching and mentoring role as regent of the future king of the Rharhabe. Ndlambe 'placed his sister Ishua over those kraals that had been under the sway of his deceased brother'.²⁴ As adults, their complex relationship suggests that a strong degree of attachment survived, despite all of their disputes. Ndlambe remained a prominent figure throughout the whole of Ngqika's life, as they died within a year of each other.

When it came close to the time for Ngqika's initiation into manhood, his uncle introduced him to the arts of warfare, taking him along on the campaigns of the second frontier war. As the traveller George Thompson put it, 'At this time Gaika was a very young man; and was carried by S'Lhambi on the expedition, to train him to hardihood and heroism.'²⁵ This was the 1793 war that witnessed the resounding victory of the amaXhosa over the boers, but only after the various chiefs stopped fighting each other and united against their common enemy. This stands as an example of Xhosa leadership acting according to the unifying principle and not allowing grudges to be maintained. It quite puzzled the pro-colonial historian George Cory, who said, 'Strange to say, reconciliation seemed to have taken place between the tribes, which up to that time, had been at variance.'²⁶ He then goes on to describe the utter annihilation of boer farms and livestock. It was during this war, Peires states, that Ngqika earned his praise name 'Aah! Lwaganda' meaning 'He who stamps the ground while fighting'.²⁷

Contested leadership

All sources agree that the problems between Ndlambe and Ngqika started as soon as the young man's initiation into manhood was finished. In acknowledgement of the seniority of the Gcaleka royal house, King Khawuta was called to pronounce

officially on the next heir. According to Peires, ‘the majority of the councillors chose Ntimbo and sent for the paramount Khawuta to invest him, but to their surprise he invested Ngqika, who was the choice of Mlawu’s younger brother, Ndlambe.’²⁸ Oral tradition claims that Ndlambe feared Ntimbo’s poor health would be problematic.²⁹ Ndlambe’s support for Ngqika as future Rharhabe king would become an important factor in the years to come.

Although colonial writers all repeated Ngqika’s claim that it was Ndlambe who refused to acknowledge his new status as ruler of amaRharhabe, Xhosa traditions show that it was Ngqika who provoked the first war between the two of them. Juju, the son of one of Rharhabe’s councillors, claimed that Ndlambe fully accepted the young man’s rule and peacefully moved further west into the area of present-day Fort Beaufort to create a reasonable distance between them, much as his father, Rharhabe, had created distance between himself and his ruling brother, Gcaleka.³⁰ However, Ngqika became jealous because so many people followed the elder statesman. At that time it was understood that when people were unhappy with their chiefs they simply moved away, seeking protection from another chief: ‘the fear of desertion consequently operates as a considerable check on the arrogance and cupidity of the chieftains’.³¹

The conflict started when Ngqika urged some of the young men from his initiation group to steal cattle from the kraals of Ndlambe’s people. Ndlambe intervened, coming to Ngqika ‘in a peaceable manner, and remonstrated against his violent conduct’ and the cattle were restored.³² But then Ngqika’s young men stole cattle from Ndlambe himself and they were in turn recovered by Ndlambe’s followers. Ngqika claimed he had no knowledge of this, allowing his uncle to go back home. But the final blow was still to come:

It was the custom for young men just emerged from circumcision to distinguish themselves in some brave action, and his young age-mates urged him on. ‘You see, chief,’ they said, ‘the *Maduna* [big-shot] is running away with your people, for they have become accustomed to him. Go, pretend you are paying him a courtesy visit and then we shall attack him.’ Shortly thereafter, Ngqika visited Ndlambe, ostensibly to settle a court case between their subjects. Oxen were slaughtered for the visitors and a dance was in progress when Ngqika gave the signal to attack.³³

Thompson learned that ‘this act of audacity gained Gaika no small admiration,

particularly among the young warriors of his tribe'.³⁴ This account confirms Mda's view that it was Ngqika's independent and rebellious spirit that launched them into their spiral of conflict. It is impossible to know the exact trigger for Ngqika's attack. However, starting a war would not have been considered a very appropriate way to resolve the differences between the new king and his uncle, who would have played the role of a chief adviser.

As a result of this provocation, Ndlambe fled up the Kat River, seeking refuge among his mother's Thembu people. But finding them not very welcoming, he moved on to the Gcaleka Great Place where he remained for nearly a year. When King Khawuta died, however, not long afterwards in about 1796 or 1797, Ndlambe and the Gcaleka initiated an attack on Ngqika.³⁵ The Gcaleka were over-confident about victory and brought their women and children along to the battle. Suffering a disastrous loss, several key people fell into the hands of Ngqika as his prisoners. They included the young Gcaleka heir-apparent, Hintsa, one of his brothers and Ndlambe. Ngqika is alleged to have killed the brother with his own hands, but released Hintsa 'because he was only a boy'.³⁶ Collins claims that elder councillors had a hand in securing the young heir's freedom, giving some insight into the role played by councillors to mitigate the actions of errant chiefs.³⁷

At the time when Ndlambe fled north to the Thembu, his brother Mnyaluza, an influential chief in his own right, chose to flee to the south, taking with him several other Rharhabe chiefs. He settled in the area of present-day Alexandria around 1796. British visitors to Ngqika's Great Place in 1798 observed that whole villages had been abandoned and destroyed and that no crops had been grown for two years as a result of the intensive fighting. Ngqika told them that the departing chiefs had committed 'great depredations on the cattle of his subjects' and were now totally independent of him.³⁸

Ngqika held Ndlambe as something of a prisoner, although he was given a fair amount of freedom of movement and allowed to have his wives with him. The elder chief was placed under the watchful eye of Princess Ntsuza.³⁹ The English visitors to Ngqika at the time noted: 'The young king's treatment of this man did him great honour. All his former attendants, his cattle and his six wives, were restored to him, with as much liberty as the rest of his subjects, except that he was always obliged to be in the same village with the king.'⁴⁰

During this time, Ndlambe was protected from harm by 'his own people' who lived under Ngqika's rule and by Ngqika's councillors, suggesting that the rift between the two was not considered worth spilling royal blood.⁴¹ This again gives

evidence of the way that the unitary nature of traditional leadership operated on the ground.

During the time that Ndlambe was still being held prisoner by Ngqika, two British visitors gave this description of Ngqika's appearance:

Gaika was a young man at this time under twenty years of age, of an elegant form and a graceful manly deportment; his height about five feet ten inches; his face of a deep bronze colour, approaching nearly to black; his skin soft and smooth; his eyes dark brown and full of animation; his teeth regular, well-set and white as the purest ivory . . . He seemed to be the adored object of his subjects; the name of Gaika was in every mouth, and it was seldom pronounced without symptoms of joy.⁴²

This visit from the newly arrived British colonial authorities set in motion two themes that would remain central to unfolding events over the next two decades. The young ruler Ngqika clearly enjoyed the recognition the visitors gave him, treating him as a king. He immediately saw their value as potential allies and so portrayed Ndlambe as an illegitimate rival to his power. From this time onward Ndlambe saw Ngqika as selling his own people to the foreigners, saying to his close friends and relatives, 'This man has already sold us to the visitors.'⁴³ It is quite likely that Ngqika's appetite for Western commodities had been stimulated by the presence in his kraal of Coenraad de Buys, a well-known Dutch-speaking trader and transfrontiersman, known to have had great influence over the royal house.⁴⁴

Although the exact dates and timing are not clear, it appears that the missionary Johannes van der Kemp arrived in Ngqika's territory while Ndlambe was still at hand. He noted that Ngqika feared a rebellion led by Ndlambe, but when it came to day-to-day governance Ngqika made decisions only after consulting his mother, his sister and Ndlambe: 'He treats him outwardly with great respect, and resolves nothing of importance before he has consulted him . . . but keeps him as much as possible out of real power.'⁴⁵ Of the other Xhosa chiefs who lived in the Zuurveld, Van der Kemp reported, 'There exists no war between them and Gika, who corresponds daily with them, and receives their deputies in a friendly manner.'⁴⁶ Ngqika wanted them to come to his side of the Fish River, but they refused saying the Sunday's River was the boundary with the Colony.

All of these observations confirm the positive side of the relationship between

the two rivals. At that point, one might say it was Ngqika trying to discipline his uncle to conform to his own definition of power sharing. On releasing Ndlambe after two years' imprisonment, Ngqika said to him, 'When you were my tutor, you taught me to be a generous king, and since I became your king I hope I have taught you to be a faithful subject.'⁴⁷

Ndlambe occupies the Zuurveld

Once freed of his restrictions, however, Ndlambe was not at ease. Departing one night under the cloak of darkness, he led a massive migration of people south into the Zuurveld. When Ndlambe left his confinement, it was to his brother Mnyaluza that he went. Collins states that Ndlambe and large numbers of followers 'flooded' into the Zuurveld just before the third frontier war started in 1799, travelling via Agter Bruintjies Hoogte.⁴⁸ In his southward movement, Ndlambe lived for a time on the hills overlooking Sand Flats (present-day Paterson) and also at Qhora (Alicedale) before settling near his brother.⁴⁹ As a result of this exodus, 'numbers of the Caffers were dispersed among the boors, within the colony and lived peaceably as servants and dependants – others having herds of cattle, which they grazed in unoccupied tracts of land'.⁵⁰

Peires sees Ndlambe's flight into the Zuurveld as a move to nurture his own 'hunger for power', but also describes how Ndlambe had just had to intervene to prevent Ngqika from killing Ndlambe's brother Siko.⁵¹ This suggests that tensions were running high. It was the insistence of Ngqika's councillors that restrained him from taking punitive action against his departing uncle. But Ndlambe's maturity as a senior leader influenced many people, including Princess Ntsuza, to join him. Ndlambe himself described his move as having the intention of living peacefully, without causing problems to Ngqika.⁵² Although Ndlambe 'told Gaika's people to remain with their chief when he himself left, many went away with Ndlambe'.⁵³

In hindsight, it might appear that Ndlambe was heading straight towards the seat of colonial power in Algoa Bay. However, by late 1799 the British had done nothing to suggest that they would be a more formidable foe than their Dutch predecessors. In their short rule they had defended Magistrate Maynier of Graaff-Reinet in his efforts to restrain the boer aggression against the amaXhosa. When the boers tried to rebel against British authority in 1798, it took only a small show of military force to discourage the insurgents. There was no suggestion that they would use harsher means of force to constrain the movements of the Xhosa people. Ndlambe is likely to have been familiar with all these developments.

These events fit into Mda's framework of a unifying principle within traditional

leadership. It was not a question of Ndlambe ousting Ngqika and taking over, but rather a contestation of how to share powers within the royal hierarchy. As head of the Rharhabe nation, Ngqika had to contend with his people flocking to their former ruler, his uncle. These events indicate that Ngqika's rather fragile ego played an important role in shaping the relationship. There is every indication that because it was in line with tradition, Ndlambe always respected Ngqika's status as king of the Rharhabe nation. However, his own ability to attract numerous followers should not be credited to his ambitions for power. Given the impetuous nature of Ngqika's personality, no doubt many people chose to join Ndlambe because of his seniority, maturity and wisdom, which earned him respect and high regard among his people. Princess Ntsuza's own choice to stay with Ndlambe stands as a vivid example. This in turn triggered jealousy and anger in the young Ngqika.

However, throughout all the conflicts evidence shows that they also remained on friendly terms, consulting and advising each other. All the visitors to the two chiefs, starting with Barrow and Van der Kemp, and later Cuyler and Collins, recorded aspects of this unity principle in operation. They all consistently reported on Ngqika's reliance on Ndlambe for advice. Between times of conflict, they co-operated as co-rulers of amaRharhabe within a clear sense of hierarchy that functioned according to the traditions of royal leadership.

The Thuthula war

It appears that Ndlambe's move to the Zuurveld was undertaken in good faith. Mere separation and distance, however, did not secure a lasting peace between the two. It seems that it only pushed the tensions below the surface, leaving them still boiling and liable to erupt at any time. Peires claims that in 1805 Ngqika tried to get the then Dutch colonial government to support him in an attack on Ndlambe in the Zuurveld. But when they declined, in the interests of keeping peace, the plan was dropped.⁵⁴ Again the records point to Ngqika as the one who initiated the hostile intentions, presumably triggered by his sense of insecurity in the shadow of his senior uncle.

The next eruption of open conflict is believed to have taken place in 1807. The trigger appears to have been an incident in which one of Ndlambe's sons detained a concubine of Ngqika's as she visited her family in the Zuurveld. In an act of revenge, Ngqika 'acted in the same manner with one of his uncles' ladies, who had come to see her friends at the Kyskamma'.⁵⁵ Famous for her exceeding beauty, Thuthula appears to have had her own romantic interest in Ngqika. When he sent

men to fetch her from Ndlambe's kraal, she willingly complied. As one account puts it:

They said to her, we are here because we have been sent by Chief Ngqika, he has sent us to steal you so that you can be his wife. At the mention of Ngqika's name she dashed to her hut. When she got into the hut, she took off the chief's skirt she was wearing and wrapped it with the grass mat, and left it there. She immediately left with the men.⁵⁶

This brazen deed was viewed as an intolerable moral disgrace and as an act of incest. Even Ngqika's own councillors were outraged and soon authorised military actions against him. A highly venerated elder soldier named Gokera, 'who had always been distinguished by his master for high conduct and valour', immediately led an open, armed rebellion against Ngqika, starting close to his Great Place.⁵⁷ Collins speculates that the incentive to rebel came in part from a new policy that Ngqika had been enforcing, which dictated that any family whose head died without a male heir forfeited their entire property to Ngqika. When Gokera was killed in the first round of fighting, the brewing war was accelerated by two of Ngqika's uncles, Tzatla and Siko, who then brought all their people into action. They in turn requested help from Ndlambe, who, being ill, sent his two sons, Gwiji and Kose.

These combined forces thoroughly trounced Ngqika, who was 'driven into the mountains, his kraals destroyed, and his herds captured'. The role of the two uncles, who were not living with Ndlambe but still under the direct rule of Ngqika, indicates that this war was clearly designed by the royal family to bring the young ruler into line. However, Ndlambe, the one to whom the greatest insult had been made, sent messages cautioning them that they were 'fighting a chief' and that they should not pursue him.⁵⁸ So outraged were the people that they continued fighting anyway, reducing Ngqika to absolute poverty.

At first, these troubles triggered a massive movement of more Rharhabe people into the Zuurveld, towards Ndlambe. Roundly defeated, Ngqika had to take refuge in the Amathole Mountains. Hunger and starvation touched even his own children. Gradually a few of the chiefs began to return to Ngqika's side, a move that Collins felt was prompted by Ngqika promising them their shares of the booty taken from the new inheritance system. During Ngqika's mountain exile, he met the English magistrate from Uitenhage, Cuyler, who was surprised to find him living in such a reversed state. Ngqika insisted to him that the root problem was Ndlambe's jealousy

of his authority as king. As the rightful heir to the throne, he appealed to the British for help in fighting his wars. Cuyler seized on this offer as another opportunity to request Ngqika to receive all the amaNdlambe in his country to the east of the Fish River. Reluctantly, and perhaps feeling coerced, Ngqika agreed, saying that he would not molest or harm his scattered subjects should they cross the Fish River. However, he declined Cuyler's suggestion that he should travel to Cape Town to discuss all these issues directly with the governor, indicating that he could not leave his people at the mercy of Ndlambe during such a long absence.⁵⁹

After about a year, in which Ngqika found it hard to swallow his pride, he finally asked for a settlement with Ndlambe, which was granted.⁶⁰ This was the condition in which Colonel Collins found Ngqika in 1809. Once again, the institution of traditional leadership generated a solution consistent with the practice of disciplining, but then forgiving and ultimately retaining the ruler. Ndlambe was fully participant in this, suggesting that it was not his own personal power that guided his actions, but rather his conformity to the traditions of his nation.

This second civil war among the amaRharhabe appears to have little, if anything, to do with the building tensions between white and black in the Zuurveld. But the fact that it coincided in time with the assertions of the newly ensconced British authorities, who were trying to take full control of the turbulent frontier areas, was to have significant consequences in the longer term. The visits of both Cuyler in 1808 and Collins in 1809 established the fact that Ngqika would be a willing ally in their dream to bring the Zuurveld into European hands only. This resulted in Collins' report calling for a military expulsion of all Africans living west of the Fish River. All British colonial officials became champions of the view of Ngqika as the legitimate heir, unjustly harassed by his jealous uncle. Clearly Ngqika himself fuelled the myth whenever he could. The Thuthula war confirmed that their ally needed help if he was to enjoy any kind of meaningful authority over the Rharhabe people. For the Xhosa people, the Thuthula affair forever tarnished Ngqika's name, as they considered him guilty of incest, an unforgivable crime.

Responses to the British

Ngqika's eccentric personality and strange behaviour might have been manageable within the confines of the institution of traditional leadership if it had not come at such a dangerous time for the Xhosa nation. Though scattered Dutch farmers had been appearing on their western borders for decades before Ngqika came to power, the advent of the British, with their dedication to the imposition of full-blown

colonial conquest and control, posed an unprecedented threat. The willingness of the British to use force to expel all the amaNdlambe and Khoikhoi from the Zuurveld in 1812 has been described in the previous chapter. The expulsion placed Chief Ndlambe under the direct rule of Ngqika, impoverished and with limited powers. For the most part, his people occupied the southernmost areas of Ngqika's influence, the land along the coast between the Fish and Keiskamma Rivers. Little is known about the conditions of the refugees from the Zuurveld when they arrived. Mda speculates that the newly expelled people would have sought refuge with relatives already living in the area.⁶¹ The autobiography of Matshaya, one of Ntsikana's followers, provides a few useful details.⁶² He tells how he lost his home in the Zuurveld shortly after he married his first wife. He first settled near the source of the Keiskamma River, but, suffering from hunger and poverty, then moved westward into the Kat River area. There he fell under Ngqika's direct rule. He was summoned to the king and asked to pay a tribute in cattle. However, Ngqika's councillors pleaded that as a young man, suffering from such hardships and poverty, this requirement should be forgone. To this Ngqika agreed, and Matshaya began building a new home in the area that was to become the site of a new mission station four years later. Matshaya's story reveals the power exercised by Ngqika as the accepted ruler. By receiving the new exiles, granting them places to live and possibly even grants of cattle, they became indebted to him. In contrast, Ndlambe would have been far more constrained in his capacity to bestow these chiefly prerogatives, given his own impoverishment. At least by fleeing before the advancing British troops, his people had been able to bring most of their cattle with them, but their crops were lost to Colonel John Graham's trampling oxen.

Ngqika's acquisitive disposition made him particularly vulnerable to British tactics. The instructions on how to deal with African chiefs given to Lord Charles Somerset by the Colonial Secretary in London as he set sail for his new post in South Africa in 1815 included the following:

Presents in his [King George III's] name should be made to them principally of articles of consumption, such as Brandy, wine, sugar, tea, coffee, tobacco and which may be easily distributed amongst their women & other of the Chiefs' favourites – that a few ornaments and other articles of essential utility, such as hoes, saws, axes, files should be given to the Chiefs in small quantities with an intimation that, if the Chief pleases, two or more annual meetings may take place for barter.⁶³

After creating an appetite for European manufactured goods, it was hoped that the amaXhosa would soon learn to bring in 'their cattle, skins of wild beasts and that ivory of different kinds and gold dust should be pointed out to them as articles most desirable by us'.⁶⁴ Not only did the British choose to win friends among indigenous leaders through the generous giving of gifts, they also sought ways to build sustainable forms of dependency on themselves. Trade was just such an important sector. Always on the lookout for opportunities for economic gain, part of colonial policy included shaping the new trade in ways that gave the local leaders such as King Ngqika a cut in what was to come, including monopolistic powers. In this way they would be rendered unlikely to object to any other measures their new-found benefactors might impose. Similarly, and perhaps even more effective, was the British policy of quickly trying to induce a chemical dependency on alcohol among their new allies. All of these dynamics permeate the history of Ngqika's rule.

While the amaXhosa were quiet in the immediate post-expulsion years, the boers were not. A key event in 1815 was another rebellion against British rule by renegade boers living in the area of Graaff-Reinet. Among the rebel leaders were men who had long lived among the amaXhosa. They approached Ngqika with an offer to give him back the Zuurveld and 'some iron and copper in exchange for the Kat River area' if he joined them in driving out the British.⁶⁵ What is most notable about this fanciful idea is that Ngqika promptly consulted with Ndlambe and jointly they agreed to decline. This indicates that the two of them were again sharing in the leadership of their nation and co-operating on issues of major significance. No doubt Ndlambe would have been interested, three years after the expulsion, to get the Zuurveld back. But they did not buy into it. Perhaps this was because they knew full well the feisty and drunken character of some of the rebels. Also, they probably suspected that routing the British would not be so easy.

However, at this time another issue was still festering between the two chiefs and it would take on major proportions in the lead up to the battle at Grahamstown. For both chiefs, post-expulsion relations with the British were framed by the ongoing question of cattle theft and the protection of deserters of all types from colonial society. They professed to the British their willingness to co-operate with tracking down stolen cattle and returning deserters. However, the orator of the Great Speech, Makhanda's councillor, explicitly pointed fingers at Ngqika's people as being the prime culprits, all for the personal benefit of Ngqika, who received a portion of all stolen goods:

When there was war we plundered you. When there was peace, some of our bad people stole; but our chiefs forbade it. Your treacherous friend Gaika always had peace with you; always plundered you; and when his people stole, always shared in the plunder. Have your patrols ever found cattle taken in time of peace, runaway slaves or deserters, in the kraals of *our* chiefs? Have they ever gone into Gaika's country without finding such cattle, such slaves, such deserters, in Gaika's *own* kraals?⁶⁶

A major commando undertaken by the British in 1813, one of the first in which they employed their own soldiers, suggests that indeed Ngqika's people may have been the major perpetrators in thieving. The commando entered Xhosa territory at the De Bruyn's Drift crossing of the Fish River. From the time of Ndlambe's expulsion, he and his people lived in the area from the coast extending northward on the eastern side of the Fish River. However, the river curves and runs in an east-west direction with Grahamstown situated about an hour's ride from each of the closest crossings to the north and east. The land to the north, across De Bruyn's Drift, would have been clearly understood to be under Ngqika's control. One can readily tell which of the two chiefs' people are implicated by which river crossing was used.

The 1813 commando was significant because it was framed for the first time not as simply retrieving stolen goods, but as punishment and a new excuse for aggression. It had been ordered directly by Governor Cradock, who was visiting the frontier at the time and heard at first hand the stories of how over a thousand head of boer cattle had been stolen and five Khoi servants murdered during November. The commando went directly to Ngqika's people in the Kat River area, taking from them three thousand head of cattle with colonial brands on them, but being careful not to destroy huts. George Theal claims: 'For a short time the authorities hoped that the Kaffirs would be intimidated by the knowledge that their country was open to invasion of this kind, but no such effect was produced in their minds.' It only taught the amaXhosa to slaughter and consume such branded cattle immediately, or to ensure that they were moved to areas far distant from the Fish River.⁶⁷ This commando marked a significant break in colonial policy, in that it sanctioned forays into Xhosa country when it suited colonial interests. The boers had not hesitated to pursue their stolen goods, but this marked the first of many British-commanded raids. After this, fresh orders were given that neither black nor white should cross the boundary on penalty of being shot. Indeed, the road

across De Bruyn's Drift was blocked up by fallen trees to make it clear that no passage would be allowed.⁶⁸

The complicity of Ngqika's followers in cattle thefts was exposed in a case that went to trial in the British court in Uitenhage. In 1816 a cattle thief called William, who was caught in action, gave a detailed account of how he operated.⁶⁹ He claimed that as a subject of Chungwa, one of the chiefs who had been expelled in 1812, he was approached by four men from King Ngqika's area. They asked him to lead them to a good place for a theft, which he did, taking them to a spot near the Bushman's River. However, the four hid in the forest while their guide tried to enter the kraal where the cattle were kept. Barking dogs alerted the farmer to trouble and he was captured by the alert Khoi guards. He had been told that for his efforts he would be allowed to keep half the cattle, while the instigators would keep the other half. Presumably, had the theft been successful, they would have assisted in driving off the cattle. Upon making his confession, the thief's case was referred back to Ngqika in an effort to coerce him into taking responsibility for punishing thieves when caught. However, he said that he did not know this man and that the British could do whatever they wanted with him.⁷⁰ Eventually he was taken to Cape Town and put on trial there. His sentence is not known.

Welcoming the missionaries

The flow of information about political and social developments among the amaXhosa accelerated sharply in early 1816, when LMS missionaries first travelled across the Fish River. Many details of this journey, relating to the nature of Makhandá's personality, have been given in Chapter 1. One of the important points to emerge from the visit was the tentative and somewhat strained nature of the relationship between Makhandá and Ngqika. After meeting the gathered Ndlambe chiefs, the missionary group travelled to Makhandá's kraal where they expected Ngqika to be waiting. Instead, he had sent a message from Cuyler, requesting the return of stolen cattle. The fact that communications with him seem to have failed, led them to conclude that Makhandá and Ndlambe were deliberately trying to exclude Ngqika from the discussions about a mission site. James Read speculated that this was either a symptom of their jockeying for power or based on a fear that Ngqika would not give the missionaries a good reception.⁷¹ The travellers then decided to go directly to Ngqika's kraal.

They found it difficult to locate King Ngqika, but were rescued by a late-night appearance in their camp of Ngcuka, the chief interpreter for Ngqika, whom they

also described as someone ‘perfectly acquainted with the sentiments of Geika, and of the Caffres in general’ and as a ‘chief over many Caffres’. They talked together for two hours, past midnight, upon his arrival. When they finally met Ngqika, they were struck by three things. First, on shaking their hands, he studied their faces very intently; second, on entering their tent for discussions, ‘the greatest order was observed, more than we had witnessed any where else’; and third, many people fled into the bushes when Ngqika approached. He chastised the group for not coming to him first, but then displayed a deep curiosity to know what had transpired in their meetings with the amaNdlambe: ‘He desired to know what each chief in particular had said; which we told him.’⁷² When he refused to pronounce on the issue of a site for the mission station, saying ‘that he was a child’, Read concluded that he did not want to look as if he was coercing them to settle with him. He offered to give them an answer the next day, but when the time came he left the final decision up to the missionaries. By then they had made their own decision that it would be most diplomatic to keep close to King Ngqika and so indicated they would seek an ideal spot on the Kat River.

During their stay with Ngqika, he exhibited great interest in missionary teachings. At one point, he compared the number of his sins to the number of stars – impossible to count. He marvelled that he should be seeing the young Tshatshu as his child, but instead, he conducted himself more like a father because of his understanding of Christianity.⁷³ Although he had not listened to Van der Kemp, Ngqika was now glad to have another chance. In his excitement, he even went as far as this:

Geika was very zealous in exhorting; and among other things, he said to the chiefs, that if the Lord would give him a little more strength, he would resign his wives, cattle etc. and give himself wholly to Christ; that he should wish the Caffres to follow him; but if not he would leave them and cleave to us, God’s people, and to the King of England, for having granted permission to the Missionaries to come into his country.⁷⁴

One evening, the Bethelsdorp group led a night-time procession into Ngqika’s kraal with singing, an hour of preaching and then a time of prayer, while individuals went into the bush to ask for ‘a new heart’.⁷⁵ Ngqika remained an especially long time.

When they parted on amicable terms, Ngqika said that he would allow people to settle with them and had no objection to missionaries also being sent to the

other chiefs 'for they needed the word just as much as he did'.⁷⁶ He also said that he would inform King Hintsa, in case he ever came to inspect the place, and then they could visit together. Upon returning, Read quickly wrote to London, recommending that not just one but four new mission stations should be set up in order to accommodate the incredibly warm reception and to minimise any sense of friction among the chiefs.

Despite their welcome from King Ngqika, members of the Read group named him as evidently in the forefront of the trade in stolen livestock. One of the Khoi helpers from Bethelsdorp, William Valentyne, made an exhaustive and detailed report to Major Fraser in Grahamstown of all the suspected stolen goods and livestock plus criminals they had seen while travelling through Xhosa country. He claimed that everywhere he went he saw great numbers of cattle with the colonial X marks branded on them, as well as numerous horses. Ngqika's kraal topped the list with 31. He could give 'such an exact description of them that their owners might thereby know where their horses are'.⁷⁷ While Read defended Makhanda as gathering stolen livestock to be returned to the Colony, Cobus Boesak, a Bethelsdorp convert who had been part of the group, added his own observation that 'the greatest part of the plundered property' was in the kraals of the chiefs under Ngqika.⁷⁸

Read's journal offers an important glimpse into the dynamics prevailing between Ngqika and Ndlambe in early 1816. A spirit of tension and rivalry is evident in Makhanda's failure to communicate directly with Ngqika and in Ngqika's intent quizzing about what his rival chiefs had said. However, a level of co-operation is also evident, as Ngqika tried hard not to appear to be overbearing on the question of the siting of the new mission station and in his statements of willingness to see missionaries settle and work with the other chiefs as well. His offer to inform King Hintsa of the missionary overtures also suggests a respectful relationship with his superior.

Although Ngqika never came close to putting away his excess wives, nor in leaving his people for the missionaries and the King of England, the advent of a mission station formed a crucial link in bolstering his alliance with the British. This in turn utterly alienated him from most of his subordinate chiefs. When Joseph Williams arrived at his new site, his first deed was to name a natural spring of water after his new king, Ngqika. Significantly, when he arrived a group of Xhosa people awaited him, not to hear the Gospel or to welcome the group, but to seek help. Their homes nearby had just been raided by a group of boers, who took fifty

head of cattle and left them destitute and frightened. This act of plunder convinced Ngcuka, the interpreter, that the mission station would not be a safe place to settle, prompting him to abandon his plan to live there. Ngqika's kraal was only 24 kilometres away making it relatively easy for him to visit. A few months later, in October, Williams reported Ngqika's first major visit of seventeen days. At that time Ngqika's character, guided by Williams 'with whom he had long conversations', was noted to have 'altered for the better, to the great astonishment of the Caffrees'. His sincerity or ability to sustain this kind of behaviour was doubted by Williams, who predicted that 'he will soon get weary of restraint'.⁷⁹

The subsequent meeting of Makhanda and Ngqika at the mission station has been described in detail in Chapter 1. Once again, it revealed a cautious level of co-operation between them. But the question of relationships with the colonial authorities exploded to the surface, producing Makhanda's angry tirade denouncing Ngqika. Indeed, frontier tensions were seriously strained at the time of this meeting. Within another five months the Governor, Lord Charles Somerset, would feel it necessary to visit the frontier in person to intervene as decisively as he could. Since his arrival in July 1816, Williams had been endlessly plied with requests from Magistrate Cuyler and Major Fraser, the commanding officer in Grahamstown, with requests to assist them in dealing with a multitude of issues concerning cattle raids, army deserters, absconding Khoi labourers and runaway slaves. They treated Williams as something of a government agent, expecting him to conduct their business for them. He in turn, using Tshatshu as an interpreter, offered a new means of direct communication and letter writing between the Cape government and King Ngqika. This correspondence opened up a new era of attempts to negotiate co-operation, but it produced dismal results. The governor's visit to the frontier in April 1817 would set in motion the train of events that ended in all-out warfare. It drove a fateful wedge between the followers of Ndlambe and Ngqika with dire consequences for the Rharhabe nation.

Notes

1. Mostert, *Frontiers*, p. 360.
2. Mda interview.
3. For example, see Stockenström, *Autobiography*, p. 45.
4. Peires, *House*, p. 59.
5. Mqhayi, 'Imiyolelo Yokwe'.

6. Their father, Chief Chungwa, was one of the earliest occupants of the Zuurveld, but died during the war of expulsion in 1812. Though ill, he was killed by British soldiers in his bed.
7. Thompson, *Travels*, p. 216.
8. Peires, *House*, p. 130.
9. Justus, *Wrongs*, p. 55.
10. Van der Kemp, 'History', p. 465.
11. N. Tisani, Continuity, p. 99.
12. Justus, *Wrongs*, p. 55.
13. Holt, *Joseph Williams*, p. 64.
14. Ibid.
15. J.B. Peires, 'Ngqika, c. 1779–1829' in C. Saunders (ed.), *Black Leaders in Southern African History* (London: Heinemann, 1979), p. 28.
16. Mostert, *Frontiers*, p. 369.
17. Ibid.
18. *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser* 19 April 1817.
19. Juju, 'Reminiscences of an Old Kaffir' *Cape Monthly Magazine* Vol. 3, No. 17, November 1880, p. 291.
20. Stockenström, *Autobiography*, p. 45.
21. Van der Kemp, 'History', p. 465.
22. N. Tisani, Continuity, p. 253. *Ngena* (raising seed) refers to a custom that views the offspring of a woman's marriage to her late husband's brother as being the same in status as if the original husband was the actual father.
23. Peires, *House*, p. 49; footnotes 27, 211.
24. Thompson, *Travels*, pp. 194, 197. Ishua is a misspelling of Ntsuza.
25. Ibid., p. 194.
26. Cory, *Rise*, p. 44.
27. Peires, 'Ngqika', p. 19.
28. N. Tisani, Continuity, p. 253.
29. Ndlambe chiefs, interview on 16 January 2002 by J. Wells, O. Tshebe, Z. Sakata and S.Ntleki at Berlin.
30. Juju, 'Reminiscences', p. 289.
31. Thompson, *Travels*, p. 201.
32. Ibid., p. 195. In a much later publication Juju related the story in a very similar way. However, since Thompson's book had long been published by then, it is possible that the narrator was familiar with it and gave the same version as if it were an authentic oral tradition.
33. Peires, 'Ngqika', p. 19.
34. Thompson, *Travels*, p. 194.
35. Juju, 'Reminiscences', p. 291.
36. Thompson, *Travels*, p. 195; Van der Kemp, 'History', p. 465.
37. Collins, 'Journal', p. 13.
38. Barrow, *Account*, pp. 192, 193–4.
39. Juju, 'Reminiscences', p. 292.
40. Barrow, *Account*, p. 198.
41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., p. 151. This visit came during the first British occupation of the Cape Colony. Barrow tried to negotiate an agreement with Ngqika to force the amaXhosa living in the Zuurveld to leave and to respect the Fish River as a boundary. However, this failed, as the Ndlambe people moved into the Zuurveld soon after. Peires notes that Ngqika took offence at Barrow's paltry gifts ('Ngqika', p. 22).
43. S.E.K. Mqhayi, 'The Battle of Amalinde' (*Idabi Lama-Linde*) in W. Rubusana, *Zemk'Inkomo Magwalandini* edited by B.B. Mdledle (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, 1966).
44. N. Etherington, *The Great Treks: The Transformation of Southern Africa, 1815–1854* (Harlow: Longman, Pearson Education, 2001), p. 56; and Mkungqwana, interview. De Buys is alleged to have had an intimate relationship with Chief Ngqika's mother, Yese, who in turn exercised a very powerful influence over her son. Mkungqwana believes this was an important factor in Ngqika's repudiation of Ndlambe who took a more cautious approach to outsiders and their wares.
45. J.T van der Kemp, 'Second Attempt to Enter Caffraria in the Year 1800' *Transactions of the London Missionary Society* Vol. 1, 1800, p. 397; and 'Transactions', p. 415.
46. Ibid., p. 466.
47. Ibid.
48. Collins, 'Journal', p. 14; Stockenström, *Autobiography*, pp. 26, 45.
49. Wauchope, *Selected Writings*, p. 50; Pawuli interview.
50. Thompson, *Travels*, p.195.
51. Peires, 'Ngqika', p. 22. Peires views Ndlambe's move to the Zuurveld as an act that 'generated the antagonism of the Colony, whose territory he was occupying'.
52. CA CO 2563: Conversation between Major Cuyler Pro. Landdrost of Uitenhage and the Caffer Chief Slambie, on 25 February 1808.
53. Juju, 'Reminiscences', p. 291.
54. Peires, *House*, p. 58.
55. Collins, 'Journal', p. 15. Mkungqwana suggests that Chief Ngqika's mother, Yese, may have also had a hand in prompting him to take this action, out of her own jealousy of Thuthula's affections from Chief Ndlambe, who had acted as her surrogate husband on the death of Ngqika's father, Mlawu (Mkungqwana interview).
56. Ntsikana, 'Imfazwi', p. 53.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. CA CO 2563: 2 March 1808.
60. Collins, 'Journal', p. 16.
61. Mda interview.
62. Bokwe, *Ntsikana*, p. 35.
63. CA CO 4838: Letters Despatched, 1815–16: Lord Charles Somerset Letter Book from 19 June 1815 to 17 October 1816: 16 December 1815.
64. Ibid.
65. Theal, *History*, p. 294.
66. Pringle, 'Letters', p. 74.
67. Theal, *History*, pp. 321, 322.

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- 68. La Trobe, *Journal*, p. 220.
- 69. CA 1/UIT/15/3: Letters Despatched, Miscellaneous and Statements from the District of Uitenhage 1816 and 1817: 15 April 1816.
- 70. CA CO 4838: 10 May 1816.
- 71. Read, 'Letter', p. 22.
- 72. Ibid., pp. 23, 24.
- 73. Ibid., p.24.
- 74. Ibid., p. 26.
- 75. Ibid.
- 76. Ibid., p. 25.
- 77. CA CO 2603: letter from Fraser to Cuyler, 26 July 1816.
- 78. CA CO 4838: 26 July 1816.
- 79. Holt, *Joseph Williams*, letter from Kat River, 7 October 1816, p. 53.

The poisoned wedge

The years 1817 and 1818 witnessed the unfolding of crucial events that culminated in the ultimate attack on Grahamstown in early 1819. The tensions created by the expulsion of the amaNdlambe continued to mount as Xhosa thefts of boer cattle steadily increased and these in turn triggered ever more urgent counter measures on the part of the boers and their British rulers. As pressures mounted, the leading Rharhabe chiefs at first responded with clear efforts to consolidate their tenuous unity. However, the British in the end succeeded in driving a wedge between them, which led to civil war at the battle at Amalinde. This in turn forced King Ngqika to place full reliance on the British for relief, which took the form of the lethal Brereton raid. This biggest commando ever took virtually all of the amaNdlambe's cattle, leaving them starving and desperate for vengeance. This chapter investigates the steady deterioration of the situation that eventually ended in all-out war between the amaXhosa and the British.

Background to negotiations

How to handle rampant cattle theft on the eastern frontier posed the greatest challenge to the British colonial government. The orders Governor Somerset received from the Colonial Office in London encouraged him to create 'permanent tranquillity founded upon gradual civilisation', bringing boers and amaXhosa alike into line with British rule by enhancing trade. To keep matters simple, he was to deal only with King Ngqika, whom they understood to be not only the highest-ranking chief, but also the one who had already indicated friendliness to the British. Admitting that levels of cattle theft remained high, Somerset was told, 'You will however treat these outrages and robberies as the Acts of Individuals and not of the Government of the Chiefs.' Punishment for theft should be directed only to the property of offenders, such as their livestock and houses, but 'not against their lives except in the case of resistance'.¹ In the hope of promoting understanding and co-operation, the governor ordered that Ngqika should be given 'a good horse with Saddle and bridle . . . and forward by the first Vessel going to Algoa Bay a Cask of Brandy'.²

Throughout 1816, various efforts had been made with Ngqika to deal with the cattle thefts. Three cases illustrate why little changed. First, following a particularly large theft, Magistrate Cuyler attempted to secure Chief Ngqika's co-operation in recovering the stolen animals. Although Ngqika communicated his willingness to assist with the return of some clearly identified stolen cattle, the boers from the neighbourhood refused to meet him to discuss their return. They instead demanded to travel in an armed commando of at least thirty men, preferring simply to seize what they wanted. Cuyler managed to convince them of the importance of encouraging Ngqika to play a role in restoring cattle and offered Ngqika a horse and saddle if the transaction went smoothly. However, the boers feared Ngqika had laid a trap for them and refused to proceed. Soon after they gave up, fresh thefts and murders of herders took place, revealing a high level of tension.³

Second, in the case of Kaffir William, a thief caught in the act and found guilty after a trial in Uitenhage, Ngqika refused to have anything to do with him, stating that he did not know him.⁴ Third, when Christian Niemand confronted King Ngqika directly with allegations of theft, the king invited him to go to inspect the kraals where he expected to find stolen cattle. Ngqika sent two councillors with him to ensure his safety. Niemand recovered ten head of cattle, but claimed that others had already been slaughtered and consumed.⁵ Although Ngqika stated he did not know anything about the stolen cattle, Niemand alleged that he had taken part in the feast. To allay tensions, Ngqika gave Niemand two extra cows as compensation.

Such gestures were relatively rare as Ngqika insisted that he could not control the actions of the other chiefs and that if he tried, 'they would raise up against himself!' At times he claimed to have gathered stolen cattle to be returned to colonists, only to have them stolen from *him* before he could do so.⁶ The boers, however, circulated rumours that Ngqika was simply lying about having collected such cattle.⁷ When the Xhosa raiders committed murder, the boers could hardly be restrained from taking matters into their own hands.⁸ Caution, however, had to be maintained by the colonial officials to avoid 'any measure likely to bring on a Caffre War which the finance of the Colony would be very inadequate to support & which the Government at Home would not fail to consider very unnecessary & bothersome were the British Treasury called upon to give aide thereto'.⁹

Once Joseph Williams established his mission station in July 1816 near Ngqika's Great Place, Magistrate Cuyler and Major Fraser applied enormous pressure on him to induce higher levels of co-operation, still hoping that stolen cattle would be returned and that perpetrators would be punished by the chief. Cuyler ordered

Williams to act as a spy and report even on Ngqika's facial expression when certain demands were made on him. In private correspondence with Fraser, Cuyler curtly suggested, 'Perhaps Mr W may from these circumstances feel rather more anxious to explain to Gika the nature of what should be his conduct as Upper Chief of those murderous fellows.'¹⁰ The efforts to negotiate a solution to cattle theft were clearly not working.

By this time, cattle theft was well entrenched in frontier relations and with devastating effect. When the Moravian missionary Christian la Trobe travelled through the western and northern parts of the Zuurveld in April 1816, he witnessed scenes of destruction all around. He described Sand Flats, north of Uitenhage, as a place where Xhosa 'depredations were conducted at this time with great boldness'. In the Zuurberg Mountains, his party camped at a farm 'destroyed by the Caffres and forsaken'. Nearby another farm had a large quantity of dung that was still smouldering from a recent Xhosa attack. A military post at Commadocha (Kommadagga, north-west of Grahamstown) was recently abandoned despite the fact that 'the place was surrounded by a mud wall and a ditch. The wall had loopholes and small bastions at the angles, sufficient to resist any attack of undisciplined Caffres.'¹¹ Such fortifications were clearly inadequate.

Despite the lack of progress in curbing hostilities, Governor Somerset chose to maintain faith in Ngqika's character, stating that 'all Gaika's assurances appear to be as candid & pacific as could be expected from a Chief professing so little real authority as he does'.¹² In fact, the way Ngqika handled the challenges from the colonial authorities appears to be typical of the approach taken by all the chiefs: to do nothing serious to curtail thefts and other forms of harassment of colonists, while at the same time doing just enough to appease the British officials to maintain their favour.

By January of 1817, Somerset decided to pay a personal visit to the eastern frontier to try to take firm command of the situation, knowing that his 'policy of treating the Caffres with mildness and kindness' was not effective and that his capacity to handle the problems through military force was dwindling. Xhosa attacks were 'rapidly driving the Colonists from those fertile tracts' and raids had taken place as deep into the Zuurveld as Uitenhage.¹³ Of the 145 families that had been lured into settling in the Zuurveld near military posts with offers of living with reduced rents, 90 had fled by early 1817 and 3 600 head of cattle had been stolen.¹⁴ The Xhosa raiders 'kept the country in such a disturbed state that it was impossible to carry on agricultural or pastoral operations with any prospect of success'.¹⁵

The governor wanted to find out why all efforts to date, including the deployment of a fairly sizeable military force, had failed. The effect of the deepening crisis was a notable drop in the amount of meat available for export to St Helena, Tristan da Cunha and Mauritius. This loss in export capacity had been ‘severely felt throughout the Colony, both in price and quality’.¹⁶ Unrest among the boers also intensified after mid-1816 when the Colonial Office in London reduced the number of troops stationed in the Zuurveld. In particular the removal of eighty mounted men from the Cape Corps left the local boers demanding to be armed and furnished with ammunition by the British authorities.¹⁷ Memories of their attempted rebellion against British rule less than two years before made the British hesitate. Like his predecessors, Somerset firmly believed that Ndlambe and other Xhosa chiefs had been intruders in the Zuurveld, who had rather easily been sent back in 1812. He failed to grasp that the unrest he faced in 1816 derived from this. The colonial stereotype of African people as savages prone to theft and robbery kept him oblivious to their sense of grievance.

But perhaps above all, the governor had to find some way to advise his superiors on ‘how far it might be practicable to reduce the Military Force . . . and thereby reduce the general expenditure’. His goal was to make the amaXhosa themselves feel they had a stake in the end of cattle theft and general peace on the frontier. Somerset explained that his options were either to try to use force, as the boers advocated, or ‘to hold out lasting advantages to them’.¹⁸ Though the latter option was preferred, it needed an element of military backup.

Meeting at Kat River

The meeting that eventually took place on the banks of the Kat River, across from Joseph Williams’ mission station, was the product of very careful and well-calculated planning by Somerset. By early 1817 he faced the dual crises of escalating frontier violence at a time when the British government was desperately trying to cut back its military spending on every front. The conclusion of the Napoleonic wars in Europe three years earlier resulted in a massive scaling down of military spending. Knowing that he faced an imminent reduction in troops, the governor tried to do everything in his power to find a non-military solution to the turmoil on the frontier.

As soon as Somerset arrived on the frontier, he mustered a strong military force designed to impress on the amaXhosa that the British ‘had easy access to their abodes’ and ‘by our formidable appearance in some measure to overawe the Caffer Chiefs in their own country’.¹⁹ Ngqika was informed by the missionary Williams only that the governor was coming to give Ngqika numerous presents as

a 'token of a more lasting friendship between His Majesty and the Kaffer people'.²⁰ Arriving on the banks of the Kat River on 2 April 1817, the governor's show of force consisted of 'one hundred dragoons, detachments of the 83rd, 72nd and Cape Regiments, a small detachment of artillery with two field pieces, and three hundred and fifty burghers, armed and mounted'.²¹ Never before had such a show of force, with all its pageantry and bright uniforms, been seen so deep inside Xhosa territory, a few kilometres from Ngqika's Great Place. The spectacle nearly made the whole plan backfire. Indeed, the memory of the flashy show was preserved in Xhosa oral traditions well into the twentieth century. In his writings, Samuel Mqhayi noted the many colours of the soldiers' uniforms, the governor's bright regalia, and even the decorations on the horses and their saddles, as well as the heavy armaments.²²

At first Ngqika refused to attend. Major Fraser, sent a few days in advance, arrived at the mission station with a guard of thirty armed boers. He implored Williams to use all his influence to convince the king to come. The two interpreters, Dyani Tshatshu and Hendrick Ngcuka, were sent to Ngqika with heartfelt entreaties. When they failed to return well into the next day, Fraser and Williams then set off together. On arriving at Ngqika's kraal, they found him engaged in deep consultation with his 'principal people and councillors', which eventually concluded with agreement to come to the meeting.²³ These discussions included not only Chief Ndlambe, but also most of the chiefs who served under him.²⁴

Although King Ngqika's Great Place was only an hour's walk from the meeting site, he continued to balk. When the appointed day arrived, he secured a postponement for a day due to rain. Hours after the starting time had passed, he sent messengers to Williams 'to ask me what he should do . . . he was much afraid'.²⁵ Eventually, Fraser rode with his group of armed boers to meet Ngqika to assure him once again of his safety. He agreed reluctantly to come, but 'on the way his heart failed so much that he halted several times in the short space of an hour's journey'. On reaching the Kat River, Ngqika refused to cross until Williams came over: 'He appeared to be in great distress and dread, but on seeing me, he seemed much relieved, and took me by the hand very heartily.' Ngqika brought his own armed guard of three hundred men, but they did not interfere with events. Ultimately, the two magistrates, Cuyler and Stockenström, took both Ngqika and Ndlambe 'with great difficulty' arm in arm and escorted them across the river to the meeting site.²⁶ The depth of the terror felt by the Xhosa chiefs was unmistakable. The governor noted that it was Chief Ndlambe and the other chiefs who had ultimately convinced Ngqika to take part.²⁷

Governor Somerset clearly was not willing to allow such a carefully orchestrated event to fail. His combined forces formed three sides of a square, with a white marquee in the middle and the two pieces of field artillery poised ceremonially on either side of it. 'The walls of the marquee were thrown down in order that the conference should be as public as possible, and that all the Caffre attendants upon the Chief should hear what passed and know and disseminate the results.'²⁸ When the royal entourage arrived, 'The square then opened and formed into line and the Chiefs Gaika and Tsambie came forward and walked for the Marquee, arm in arm with Lt.-Col. Cuyler, Major Fraser, and Mr. Stockenström, several other chiefs being in the rear, the Caffre guard following.'²⁹ Mqhayi claims that Ngqika knew full well that his people were against him on issues of dealing with the British, but that he began to relax after Somerset plied him with drink. Somerset provoked all the other chiefs present by 'walking up and down' with Ngqika only and then stating that he was the only chief among the amaXhosa the British would deal with, saying, '[L]ook after me and I will look after you'.³⁰

Once the meeting started, Somerset sat in a chair, while Ngqika sat to his right with Ndlambe and other chiefs next to him and his young son, Prince Maqoma, just behind him.³¹ Although shabbily dressed in a way unbecoming to the king, colonial observers noted that 'the gracefulness with which Gaika spoke was very striking, and the manly and decided tone he took was extremely impressive'.³² Interpreters came from both sides, to ensure there could be no misunderstandings.³³ Ngqika's guard formed a semicircle around him and the other chiefs and followed the proceedings very attentively, though often breaking in with their own comments, 'making such a clacking during the whole conference, that it was with difficulty the parties could be heard'.³⁴

To view the outcomes of the meeting as the conclusion of a treaty would be a misnomer, as there was discussion only and no written documents were produced. Also, the extreme anxiety that the Xhosa chiefs experienced before agreeing to attend continued throughout the meeting, resulting in only nominal assent arising out of intimidation. A particularly sensitive point was the pivotal one: the British insisted that they would deal only with Ngqika as the supreme chief who would be held responsible for the actions of all the other chiefs and their followers. To this, Ngqika replied: 'We do not do things as you do them; you have but one chief, but with us it is not so; but although I am a great man and king of other Caffres, still every chief rules and governs his own people. There is my uncle, and there are the other chiefs.'³⁵

Ngqika pointed out to Somerset that ‘many who were there present considered themselves to be independent of him, nor does he believe that any of them excepting his uncle ‘T Zambie will entirely acknowledge his authority’. When the governor flatly refused to accept this explanation of the Xhosa style of leadership, the other chiefs conferred and said, out of the hearing of the interpreters, ‘Say yes, that you will be responsible, for we see the man is getting angry . . . for we had the cannon and artillerymen and soldiers and boors with loaded muskets standing about us.’³⁶ Ngqika also tried to resist Somerset’s suggestion that the British could make him king of the Rharhabe, by humorously asking if he, Ngqika, in turn could make Somerset into a king.³⁷ Ngqika also noted that without being able to write down things as the British were busy doing, he would not be able to recall all that had been said.³⁸ In the months and years to come it would be clear that from the Xhosa point of view that nothing legitimate had been concluded under these circumstances, let alone a morally binding treaty.

Ngqika tried to deviate from the governor’s agenda when he abruptly started to quiz Somerset about the nature of Christianity and wanted to know who had sent the missionaries. Ngqika noted that the word of God among them might bring a contradiction: ‘It is much to our disgrace that we go forth to steal now that we have God’s word among us; but the fact is the Caffres will not hear it.’³⁹ Not prepared for a theological discussion, Somerset abruptly turned his attention back to the more mundane matter of gifts. Upon greedily receiving numerous items from the governor, Ngqika precipitately fled and brought the meeting to an end when he headed straight back to his Great Place. This pre-empted the governor’s plans to dazzle the chiefs further with a state dinner and a demonstration of the artillery pieces firing.

The outcomes of the Kat River meeting

The issues emanating from this meeting elicited Ngqika’s statement that he was willing to punish cattle thieves, co-operate in the return of stolen livestock, prevent runaway slaves, servants and military deserters from taking refuge among the amaXhosa, assist colonial forces to trace livestock, and allow colonial forces to retake stolen cattle under the spoor law. In return, he was to be given twelve specially designed gorgets as symbols of his authority. These he could give as a kind of passport to any person he authorised to visit Grahamstown. Such visitors could only cross the Fish River at De Bruyn’s Drift and had to travel strictly on the road, without deviation, under armed escort. In addition, trade fairs were to be

established in Grahamstown, to which the amaXhosa could bring their goods for barter twice a year. The Colony would try to reciprocate with copper, copper wire, brass wire and iron as trade goods.⁴⁰

Even before the meeting took place, Somerset had drafted instructions about how to reinforce the military presence on the frontier. Writing the day before leaving Bruintjies Hoogte for the Kat River, he ordered that a new, triple line of military posts should be built along the Fish River. Noting that most of the Xhosa cattle raiding took place at night, when it was hard for troops to respond, he ordered a series of signal fires to be established, allowing soldiers from one post to alert those at the next one if thieves were heading in their direction. Daily patrols and carefully kept records were introduced, and captains were to visit each post at least once a week to collect all reports. Each post was to have assigned to it some Khoi soldiers whose expertise in tracking should be put to best use.⁴¹

Although Somerset noted with some concern the tendency for boers to take matters into their own hands, he urged them to restrain themselves. To this end, he set up a reward system of five rixdollars for every Xhosa prisoner taken alive within the colonial boundary. Such prisoners were to be sent to Uitenhage, where Magistrate Cuyler might find them work, see that they learnt Dutch and introduce them to Christianity. After some time, they should then be returned 'improved to their own country'. This was seen as a good gesture of colonial goodwill and friendship. A reward of one rixdollar for each head of stolen cattle recovered was also offered. Both rewards were to be paid out of the local public treasury.⁴²

Perhaps the most far-reaching outcome from the governor's frontier visit was his deep conviction that the only solution to the problems there would be the massive settlement of the area by European colonists as proposed by Colonel Collins and Colonel Cuyler in 1810. The first phase was immediately to try to convince Dutch-speaking boers who had left the area that it would now be safe enough for them to return. Ironically, Somerset wrote his instructions on inducements even before meeting Ngqika.⁴³ He spelled out six incentives to be implemented at once by the magistrates on the frontier. Returning settlers should be given incentives to form small villages or collectives, especially along the Fish River. He was convinced that even half a dozen armed and mounted men who remained vigilant could easily repel any would-be Xhosa attackers.

The second phase included the wholesale importation of new British settlers to the Zuurveld. To his superiors in London, he unleashed unending praise for the beauties and glories of the Zuurveld as a desirable place to live. He described it as

‘unrivalled in the world for its beauty and fertility’;⁴⁴ ‘it resembles a succession of parks from the Bosjesman’s to the Great Fish River, in which the most verdant carpet Nature has planted in its endless variety’; and called it ‘the finest champaign country’.⁴⁵ During his visit, Somerset also got to know many of the officers and administrators first hand, opening the door for successful requests for grants of land and sites for houses afterwards.⁴⁶

A second outcome of the Kat River meeting was that the British used it to drive a poisoned wedge between the Xhosa chiefs by trying to accord more power to Ngqika than he deserved. The dynamics among the chiefs were to change dramatically over the coming year and a half as the implications of the new policies came to be felt. Though many historians point to the third and final war between Ndlambe and Ngqika, fought at Amalinde in October 1818, as evidence of their intractable hatred for each other, a closer scrutiny of the records shows that at the time of the Kat River meeting they acted in one accord on a level seldom appreciated.

The detailed descriptions of the Kat River meeting reveal a good deal about the personality of King Ngqika and his relationship at that time with his uncle, Ndlambe. Ngqika showed an almost pathological fear of meeting the British and was only convinced by Ndlambe and his councillors and by the hand-holding of the missionary Williams. His greedy grasping at the gifts, followed by his sudden exit before the meeting’s events had concluded, can also be taken as symptomatic of the compulsive side of his personality. Ndlambe, by contrast, dressed as a chief of high standing and apparently maintained his royal comportment throughout the event. He acted in every way as the legitimate co-ruler of the amaRharhabe. The manner in which they conducted themselves through this trying event exemplifies the unity principle of traditional leadership at its most effective. Their united show of force as chiefs at the Kat River meeting has puzzled many historians, who assumed that they were locked in irremediable hostility.

In a very short space of time after the meeting, however, Ngqika began to enjoy his exalted status with the British, who continued to offer him generous gifts. Horses and casks of brandy were the most popular.⁴⁷ With his acquisitive disposition, Ngqika quickly responded by coming up with his own lists of demands, including one horse from Colonel Cuyler, two from Major Fraser, sheep, goats, a suit of clothes, a greatcoat, shoes, hat, knives, tinderboxes, beads ‘very fine and small’, brass plates and wire, an axe, iron, leopard skins, ‘buttons such as you wear’, corn for seed, garden seed, dogs and cash so he could purchase things from the boers. As Holt put it, ‘greed was one of his besetting sins and he was a most

arrant beggar'.⁴⁸ This aspect of Ngqika's disposition made him easy prey for the British policy of co-option and divide-and-rule.

Enforcing the Kat River agreements

The formalisation of the spoor law would generate unrest and spirals of violence for twenty more years, including two more wars between the Xhosa and the Colony. It stated that colonial military formations, often called commandos and increasingly relying on full British military capacity, had a right to enter Xhosa territory to follow the spoor or tracks of stolen cattle. But instead of finding the perpetrators and the actual stolen beasts, the principle stated, the raiders had a right to confiscate the same number of animals from the first kraal they came to. The simple injustice of punishing the first kraal that lay along the path of thieves, along with the fact that such acts of retribution quickly came to exceed what had originally been stolen, quickly led to a deep sense of grievance among the amaXhosa. The first test came within three weeks of the meeting. Lieutenant Vereker of the 83rd Regiment pursued the tracks of nineteen stolen cattle to the kraals of Chief Habana. Instead of providing the stolen cattle, the chief sent armed men who surrounded Vereker's camp and then ambushed his retreating men in a narrow valley in the Little Kat River. The Xhosa soldiers attacked 'with great impetuosity . . . making horrible shouts and casting their assegais [spears] at our people'.⁴⁹ When the fighting ended, five Xhosa lay dead and three British soldiers wounded, but Vereker escaped with nineteen head of cattle he had impounded along the way. The British ascribed Chief Habana's hostile response to the fact that he had not been at Kat River. However, as events were to prove, it is more likely that he exhibited the common Xhosa attitude towards the spoor law.

After this encounter, Ngqika encouraged a more diplomatic approach. He requested that rather than send large armed forces, small groups of five to six farmers should come and appeal to him directly when they believed they knew where their missing cattle had been taken. He would then appoint one of his men to accompany them to the relevant kraals to allow them to look for their livestock. This, in fact, was simply a continuation of the way he and Ndlambe had been handling cattle theft for many years. Their policy was to co-operate in a reasonable way only when directly confronted by claims of missing cattle. But at no point is there any evidence that either of them seriously tried to eradicate all cattle theft. Despite urgent British requests, they never punished anyone for such deeds. By 1817, such plundering of their white neighbours had long been a way of life.

Ngqika made a limited effort to send back colonial cattle and horses on a few occasions. Dyani Tshatshu claims that he sent men out to find such animals the day after the Kat River meeting.⁵⁰ By the end of May, Ngqika sent his interpreter, Ngcuka, to Grahamstown with 53 horses and a promise of an additional 30 to come soon.⁵¹ This made a very positive impression on the British, but the deed was not to be repeated for another four months when Ngqika sent seventeen cows and thirteen horses in September.⁵² These were among the few occasions when any stolen livestock were returned by Ngqika. As Jeff Peires points out, horses at that time had little meaning or value for the amaXhosa, so did not represent much of a sacrifice.⁵³ For this modest pretence at co-operation, however, Ngqika managed to extract numerous gifts as well as loyalty from his British friends. The missionary Williams, acting as his correspondent with government, faithfully continued to forward Ngqika's requests for colonial goods. The governor bent over backwards to ensure his every wish was met.

There is surprisingly little evidence of regular efforts to carry out the provisions of the spoor law. A rare exception is an expedition by a boer named Durand in July 1817, in which he recovered 66 cattle and 18 horses. By that time, just four months after the meeting at the Kat River, Ngqika told him that if he enforced the spoor law, all his people would defect to Makhanda, who was 'already stronger than himself'.⁵⁴ This statement indicates the high level of non-compliance and resistance to the spoor law among the amaXhosa, as well as the source of Makhanda's rising popularity.

The second recorded armed confrontation involved Chief Ndlambe, who was visited by a commando headed by Field Cornets Nel from Grahamstown and Muller from Boknes in November 1817. Travelling with sixteen boers, they first stopped at Ngqika's kraal. He advised them which chiefs' kraals they should visit to look for cattle, including those of Nqeno, Kasa, Funa and Ndlambe himself. After taking cattle from the first three chiefs, they met an extremely hostile and unco-operative response from Chief Ndlambe. They reported that he met them with a large military force and that in discussion Ndlambe had used very rude and insulting language, ferociously ordering them off his land.⁵⁵

A few days later, Ndlambe sent out eleven stolen cattle to be returned to Grahamstown, using the Upper Kaffir Drift military post. This gesture was then followed by Makhanda, who appeared at the post in person with a guard of 250 men to deliver over an army deserter from the 60th Regiment and eight head of cattle, promising to bring two more deserters soon.⁵⁶ When the governor sent

instructions to urge Ndlambe to co-operate instead by sending cattle through Ngqika only, he answered that anything that he sent via De Bruyn's Drift, Ngqika's entry point into the Colony, never arrived and was not acknowledged.⁵⁷ The governor concluded that the sudden and unprecedented gesture of returning cattle by Ndlambe was an effort to offset his defiant behaviour to Nel and Muller. But he had already formed a clear opinion that Ngqika alone was to be dealt with and that Ndlambe was an implacable enemy of the British. As Peires puts it, this characterisation boiled down to a simplistic 'good Ngqika, bad Ndlambe' stereotype.⁵⁸ By early December 1817, Governor Somerset sent orders to Fraser, now the commanding officer of the frontier, to lead a major commando, punitive in nature, against Ndlambe.

At the same time, he made it as clear as he could to his subordinates on the frontier that he still trusted Chief Ngqika, whose few gestures of compliance were taken as evidence of his good faith. In November, Ngqika requested a swap of cattle taken by both sides. He offered eighteen head of colonial cattle in return for the same number which Captain Andrews had taken from his own people as he enforced the spoor law. The governor agreed and the exchange took place. At this stage Somerset showed his resolve to make his system work, no matter what the cost: 'His Excellency holds it to be essentially necessary that good faith with Gaika should be most rigidly observed . . . who certainly appears to have done as much & perhaps more than could have been expected, to evince the sincerity of his promises towards the Colonists.'⁵⁹

The great mistake and Xhosa confederation

A major attack on Chief Ndlambe, which took place in early January 1818, was to prove to be the undoing of the spoor law. In many ways, it oddly pre-shadowed the events of nearly a year later that would culminate in the battle at Grahamstown. Major Fraser, the commanding officer on the frontier, started gathering a large commando by requesting armed boers from both Uitenhage and Graaff-Reinet. His instructions were very clear: to punish Ndlambe and make an example of him by kidnapping and holding him captive until he yielded up all the stolen cattle held by his people. The plan was to deal decisively with Ndlambe, while warning Ngqika to remove his people from harm's way so that the innocent would not suffer. Fraser tried to keep all of the preparations for the commando, as well as the warnings to Ngqika, a secret so that the British could enjoy an element of surprise.

Crossing the Fish River on 7 January 1818, Fraser reached Ndlambe and found him fully prepared for the encounter. The chief had gathered an estimated two thousand men from nine chiefs and organised them to form three units, which essentially surrounded the commando. Bravely, Fraser demanded all the colonial cattle be given up to him, asking that it should be done by the next day. When the day dawned and the full strength of the Xhosa resistance became apparent, his boer colleagues advised a hasty withdrawal, saying, 'You should never attack a bee's nest from behind, but in front; it will never do to fight the Caffres so far into their own country.'⁶⁰ Not wanting to return empty-handed, Fraser then moved into what had always been considered Ngqika's territory and conducted wildly successful raids against the kraals of several chiefs. Before he finished, he had collected two thousand head of cattle; an unprecedented number for any commando, which usually recovered fewer than a hundred.⁶¹ When he returned to Grahamstown, he was congratulated for a job well done and for having severely punished Ndlambe.

However, his triumph was to be short-lived. By early February, he received a furious letter from Ngqika protesting that rather than punishing Ndlambe, he the British friend and ally had been punished as all those who lost cattle were his own adherents:⁶² 'For not one of Tslambie's men were shot nor one of his beasts taken'; only those of Ngqika's followers.⁶³ He angrily demanded an explanation. It took nearly another nine months for his questions to be adequately answered by the governor, who clung desperately to his line of nurturing friendship with Ngqika as the low-cost solution to frontier problems. With dogged determination, the governor forced Fraser to account for his actions. Fraser insisted that the chiefs he attacked were only those whom he knew had been expelled with Ndlambe from the Zuurveld in 1812.⁶⁴ Somerset demanded a list from Ngqika of the affected chiefs and how many cattle each had lost. He compared this with a list that Williams had prepared for him of the Ngqika chiefs at an earlier date, discovering only one name in common on both lists, that of Chief Krata, one of Ngqika's councillors, but also a former councillor of Ndlambe.⁶⁵ The confusion that Fraser experienced can be partly explained by the way that Ngqika and Ndlambe were working together at this time, making it impossible to distinguish which of the minor chiefs belonged to one or the other. They were all Rharhabe and acting with one accord.

Indeed, the way that the Fraser commando served as a catalyst to unite the Xhosa chiefs on an unprecedented level was of far greater significance. Peires put forward the idea that a great confederation of all the Xhosa chiefs, including not

only the chiefs of Ndlambe and Ngqika but also King Hintsa of the Gcaleka senior house and the leaders of the Thembu nation, came together and agreed on a plan to launch a major attack against the Colony, designed to eradicate the pernicious settler presence and colonial rule once and for all.⁶⁶ This theory flies in the face of everything that was ever written about this period, but warrants serious attention. Peires based his argument on a few odd reports that trickled into the ears of the British. A recaptured runaway slave explained the basic developments. Suspicions that something was up were fuelled further by Khoi spies who reported the presence of Ndlambe and Ngqika at a series of rejoicing events at the Kat River where all their followers intermingled happily. The spies 'also affirm that all the Kaffirs seem unanimous and are on much better terms of friendship than they had witnessed at any former period'. Ngqika fled when he saw the informants, implying he did not want to be seen as a participant. The report stated that the amaXhosa were waiting to see if Ngqika's request to the governor for the return of the cattle would be heeded or not, failing which they were prepared 'to murder as many of our cattle herds and carry off as many cattle as they possibly could'.⁶⁷

Uncertain as these isolated reports may seem, they are supported by a wide range of circumstantial events. First, the development is entirely consistent with the Mda theory that the institution of traditional leadership acted to unify and pull together. The alleged bitter relationship between Ndlambe and Ngqika has been shown to vacillate, exhibiting as much co-operation as hostility over time. If the combined Xhosa forces agreed to a major attack on the Colony, a period of preparation should be evident. The first half of 1818 witnessed unprecedented levels not only of cattle theft, but also murder of those who offered resistance. In a letter to the governor in late May 1818, Magistrate Cuyler reported:

[S]ince writing you on the 28th Febr. last, they murdered no less than 10 of our people, 2 soldiers, 3 slaves, 3 Hottentot men and 2 Hottentot women, and carried off 6 flintlocks from those who they barbarously put to death (besides daily stealing cattle). They murdered a Hottentot and a slave at Baviaans River last week and two days ago they murdered the Hottentot taking care of the cattle at Theopolis, took away his flintlock and 13 milk cows.⁶⁸

Other events during this era show that accelerated cattle raiding could be orchestrated as part of moving towards more direct forms of military confrontation.

Such raids formed a strategy in the lead-up to something bigger. First, they frightened off a significant portion of the white settlers. Second, they strengthened the Xhosa economic basis of security by providing large numbers of cattle. Third, the raids tested and stretched the military strength and will of their colonial opponents. Fourth, such stepped-up incursions allowed the amaXhosa to plunder the very assets that gave the colonialists their military advantage. These included the greatly increased taking of horses, guns, ammunition and iron.

Descriptions of a rather abrupt change in conditions in the first part of 1818 are all consistent with these actions. Even the sharply pro-colonial historian George McCall Theal viewed this period as a 'major turning point'. However, being dedicated to the feud between Ndlambe and Ngqika as the central factor in frontier events, he could not explain why things changed so drastically. Theal blamed the escalation of frontier unrest on the reconciliation between Ndlambe and his son Mdushane, the rising influence of Makhanda and the cutting back of British troops.⁶⁹

In addition to the circumstantial evidence, some rumours and the noticeably stepped-up raiding, the British authorities uncovered a serious plot to overthrow them. At the time it was probably viewed as the deeds of a few renegade individuals. However, it fits exactly with the timing and circumstances of the emerging united Xhosa force. Three Khoi convicts escaped from Uitenhage prison on 1 March 1818, stole some horses and then took refuge with Chief Krata. At the time he lived near Williams' mission station and was considered to be one of Ngqika's chiefs. He agreed to support the plotters in an attack on Uitenhage which was to be an

attack from two sides, one group to enter town near the powder magazine, the other to go straight to the Drostdy to murder the Landdrost and then go into the village; if they didn't get him at the Drostdy they would wait for him at Doorn Kraal where he often goes and break in in the early morning and 'murder him in his bed'; if that failed they would hide in the stables and murder him when he came to get his horse in the morning.⁷⁰

After murdering Cuyler and burning Uitenhage, all the Khoikhoi and slaves were expected to join the amaXhosa, who in turn would assist in the murder of all boers and English soldiers, extending as far north as Graaff-Reinet and as far west as the Langkloof and Olifants River.⁷¹ However, the chief sent along only four men to assist and the plotters were eventually captured and tried. Klaas Geswind, the

leader, was sentenced to hang, while his colleagues received sentences of ten years on Robben Island.

If Ngqika's own behaviour is looked at broadly, he can be seen at least initially to be in line with the rest of the chiefs. As he had complained in 1817 about losing followers to Makhanda if he enforced the spoor law too strictly, he never did so with any zeal. Indications that he acted in concert with the rest of the chiefs in early 1818 take several forms. First, there are the reports that he took part in the series of rejoicing celebrations. Second, he took an additional wife, normally a sign of consolidating alliances with other royalty.⁷² Third, Ngqika expressed virulent bitterness against his former friends, the missionaries. After a three-day visit to the mission station in mid-April 1818, he launched into a tirade against his mission escorts back to his kraal. He strenuously objected to mission teachings against the wearing of traditional insignia and facial painting, saying:

You have your manner to wash and decorate yourselves on the Lords day and I have mine the same in which I was born and that I shall follow. I have given over for a little to listen at your word but now I have done for it, for if I adopt your law I must entirely overturn all my own and that I shall not do. I shall begin to dance and praise my beast as much as I please and shall let all see who is the lord of this land.⁷³

Amid the increasing tension, Williams was abandoned by all the people from Bethelsdorp, including Dyani Tshatshu, the only individual Williams could speak to with 'any satisfaction'.⁷⁴ When the Bethelsdorp people got back to Grahamstown, they informed Major Fraser that Ngqika's people had descended upon them, burnt their wagons and stolen all the iron – a strong indicator of building military ambitions.⁷⁵

It appears that Ngqika's strategy was to continue to pose as the great friend of the British, firmly pressing the governor for the restitution of the two thousand head of cattle taken in the Fraser raid. He also made efforts to return stolen animals to the Colony. During May his interpreter Hendrick Ngcuka brought forty head of colonial cattle and eleven horses, including three stolen during the recent Uitenhage prison escape, to Major Fraser in Grahamstown.⁷⁶ Whether he acted with the full consent of the united chiefs or was two-faced in his dealings, it is impossible to know. Unfolding events would suggest that his dealings with the British were not accepted by the other chiefs and the consequences were disastrous.

If the united Xhosa chiefs were preparing for a major attack on the Colony, something went quite wrong before it could be carried out. But it is clear that all the rest of the now united chiefs came to view Ngqika as a threat to their intentions. The written records show only that during this time Ngqika resumed his friendship with Williams to keep supplying him with lists of requests for gifts from the governor. But then the records fall silent after Williams died suddenly in August 1818, leaving a gap in the flow of information. By October 1818, the confederation fell apart. All the military preparations that had been intended for the united attack on the Colony were now expended on a well-calculated plan to put the errant king in his place once and for all. Ngqika's wavering in the direction of the British could not be tolerated if they were to be effective against their real enemy, making him their first target instead. Perhaps the intensity of the civil war can be traced to the huge resentment of one who knew better openly flaunting his disregard for custom, hereditary leadership structures, the quest to get back the lost land and the overall welfare of the people.

Battle of Amalinde

The battle fought between the forces of Ndlambe and those of Ngqika at Amalinde in October 1818 is generally remembered as the most ferocious conflict ever seen amongst the amaXhosa. 'It was the event from which the aged among them until very recently dated all the occurrences of their youth,' wrote Theal.⁷⁷ Since it was fought completely out of sight of any colonial observers, details of what happened rely solely on abundant oral traditions, primarily from Theal, Wauchope and Mqhayi. Theal, using his mainly amaNgqika sources from his years at Lovedale in the 1870s, views the fighting as the logical outcome of the longstanding feud between Ndlambe and Ngqika. Dedicated to this point of view, he attributes many events in the two years prior to it as leading to the inevitable collision. Peires, following the same logic, also weighs all events according to how much power one chief held relative to the other. For historians, the power struggle and personal animosity explain everything. Andries Stockenström appears to have taken the statement of the orator of the Great Speech at face value when he said, 'We quarrelled with Gaika about grass – no business of yours', as an explanation of the battle at Amalinde.⁷⁸ In his memoirs he staunchly maintained that the war was a strictly internal affair that had nothing to do with the British and that they should have stayed out of it.⁷⁹

African writers, however, stress that 'Ngqika was loathed for the recognition he received from the government' and that 'the great lion Gaika – whom Lord

Charles Somerset had patronized and called King . . . was now to be crushed forever'.⁸⁰ Mqhayi articulates the amaNdlambe point of view, stating that it was Ngqika's manner of dealing with the British that triggered the war: '[A]ll the chiefs reached an agreement, which was approved by the Gcaleka as well, that this young man must be punished. He has gone too far, he has sold the nation to the white people.'⁸¹ Dyani Tshatshu concurred in 1836: 'Gaika brought these troubles on himself for having joined the English government.'⁸² The co-operative nature of traditional leadership evident during better times between Ndlambe and Ngqika could not survive the poisoned wedge. The intrusion of a foreign power, which skilfully exploited all of Ngqika's greatest weaknesses, destroyed the balance. His independent tendencies became too costly to the nation and he had to be brought into line once again.

The detailed descriptions of the conduct of this war provide good insight into the conduct of formal warfare in those days. This becomes significant when trying to understand the course of the battle at Grahamstown roughly six months later. Unlike the endless cattle thieving and night-time attacks on farms, both were set battles that pitched the largest possible gathered armies against an enemy. These required carefully planned strategies, the gathering and build up of necessary supplies and equipment, and a high degree of ritual in the way the soldiers dressed and behaved. From all accounts, it appears that both sides anticipated the coming conflict and prepared for it accordingly. The signal to prepare for such a formal war was an act of provocation. Prior to the commencement of fighting, some of Ngqika's people 'stole by force some of the plumes of the crane feathers which are worn by the warriors' from King Hintsa. This signalled the fact that the approaching war was not simply against Ndlambe, but also the senior house of amaXhosa. George Thompson also claims that Ngqika had kidnapped the wife of one of Ndlambe's councillors and refused to release her.⁸³

In the opposing camp, Makhanda is credited with ordering a decoy to lure Ngqika into battle at the place of his own choosing: 'For this purpose a large party was sent out by night to seize the cattle belonging to one of his subordinate chieftains, and then to fall back to the eastward.' The chosen spot is known by the amaXhosa as Amalinde, which means the place of giant earthworms the size of snakes. These unusual worms create mounds nearly a metre high, giving the ground a peculiar bubble-like look. When Ngqika called a war council, the views of his advisers were divided. Mankoyi, a famous and distinguished warrior, 'was urgent for revenge' and overcame the caution of others. A leading voice against marching to war came

from Ntsikana, who was too ill to attend the council but sent a message regarding a vision he had seen: 'Listen, son of Umlawu, to the words of the servant of God, and do not cross the Keiskamma. I see the Gaikas scattered on the mountains, I see their heads devoured by ants. The enemy is watching there, and defeat awaits your plumed ones.'⁸⁴ Ntsikana was viewed suspiciously as too pro-Ndlambe, so the hawks prevailed and preparations went ahead, including calling up all able-bodied men and stripping the recently abandoned mission station of all its iron in order to make spearheads.⁸⁵ Wauchope gives extensive detail on instructions and comments made by King Ngqika to individual warriors on the eve of the battle. As one who lived in the area at the turn of the twentieth century, he also offers detailed descriptions of troop movements down particular hills and valleys in the Debe area.⁸⁶ Theal's description of the battle echoes much of this detail:

[T]he warriors set out from the Tyumie before sunrise of a winter morning, and marched eastward until they reached the pass named Debe Nek, under the peak called Intaba-ka-Ndoda. Then in the plain below, they saw the AmaNdlambe arrayed for battle, covering the ground in patches like strips of red carpet . . . Gaika's warriors thought they saw the whole force of their enemies, and when Mankoyi shouted exultingly, "Huku, to-day we have them!" it was with difficulty that the more prudent men restrained an impetuous rush. In reality, much of the larger portion of Ndlambe's army was concealed, and a strong division of Galekas, as a reserve, was posted five or six kilometres farther eastward, close to the Green River.⁸⁷

The Ndlambe warriors first seen and attacked by Ngqika's forces were those of junior rank, referred to as round heads. As they fled down the hill feigning defeat, the more senior warriors, often referred to as the plumed ones for the long feathers of a blue crane they wore on the sides of their heads, leapt into action, taking the amaNgqika by surprise.⁸⁸ Prince Maqoma, Ngqika's oldest son, destined to become an implacable adversary of the British over the next half century, was just out of his period of initiation and distinguished himself in this battle: 'He led his braves right into the centre of the field and charged again and again at the thickest mass of the foe.'⁸⁹ He barely escaped being made a prisoner after severe injury.

Both Ndlambe and his son, Mdushane, are given credit for planning their side of the battle, with 'Makana also lending a hand', although he was not present but stationed nearby.⁹⁰ As the soldiers set off for battle, Chief Ndlambe exhorted them, saying

There he is, children of Phalo, children of Tshiwo of Ngconde! In all this I have not done anything wrong, I did not wrong anyone. I just raised a child and now he is killing me. Go! I am sending you. I am saying eliminate that trouble, I do not know it, and you also do not know it. You must fight with all your strength, do not get weary!⁹¹

Intense fighting went on from roughly midday until darkness set in. By that time, Ngqika's forces were routed, but mercilessly chased by the victors. As Thompson described it:

[T]hey came up with a number of fugitives, and made a selection of those who had the greatest riches, that is, who had the most beads and ornaments; these were slain, while others, from their apparent poverty, were suffered to escape. The number killed were considerable; and Gaika lost the whole of his old councillors with the exception of one.⁹²

The amaNdlambe made good use of the guns and horses they had been acquiring from their colonial neighbours 'which annoyed Gaika's followers'.⁹³ They used the horses effectively to run down fleeing adversaries. After the amaNgqika retreated, 'the victors returned to the scene of carnage and kindled great fires, by the light of which they sought their wounded enemies and put them to death with brutal ferocity'.⁹⁴ In the course of the fighting, Ndlambe's brother Mnyaluza, who lived near the Kat River, defected from Ngqika's side and joined his brother's victorious forces, helping himself to large quantities of plundered cattle to the east of the area of fighting. Ndlambe's people burned the kraals and looted the corn pits of their enemies, but could not get their hands on their cattle, which were driven away.⁹⁵ According to Wauchope, 'The Ndlambes pursued their enemies from there to the Tambo beyond Bedford – a distance of about 85 miles.'⁹⁶ Ngqika and large numbers of his followers first settled at the headwaters of the Koonap River.⁹⁷ According to Theal, once the battle was concluded the Ndlambe soldiers made no effort to follow up or further punish their vanquished.⁹⁸

Ngqika wasted no time sending Hendrick Ngcuka, his interpreter, to Grahamstown to inform the British of what had happened. He reported that 'in numerous families there was not one male member left alive, and that no such wailing as that of the women had ever before been heard in the Kaffir country'.⁹⁹ He also claimed that the conflict had been so bitter that the Ndlambe warriors threw babies into their large fires and speared the women, but this has been taken

by all as an exaggeration. The Cape Town press also reported that Prince Maqoma had been killed, which was clearly not true.¹⁰⁰ Ngqika appealed to the British to assist him, offering them the fertile land in the Kat River valley area in return.¹⁰¹ Even Ntsikana felt this was going too far, seeing it as tantamount to giving away the country to the British.¹⁰²

Brereton raid

No historians or eyewitness disputes the fact that the overly zealous response of the British in conducting a hugely punitive raid against Ndlambe's people was the event that ultimately triggered the attack on Grahamstown. Although tensions were high on the frontier, the commanding officer must shoulder the blame for triggering the war that everyone else had been trying so hard to avoid. Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Brereton had arrived barely three months before, so had little understanding of frontier dynamics. His service on the eastern frontier was marked by a number of irregularities starting even before he arrived. As he travelled eastwards from Cape Town, he learned of the sudden and tragic death of his wife.¹⁰³ Once he arrived in Grahamstown, he made excessive demands on the local administrators to find him suitable furniture so that he could live comfortably.¹⁰⁴ Many of his routine military tasks were bungled. He commandeered wagons without paying for them and left a string of bills wherever he travelled.¹⁰⁵ In Grahamstown, he allowed an unlicensed trader in liquor to operate, leading to the threat of a lawsuit from the man who held the official licence. Writing to a friend, he indicated his utter loathing for Grahamstown and everything he saw in his new assignment, referring to himself as 'poor unfortunate me' saying, 'it will be impossible for me to remain in this country, unless to be the most miserable of men'. His tour of duty on the frontier lasted only six months before he was recalled to Cape Town. His flawed military career ended in 1832 when he committed suicide over a court martial for mishandling riots in Bristol.¹⁰⁶ Given this profile, it appears possible that he deliberately provoked war as a means of keeping army activities alive. His tour of duty to the eastern frontier came at a time when many officers were being put on half pay, enticing some of them to take up posts in the civil service.

When Brereton set out for Grahamstown, he received lengthy and detailed instructions from his commanding officer in Cape Town, Major Rogers. For the most part, Rogers repeated the basic terms of the Kat River meeting, tactfully describing it as an interview to which the chiefs had assented. He advised that operation of the spoor law should only involve taking cattle from Xhosa kraals

equal in number to those that were missing from colonists. The role of the army was 'for observation, not aggression' as the whole point of colonial policy was to 'render the presence of a military force on the border unnecessary'. This was to be achieved gradually by introducing new settlers to the area, which made it important to remove the dangers. Any action taken against border chiefs should be 'within moderate bounds and not to destroy the fields or kraals of the offenders'.¹⁰⁷ The only change since Kat River was that communications with Ndlambe's people via the Upper Kaffir Drift post should be allowed, suggesting that experience had shown that it was pointless to deal only with King Ngqika. Absolutely no form of military punishment of chiefs was to be undertaken without direct permission from the governor.

Of all these instructions, it was only the final point that Brereton adhered to. In every other respect he seriously stretched or blatantly disregarded the spirit of his orders. Hearing rumours that most of the Xhosa chiefs were preparing to unite together to attack Ngqika, Brereton hastily wrote to Cape Town on 22 October 1818 for the necessary permission to take strong punitive action.¹⁰⁸ On receiving his letter on 30 October, Major Rogers immediately consulted the governor, who granted permission to act. Ndlambe's offences included his constant protection of people who plundered the Colony, his refusal to comply with the spoor law and the murder of two privates attributed to his people. The instructions once again gave orders to seize Ndlambe in person.

Rogers proposed caution, however, first to ascertain as realistically as possible the true nature of the situation among the chiefs; and second, not to leave any part of the Colony unprotected. Major Fraser was instructed first to meet Ngqika to assess matters, given that evidence was mounting that the interpreter Ngcuka could not always be relied on to give honest reports. The message to Ngqika, however, also included a warning that if he did not comply fully with all British terms, 'His Excellency will forthwith direct an invasion of the Caffer Territories for the punishment of such Chiefs as shall have been found to have transgressed'.¹⁰⁹ Surprisingly, no other historian has noted that the British were quite prepared to undertake a major invasion of Xhosa lands prior to the battle of Amalinde, the Brereton raid, the massive Xhosa attacks on the Zuurveld and the battle at Grahamstown. All the evidence points to the probability that Brereton's raid, which far exceeded his mandate, was a deliberate attempt on the part of the forces on the frontier to precipitate war as an excuse to move more aggressively into Xhosa land.

When Brereton heard the first reports of the battle at Amalinde on 4 November, he immediately sent out orders calling up the boer forces, requesting 230 men from Uitenhage and 350 from Graaff-Reinet. This pre-empted his receiving authorisation to do so from Cape Town by five days, confirming that he acted beyond his orders. His actions rubbed the two magistrates up the wrong way. Both expressed grave concern that sending so many men on commando would leave their areas open to any rearguard attacks on the Colony and they questioned the necessity of the call-up. Though reluctant, Cuyler complied, but Stockenström agreed to send only 150 men from Graaff-Reinet.

Brereton finally received his go-ahead from Cape Town on 9 November, leading to a new round of letters urging the greatest speed in gathering the commando, as well as confirming his right to issue such orders. In this round, he also explained the reasons for the first time: 'This force is to be employed against the Kaffer Chiefs Hynsa, Slambie and such other chiefs with their people as have joined in a body against Gika – much hurried.'¹¹⁰ Men coming for the commando were asked to bring six to eight days' provisions with them. The mission stations of Theopolis, Bethelsdorp and Witte River were all asked either to send a few men or have them ready for whatever might be asked. Brittanye Jantjies was called up from Bethelsdorp to serve as interpreter on the commando.¹¹¹ In order to appease Stockenström, Brereton ordered some of the Graaff-Reinet men to report to the various military posts scattered throughout their district as a form of backup. But he fumed in a letter to Stockenström that he 'would be unable to carry out his orders unless all the men are sent'.¹¹²

Once Major Fraser had consulted Ngqika, the invading force marched out of Grahamstown on 1 December, heading northward in his direction. Three days after crossing the Fish River at De Bruyn's Drift, Brereton and his men met up with Ngqika, who headed a large contingent of his own men. From there, they all marched eastward into the country of the Kat, Tyumie and Keiskamma Rivers. After pillaging Poonah's Kraal of six thousand head of cattle, the force encountered Ndlambe's people near the Keiskamma River where the main action took place on 7 December. The people were driven from their villages, which were burned, while Ndlambe's soldiers sought cover in the thick forests. To their surprise, Brereton actually shot the two cannon he had brought directly into the forest, generating a stampede of the cattle that were also hidden there. Peires notes that descriptions of the Brereton raid suggest that the British never encountered a Xhosa army, but rather 'the whole tribe'.¹¹³ Brereton's men proceeded then to round up more cattle until they had

collected twenty-three thousand. Ndlambe's people suffered 'great loss of life' as Ngqika's men sought retribution for their recent defeat. As Theal put it, 'The British Commander found it impossible to restrain the savage passions of the Ngqikas, who were mad with excitement and joy at being able to take revenge upon their enemies, and were unwilling to show any mercy.'¹¹⁴

The task of managing such large numbers of cattle in open country was given to Ngqika's soldiers, partly as a way of disarming them as they were asked to relinquish their spears first.¹¹⁵ The weapons were kept safely in a wagon and were only returned once the campaign ended.¹¹⁶ Brereton then returned to Grahamstown on 15 December after two weeks in the field, having lost only one man. On taking leave from Brereton, Ngqika 'expressed himself indebted to His Excellency, the Governor, for his life, for the land he holds, and for the property which has been restored to him (about 11,000 head of cattle) and at parting with Lieut. Col. Brereton, he shed tears'.¹¹⁷ For the time being, Ngqika had firmly cast his lot with the British. Wauchope claims: 'From that day Gaika spoke of the whites as *Amabandla, akulo 'nibe* – (the people of Nonibe).'¹¹⁸ This refers to Nonibe, the wife of Mdushane, who was a descendant of a shipwrecked European girl.

The colonial press in Cape Town was quick to claim that at long last matters on the frontier had been resolved, making it safe for settlers:

It is to be expected that this blow will put a final stop to the attempts to renew the former aggressions on the Colony, and that henceforward, by means of the friendly Chief who is in our interest, an intercourse mutually advantageous, may be established with the Tribes under his influence . . . but holding out the strongest motives to further Settlers to establish themselves in a country unrivalled for fertility and beauty.¹¹⁹

For the Xhosa people and Makhandla in particular, this invasion marked the point of no return in their handling of the colonists. Roughly two weeks after the Brereton raid, Ngqika was driven by Xhosa forces deep into the Kakaberg Mountains, where he eventually took refuge at the Roodewaal military post within the Colony. From there they turned with vengeance to clearing the Zuurveld once and for all. As the orator of the Great Speech put it:

You sent a commando – you took our last cow – you left only a few calves – which died for want along with our children. You gave half the spoil to Gaika; half you kept yourselves. Without milk, our corn destroyed, – we

saw our wives and children perish – we saw that we must ourselves perish; – we followed therefore, on the spoor of our cattle into the colony. We found you weak: we destroyed your soldiers. We saw that we were strong; we attacked your headquarters – and if we had succeeded, our right was good; for you began the war.¹²⁰

If there had ever been any doubt, hesitation or delay about attacking the Colony, the Brereton raid resolved everything for the confederated chiefs. It not only confirmed the British as a dangerously powerful and menacing military threat, it also reduced a large sector of the population to starvation and misery. It was more than ten times more damaging than the Fraser commando had been ten months earlier. Indeed, the Brereton raid marked a clear declaration of war to which the amaXhosa responded with unprecedented determination.

Notes

1. CA CO 4838: Lord Charles Somerset Letter Book from 19 June 1815 to 17 October 1816: letter from Henry Alexander, Colonial Secretary, 16 December 1815.
2. Ibid., 7 June 1816.
3. CA 1/UIT/15/3: letters from Cuyler to Fraser, 10 June 1816, 28 June 1816 and 3 July 1816; from Cuyler to the Colonial Secretary, 1 July 1816 and 2 July 1816.
4. CA CO 4838.
5. CA 1/UIT/15/3: 3 August 1816.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., 28 June 1816 and 1 July 1816.
8. Ibid., 2 July 1816, Tuesday morning at 6 o'clock.
9. CA CO 4838.
10. CA 1/UIT/15/3: letter from Cuyler to Fraser, 21 October 1816.
11. La Trobe, *Journal*, pp. 221, 223, 224, 225.
12. CA CO 4838: 22 August 1816.
13. G.M. Theal, *Records of the Cape Colony*, Vol. 11, 1815–1818, Vol. 12, 1818–1820, Vol. 13, 1820–1821 (London: Printed by William Clowes for the Government of the Cape Colony, 1897–1905); Vol. 11: letter from Lord Charles Somerset to Earl Bathurst, 23 January 1817, p. 253.
14. Theal, *History*, p. 323.
15. G.M. Theal, *Compendium of South African History and Geography* (Lovedale: Lovedale Institution, 1877), p. 184.
16. Theal, *Records*, Vol. 11: letter from Lord Charles Somerset to Earl Bathurst, 24 April 1817, report of meeting at Kat River, pp. 252, 305.

17. CA CO 4838: letter from J. Cuyler to Col. J. Graham in Simon's Town, 2 May 1816.
18. Theal, *Records*, Vol. 11: letter from Lord Charles Somerset to Earl Bathurst, 24 April 1817, pp. 303, 306.
19. Ibid., p.306.
20. CA 1/UIT/15/3: letter from Cuyler to Williams at Kat River, 24 March 1817.
21. Holt, *Joseph Williams*, p. 60.
22. Mqhayi, 'Battle', p. 93.
23. Holt, *Joseph Williams*, pp. 58–9.
24. Mqhayi, 'Battle'.
25. Holt, *Joseph Williams*, p. 59. Williams believed this was a tactic designed to place the blame on him if anything went wrong.
26. Ibid., p. 60.
27. Theal, *Records*, Vol. 11: letter from Lord Charles Somerset to Earl Bathurst, 24 April 1817, enclosure B, Minutes relative to a communication with and of a conference between His Excellency Lord Charles Somerset and the Caffer Chief Gaika at the Kat River on 2 April 1817, written by C. Bird, p. 310.
28. Ibid.
29. *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser* 19 April 1817.
30. Mqhayi, 'Battle', p. 193.
31. Theal, *Records*, Vol. 11: report on Kat River meeting, p. 311. The chiefs included Ndlambe, Botoman, Nqeno, Mnyaluza, Tshatshu and Kobe Chungwa according to Mqhayi.
32. *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser* 19 April 1817.
33. Theal, *Records*, Vol. 11: report on Kat River meeting, p. 312. The governor spoke in English, which was then translated into Dutch by Buttanje, a Gonaqua Khoi often used by the missionaries for interpretation, who then interpreted to Ngqika. On the colonial side, two isiXhosa-speaking colonists, Christian Vogel and Christian Niemand, checked for accuracy, while on Ngqika's side Hendrick Ngcuka monitored what was said.
34. *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser* 19 April 1817; Holt, *Joseph Williams*, p. 61.
35. CL Great Britain, *Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines*, Dyani Tshatshu evidence, p. 569.
36. Theal, *Records*, Vol. 11: report on Kat River meeting, p. 313.
37. Justus, *Wrongs*, p. 71.
38. Theal, *Records*, Vol. 11: report on Kat River meeting, p. 315.
39. Holt, *Joseph Williams*, p. 63.
40. Theal, *Records*, Vol. 11: report on Kat River meeting, p. 313.
41. Ibid., pp. 307, 316, 317–18.
42. Ibid., pp. 320.
43. Theal, *Records*, Vol. 11: letter to the Landdrost, Deputy Landdrost and the Heemraden of the District of Uitenhage from Lord Charles Somerset at Bruintjes Hoogte, 29 March 1817, p. 296.
44. Ibid.
45. Theal, *Records*, Vol. 11: report on Kat River meeting, pp. 305, 308.
46. CA CO 4839: Lord Charles Somerset Letter Book from 18 October 1816 to 31 December 1817: letter to Cuyler dated 16 April 1817 agrees to a grant of land to him at Cuyler's

- request of four thousand morgen on the Swartkops River near the sea 'at the peppercorn rent of 50 Rx per annum' in appreciation for his services 'at a peculiarly eventful period'.
47. CA CO 4838: 7 June 1816 refers to sending a horse and bridle plus a cask of brandy to be 'forwarded by the first vessel going to Algoa Bay'. See also Holt, *Joseph Williams*, p. 68.
 48. Holt, *Joseph Williams*, pp. 68, 69.
 49. Theal, *Records*, Vol. 11: letter from Lord Charles Somerset to Earl Bathurst, 23 June 1817, pp. 357–8.
 50. CL Great Britain, *Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines*, Dyani Tshatshu evidence, p. 569.
 51. J.B. Peires, *Causes and Development of the Frontier War of 1818–19* (B.A. Honours thesis, University of Cape Town, 1971), p. 70.
 52. CA 1/UIT/15/4: Letters Despatched from the District of Uitenhage, July 1817 to February 1819: 29 September 1817.
 53. Peires, *Causes*, p. 75.
 54. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
 55. CA CO 2613: Letters received from Uitenhage, 1818: letter from Major Fraser to G. Bird, Colonial Secretary, 31 July 1818.
 56. *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser* 14 February 1818; Peires, *Causes*, p. 81.
 57. CA CO 4839: letter from Somerset to Cuyler, 4 December 1817 in response to letters from him of 7 and 10 November.
 58. Peires, *Causes*, p. 76.
 59. CA CO 4839: 6 November 1817.
 60. CL Great Britain, *Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines*, Dyani Tshatshu evidence, p. 569.
 61. CA 1/GR/9/71: Letters from Commanding Officer Frontier, 1817–20: letter from Fraser, 21 January 1818.
 62. CA CO 2613: 31 January 1818.
 63. CA CO 90: Letters Received: Sundry Committees, Loan Bank, Orphan Chamber, Printing and Post Offices and Consistories, 1818: letter from J. Williams, Kat River, Caffreland to the Governor, 1 May 1818.
 64. CA CO 2613: full report on commando from Fraser, 31 July 1818.
 65. After much debate among the frontier authorities, Chief Krata had 122 head of cattle returned to him, but only after there was a surplus from the Brereton raid (CA 1/UIT/15/4: letter to Fraser, 28 September 1818).
 66. Peires, *Causes*, pp. 87–9. Even Peires hesitated to take the proposition further as he remained dedicated to the idea that the root cause of problems on the frontier was the implacable hatred between Ndlambe and Ngqika.
 67. CA CO 2613: letter from Fraser to Bird.
 68. CA CO 2613: letter from Cuyler to Sommerset, 25 May 1818.
 69. Theal, *History*, pp. 328–9.
 70. CA CO 2613: letter from Cuyler to Major Fraser, 25 April 1818; and statement made by Klaas Geswind when questioned by the landdrost, 11 May 1818.
 71. CA CO 2613: letter from Fraser to Bird, 20 March 1818.
 72. Holt, *Joseph Williams*, p. 81.

73. Ibid., p. 80.
74. Ibid., p. 81.
75. CA CO 2613: letter from Fraser to Cuyler, cover letter for one from Williams 'received about a week ago', Grahamstown, 9 May 1818.
76. CA CO 2613: 25 May 1818.
77. Theal, *History*, p. 334.
78. Pringle, 'Letters', p. 75.
79. Stockenström, *Autobiography*, p. 115. The grass is best taken as a metaphor and perhaps a deliberate dodging of the issues, since the Great Speech was given as an act of surrender at the end of the war of 1819.
80. Wauchope, *Selected Writings*, pp. 101 and 57 respectively. Wauchope disagrees with Falati's view that the war should be seen as punishment of Ngqika for the Thuthula affair. He feels, however, that the outrage over Ngqika's incest contributed to the decision to go to war (p. 60).
81. Mqhayi, 'Battle', p. 194.
82. CL Great Britain, *Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines*, Dyani Tshatshu evidence, p. 570. As a chief whose family lived under Ndlambe in the Zuurveld, his voice can also be taken as reflecting the amaNdlambe view.
83. Thompson, *Travels*, p. 197.
84. Theal, *History*, pp. 331, 333.
85. Mqhayi, 'Battle', p. 194.
86. Wauchope, *Selected Writings*, pp. 57–60.
87. Theal, *History*, p. 333.
88. Ibid. Veterans were distinguished by blue crane feathers on their heads and supposed to attack only those of similar rank; younger men formed the second class, called round heads. When battle started, the plumed ones were supposed simply to shield themselves from the round heads and wait until they encountered other plumed ones before using their spears, 'but in the heat of battle all such distinctions were forgotten'.
89. Theal, *Compendium*, p. 187; see also Mqhayi, 'Battle', p. 194.
90. Thompson, *Travels*, p. 197. Wauchope claims that a man named Cambele went to Makhanda to ask him to invoke the power of the spirits (*Selected Writings*, p. 65).
91. Mqhayi, 'Battle', p. 195.
92. Ibid.
93. Ibid.
94. Theal, *Compendium*, p. 188.
95. Theal, *History*, p. 334.
96. Wauchope, *Selected Writings*, p. 60.
97. Bokwe, *Ntsikana*, p. 34. The fugitives included people from Williams' mission station who continued their Christian worship while at the Koonap.
98. Theal, *Compendium*, p. 188.
99. Theal, *History*, p. 334.
100. CA 1/GR/9/71: letter from Fraser to Cuyler, 4 November 1818; *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser* 2 January 1819.
101. Pawuli interview, 10 March 2002.

102. CL MS 9063: Falati, p. 7.
103. CA CO 4840: Letters Despatched, 1818: Lord Charles Somerset Letter Book 2 January–30 November 1818: 18 September 1818.
104. CA 1/UIT/15/4: letter from Cuyler to Fraser, 11 January 1819, indicating that he had found a mattress and ‘plated flat candlesticks’.
105. Ibid: letter to Colonial Secretary, 3 December 1818, no. 426. Wagons he brought from Cape Town had to be dismantled and placed aboard a ship to return them.
106. P.B. Boyden, *The British Army in the Cape Colony: Soldiers’ Letters and Diaries, 1806–1858* (London: Society for Army Historical Research, 2001): letters from Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Brereton to Lieutenant Colonel William Warre, 9 October 1818 and 17 October 1818, pp. 43, 44–5.
107. Theal, *Records*, Vol. 12: letter from Major Rogers to Lieutenant Colonel Brereton, 4 September 1818, pp. 38, 41, 44.
108. CA 1/GR/9/71: letter from Rogers to Brereton, 1 November 1818.
109. Ibid.
110. CA 1/GR/9/71: letter from Fraser to Stockenström, Grahamstown 10 November 1818 at 9 o’clock in the evening.
111. Ibid., 14 November 1818.
112. Ibid., 11 November 1818.
113. Peires, *Causes*, p. 112.
114. Theal, *Compendium*, p. 188.
115. Theal claims the invading force consisted of four to five thousand men, both burghers and army regulars. However, the two magistrates only mustered 600 burghers and the figures given for the army on the frontier a few months later showed 333 men (*Records*, Vol. 12, p. 193).
116. Wauchope, *Selected Writings*, p. 60: ‘to prevent the cruelty with which they treated their prisoners’ all their assegais were put into a military wagon and then handed back to them at Breakfast Vlei, hence the name *Icibilentonga* (Vlei of the Weapons).
117. *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser* 2 January 1819.
118. Wauchope, *Selected Writings*, p. 60.
119. Ibid.
120. Pringle, ‘Letters’, p. 75.

Imfazwe ka Makhanda – the war of Makhanda

Xhosa guerrilla tactics

The battle at Grahamstown on 22 April 1819 was momentous, but the entire war extended several months both before and after. From the time of the Brereton raid in late 1818, everything changed as both amaXhosa and British engaged in a sharp escalation of conflict that would ultimately determine who controlled the frontier. The combined Xhosa chiefs no longer entertained any possibility of co-existing with the British. Brereton had inflicted damage on a scale that the amaXhosa had never experienced before. If the Fraser commando at the beginning of 1818 had provided a reason for a combined Xhosa attack on the Colony, then the Brereton raid, seizing ten times as many cattle, sealed the Xhosa resolve. Both John Soga and Thomas Pringle are right to say that this event transformed the prophet Makhanda into the warrior. Both say that after this event he poured his entire heart and soul into seeking revenge against the British. George Theal learned from his oral sources that

Makana was the leading actor in this movement. His messengers were everywhere in Kaffirland, calling upon all true Xhosas to take part in the strife against the Europeans and the Gaikas, in thrilling language promising victory to those who would do their duty, and denouncing the wrath of the spirits against those who would hold back.¹

He would be satisfied with nothing less than driving the Europeans out of the Zuurveld, to be gone forever from the region. Andries Stockenström, the magistrate at Graaff-Reinet, claimed that rumours that ‘the enemy was preparing for one grand invasion, which was to “drive the white man into the sea”’ became well known in his district, spreading general alarm.² As Theal observed, ‘Makana, who up to that time had exerted himself to cultivate friendly relations with the white man, now spoke of nothing but war.’³

Observers uniformly blamed the blundering approach of the Brereton raid for the massive warfare that followed. Stockenström declared that

We did Gaika no good, and all Kaffirland, except the immediate adherents of that chief, joined in one desperate combination against the Colony; one general rush was made into the Zuurveld . . . Kaffirland, which we had almost completely denuded of cattle, thus causing starvation and misery, soon was covered once more with our, as well as Kaffir, flocks.⁴

Writing nearly a century after the events, George Cory condemned the Brereton raid as

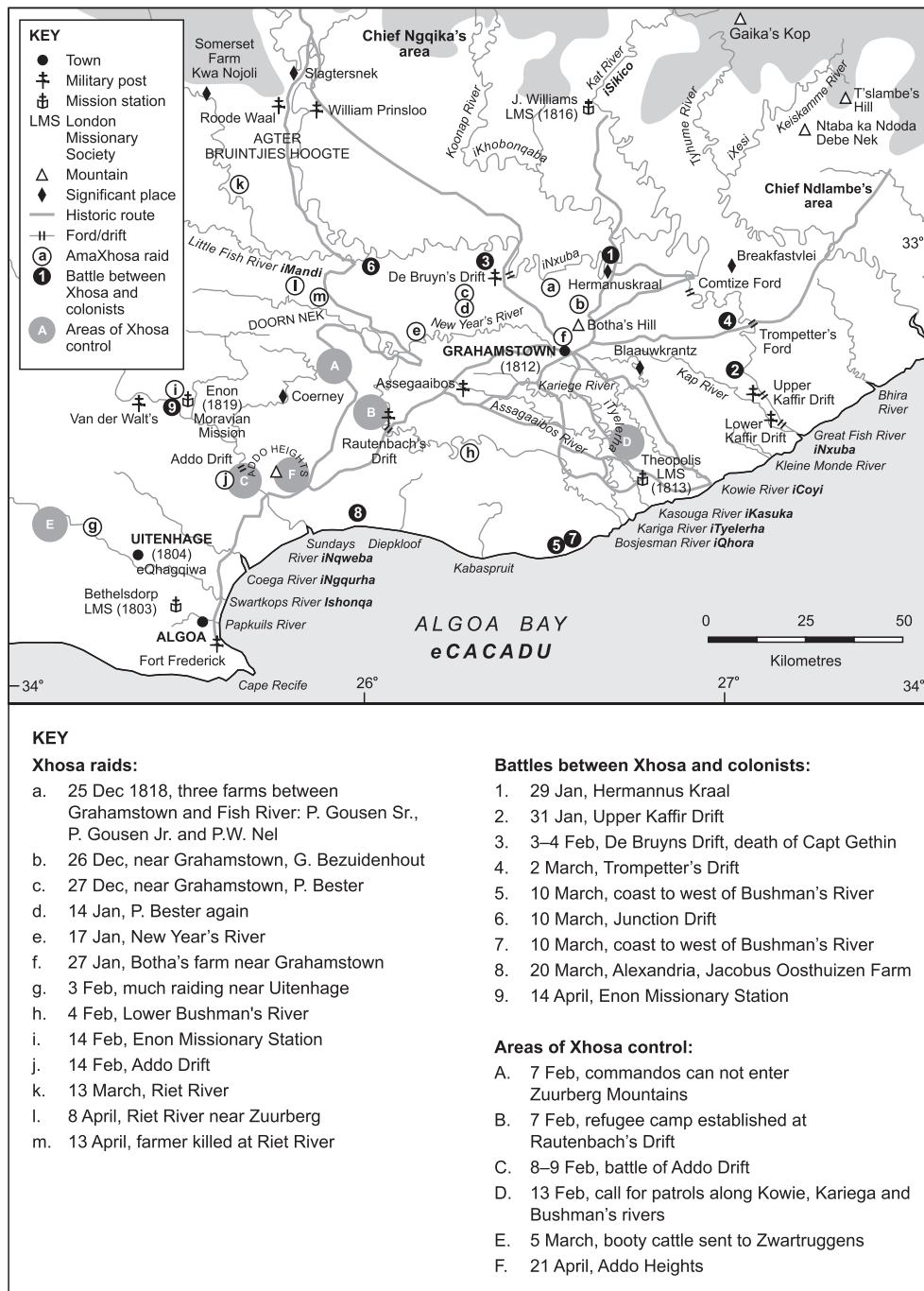
worse than useless, for it was the cause of greater misfortune to the Colony . . . The enormous number of cattle taken rendered it absolutely certain that these people, driven to choose between starvation and retaliation, would very soon invade the Colony and with increasing violence. The bees had been deprived of their honey and angered.⁵

Travelling through the area seven years after the event, George Thompson showed sympathy with the amaXhosa when he observed:

In these attacks, the Caffers showed a determined resolution to recover their cattle; yet although they killed many soldiers and colonists, they did not evince that blood-thirsty disposition that is common to most barbarians. When they could get away the cattle without being opposed, they made no attempt on the lives of the inhabitants.⁶

Indeed, between January and April 1819, the Xhosa forces ‘swept over the entire Zuurveld as far west as Algoa Bay clearing it of the few farmers it contained’.⁷ This final attempt by the amaXhosa to clear the Zuurveld succeeded on a scale seldom acknowledged by historians. Of the pro-colonial historians, only Cory treats the lead-up to the attack on Grahamstown as significant enough to warrant detailed attention. However, he sees the events only in terms of what the British did or did not do, failing to give credit to Makhanda and the Xhosa leadership for being able to plan and execute an offensive on such a huge scale. He blames Brereton for triggering Xhosa anger, the flooding of the Zuurveld by the amaXhosa on the British lack of mounted cavalry, and the strategy of the attack on Grahamstown on British army deserters known to be collaborating with Makhanda.

THE RETURN OF MAKHANDA



Xhosa invasions of the Zuurveld, January–April 1819.

The evidence confirms that Makhanda's strategy to achieve the final liberation of the Zuurveld clearly took two phases. The first phase was guerrilla warfare. The tactics used were the same as those of the previous forty years. Small groups of amaXhosa used the cover of the bush, their knowledge of the terrain and their ability to live off the land to travel deep into Zuurveld territory. As one contemporary put it, 'Their marauding parties seldom consist of more than six or eight men, and often not more than two or three; therefore, a patrol of ten or more troops sent out in search of two or three Caffers, are seldom successful in overtaking them'.⁸ They hid in forests until after dark, then attacked isolated farmhouses at night. According to eyewitnesses, they came with firebrands in hand, intending to set fire to dwellings, which were almost entirely made of reeds or had thatched roofs. As a form of protection, they drove cattle in between themselves and the house.⁹ The aim was to drive out the occupants from the burning houses, killing them as they tried to flee. Although it is often said that they did not kill women and children, there are a few accounts that contradict this. In some instances, a handful of armed men, shooting from inside such houses under siege, succeeded in driving away their attackers, holding them off by their gunfire. The military posts established to defend the area often consisted of huts made of mud and grass, with only a special mud wall with holes for guns as added protection.¹⁰

Besides harassing, killing and frightening off boers this way, the Xhosa soldiers also used such raids to collect materials for their second phase, which was formal warfare involving the full army, to be launched against British military headquarters at Grahamstown. Knowing that armed farmers provided the British with a deadly support system, it was important to reduce their numbers as much as possible before employing their full military might. They particularly targeted horses, guns, ammunition and iron. Just as Joseph Williams' mission station had been stripped of its metal hinges and wagon parts in May 1818, a raid on Major Fraser's farm at the Kariega River in February 1819 saw his small grinding mill stripped of all its metal parts.¹¹ This was all clearly designed to assist in making spearheads for the great battle to come. It is interesting to note that this practice of plundering everything metal to make spears was something that Ndlambe himself admitted, in his old age, he could not persuade his people against.¹² Similarly, the Xhosa seizure and usage of horses put them on an equal footing with their European adversaries. On at least one occasion in the lead-up to Grahamstown, the British had to retreat when they found themselves outnumbered by mounted Xhosa warriors.¹³ The acquisition of guns and ammunition also remained a high priority

of the Xhosa guerrilla raiders. Even when colonial forces overtook raiders and regained cattle, the stolen guns and ammunition always remained in Xhosa hands.¹⁴

Key to the success of their guerrilla warfare tactics was a detailed knowledge and understanding of the country that had once been their home. In the thickest of the bush country, such as that around the Addo area, the vegetation itself offered shelter: 'The trees were low evergreen, so thick that they were impenetrable, except at about three places, two of which appear made by the wild beasts; the other was a kind of house, cut out probably by the Caffres. This green house afforded very comfortable shelter during the night from the wind, which blew cold.'¹⁵

Trees and bushes were also used to form blockades against mounted soldiers and wagons. In one instance, a 'huge beam' was placed across a narrow passage 'at each end fastened with thongs to the trees' to prevent enemy movement.¹⁶ Such were the tactics used effectively to overpower the European presence in the length and breadth of the Zuurveld.

The British panic

It is notable that most historians give the period of intensive guerrilla warfare that preceded the battle at Grahamstown very superficial attention. Both Theal and Peires summarise the events in one sentence. However, a closer look at what happened makes it clear that the British were forced to use an unprecedented level of force to retain their position. From the end of December 1818 until the attack on Grahamstown, they fought a losing and defensive battle simply to maintain a foothold in the Zuurveld.

Boers living near the Fish River boundary were the first to learn that a new war had started. Strategically choosing Christmas Day, perhaps to show contempt for the hypocrisy of colonial Christians, the amaXhosa attacked three different farms simultaneously. They took over a hundred head of cattle from the farms of P. Gousen Senior, P. Gousen Junior and P.W. Nel. G. Bezuidenout suffered from a raid the next day and Paul Bester a few days later. When Bester was ultimately deprived of all his cattle in a second raid on 14 January, he fled, abandoning his farm.¹⁷

During January 1819 the attacks escalated, becoming more numerous and more violent. On 11 January, two hundred head of cattle were stolen from different places; on 17 January, one hundred and fifty cattle were taken from New Year's River; and on 29 January over one hundred head of cattle and twenty-three horses were seized.¹⁸ In all these cases, Khoi herders were murdered, including even a

young girl herding sheep. Efforts by the army to trace and recover stolen cattle only led to further disaster. Four privates of the Royal African Corps lost their lives on 27 January and another five soldiers died on 29 January after encountering ‘a large body of Kaffirs’ near Hermanus Kraal, just 37 kilometres north of Grahamstown.¹⁹ They had been pursuing 133 head of cattle taken from the farm of Phillip Botha, at Botha’s Hill just outside the town. Military headquarters then reeled under the shocking news that an officer, Ensign Edward Hunt, had been killed along with one private as he pursued Xhosa soldiers in the thick Fish River Bush near his post at Upper Kaffir’s Drift. The British soldiers were suddenly surrounded and unable to defend themselves: ‘Hunt’s body was found the next day, naked and frightfully mutilated.’²⁰ Three men, though wounded, survived to tell the story. Such actions precipitated the hasty flight of Zuurveld boers. As Cory put it:

During the month of January, 1819, the district of Albany was almost completely in the possession of the Kaffirs as it was before the expulsion in 1812 . . . The available military forces were kept incessantly on patrol both day and night, but so daring were the Kaffirs that any such attempt to keep them in check was either ignored or condemned by determined attack.²¹

By the beginning of February, deep panic began to set in. Colonel Cuyler, the magistrate at Uitenhage, wrote frantically to his superiors in Cape Town, asking what was to be done with the cattle that had been taken during the Brereton raid. Clearly, they were serving as a target for the raiding Xhosa forces and required too many men to guard. During this time, the British kept moving their booty further and further westward, trying to keep it out of reach of the invading forces. During February, intense raiding commenced in Cuyler’s area of jurisdiction, demanding his full attention. Since this area is far to the west of Grahamstown and Ndlambe’s territory, which lay due east, it is likely that the incursions into this area came from the northern boundary of the Colony. The chiefs known to occupy the land just beyond the De Bruyn’s Drift crossing of the Fish River, Nqeno, Botoman and Funa, had all been considered adherents of Ngqika.²² But the intensity of raiding originating from their areas confirms that they were fully party to Makhanda’s invasion plans.

Letters began to fly between Brereton and Fraser at headquarters in Grahamstown and the two magistrates, Stockenström in Graaff-Reinet and Cuyler in Uitenhage. Each one sought assistance and support from the others. ‘The

Depredations of the Kaffers has this last month exceeded anything we have experienced in Uitenhage Since Col. Graham is Commander,' wrote Cuyler to Fraser at the beginning of February. He went on to list eleven murders, four to five hundred head of cattle stolen and thirty horses taken from the Sunday's River close to his office.²³ The next day Captain Gethin, of the 72nd Regiment, left his post at De Bruyn's Drift to investigate a report of stolen cattle and the murder of yet another herder, only to find himself and his men surrounded by Xhosa soldiers, who slaughtered them. Gethin's body was found with thirty spear wounds in it. Two other privates died in this attack and the amaXhosa made off with their horses, arms and ammunition.²⁴ The following day, eleven men of the Royal African Corps also died at the hands of the Xhosa invaders.²⁵ The day after, raiders attacked the brother of J. Meyer on the lower Bushman's River, part way between Grahamstown and Uitenhage, leaving one soldier dead and Meyer pleading desperately for help from his local field cornet, F.C. Fourie, saying, 'One can have no idea but that the whole of Kaffirland is here. For God's sake, please come to our assistance.'²⁶

When Colonel Brereton ordered Cuyler to send a commando of Uitenhage men to Grahamstown, Cuyler replied that this would be quite difficult given the extent of military activity in his own immediate neighbourhood. In fact Cuyler had not only called up the boers from his district, but had also written to Magistrate A.G. Kernee of George district, asking him to send a commando to assist:

From the daily depredations and horrible murders committed by the Caffres, I will feel obliged by your sending me with as little delay as possible Fifty mounted inhabitants from your district to enable me more effectually to clear the Colony of those Barbarians our mutual cooperation will finally put a stop to the almost daily murders – & ultimately severely punish these horrible savages.²⁷

Cuyler had also given instructions for Field Cornet Fourie to gather all the boer families from the lower Bushman's River area at Rautenbach's Drift, where they could more easily defend each other, saying,

but my dear Colonel you can not have any Idea in the way my people are stressed and harassed from the state of affairs, it now becomes necessary that many of the farmers who are exposed must leave their places and seek

protection from their united strength, where the country will afford it. Camps will be formed and men will be required to protect themselves and their own families.²⁸

Cuyler also made arrangements for the emergency defence of Uitenhage itself, should it come under attack. Every able-bodied man was asked to hold himself in readiness 'to turn out armed at a moment's warning'. The signal for such action would be the ringing of the bell and a shot fired from the steps of the jail. A regular patrol of ten men was set up to stand on the wall of the courthouse as guard starting at sunset every night, with three other men patrolling all night long.²⁹ Still anxious about his safety, Cuyler wrote again to Magistrate Kernee in George, asking him to send along any boers he could muster as soon as they had gathered, in batches of twenty to thirty if possible. Since his previous letter, one thousand head of cattle had been stolen.³⁰ Cuyler further sent Field Cornet Muller to scour the Zuurberg Mountains in response to rumours that large numbers of Xhosa soldiers were sheltering there.

By the second week of February 1819, all responsible authorities on the frontier concluded that the situation had become truly desperate. Colonel Brereton ordered Major Fraser, his second in command, to ride as fast as possible to Cape Town to deliver an urgent request for emergency assistance to the governor. However, Fraser could barely make it through from Grahamstown to Uitenhage, encountering a strong Xhosa force at Addo Drift. It took a guard of twenty men to force his way through.³¹ Fraser spent the night of 9 February with Cuyler, who took the occasion to fire off several letters of his own to the governor, detailing the pressure he was under. In a confidential letter, he acknowledged that he was in an awkward position as an officer of higher rank than Brereton, but not holding the critical position of commander of the frontier. He urged the governor to send an even higher-ranking officer as a matter of urgency to take command of the crumbling situation.³² He also requested that as many men as possible should be sent from the interior districts.

The day after Fraser departed, using horses borrowed from Grahamstown's leading businessmen, was one of Cuyler's grimmest.³³ He learned that after a rendezvous between Commandant Muller and Fraser on the Sunday's River at Addo Drift, Muller's group had been attacked that night by two hundred amaXhosa coming at him from three different sides. They remained trapped and unable to move for the entire next day, already exhausted from their efforts in the Zuurberg, where they found the amaXhosa too strong to deal with.³⁴ To add to their misery,

incessant rain caused the flooding of the Sunday's River, making it very hard to cross back towards the safety of Uitenhage. In a separate incident, a group of twelve boers sent by Cuyler to deliver gunpowder and letters to Grahamstown could not get through at Addo Drift. They had to spend the night at a farmhouse where a few families had gathered. They, too, were attacked, this time from all four sides. Their gunfire saved the lives of the families seeking shelter. Cuyler sent an additional twelve men to help evacuate the people, bringing them across the flooded river but having to leave behind all their cattle and wagons.³⁵ The men from Uitenhage were accused of abandoning an order to assist a commando from Graaff-Reinet that had been given the task of driving the cattle from the Brereton raid for safer keeping in Uitenhage. These men claimed that as they approached the Addo Drift area, they learned that the area was full of Xhosa soldiers and that the flooded river would not allow them to take the cattle across. Without the expected help from the Uitenhage men, they felt compelled to drive the cattle through the Zuurberg Mountains, hoping to find a better crossing place higher up. These exertions left the Graaff-Reinet men complaining that for their extended duties they had been 'almost reduced to nakedness'.³⁶

Cuyler's letters to Brereton in Grahamstown had not been able to get through after four days of waiting. All of these events took place 'less than a day's journey' from Uitenhage, prompting Cuyler to refuse to send any extra men on commando to Grahamstown to assist Brereton.³⁷ In his observations, Cuyler noted that sending out ill-equipped troops might in fact only assist the Xhosa 'whose object seems to be to get arms and horses'.³⁸

Upon Commandant Muller's return to Uitenhage, Cuyler received an urgent letter from Mr Schmitt, the missionary at the Moravian mission institution at Witte River about 50 kilometres north of Uitenhage. The mission station had been attacked, but the people there had managed to fight off the raiders, killing thirty of them, but losing all their three hundred cattle.³⁹ To complicate matters even further, soldiers of the Royal African Corps managed to let the only boat being used to ferry men and materials across the Sunday's River slip out of their hands. It was found a few days later downstream and eventually returned to its place of use, but not before another night attack on the military post had been sustained.⁴⁰

Though not as heavily affected by the Xhosa invasion, Stockenström also became embroiled in the events as they unfolded as his district of Graaff-Reinet provided the closest area of possible relief and back-up support. Reluctantly, he

agreed on 9 February to send a commando of one hundred men to Grahamstown as requested by Brereton. He also had reservations about leaving his home turf unprotected in such dangerous times and knew that he would run into resistance from some of those who were being called up. Rumours spread that Xhosa kraals were being established in the Tarka area, prompting Stockenström to send a commando to look into it. Ultimately it turned out to be a false alarm, generated by a few local farmers who saw it as a good means to keep their family members out of the commando forming for Grahamstown. Others, Stockenström reported, simply refused to go on small commandos into Xhosa territory, while yet others refused point blank to leave their own homes unguarded.⁴¹

By mid-February, Stockenström had formed an opinion that only a major military offensive against the amaXhosa, like the one conducted by Colonel John Graham in 1812, would bring peace to the frontier.⁴² However, he did not commit all of his thoughts to paper, choosing instead to send a trusted friend and colleague, Mr Meintjies, to speak to the governor directly. His visit coincided with that of Fraser, offering the governor a clear picture of the depths of the crisis, as well as a proposed solution.

State of emergency

Major Fraser's emergency ride to Cape Town took him six days. He arrived in the evening of 16 February and went straight to the governor with his letters from Brereton and Cuyler. Somerset did not need any convincing that his policy of diplomacy with King Ngqika was in utter shambles. He responded swiftly and decisively, informing Cuyler:

Major Fraser arrived here last night with all the melancholy details to which his letter alludes that a vessel, probably HM Ship Favourite will sail for Algoa Bay with the Light Company 38th Regiment 4 six pounders, a detachment of artillery and such ammunition and stores as are immediately necessary – that it is HE the Governor's intention that the Colonial Corp shall be all mounted for which purchase is necessary he the Landdrost should without loss of time require that the best Horses he can procure that the Vessel take up to 150 stand of arms with an adequate quantity of ammunition for arming such Hottentots and others as he may deem advisable – that gun powder & lead will also be sent, with an invoice to Capt Evatt, that he may know what to receive & store on his/the Landdrosts account.⁴³

One of his first acts was to appoint Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Willshire as the new commanding officer on the frontier. Brereton, no doubt fully aware of the debacle he had caused, had diplomatically asked for a leave in England to attend to private affairs.⁴⁴ Noël Mostert points out that Willshire's credentials as a veteran of the peninsular campaign in Europe suited him very well for operating in somewhat similar conditions on the eastern frontier.⁴⁵ Fresh supplies were shipped out to Algoa Bay within a few days and began arriving on 9 March, much to the relief of the military officers. On 2 March, the governor declared an official state of emergency in the eastern frontier. This allowed him to call up commandos from all parts of the Colony and order them to march to Grahamstown. As Cory put it, 'the whole Colony was called upon to assist in ridding Albany of the pest which was desolating it'.⁴⁶ Altogether, Somerset built a force of 3 352 men.⁴⁷ Although his instructions to Willshire upon taking up his duties were essentially the same as those given to Brereton six months earlier, Somerset and his military secretary G.J. Rogers also drew up a detailed plan for a major invasion into Xhosa territory.⁴⁸ Since this was what Stockenström had called for in his private communications, he was immediately summonsed to meet Willshire soon after his arrival in Grahamstown on 16 March.⁴⁹ They eventually met at Somerset Farm and apparently hammered out details of a three-pronged invasion.⁵⁰ Since the plan depended on commandos gathering from as far afield as Cape Town, some of the Graaff-Reinet men were relieved of their commando duties in Grahamstown to return home to protect their families until they were needed for the larger force. It would take three months for all the commandos to gather and then another month before all preparations for the invasion were made. So, by mid-March the British military officials on the frontier began their long wait for help to arrive. Few historians writing about these events ever noted that the invasion was fully planned prior to the attack on Grahamstown and not as a consequence of it. These plans included expelling all amaXhosa from the land between the Fish and Keiskamma Rivers, to create a buffer zone between the amaXhosa and the Colony.

The George commando, which had been raised promptly in response to Cuyler's independent call for help, arrived on the Sunday's River by 2 March, though some stragglers remained as far west as the Gamtoos River by then. Under the command of Commandant Botha, they assisted Cuyler in numerous operations in his district while awaiting the arrival of other groups from further west. Others were much slower to swing into action, with the Swellendam commando only departing from home on 15 March, that from the Cape Districts on 18 March and from the Stellenbosch district on 20 March.⁵¹

Although the Cape Town press reported that the arrival of the new commanding officer and fresh supplies frightened the amaXhosa off, evidence suggests otherwise. The reports of further raids and attacks diminished somewhat during March, but never disappeared altogether. Flooding of the Fish River caused a group of Xhosa raiders to be trapped with their booty near Trompetter's Drift on 2 March, while Cuyler focused his military efforts of 10 March in the area between Addo and the coast up to Bushman's River 'where the kaffirs are still attacking'.⁵² On 20 March, Ngqika's people informed the British where Ndlambe's men were hiding along the Fish River, allowing a small commando to be sent out after them. At the same time, Ngqika forwarded a message of goodwill from King Hintsa.⁵³

The few cases where British troops managed to fend off attacks were championed by the Cape Town press as evidence that they would quickly prevail. Lieutenant Everett of the Royal African Corps became something of a hero for fending off five hundred Xhosa attackers for five and a half hours from within a small hut at his post at Riet Fontein. With his four men, he killed 'those who came forward with fire to burn it, using shots very carefully'. His mother was among those inside, but managed to escape during the night to take refuge at Rautenbach's Drift.⁵⁴

During the first week of April, Willshire, newly in charge of the frontier, had to use heavy military escorts to move supplies of barley from Graaff-Reinet to Grahamstown. He also frantically cast around for means to buy fresh horses as African horse sickness was beginning to take a heavy toll within his military establishment. Xhosa raiders were especially active in the Zuurberg area, killing a slave at Riet Rivier on 8 April and making off with another two hundred head of cattle. A patrol of the 72nd Regiment pursued them and, after an intense skirmish, managed to recover the cattle. The members of the Graaff-Reinet commando refused to take part in patrolling in the area of Junction Drift, the confluence of the Little Fish and Great Fish Rivers, considering it too dangerous. As a result, the services of Commandant Botha and his commando from George were enlisted by Cuyler to scour the Zuurberg Mountains once again. The commando recently arrived from Swellendam under Commandant Linde served as reinforcement, hoping to clear the country near Riet Rivier. But their activity failed to prevent the murder of Adam Reynecke at Riet Rivier the next day, 13 April.⁵⁵

The biggest attack preceding the one on Grahamstown a week later was directed against the Moravian mission station at Enon on 14 April, confirming Xhosa strength in the Zuurberg. The head missionary's wife, Mrs Schmitt, wrote a desperate and heartbreaking letter to Cuyler in Uitenhage, pleading for help:

All our cattle are gone and eight of our best men murdered, not far from our house on the road to Coerney . . . Would we flee we have no oxen: eight guns have the Kaffirs and eight of our best men, – I have just heard, nine. Do pray send us help as soon as possible. The two men that have escaped tell me the number of Kaffirs far exceed what was last here. Pray help us! We find ourselves surrounded with women crying for their husbands and children for their fathers.⁵⁶

Fortunately for them, the Uitenhage commando was already assembled so could march quickly, removing about 150 men, women and children from Enon. They remained in Uitenhage for several months at government expense. The commando under J.J. Muller, based at the Kwagga Flats near Addo Heights, kept busy on constant patrols right up to 21 April. In the view of the historian George Cory, all this success stimulated the amaXhosa ‘from daring to daring’ until they attacked Grahamstown, ‘a task which in magnitude and boldness of design, eclipsed all their former hostile adventures’.⁵⁷

Historiography of the attack on Grahamstown

While some historians shrug off the battle at Grahamstown as a minor event that was all over in a few hours, others see it as pivotal to South African history. Mostert claims: ‘Grahamstown 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 from what followed.’⁵⁸ In the nineteenth century Grahamstown residents viewed it as a struggle ‘for dear life’.⁵⁹ Though many have tried to write about it, this battle remains extremely difficult to pin down in detail. In a broadcast made in 1941, Theodore Mackenzie, a South African Broadcasting Corporation radio journalist, got so exasperated with trying to learn the truth about it that he concluded ‘history is bunk’ and stated ‘I am not writing history; I am producing headaches for historians’.⁶⁰

In fact, there are only two key primary written sources about the battle. Thomas Pringle’s text published first in 1827 and then again in 1835 became the standard version of the story. It was used, mostly verbatim, by the Reverend John Philip and by Charles Lennox Stretch in their published accounts in 1828 and 1876 respectively. Although Stretch was himself a participant in the battle, his publication, nearly fifty years later, contained very little that was original. As noted previously, Pringle contributed two important themes to the historical narrative. On the one hand, he

sympathised with the amaXhosa and saw the attack as fully justified by people who had been grievously wronged by the British. On the other hand, he also promoted the view that the conflict stemmed primarily from one man, Makhanda, who was driven by a mysterious and exotic form of African religious fanaticism. It is this latter theme that is cited by every other historian writing on the events. As noted previously, the weight of this focus seriously detracts from the first theme, of the justified claim of the African people to recover their own land. It must be borne in mind that Pringle was neither an eyewitness nor a participant in the battle, but only gathered his information a few years after it had taken place from unknown informants. His poem 'Makanna's Gathering' is an imaginative but fictitious attempt to describe what Makhanda might have said to encourage his warriors on that fateful day. It fired the imagination of later historians, such as Sheffield, who took it as a fair rendition of what actually happened.⁶¹

The second key account is the official report made by Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Willshire to Governor Somerset. The main body of this report was, in turn, passed on to the Colonial Secretary in London. This account is reinforced by correspondence between Major Fraser, who had been sent on a mission out of town on the day of the battle, and Colonel John Graham, who by that time held an office job as commander of Simon's Town on the Cape Peninsula. Neither of the two magistrates on the frontier, Stockenström or Cuyler, was present, so had little to add. The traveller George Thompson picked up a few more fragments of information from an 1826 meeting with Captain Harding, who had been a participant.

Almost all that has been written about the battle relies on these few sources. Later nineteenth-century historians resident in Grahamstown show evidence of having gathered some oral traditions. Cory describes doing interviews with Mrs Huntly, who was present at the time of the battle and may have lost her husband in it. He and Sheffield also go to great lengths to identify places around Grahamstown where certain events are alleged to have occurred, as well as to reconstruct a profile of the buildings present in 1819. Surprisingly few African oral traditions about the battle itself have been uncovered. This may be due to the fact that the early colonial historians such as Theal and Cory who interviewed African informants tended to draw from among the mission-educated followers of Ntsikana who was hostile to the amaNdlambe and their cause.

Xhosa preparations for war

The dearth of information about the battle and its preparations from African sources leaves a gaping hole. Virtually everything about how it came about can only be deduced from a few known facts and a good deal of conjecture based on the events themselves. British accounts place the number of amaXhosa who participated in the fighting at between five and ten thousand. All accounts concur that Ndlambe's son Mdushane played a leading role in commanding the forces, with suggestions that Phato, son of the deceased Chief Chungwa, also took a prominent position. These chiefs had clearly harnessed much support for the attack from a variety of other chiefs, including King Hintsa and probably several chiefs who had previously been primarily viewed as supporters of Ngqika. It was indeed a confederate Xhosa attack. The preparations for a military expedition of this size would have been staggering and, as has been suggested above, took at least four months to prepare. Most urgently needed by the amaXhosa was iron from which to make spearheads. It was said that each warrior carried a bundle of spears. Using anthills as effective forges, the amaXhosa had to hammer out each blade one by one. Each spear was 1.8 metres long, topped by a blade of 19 centimetres 'sharpened at the point, having the alternate flat edges grooved and smooth . . . The wooden part is made about ½ inch diameter at the bottom, and terminates at the top spirally. The iron part is strongly bound by a thong of hide neatly plaited on: some of the assegais have the iron handle carved with much ingenuity.'⁶²

For a formal battle, such as the one at Grahamstown, each soldier also needed to be properly attired according to his rank and function. The veteran warriors had to prepare their plumed headgear, shields had to be made and other decorations acquired. Warriors who surprised the townspeople in Grahamstown were described as 'armed with shields and assegais and decorated around their elbows and knees with fringes made of the ends of ox tails'.⁶³

In addition to the physical preparations, plans and strategies had to be carefully laid. By far the most successful part of the planning was the fact that the British were genuinely taken by surprise. Given their military posts all along the Fish River and their alleged friendship with Ngqika, it is astounding that they were unaware of such a huge force gathering against them. Although the British had at least two warnings, neither was taken seriously. Ngqika is said to have communicated that a mass attack was coming, via the military post nearest to him at the time, Roodewaal.⁶⁴ Makhanda himself also sent a message to Willshire the day before the attack, promising to 'breakfast' with him the next morning. Willshire

replied that he would ‘find all things in readiness on his arrival’.⁶⁵ However, he did not take the warning seriously and was to be caught quite off guard. The place where the Xhosa forces were gathering is today still called Breakfast Vlei as a result. The African name for this natural large pond, however, is Icibilentonga (Vlei of Weapons) and it is well known in tradition as the place for gathering before and after major battles. Located about 12 kilometres from the Fish River, it would have been ideal for these purposes, not readily in view of anyone on the colonial side of the Fish, but offering quick access to the crossing at Committee’s Drift. At the time, this crossing was seldom used by the colonists because of its steep gradient on the Xhosa side. For the amaXhosa, travelling on foot, this would not have been a major obstacle. The rest of the march to Grahamstown, about 25 kilometres away, would have been relatively easy, travelling across a wide flood plain before ascending up a narrow pass, today called Pluto’s Vale, and then coming out into relatively open country on the northern side of Grahamstown. During the invasion that followed a few months later, however, the British enlarged the access road and regularly used this ford.

If the British knew little about what Makhanda was planning, the opposite could not be said about him. He made strategic use of Hendrick Ngcuka, the long-time personal interpreter for King Ngqika. He and two other former interpreters were cited among the dead in the battle, showing that they had shifted their loyalty to Makhanda following the Brereton raid in which they had all been active, serving the British forces. Their defection to the cause of the allied Xhosa forces stands as evidence of how low Ngqika had fallen in the esteem of many people, particularly after the devastating Brereton raid. Ngcuka was one of the few Africans who had the liberty to move back and forth across the border at will and was said to have been in Grahamstown for about a month prior to the battle. Two days before the attack, he tricked the British by saying that he ‘heard a noise’ in the direction of the Lower Kaffir Drift crossing of the Fish River.⁶⁶ As a result, one hundred men of the 38th Light Company were despatched to the south-east, in the opposite direction from where the forces were actually gathering. This reduced the British garrison at Grahamstown by about 25 per cent.

The night before the battle was no doubt like others. An account provided five years later by the Reverend William Shaw of his experience of spending the night before a colonial engagement with Chiefs Ndlambe and Mdushane and thousands of their soldiers offers great detail about how they organised themselves: ‘I can never forget that night. We were to sleep in a deep glen, surrounded by a very wild

and broken tract of country. They selected an extensive bush to serve at once for shelter, and as their garrison for the night.' The evening started with the ritual slaughtering of cows brought especially to feed the troops. This was accompanied by spells of singing and dancing. The breast parts of the beasts were presented to the chiefs who 'were attended by their servants with some form and ceremony. Their cooks broiled their beef on the burning embers with great care.'⁶⁷ Those who had done the slaughtering then carefully and systematically distributed the rest of the meat to all. In the calm of the night Shaw explored his unusual camp:

I visited the various parts of the bush, which seemed like a large sylvan city. There were between two and three thousand Kaffirs assembled, all well armed with their full complement of spears, javelins, fencing sticks, and knobbed sticks, or clubs. They were distributed into parties of from twenty to fifty men. Each party had its separate fire for warmth and broiling their beef.⁶⁸

When the morning dawned, the chiefs gathered to get reports from the spies returning from a night's reconnaissance of the British. Their reports were entirely accurate. When the call to action went out 'they formed in clans under their several petty Chiefs and headmen, and then combined in larger divisions, according to the hereditary branch of the Chief's houses or families to which they respectively belonged'.⁶⁹

We shall never know exactly what Makhanda told his men the night before the battle, nor as they set out for Grahamstown. What can be said with certainty, however, is that whatever he said was not considered misguided or wrong by his people. On the contrary, the memory of Makhanda remained one that was cherished with unparalleled reverence by generations of amaXhosa. This confirms that his vision and his leadership consolidated the highest aspirations and longings of his people. He was not blamed as a failure, but rather remained as the one guiding spirit in whom people still wished to place their hope and confidence. Even 37 years later in 1856, at the time of Nongqawuse's prophecies that the ancestors would finally arise to drive the white men into the sea, it was said that Makhanda would not be included because he was believed to be still living and would return from Robben Island to lead his people in flesh and blood.⁷⁰ It took another generation before his personal effects were buried in admission that he was not going to return.⁷¹ So whatever his message was, it had not only galvanised and united the

amaXhosa as never before to come in full force to Grahamstown, but it continued to resonate in their hearts for generations to come.

The morning of the battle

All accounts agree that the massive Xhosa force literally reached the edges of Grahamstown before it was discovered. This in itself shows brilliant logistical planning. The British had sent their own forces out in every direction except the one from which the attack came, fumed a flabbergasted Colonel John Graham when he heard of it.⁷² Completely impervious to Makhanda's warning message, Willshire had ridden a short distance out of town to inspect the colonial troops housed near Botha's Hill, about 5 kilometres out of town around ten o'clock in the morning. While there, he was informed that amaXhosa were in the act of stealing cattle less than a kilometre away. He took the small mounted force with him to inspect and was astonished to find 'two bodies of Kaffirs' on either side of Botha's Hill, about two to three hundred strong. Upon seeing him, they retreated up the hill. Before crossing the small stream at the bottom of the hill to pursue them, Willshire placed two men on top of an adjacent hill to keep on the lookout for any other movements of amaXhosa. Indeed, before he could get far in his pursuit, they warned him that 'they were forming a circle around us in great numbers'. On retreating back up the hill from which he had come, Willshire was then 'surprised to discover we were followed by about 5,000 who gave a horrid yell, rushed down and crossed the river after us'.⁷³ Judging correctly that a force this size was intended for an attack on Grahamstown, he then quickly dispatched a messenger to give the warning, while he and his men tried to distract the attackers as a delaying tactic. But it soon became clear that it would be a race to see who would get to Grahamstown first. Willshire and his mounted colonial force beat a hasty retreat to town with the Xhosa warriors in full chase. His safe arrival was attributed 'only to the fleetness of his faithful steed "Blucher"'.⁷⁴

Fortunately for Willshire, his second-in-command in town, Captain Trappes, had also heard of the impending attack from Khoi herders who reported directly to him.⁷⁵ 'All was now bustle and confusion in the little garrison,' noted Pringle.⁷⁶ Like its attackers, the British military had to prepare itself for battle. Each regiment had to be decked out in its own uniform – bright red with white trousers for the 38th and 72nd, dark blue for the Royal Artillery and green with black trim for the Cape Corps. The drummers and buglers had to be summoned and put in place as

the main form of communication up and down the lines. Oxen were harnessed to the cannon so that they could be moved as needed during the battle to come.⁷⁷

When Willshire arrived, he took charge of the force that had been gathered at the eastern end of town, below where the cathedral now stands. To make best use of the artillery, they needed to position them on a slope that allowed for shooting at the attackers across a small valley, or as they charged up the slope if it came to that. Oddly enough, no one is exactly sure of where the main fighting took place. One theory places the artillery near the present-day train station, while the other places it where the Market Square shopping mall and police station now stand. Both fit the description of how the slopes were used. Unfortunately, Willshire's own account makes reference only to the artillery being at the 'top of a slope of the plain' which could be at either site.⁷⁸

Willshire arrived in town only ten minutes before his adversaries started to appear. They halted on the high ridge to the east of town and spread themselves out both along that ridge and to the northern side of town. Taking nearly an hour and half to prepare their columns, the amaXhosa gave the British enough breathing space to evacuate their civilian population to the eastern barracks for safety. But this did not take place before some straggling warriors moved into the settlement. The family of Mr Potgieter, living at the corner of High and Somerset Streets (now across the street from the main entrance to Rhodes University), was surprised by a few such warriors coming into their house just as the family sat down for lunch. The family immediately fled to the officers' quarters at the opposite end of High Street and 'the uninvited guests had the dinner to themselves'. Potgieter's niece, Mrs Huntly, lived until over the age of ninety and provided Cory with this first-hand account.⁷⁹ From the officers' quarters, the women and children were then removed to the east barracks, the only building of a military nature in town and able to offer any protection. Trappes and Willshire ordered sixty men of the Royal African Corps under Lieutenant Cartwright to defend the barracks, located 'about 2 000 paces from the Town which is itself straggling and open'.⁸⁰ The town at that time consisted of about thirty houses situated on muddy, overgrown tracks that could hardly be called streets, more or less lining what is today High Street in central Grahamstown.⁸¹

The attack

Even Willshire was caught unprepared by the high level of planning and precision with which the Xhosa forces executed their attack: 'You have no idea of the manner

it was conducted,' he wrote to Stockenström three days later, repeating the expression three times in the same letter.⁸² He had placed the 38th Light Company and colonial troops below the artillery, hoping to draw the attacking force within range of the cannon. He ordered them to commence firing in order to start the fighting, but the Xhosa forces refused to charge until their own plans had been executed. Two columns moved silently down from the long ridge. The first headed away from town down the Kowie River Valley towards Blaauwkrantz, where the George commando under Commandant Botha was camped. Willshire had tried to send him a message to circle around behind the attacking force to help cut them off, but this was in vain as Botha had gone out on patrol in another direction.⁸³ Nevertheless, a column of about a thousand Xhosa warriors stood prepared to fend off any form of assistance coming from that direction. The second column, headed by the plumed veterans under the command of Makhanda himself, headed towards the east barracks.⁸⁴ This column consisted of several men mounted on horses and guns. The main force, remaining on the ridge, however, 'would not move until the mass that went to the African Corps barracks began firing'.⁸⁵

Once these two columns were in place, the main attack commenced with a gunshot given as a signal from the rocky knoll that overlooks the town in the valley below, today covered in trees planted as a reminder of the battle. In classic two-pronged horn formation, two further columns emerged, one led by Mdushane and the other by Phato, moving rapidly towards Willshire's waiting men.⁸⁶ As Cory described the scene, 'with blood-curdling war shrieks from thousands of throats, the black, or rather red, cloud of death and destruction moved swiftly down the slopes towards the apparently doomed village. Onward they came like an irresistible wave.'⁸⁷ Seeing that his men were highly vulnerable, Willshire ordered them to retreat across the small stream and take shelter around the artillery. He also immediately had to order the Cape Corps, which he had hoped to hold in reserve, into action to defend his right flank: 'I could now plainly discover that they were acting on a regular system,' Willshire reported.⁸⁸ This immediate consolidation of all his forces into one compact unit proved successful. No further shots were fired until the amaXhosa were within range and 'almost every shot brought a man down'. It was no doubt the cannon, however, with a longer range than the Xhosa spears, which turned the battle in favour of the British. As Stretch described it:

The field pieces were loaded with shrapnel shells, which with the destructive fire of the musketry, every shot of which was deadly, opened spaces like streets in the courageously advancing masses, with their wild war cries; and they were literally mowed down, while their showers of assegais fell short or ineffective.⁸⁹

As Cory succinctly noted, 'the fight was in reality very one-sided'.⁹⁰ At one point in the fighting, Willshire ordered a charge, which induced a temporary retreat of the amaXhosa but ended with the British returning to their tight position. Willshire described the actions:

I ordered the advance to sound, when the soldiers cheered and, strange to say, the savages began retreating directly pursued by the troops; but they run so excessively fast men were not long able to keep up with them, and not wishing to pursue too far, I sounded the retreat, and brought the troops back to the place where the guns were, lest a body of them, that had remained on the hill, might, by the rapidity of their running take advantage of the troops being so far from their guns and the town, and make a rush to get in their rear.⁹¹

This kind of close-range fighting continued for about an hour and a half before the amaXhosa ultimately retreated. Willshire marvelled at their tenacity in the face of so much fire power, which was clearly lethal and overwhelming:

While kneeling and ducking in front of the troops, the right hand was always raised with the assegai, their fear of looking at the fire prevented them throwing as often or as correctly as they otherwise would have done. On seeing a flash they immediately placed the left arm with the kaross (bullock's hide) before their eyes.⁹²

The fighting at the east barracks was no less intense. Makhanda allegedly gave orders for his men to break their spears in preparation for hand-to-hand combat.⁹³ Many of the Xhosa warriors succeeded in penetrating the walls of the barracks to fight at close range inside. Urged on by Makhanda, 'the invaders became insensible to danger and rushed on to the very muzzles of the guns . . . they poured into the barrack square, where they were mown down in scores'.⁹⁴ Before they too retreated,

after three hours of such fighting, they suffered 102 casualties inside the barracks and probably many more outside it.⁹⁵

For the British, perhaps one of the most unnerving features of the battle was the discovery that three of their most trusted interpreters had joined the attackers. Most famous was Hendrick Ngcuka, who had served many years as Ngqika's primary interpreter. At the height of the battle Willshire passed where Ngcuka was hiding behind a bank and was warned by another soldier of his presence. This soldier

was on the brink of shooting him, when I rescued him and gave him into the hands of a Dragoon, intending to hang him when I had done with the Caffers, but I had not left him but a few hours when a person in Col'l Cloathes rode up & blew his brains out in spite of the Dragoon.⁹⁶

Another interpreter named Stephanus, and yet another unnamed, were also found among the dead after the battle. This raised serious questions about Ngqika's trustworthiness and no doubt contributed significantly to his own harsh treatment by the time the war concluded six months later. Willshire noted that six or seven runaway Khoi servants were also among the dead. He gave the Royal African Corps deserters credit for the precision planning of the offensive.⁹⁷ Sheffield's account of the battle makes several references to armed civilians seeing action against Xhosa soldiers, using mud forts that were scattered around town for its internal protection.⁹⁸ However, such mud forts were not built until three months later, as a precaution against leaving the town undefended while the invasion of Xhosa territory was under way.

When the battle finally ended, the amaXhosa retreated up the hill from which they had come, taking great effort to carry off their dead and wounded. Willshire restrained his men from following them as they would be virtually defenceless once they moved out of their tight formation and away from the awesome power of the artillery. As the Cape Town press reported, 'The scene of the engagement was covered with Caffer shields and assegays, which they had thrown in great numbers, but they do not lance them with precision when opposed to the fire of musquetry'.⁹⁹ However, George Fraser, who returned the next day, noted that '[i]t is really singular how few assegays were thrown by the Kaffirs' referring to many bundles of assegais found on the backs of the slain: 'They probably expected to overrun the place with great ease.'¹⁰⁰

Many of the injured took refuge in the deeper pools of the Kowie River ‘merely keeping their head above the surface, which they endeavoured to conceal by covering them with such grass and weeds as overhung the banks and so perished’.¹⁰¹ Stretch noted that he found some corpses with grass stuffed into the wounds in the vain hope that this would stop excessive bleeding.¹⁰² It was the imagery of the small stream running red with the blood of the warriors that stuck most vividly in the minds of both black and white in the generations following the battle. The amaXhosa gave the area the name Egazini, meaning Place of Blood, while ‘the story of how the stream running below Fort England ran on that day red with blood has been told in every nursery in Grahamstown and listened to with dread, and almost with incredulity’.¹⁰³ No one knows the number of Xhosa fatalities or what happened to their bodies.

Decisive factors

The question of why it was that the amaXhosa lost at Grahamstown must inevitably be asked. The officers who fought there scarcely believed they had a chance to survive. Willshire himself said, ‘he would not have given a feather for the safety of the town’.¹⁰⁴ A few years later Captain Harding told Thompson that ‘in all his campaigns . . . he had never seen a more spirited little action than that at Grahamstown . . . He absolutely thought the savages would have gained the day.’¹⁰⁵

Part of the answer lies in the fact that help for the British came from two unexpected participants. Neither Elizabeth Salt nor Jan Boesak are mentioned in the official reports, yet appear to be well confirmed by other sources. Details concerning both are often sketchy and contradictory. This is especially true of Jan Boesak. He was a well-known frontier figure, a Christian convert of Khoi background, who settled first at Bethelsdorp and then became a leader of the Theopolis mission community. All sources on the battle at Grahamstown describe him as a buffalo hunter, which meant that he made a living by providing meat for the British forces through hunting activities. It is Stretch’s account as a participant in the battle that gives Boesak credit for turning the tide in favour of the British. He claims Boesak informed Willshire that the Xhosa forces were gathering on the edge of town, whereas numerous other sources claim this was done by Khoi herders who saw that the cattle they were tending were the imminent target of theft. The latter seems more plausible as the invading amaXhosa did carry off one thousand head of cattle and numerous horses that day.¹⁰⁶ Another anonymous source claims that Boesak and his men were out of town in the vicinity of Fraser’s Camp, nearly

40 kilometres away, but rushed back when they heard the shooting.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, the sound of cannon reverberating in the hills surrounding Grahamstown was an ominous signal of something unprecedented.

In a passage often quoted by historians, Stretch claimed that ‘the Hottentot Captain Boezak, with one hundred and thirty of his people, rushed intrepidly forward to meet the enemy along the river banks from the old Cape Corps’ barracks’. Although all sources agree that Boesak’s approach was along the river from the side of the barracks, the number of men he was said to command is doubtful. What this account suggests, however, is that perhaps, in the heat of battle and seeing the desperation of the situation, Boesak actually took charge of the mounted Cape Corps. Since this worked, it was hardly the focus of complaints. Stretch goes on to say that Boesak knew Makhandla personally, as well as all the other leading Xhosa figures engaged in the battle. Under his direction ‘some of the best marksmen in the Colony, levelled in a few minutes a number of the most distinguished chiefs and warriors’.¹⁰⁸ Among those thus slain were three minor sons of Ndlambe, including Samsam and Kuse.¹⁰⁹ This caused an immediate turn in the course of the battle and the beginning of the Xhosa retreat, triggering loud cheers from the weary British soldiers. Indeed Boesak could easily be seen as the hero of the day.

But another clear hero was a young French woman named Elizabeth Salt. She married her English husband, a sergeant of the 38th Regiment, soon after the battle of Waterloo in 1815 and then accompanied him to his posting in Grahamstown. One of the few women then living in town, she was among those evacuated to take shelter in the east barracks. At some point during its siege by Makhandla and his forces, it became clear that the supply of gunpowder was running dangerously low. Without this vital commodity, they would all have been killed in a few moments. According to a family tradition:

Nobody could be spared to leave the fort and no man felt inclined to risk his life in the face of death. E. Salt then came forward saying, ‘I cannot shoot, and you cannot afford to lose a rifle. Let me go’ . . . Though the soldiers tried to dissuade her, she reminded them that the Xhosa normally never harmed women during warfare, and so they were persuaded to allow her out.¹¹⁰

There are two versions of the story. One claims that she was actually in a small mud fort, which housed the gunpowder, near the barracks. Her journey into the

barracks was therefore quite short and one-way. The other account suggests that she had to walk through open veld to the vicinity of the High Street, about 1.5 kilometres away, and then return with a keg of gunpowder. In the first account, she wrapped the keg in a blanket and carried it on her head; in the second one, she wrapped it in a blanket and carried it like a baby. There is no way of verifying which is correct. But the central features of the story are the same. Her brave journey through the height of battle secured the vital gunpowder that gave the defenders of the barracks their victory. The pro-colonial historian Sheffield fancifully elaborated on the account: 'Surrounded by yelling Kaffirs, who brandished their assegais and howled around her like demons, she passed on her way, intent only upon fulfilling her mission, heedless of their threats, and of the danger by which she was menaced.'¹¹¹

Elizabeth Salt went on to become a farmer in the Tarkastad area and took up frontier trading. She is said to have amassed and buried a significant fortune. But her sudden death in 1850 meant that she took her secret with her and the treasure has never been found. Her obituary in September 1850 was the first time that her role in the battle was committed to print.¹¹² It claimed that the British government granted her a farm in gratitude for her services.

Though it is possible that the British might have lost had it not been for these quietly acknowledged heroes, to most observers the battle had been the ultimate test of African spears against European firearms and artillery. Thompson, writing within a decade of the event, noted:

The Caffers were elated by their former success, and Makanna, had assured them of victory; yet from the bloody defeat they met with on this occasion, it is obvious what a vast superiority the use of fire-arms confers, and how weak an enemy the Caffers are, when encountered by Europeans in the open plain.¹¹³

In accounting for the Xhosa loss at Grahamstown, all historians blame Makhanda for being overly confident and placing too much weight on his beliefs that supernatural forces would assist the amaXhosa. Sheffield bluntly stated: 'If this attack had been made at night, no human power could have saved the place.' He attributes this to the 'vainglory' of Makhanda alone.¹¹⁴ A more sympathetic view, however, suggests that for the amaXhosa, as for their European counterparts at that time, raiding and war were two different things. Both sides understood the

ritual and psychological value of donning special uniforms as well as showing and using one's full might in a disciplined fashion. For the amaXhosa to invoke the assistance of their ancestors in a time of war was nothing unusual. Makhanda as a spiritual leader could not have done otherwise. Mostert alone of historians sees some explanation for the failed daylight attack by comparing it to the recent battle at Amalinde:

One can easily understand his scorn of creeping upon the British covered by the dark. . . . Amalinde had proved his generalship and it is somehow inconceivable that, after that set-piece destruction of Ngqika's power, he should have sought to hide the glory of the expected triumph over the British by an operation at night.¹¹⁵

However, he does not go as far as to differentiate between guerrilla-style tactics and formal warfare, also concurring with false spiritual pride as the central explanation of Xhosa failure.

Apart from persons and personalities, there can be little doubt that the biggest lesson learned from the battle at Grahamstown was the relative helplessness of traditional African weaponry in the face of guns and cannon. Even the overwhelming numbers of Xhosa warriors could not succeed in bringing them to the point of hand-to-hand combat for which they clearly hoped. The devastation wrought by each shot from the artillery, possibly killing three hundred in one shot at such close range, was unparalleled by any experience in Xhosa history. So impressed was he with the power and might of the cannon that Sheffield, writing as a loyal colonial Grahamstonian in 1884, proposed that the city crest should prominently feature cannon as the key to its survival and identity.¹¹⁶ The battle marked a turning point in African encounters with Europeans that would ripple through the history of the continent for yet another century.

Notes

1. Theal, *History*, p. 336.
2. Stockenström, *Autobiography*, p. 117.
3. Theal, *Compendium*, p. 188.
4. Stockenström, *Autobiography*, p. 116.

5. Cory, *Rise*, p. 378.
6. Thompson, *Travels*, p. 198.
7. Theal, *Compendium*, p. 189.
8. Thompson, *Travels*, p. 196.
9. CA 1/GR/16/8: Letters Despatched by Landdrost and Secretary, Graaff-Reinet 1819: 2 July 1819.
10. La Trobe, *Journal*, pp. 218, 225 (description of an abandoned military post at Kommadagga).
11. CA CO 2613: extract of a letter from Fraser to Cuyler, 4 February 1818.
12. Kay, *Travels*, p. 73.
13. CA 1/UIT/15/4: letter to Frederick Korsten, Cradocks Farm, 10 February 1819.
14. La Trobe, *Journal*, p. 226.
15. Campbell, *Travels*, p. 136.
16. La Trobe, *Journal*, pp. 220, 226.
17. Cory, *Rise*, p. 379; CA CO 5791: Day Book, May 1818–November 1819: letter from Cuyler as cover to one from Major Fraser, 21 January 1819.
18. Ibid.
19. NA WO 12/10350: Muster Book, Royal African Corps, 1819–21; Cory, *Rise*, p. 379.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Theal, *Records*, Vol. 13: 'Report upon Kaffraria in Southern Africa' 1 March 1820 by Ives Stocker, First Lieutenant, Corps of Royal Engineers, pp. 37–8.
23. CA 1/UIT/15/4: letter from Cuyler to Fraser, 3 February 1819.
24. Cory, *Rise* p. 380. The privates were Peacock and MacDonald.
25. NA WO 12/10350. The slain soldiers were Privates Thomas Benson, Bernard McDead, William Anderson, George Bedford, John Thomas Bowes, Henry Celler, John Cullen, Laurence Dowling, Thomas Duffy, Joseph Garness and William Harris.
26. Cory, *Rise*, p. 381.
27. CA 1/GR/9/71: letter 21, from Brereton to Stockenström, 4 February 1819.
28. CA 1/UIT/15/4: letter from Cuyler to Brereton, 7 February 1819.
29. CA 1/UIT/15/4: letter from Cuyler to O. Lange, Uitenhage, 7 February 1819.
30. CA 1/UIT/15/4: letter from Cuyler to A.G. Kernee, Landdrost, George, 7 February 1819.
31. CA 1/UIT/15/4: letter from Cuyler to Frederick Korsten, Cradocks Farm, 7 February 1819.
32. CA 1/UIT/15/4: letter from Cuyler to Colonial Secretary, 7 February 1819.
33. CA 1/UIT/15/4: letter from Cuyler to Mr Braekhusen in Grahamstown, 13 February 1819. The horses were borrowed from Dietz, Retief and Braekhusen.
34. CA 1/UIT/15/4: letter from Cuyler to Brereton, 13 February 1819.
35. CA 1/UIT/15/4: letter from Cuyler to Korsten, 10 February 1819.
36. CA 1/GR/16/8: letter from Stockenström to Cuyler, 13 February 1819.
37. CA 1/UIT/15/4: letter from Cuyler to Korsten, 10 February 1819; letter from Cuyler to Brereton, 13 February 1819.
38. CA 1/UIT/15/4: letter from Cuyler to Korsten, 10 February 1819.
39. CA 1/UIT/15/4: letter from Cuyler to Kernee, 15 February 1819.
40. CA 1/UIT/15/4: letter from Cuyler to Brereton, 15 February 1819.
41. CA 1/GR/16/8: letter no. 1157 from Stockenström to Brereton, 24 February 1819.

42. Mostert, *Frontiers*, p. 470.
43. CA CO 4841: Letters Despatched, 1818–19: letter from Bird to Cuyler, 17 February 1819.
44. Cory, *Rise*, p. 381.
45. Mostert, *Frontiers*, p. 471.
46. Cory, *Rise*, p. 383.
47. List of armed forces: Graaff-Reinet 400, Uitenhage 300, Tulbagh 300, Swellendam 300, George 250, Stellenbosch 200, Cape Districts 100, Total 1 850 civilians; Military: Infantry 1 100, Artillery 32, Cape Regiment mounted 155, Rehired Cape Regiment 150, Colonial troop 32; Grand total 3 352 (Cory, *Rise*, p. 383).
48. Ibid., p. 382; CA 1/GR/9/71: letter no. 23 from Brereton in Grahamstown to Stockenström in Graaff-Reinet, 22 February 1819.
49. CA 1/GR/9/71: letter from Willshire to Stockenström, 16 March 1819.
50. Stockenström, *Autobiography*, p. 117.
51. *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser* 20 March 1819.
52. CA 1/UIT/15/5: Letters Despatched, 1819–20: letter from Cuyler to Field Cornet P.R. Botha at Tygerfontein, 10 March 1819 (translated from Dutch).
53. *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser* 20 March 1819.
54. Ibid.
55. CA 1/UIT/15/5: letter from Cuyler to Field Cornet J.J. Bekker at Riet River, 17 April 1819 (translated from Dutch).
56. Cory, *Rise*, p. 384.
57. Ibid., p. 385.
58. Mostert, *Frontiers*, p. 481.
59. Sheffield, *Story*, p. 99.
60. Justus, *Wrongs*, p. 5.
61. Pringle, *African Poems*, pp. 35–6.
62. Theal, *Records*, Vol. 13: Stocker report, pp. 49–50.
63. Cory, *Rise*, p. 386.
64. Thompson, *Travels*, p. 199.
65. Cory, *Rise*, p. 385.
66. Stretch, 'Makana', p. 299.
67. Shaw, *Journal*, p. 116.
68. Ibid., p. 118.
69. Ibid., p. 120.
70. A.W. Burton, *Sparks from the Border Anvil* (King William's Town: Provincial Publishing, 1950), p. 41.
71. Theal, *Compendium*, p. 191 describes how Makhandas son finally lost hope of his father's return as a 'mighty conqueror' in 1870.
72. C.T. Atkinson (ed.), *Supplementary Report on the Manuscripts of Robert Graham Esq of Fintry* (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1940): letter from Colonel John Graham, 16 February 1820 written from Cape of Good Hope, p. 144.
73. *Graham's Town Journal* 26 September 1846: reprint of Colonel T. Willshire's report to Governor Somerset, 23 April 1819.
74. Stretch, 'Makana', p. 300.

75. Cory, *Rise*, p. 386.
76. Pringle, 'Letters', p. 72.
77. Sheffield, *Story*, p. 102.
78. *Graham's Town Journal* 26 September 1846.
79. Cory, *Rise*, p. 388. Cory claims that Mrs Huntly's husband died in the battle that day, but this is not confirmed by other records so remains in question.
80. Theal, *Records*, Vol. 12: letter from Lord Charles Somerset to Earl Bathurst, 22 May 1819, p. 194.
81. See Cory, *Rise* and Sheffield, *Story* for more detailed descriptions of the state of the town.
82. CA 1/GR/9/71: letter from Willshire to Stockenström, 17 April 1819.
83. *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser* 15 May 1819.
84. Theal, *Compendium*, p. 189.
85. *Graham's Town Journal* 26 September 1846.
86. Theal, *Compendium*, p. 189.
87. Cory, *Rise*, p. 389.
88. *Graham's Town Journal* 26 September 1846.
89. Stretch, 'Makana', p. 300.
90. Cory, *Rise*, p. 389.
91. *Graham's Town Journal* 26 September 1846.
92. Ibid.
93. Theal, *Compendium*, p. 189.
94. Cory, *Rise*, pp. 389–90.
95. Theal, *History*, p. 194.
96. CA 1/GR/9/71: letter from Willshire to Stockenström, 25 April 1819. Sheffield claims that Ngcuka was shot while in the act of flinging an assegai at Willshire, but Willshire's own first-hand account does not confirm this (*Story*, p. 117).
97. *Graham's Town Journal* 26 September 1846.
98. Sheffield, *Story*, pp. 101–11.
99. *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser* 15 May 1819.
100. Cory, *Rise*, p. 391.
101. Ibid.
102. Stretch 'Makana'; Kay, *Travels*, p. 91.
103. Sheffield, *Story*, p. 112.
104. Stretch, 'Makana', p. 301.
105. Thompson, *Travels*, p. 36.
106. Theal, *Records*, Vol. 12: letter from Fraser to Cuyler, 2 May 1819, p. 177.
107. CL Theodore Mackenzie, 'The Battle of Grahamstown', SABC transcript of a radio broadcast, 1941, p. 5.
108. Stretch, 'Makana', pp. 300–1.
109. Pawuli interview, 10 March 2002.
110. 'Elizabeth Salt', typed manuscript donated to Bayworld Museum, Port Elizabeth by Betty-Lou James Brown, descendant of E. Salt.
111. Sheffield, *Story*, p. 116. This imagery took tangible form in 1914 when a monument was built in the centre of the High Street to mark the spot where Colonel Graham and Stockenström

had agreed to establish military headquarters, later to be named Grahamstown. Though most of the monument was never finished, one facade contains an image of Elizabeth Salt carrying her bundle, surrounded by ferocious, wild-looking amaXhosa.

112. *Graham's Town Journal* 21 September 1850.

113. Thompson, *Travels*, p. 199.

114. Sheffield, *Story*, p. 115.

115. Mostert, *Frontiers*, p. 481.

116. Sheffield, *Story*, p. 114.

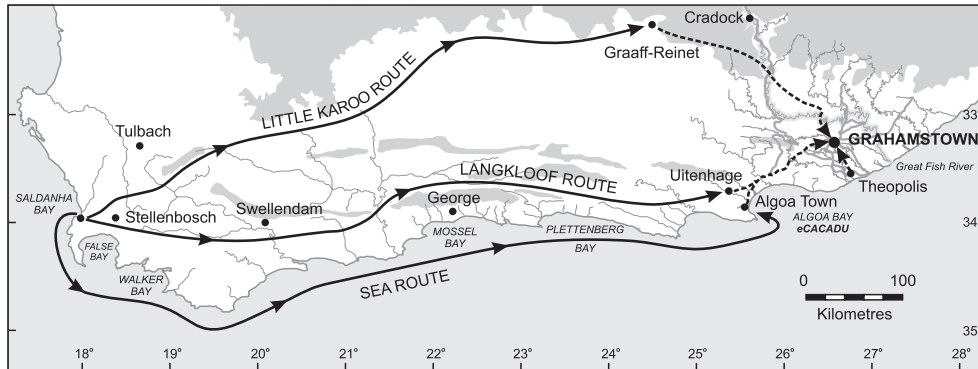
The pain of conquest

The events that followed the battle at Grahamstown should be seen as bringing the British war of conquest to its logical conclusion. The nature of this military activity has been little appreciated by previous generations of historians. Virtually all the terms used to describe the events deliberately downplay their size, scale and importance. Although Governor Somerset insisted that the intention was never to annex new territory to the Colony, this was precisely what happened. A closer look at the unfolding of British military planning and execution makes it clear that there could never have been any other intention. However, even the language used at the time aimed to obscure the objective. Junior officials referred to it as a commando, giving the impression that this was just another quick raid to punish Xhosa enemies and gain a fresh supply of cattle in the process. Indeed, the war against the amaXhosa proved to be highly destructive, not only to the amaNdlambe but also to the amaNgqika. But the fact that it ended with the annexation of Xhosa territory never before claimed by the Cape Colony, as well as treating King Ngqika, the supposed ally of the British, with the same level of harshness as other warring chiefs, suggests that this was a conflict of unprecedented proportions – a full conquest and irreversible defeat of Xhosa independence.

Most colonial historians portray the post-Grahamstown events as either insignificant and hardly worth mentioning; or, if the details are gone into at all, as an example of British military and technological triumph. This chapter shows that it was in fact the logical conclusion not only of the fifth frontier war, which might be said to have started with the Brereton raid in November 1818, but also of the forty years of struggle for control over the Zuurveld. The very size, scale and deliberation involved in securing a decisive conquest confirm that this was a pivotal war that changed the dynamics of British-Xhosa relations forever.

After the battle

One of the most common misrepresentations of the conclusion of the long war is that the amaXhosa meekly slunk away following their annihilation after the fighting



Transport routes of colonial forces, 1819.

at Grahamstown and hardly resisted the invasion forces once they entered Xhosa territory. In describing the immediate aftermath to the battle at Grahamstown, for example, George Theal stated that ‘they at once abandoned the contest, and retreated across the Fish River as rapidly as possible’.¹ They are portrayed as shattered and disheartened, baffled by the failure of Makhanda’s magic to deliver them. A popular tale to support this view tells of a group of seventeen soldiers, under the command of Lieutenant Cartwright, who encountered the retreating Xhosa forces on the day of the battle.² As one report put it, ‘The Kaffers, eyeing askance the little handful of men whom fate appeared to destine as their victims of vengeance, ranged themselves on either side, and in place of annihilating the little band allowed the Officer deliberately to face his men and file off towards Graham’s Town unassailed and uninjured.’³ Though it was alleged by the *Cape Town Gazette* that the chiefs encouraged their soldiers to attack, instead, this gesture might equally be interpreted as an indication of a Xhosa sense of ethics in times of war, given its ritualistic nature.⁴

While it is clear from several accounts that the injured amaXhosa were immediately taken back to places of safety across the Fish River, the able-bodied warriors did not retreat immediately. Lieutenant Colonel Willshire reported that the fires that burnt all around the perimeter of Grahamstown kept his men on high alert all through the night of 22 April. They remained on constant guard for six days, fearing a renewed attack.⁵ Willshire hastily wrote to his superiors to ask for permission to spend extra on provisions for his men ‘who are suffering so much – costs are high, but unavoidable’.⁶

In addition, Colonel Cuyler reported continued Xhosa military activity far to the west of Grahamstown in the weeks following the battle. The night after the Grahamstown fighting, three hundred head of cattle were stolen from Gert van Rooyen's farm adjacent to the military post at Rautenbach's Drift. The marauders were followed by a small party who spotted them with the missing cattle, but 'found them too numerous to dare to come near'.⁷ This report led to the recall of a commando patrolling the nearby Zuurberg Mountains and raised fears that communications between Uitenhage and Grahamstown, which depended on the Rautenbach's Drift post for safety, might be endangered. Upon learning of the attack on Grahamstown, Cuyler offered to send what extra supplies he could to the beleaguered Willshire, but held back fifty muskets to comply with 'daily applications from the residents' for help.⁸

By early May, large numbers of farmers fled the northern parts of the Uitenhage district, seeking safety closer to Graaff-Reinet, due to 'the large numbers of Caffers in their area and large numbers of cattle being taken'.⁹ Two slaves were murdered and 142 head of cattle stolen just three days after the Grahamstown battle. The mountains between the Zuurberg and Bruintjies Hoogte offered 'a good look out from which the Kaffers can see the cattle that may be grazing below'.¹⁰ These incidents suggest that many of those who fought in Grahamstown moved on further west, rather than retreating across the Fish River to the east. When informed that he would get ninety Khoi foot soldiers from Theopolis to help guard Uitenhage, Cuyler begged Willshire to send more mounted men 'to fly from right to left in front of this Drostdy', claiming that only men on horseback could be truly effective.¹¹

It took the eastern amaXhosa only two weeks to mount another concerted attack. They surrounded the military outpost at Upper Kaffir Drift with three to four thousand warriors on 8 May, but were driven off by Captain Birch and his men of the Royal African Corps after an hour of intense fighting. The amaXhosa were reported to have suffered 'considerable slaughter' while the British had only one man slightly injured.¹² This assault at one of the major crossings of the Fish River, not far from the sea, would have been undertaken by forces loyal to Chief Ndlambe. It implies that his army had not yet been dismantled and was still prepared to continue fighting. By mid-May, Willshire reported that the amaXhosa were 'thick in the bush' at Kaffir's Drift and Trompetter's Drift.¹³

Nearly two months after the battle at Grahamstown, Xhosa raiders were still able to penetrate deep into the Cape Colony. By early June, reports of an effective force in the Zwartruggens area, far to the west of Uitenhage and south of Graaff-Reinet, suggest that the amaXhosa were still attempting to recover the cattle taken

from them in the Brereton raid, which had been sent to the Zwarttruggens area for safekeeping.¹⁴ The raiders murdered three herdsmen, stole 309 cattle and eight saddle horses.¹⁵ Such raiders are most likely to have come from what was nominally King Ngqika's area on the northern border of the Fish River.

Preparing the invasion

For the British, the battle at Grahamstown signalled the need to ensure that maximum force should be gathered before any kind of offensive move was taken. For the first six weeks, the British simply sat tight and continued with their plans to mount the largest invasion force they could, waiting out the time that was required to implement fully the plans set in motion with the 3 March declaration of a state of emergency.

The basic plan, as originally proposed by Magistrate Stockenström, was to invade Xhosa territory simultaneously from three points. Willshire was to head a central column that would be heavily fortified with artillery, guarding wagons carrying ammunition and supplies. He was to cross the Fish River at De Bruyn's Drift, about 30 kilometres north and west of Grahamstown and then move eastward to a flat open place near present-day Peddie, to set up a base camp. Fraser was to head another (right) column, to cross the Fish River at Trompetter's Drift, in the heart of Ndlambe country. Willshire planned to cover his ascent up the steep and thickly forested eastern side of the Fish River from the open area at the top. Fraser was then deployed to drive all amaXhosa out of the thick river bush, moving southward to the sea. Stockenström was to head the northern (left) column of men from the Graaff-Reinet district, crossing into Xhosa country at Commando Drift just east of Cradock, travelling eastward through what was traditionally King Ngqika's territory, to meet up eventually with Willshire at the base camp.¹⁶

Sending fresh instructions to his field cornets within a week of the battle at Grahamstown, Stockenström made it clear that he was implementing the invasion plan that he had proposed in February. All clothing for the Graaff-Reinet commando was to be sent with the middle invading column, while the food was to be gathered to go with the northern column.¹⁷

As the plans proceeded, Cuyler held back men, horses and ammunition in order to secure the defence of the Uitenhage area, which was still under continuous threat. Horses were too exhausted by constant patrolling and depleted by the horse sickness to be pushed any further. After a cattle raid in early May at Mr Maree's farm, the family simply watched the cattle go as no horse could be found to pursue

them.¹⁸ Cuyler estimated that half the commandos should be left behind to guard the towns and farms in the rear.¹⁹

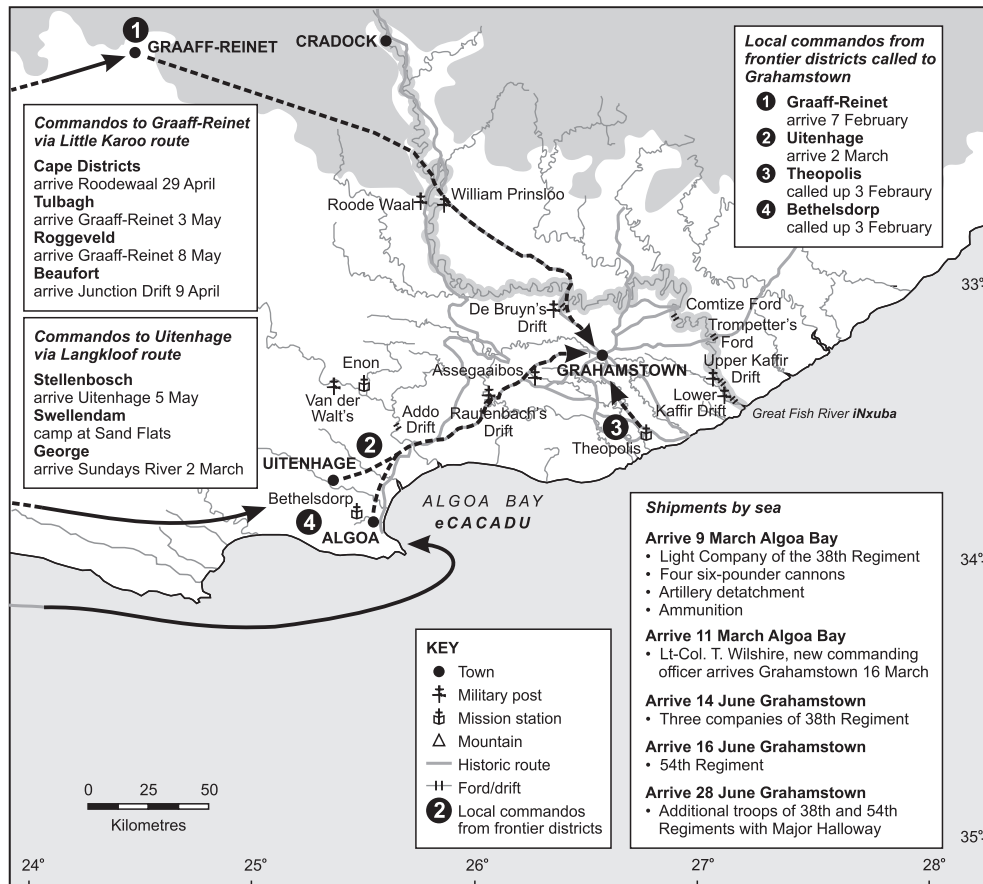
Although the commanding officer and his closest advisers expected to be ready to move on 31 May, they ended up waiting nearly another two months for additional help to arrive from Cape Town. The long wait from late April until late July was solely due to the need to make maximum preparations to achieve the desired results. Without fresh reinforcements from Britain, the Cape Colony did not have the capacity to mount such a force with its own resources. With the full complement, they effectively routed the amaXhosa with relatively little actual combat.

The long wait

One of the greatest difficulties the British faced was how to manage the care and support of a force that took five months to be completely gathered. Civilians from the commandos mobilised at the outset, such as those from George, literally had to sit and do nothing but wait for months on end. Though they had been camped a few kilometres outside Grahamstown at the time of Makhanda's attack, they missed the fighting on that day and ended up waiting another full three months before moving into action.

The other commandos from the western parts of the Colony arrived gradually as each had to travel long distances and been slowed down by horse sickness. At the time of the battle at Grahamstown, the commando from the Cape Districts was still en route via the Karoo road and would only arrive at Roodewaal on the upper Fish River on 29 April.²⁰ The Tulbagh commando had arrived at Graaff-Reinet by 3 May and then moved on towards Grahamstown.²¹ The Stellenbosch group travelled through the Langkloof to arrive only on 5 May at Uitenhage,²² where they had to pause to recuperate from ravages of horse sickness and loss of cattle.²³ The Swellendam commando was camped at Sand Flats, about 80 kilometres west and south of Grahamstown. Cuyler sent an additional patrol of one hundred men to reinforce them, to try to clear the area of Xhosa warriors in the immediate aftermath of the Grahamstown battle.²⁴ The last commando to arrive was from the Roggeveld, only reaching Graaff-Reinet on 8 May.

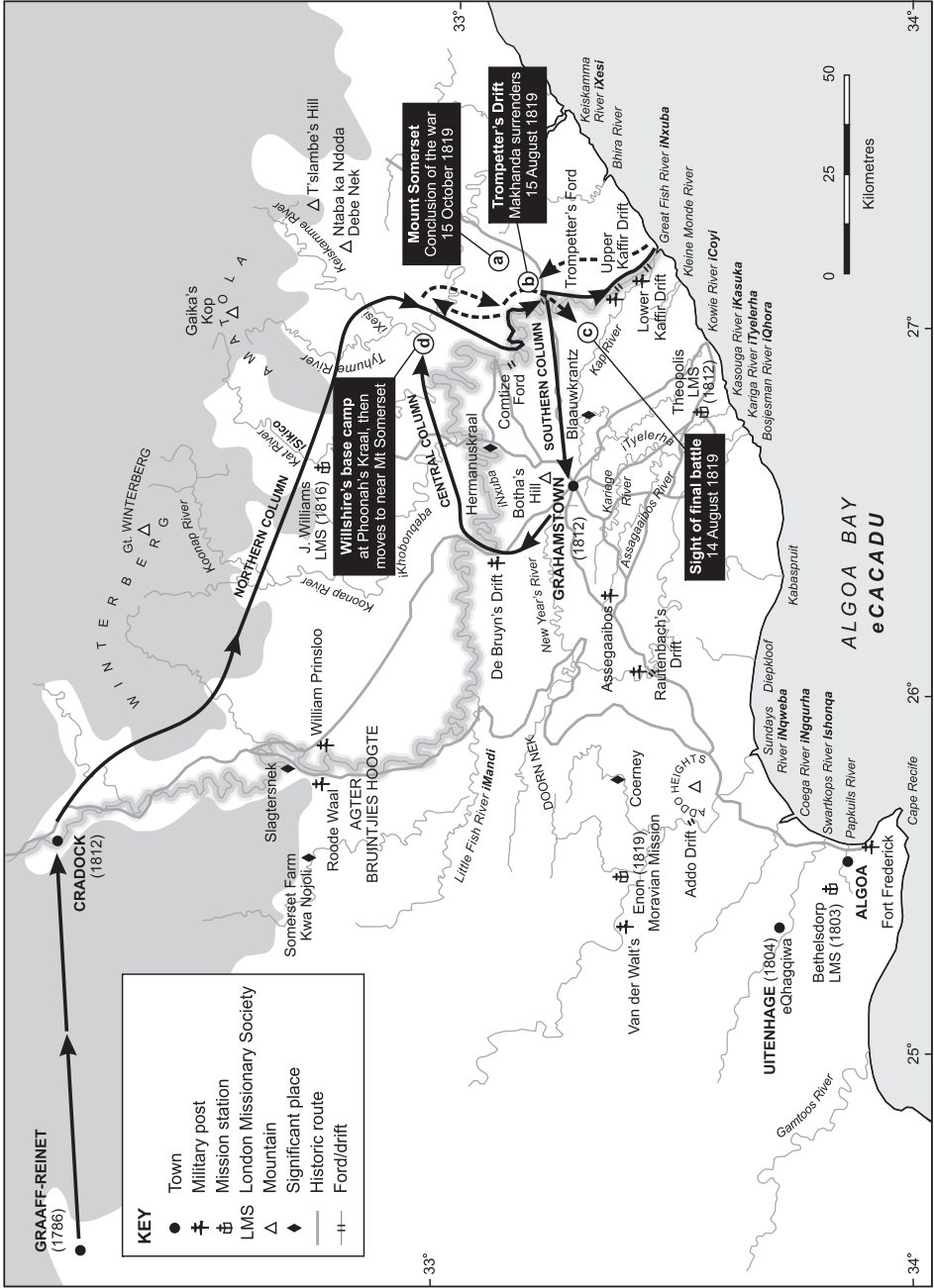
Most official sources give a picture of the civilians called out for commandos as men who were prepared to offer great heroism and sacrifice for the safety of their families and nation. As Stockenström said, 'I cannot put it into words how pleased I am with the dutiful way in which the inhabitants are willing to defend their country. I therefore can maintain my favourable opinion of the inhabitants'



Declaration of a state of emergency: movement of colonial forces, February–June 1819.

loyalty towards the Government.²⁵ These volunteers were expected to provide their own horses, food and arms in return only for ammunition, but no pay. As in the case of this conflict, it might mean being away from home for as long as six months or more. It is not surprising, therefore, to find several reports of lack of co-operation. A wide range of reasons for not going were offered, such as medical problems and recent family bereavements. Some simply refused to go on commando. The case of four men from George who refused came to the attention of the commanding officers when this debacle created great unrest among those who were on duty.²⁶ Often Khoi servants were sent instead of their masters, but this also led to protests as their labour was sorely missed.²⁷ In the case of the Stellenbosch

THE RETURN OF MAKHANDA



Colonial invasion of Xhosa territory, July–August 1819.

commando, mostly young boys were recruited leaving Commander Van Niekerk to complain:

Some of the young men are so unfit, they have never loaded a gun before . . . I am confident that it is not the intention of Government to employ 200 children where one hundred men can do . . . For I have been dispatched with a parcel of children, instead of Men fit for the present service. Had I received my appointment as Commandant prior to the organisation, I would have objected to at least fifty of 'em.²⁸

Actual desertions, or threats of desertion, also posed a problem. Two men from the Stellenbosch commando returned home without permission and were arrested, then ordered to return to the frontier. A few weeks later another six men also deserted.²⁹ A number of Khoi soldiers from Theopolis mission station proved reluctant to leave their families and protested that the government refused to close the school to release the young men. The army then simply converted the school into a military post, thus serving a dual purpose.³⁰

The long weeks and months of inactivity also took their toll among the men. In one case, members of the Beaufort commando demolished their small military post at Junction Drift where they 'committed shameful depredations on the buildings so much so they did not leave a door window shutter or in fact anything but the bare walls, and threw down the mud wall, which formed a part of its defence'.³¹ Others began to engage in capturing cattle, claiming the one rixdollar government reward per head for the recovery of cattle that had been stolen from colonists. The problem for the officials was to be sure the cattle had indeed been stolen by the amaXhosa and were not just being used as a way of making extra money. Also, it was important to ensure that such cattle were not obtained from unauthorised raiding inside Xhosa territory, which would have exacerbated tensions greatly on the frontier. By early June, Fraser reported that 'several hundred head of cattle which were stolen by the Kaffirs from the Colonists have been retaken by the armed inhabitants now on commando who claim the allowance of One Rx per head as allowed by his Excellency the Governor'.³² Clarification was sought from Cape Town as to whether or not the arrangement covered men on commando in addition to armed civilian residents.

The idleness of so many men for so long also created problems of excessive drinking and illegal trade in alcohol. Willshire complained to his commander Major

Rogers, 'I have much trouble arising from the drunkenness of the Troops . . . so many selling liquor in Graham's Town & the soldiers having no other way of spending their money than in drink.' In particular, a local businessman Piet Retief and a Sergeant Murray repeatedly violated liquor-selling regulations, receiving fines as often as four times a week. Willshire conceded that 'to men not of military life it must be miserable'.³³

Providing all the food, arms and ammunition needed by such large numbers of men proved to be a major challenge. The bakers of Uitenhage managed to maintain high production of bread and rusks, and meat came under great demand.³⁴ Due to shortages, Willshire ordered some of the cattle still left over from the Brereton raid to be returned from Zwarttruggens where they had been sent for safekeeping three months earlier. They were needed to feed the troops and supplement the oxen, which were growing too weak from overgrazing to be useful in hauling the wagons needed for the invasion. As Willshire put it, 'the grazing being so bad it has literally worn the cattle of the commandos here off their legs'.³⁵ The acute shortage of horses enabled several locals to make handsome profits by selling any horse that was in usable condition. Colonel Cuyler himself sold six horses at 150 rixdollars each and Stockenström managed to round up fifty horses 'not of the best condition' from the Graaff-Reinet area.³⁶ Saddles and guns also proved popular commodities. Barley from the Graaff-Reinet area was in high demand.³⁷

During May, Stockenström busily prepared to take command of the northern invasion force. As the designer of the invasion plan sent to Cape Town in February, he knew exactly what would be expected of him and his men coming from Graaff-Reinet and the northern farming areas. He sent men to Grahamstown to secure the arms and ammunition that he would need and arranged for extra clothing for his men to be packed into knapsacks and chests to remain in Grahamstown until the action started, at which time they would be transported with the central supply train:³⁸

The clothing should be packed tightly, because the middle Commando cannot take along more than one wagon for every 50 men. But the wives or mothers can keep in readiness that which they would want to send to their husbands and sons later on. After the first attack has happened, we will again replenish that which we might need.³⁹

During the month, he deployed various field cornets to the military posts along the Fish River in readiness for the full three-pronged invasion he expected to take

place on 31 May.⁴⁰ As a precautionary measure, he ordered all farms nearest his borders to be abandoned and the occupants moved into more densely concentrated camps for safety.⁴¹ He remained in steady communication with Willshire in Grahamstown throughout the month, the two collaborating in working out every logistical detail of the coming military action.

However, the plans did not work out as expected. Governor Lord Charles Somerset found it difficult to muster all the needed men, arms and ammunition from Cape Town and the transport ships to carry them to Algoa Bay were not available.⁴² He had to order Willshire to hold off the invasion.⁴³ Once the fresh reinforcements arrived in early June, Willshire ran into difficulties getting them transported inland. He hired wagons from the various commandos, but was later instructed to ask them to refund their payments as these had not been duly authorised by the governor.⁴⁴

A new target for the invasion was set for the beginning of July. As the expected date approached, it became clear that further reinforcements would soon be at hand, leading to yet another postponement. Delays in moving goods and men from Cape Town could not be avoided and hasty arrangements were also made to divert several companies of British soldiers who were headed for India to join the operations on the eastern frontier. Three additional companies of the 38th Regiment arrived in Grahamstown on 14 June, joined two days later by the 54th Regiment and more reinforcements from the 38th.⁴⁵ From the Swellendam district, four hundred fresh horses (in four divisions of seventy-five each) were sent, but were only expected to arrive in mid-July.⁴⁶

Clearly the greatest and most exasperating delay for Willshire was caused by the arrival on the frontier of Major Holloway of the Royal Engineers, who reached Grahamstown on 28 June along with the last detachments of the 38th and 54th Regiments.⁴⁷ Without wasting time, he got to work the next day: as Willshire put it, 'Major Holloway and myself rode around Grahams Town this day' inspecting whatever was necessary for the safety of the town.⁴⁸ Holloway immediately countermanded orders to proceed with the invasion until proper reinforcement of military installations within the Colony had been made. As the governor explained to the Colonial Secretary, 'the molestations which several of the military posts suffered from numerous bodies of hostile Caffers' meant precautionary measures had to be taken 'previous to following the enemy into his own country'.⁴⁹ Most of the required work took place in Grahamstown where several small redoubts, or mud forts, were constructed as a backup in case of a counter-attack on the town.

This construction delayed the invasion by an additional four weeks in July and required ten more wagons from Graaff-Reinet for daily use in carrying materials.⁵⁰ Though clearly frustrated by the additional delay, Willshire admitted to Stockenström that he could not argue against it as the amaXhosa had already expressed their intention to counter-attack behind the lines of the invading force: 'Indeed to our patrols on the Fish River they have said they would do so. Should they do it and carry Grahams Town during our absence, how could I justify myself for leaving it before it was secured? and thereby risking no less than the loss of the Frontier.'⁵¹ The Cape Town press reported:

From the communications which have been had with the Caffer people from Caffer Drift, it seems that the Chiefs expect to be attacked, and that they have a force in readiness to enter the Colony, as soon as they shall have ascertained that our troops have moved; upon a rumour to that effect lately, they threw forward several detached parties, which retired upon finding their information incorrect.⁵²

The additional month's delay apparently stretched Willshire's patience to the limit. In a confidential letter to Stockenström he wrote in mid-July: 'You cannot imagine the difficulties that I have daily to encounter (not from the commando's, for never did men behave better than they have) from the nature of the Service I have to perform, but difficulty must never be mentioned when Duty is in question.'⁵³

Xhosa strategies

Only a few glimpses come through the written records to give insight into the amaXhosa response to events at Grahamstown and then the long wait before the British invaded over three months later. As seen above, fairly intensive military actions continued after 22 April in the areas to the west and north of Grahamstown. This suggests that the amaXhosa living to the north of Grahamstown, traditionally believed to be followers of Ngqika, were in fact very active in hostilities against the Colony. As with the battle at Grahamstown itself, it is impossible to know if Ngqika himself supported the attacks or merely lacked the power and influence to restrain his people, who clearly chose to follow the policies of Ndlambe and Makhanda. Ngqika himself remained ensconced in the Kakaberg Mountains. His occasional messages to the nearest officer on the frontier, Major Abbey, posted at Roodewaal, provide the only clue about the relationship between the Xhosa chiefs.

Just two weeks after the battle at Grahamstown, Major Abbey received a strange

request from Ngqika, asking for permission to travel with a group of his people to Trompetter's Drift 'to retake some cattle stolen from him by Slambie'.⁵⁴ Ngqika sought permission in advance, he stated, since he did not want his British allies to become alarmed at the movement of his people. He awaited their reply before starting out. Given the surprising number of Ngqika's men, such as Ngcuka, who had fallen in the battle at Grahamstown, Willshire, Stockenström and Cuyler all remained highly sceptical about where Ngqika's loyalties lay: 'He is as great & faithless a rascal as any of the others,' wrote Cuyler a few days after the battle.⁵⁵ In response to the request of early May, Willshire sought to put him to the test by agreeing to allow him to go to Trompetter's Drift only if he immediately then returned to the Kakaberg. 'If Gaika goes to retake his cattle and returns to the Kakaberg, tis clear no understanding exists between him and Slambie; If he remains at Trompetter's drift, we have forced him to show himself in his real colours, sooner than he intended.'⁵⁶ Since Ngqika's messenger to Major Abbey had hinted that his king might wish to remain at Trompetter's Drift to avoid getting in the way of the impending invasion, Willshire suspected that the proposed journey was more likely to be about forging an alliance with Ndlambe.

Although such a journey never materialised, the request reveals the dynamics between the chiefs. Within the unity principle it would not have been unusual for Ndlambe and Ngqika to have come to a mutual understanding that Ndlambe should return to his vanquished nephew some of the cattle won at the battle of Amalinde. Despite the devastating effect of the Brereton raid on Ndlambe's people, Ngqika had remained in a form of exile in the Kakaberg Mountains for six months after it. It appears likely that the proposed journey was designed primarily to conduct a face-to-face indaba (parley) between Ndlambe and Ngqika, possibly the first to take place after the tumultuous string of events of which the routing at Grahamstown was only the latest. If this had been the intention, liaising with the British for safe passage could be seen as a sign that matters remained extremely tense between uncle and nephew. It is hard to imagine why Ngqika would have consulted the British at all, if he had not intended travelling through the Colony on the way to Trompetter's Drift, the nearest river crossing to Ndlambe's stronghold on the eastern side of the Fish River. Someone who sees himself as the king of his land would hardly ask a neighbour for permission to travel through his own kingdom. The request suggests that Ngqika wanted to approach Trompetter's Drift from the colonial side of the river. Since the country on both sides of the crossing is quite open, with gently rolling hills bordered by higher cliffs and ridges to the rear,

it provided an ideal location for Ngqika to set up camp on the colonial side while being able to keep a watch for movements of large numbers of Ndlambe soldiers from the higher hills nearby. The same could be said for the terrain from the Ndlambe side of the river.

In some ways, the proposed meeting echoed the layout of the 1817 Kat River meeting, with the river forming a distinct barrier between the two sides and rendering any major military action unlikely. Willshire was probably right to suspect that the request would lead to heightened co-operation between the two chiefs. However, he failed to understand that it also signalled the tenuous nature of Ngqika's position among his own people, if he could not travel safely through his own territory and had to rely on British protection.

About a month later, in mid-June, Ngqika again sent a message to Major Abbey to say that his people intended to take their cattle for grazing in the pastures near the confluence of the Koonap and Fish Rivers. When he learned of this, Willshire noted that the area in question was inhabited by people viewed as Ndlambe's adherents. His concern was that once the invasion got under way it would be impossible to differentiate between followers. However, he agreed to the proposal saying, 'I will apprise him when it is necessary for him to recall his people to the Kakaberg, to be out of the way of my part of the Commando.'⁵⁷ Presumably some understanding about grazing had been reached between Ndlambe and Ngqika, whether they had actually met or not.

In a similar spirit, it would appear that Ngqika was doing nothing to prevent further Xhosa raiding designed to recover more of the cattle taken from them in the Brereton raid. In early June, Willshire reported that large numbers of amaXhosa had flooded into the Zwartuggens neighbourhood roughly 130 kilometres west of Grahamstown, where the remaining cattle had been taken for safekeeping. Following the murder of some herders, Stockenström sent a special patrol to restore order.⁵⁸ This area would have been accessible only from the Xhosa territory that borders the Fish River where it runs from north to south in the vicinity of Roodewaal military post (Cookhouse today). This is quite near the Kakaberg where Ngqika resided and far from Ndlambe's area to the east of Grahamstown.

On 1 July Stockenström had a face-to-face meeting with King Ngqika. From this encounter, he concluded that Ngqika certainly was not to be trusted, based on his statement that he could not act against the amaNdlambe because so many of his mother's 'people and children' lived among them. Even though Ngqika's men had recently killed two Ndlambe soldiers, this was not deemed to be sufficient

assurance of the king's loyalties. Stockenström proceeded to order that all cattle owned by farmers near the border should be grouped together in safe places since the amaXhosa often drove cattle in front of them when setting fire to farmhouses at night.⁵⁹ He further recommended that full contingency plans be made for the possibility that Ngqika might invade the Colony behind the invading column.

The war for the Fish River bush

The long-awaited British invasion finally commenced on 28 July 1819, using the plan to move in three distinct columns. Virtually all of the fighting took place in the Fish River valley itself, a mere 35 kilometres from Grahamstown. This was the area chosen by the amaXhosa to make their stand, based on their own intimate knowledge of the thickly forested valleys and steep cliffs that characterised their side of the border. Indeed, the gloom and mystery of the thick bush country began to take on almost mythic proportions in the minds of the invaders. The near success of the amaXhosa in controlling the river valley soon emerged as justification for driving them out altogether from its vicinity and making the next river to the east, the Keiskamma, with its much gentler banks, the new boundary between the Colony and independent Africa. The threat of the ominous Fish River bush became the reason for annexing land that had never before been considered part of the Cape Colony and had always been understood to belong entirely to the amaXhosa.

A vivid, detailed account of the experiences of Willshire's central column was kept by Ives Stocker, a military engineer and geographer sent to report on the prospects of the about-to-be-acquired territory for settlement, agriculture and other forms of colonial industry. He described the terrain and vegetation:

[T]he country skirting the Great Fish River is an uniform black forest of bush of an average depth of 2½ miles, above which it is open, small clumps of bushy and shrubby plants . . . The density and black appearance of this forest is uniform and always preserves its dark green colour throughout the year. From the closeness with which the several shrubs are interwoven and their compact arrangement, this forest may be considered as almost impenetrable. Human art may readily affect a passage, but human effort would generally fail in the attempt to penetrate it. Elephants and Rhinoceros infest the above in vast herds and by their tracts throughout it passes are established which might be perfected into roads at pleasure.⁶⁰

What Stocker failed to report was that the bush was infested with the treacherous *umqagula* plant, a harmless looking bush with soft leaves covering nearly invisible small thorns on the branches that act like hooks in manufactured fabric. A British soldier in his woollen red uniform would stand little chance of moving swiftly if his clothing was thus hooked in hundreds of places. In contrast, the amaXhosa used leather garments and shields that easily deflected the small clinging thorns. Mostert described the conditions as very dangerous for the British because an assailant could 'be sitting mere inches away, invisible and unsuspected, and waiting to thrust his spear into a pursuer'.⁶¹ Theal also elaborates on the challenging nature of this bush: 'To persons who have not seen the face of this country and who are not aware of the strength of the ravines and clefts into which this extraordinary people retreats, the exertions of the assailants will not be understood; but to those who have seen it, it will appear almost incredible that so much has been effected.'⁶² British reconnaissance told them that many of the amaNdlambe had never moved away from the edge of the bush during the whole of the long wait, obviously keeping close in readiness for the invasion.

Indeed the entire plan for the invasion revolved around trying to deal with the conditions of the Fish River valley. The area inhabited by Chief Ndlambe's people coincided with the part of the Fish River that runs in a north to south direction, culminating in the Indian Ocean. From the ocean up to Trompetter's Drift, the cliffs and thick bush come virtually down to the river's edge, making movement by soldiers from either side extremely difficult. This part of the river includes the Lower and Upper Kaffir's Drifts, both of which were quite inaccessible for wagons, but therefore used by the Xhosa soldiers who could slip through the rugged bush much more easily. Thus, Major Fraser's column could cross only at Trompetter's Drift and then slowly make its way down towards the sea, moving along the open, grassy land on top of the cliffs. Before the war concluded, the colonial forces had exerted great effort to clear a road leading up from Trompetter's Drift to the open lands at the top of the cliffs.⁶³

Willshire's central supply column would never have dared to try crossing at Trompetter's Drift because of the steep slopes and thick bushes on the Xhosa side, making it extremely vulnerable to attack. Instead, his supply train circled round slightly to the west, to cross at De Bruyn's Drift and then travelled eastward through fairly open country, already largely cleared of Ngqika's followers after the battle at Amalinde. It consisted of '350–400 regular troops, an artillery and engineer brigade and 40 wagons' over which Stocker presided as quartermaster-general. The main

challenge of this route was crossing the Kat River. For this, the British brought along a team of engineers who paused to build a small bridge, allowing the artillery to cross over. If rainmaking was indeed one of Makhanda's special skills, he could hardly have done a better job. Most of the invasion force found itself seriously bogged down for the first several days of its operations. It took four hours to construct the bridge across the Kat River and one and half hours to get all the wagons across.⁶⁴ These delays, also hampered by very heavy rain, caused the burgher forces to become exceedingly restless and disgruntled with British reliance on technology: 'This was "the fashion" as a boer observed in a very angry tone, which lasted two months.'⁶⁵

Having crossed the intervening rivers, Willshire's column made camp at a spot about 8 kilometres north-east of Committee's Drift, the next crossing upstream from Trompetter's Drift. Once there, his engineers saw how they could improve the access to this crossing with just a few hours' work, rendering it a far shorter way back to Grahamstown than the long circuitous route they had just taken.⁶⁶ Charles Lennox Stretch, who also travelled with the central column, recalled years later when writing his memoirs that the British had been quite uninformed about the nature of the enemy they moved against, saying that 'so deficient was the knowledge at that early intercourse with the barbarians occupying western Kaffraria, we fancied they possessed redoubts or stockades, for some of the waggons in the train contained scaling ladders and some thousand sand bags'.⁶⁷ A second temporary bridge was built by the engineers over the Kilo River, also in heavy rain. By 2 August, Willshire's supply column set up its base camp at Phoonah's Kraal, overlooking the Keiskamma River.⁶⁸

Most of the hard work of the invasion was borne by Stockenström's forces, which had made a twelve-day journey from their entry point to the far north, leaving the Baviaan's River on 22 July. Stockenström himself commanded this column of one thousand men divided into six divisions, each headed by trusted veld cornets.⁶⁹ Since this column mostly consisted of boers who were much more familiar with the terrain than the British regulars, it fell to them to scour the Fish River bush which had been so studiously avoided by Willshire's supply column.

Prior to this arduous undertaking, Stockenström believed he had achieved an easy victory. His column had travelled rather uneventfully as far east as a ridge overlooking the Keiskamma River, where it arrived on 30 July. From there he could see, beyond the river, vast herds of what were indeed Chief Ndlambe's cattle. The old chief himself was said to be among them. He had left the area of the Fish

River bush during the months of waiting, seeking better grazing some 50 kilometres away. But just when Stockenström would have embarked in hot pursuit to drive them even further away from the colonial border, his men got bogged down by extremely heavy rain, forcing them to try to hide in the woods for cover. However, 'the Caffres surrounded him in the night with great numbers; the sentinels gave the alarm, but the muskets were wet, and he had only the bayonet to trust to'.⁷⁰ The boers managed to defend their precarious position and ultimately succeeded with no loss of life.

Whilst Stockenström's men remained unable to move in the torrential rains for the next three days, Ndlambe, his men and his cattle successfully crossed back westward over the Keiskamma River and did not stop until they reached their familiar Fish River bush. They took refuge in one of the deepest, most remote clefts in the cliffs, still remembered today by his descendants as 'the place where Ndlambe hid'.⁷¹ It is strategically located about midpoint between the Fish River crossings at Trompetter's Drift and Committee's Drift, thus enhancing the Xhosa chances of seeing any approaching hostile force. The *ezifrareni* (place of wood) valley has a sheer cliff at its back and some of the densest bush of the whole Fish River valley filling the entrance.⁷² With a natural spring and good grazing land on the top of the cliff area, cattle could be sustained quite easily. Three of Chief Ndlambe's most trusted councillors, Phungela, Qebeyi and Marhamba, each occupied adjacent hilltops to keep a lookout for the approaching enemy, ready to light signal fires to warn of danger if need be. From this well-secured spot, Ndlambe co-ordinated with Makhanda and Chungwa, who resided further to the south, occupying the coastal lands between the Fish and Keiskamma Rivers.⁷³

Eventually on 4 August, as the heavy rains ceased and clear cool weather returned, some of Stockenström's men discovered Chief Ndlambe's forces and they engaged in one of the most desperate clashes of the entire war, testing the ability of the boers to the utmost. A reporter described the encounter:

In a deep cleft, however, a great number of them were discovered and 150 of our undaunted Burghers descended almost a precipice after them; unfortunately a musket going off by accident, gave them notice of the approach of the Graaf Reinnetters, when they gave a dreadful yell, and with threats of destroying the whole party charged them, and they flew into the deepest recesses of the woods, leaving 60 men dead, besides having had many wounded, who crept into the fastnesses.⁷⁴

This, like so many other engagements in the bush, ended inconclusively as the amaNdlambe melted into the dense growth and then disappeared. Both Stockenström and Willshire were deeply concerned over the welfare of their men, who had been exerting themselves under arduous conditions for eighteen days with little rest. However, after only a short break, from 5 to 7 August they resumed their task of bravely entering into the worst of the thick bush to rout out their Xhosa enemies, ultimately succeeding. As Stockenström put it:

I had no trouble in making such men as I had under me creep into the narrowest foot-paths, and descend the steepest precipices. Day and night they pursued and surprised the enemy in the remotest recesses, till then considered inaccessible, until large bodies of men, women and children were compelled night after night to find their way to the Keiskamma.⁷⁵

The most intensive fighting in the war for the Fish River valley took place between 7 and 14 August. It started with a skirmish that left six Xhosa warriors dead and a number of cattle retaken. Two days later, on 9 August, a major colonial thrust into the bush resulted in twenty amaXhosa killed and two thousand head of cattle captured. Apparently, most of the Xhosa fighters had regrouped further downstream as 'parties were employed to scour the bush and hunt them out, but only women and children were encountered'.⁷⁶ The colonists were then delayed a further three days by more heavy rain. By 11 August, Willshire, writing to Stockenström, stated that he did not know where the amaXhosa were but hoped they had all fled over the Keiskamma. He surmised that they were leaving the thinnest, weakest cattle behind as a bluff for the British, while taking the best with them. If the amaXhosa thought this would appease the boers and encourage them to return quietly back to Grahamstown, they were wrong. He said: 'they will know better soon' of the plans to pursue and 'punish' them.⁷⁷ By this time, Stockenström had established a camp at the top of the rise at Trompetter's Drift, giving him better access to the steep bush downstream.

With the rain still falling, 'on the 13th, the Caffres showed themselves in great force, hoping that the wet would prevent our Burghers from using their firearms'.⁷⁸ But they were met with heavy fire and the boers were ready to attack, so the amaXhosa retreated. When the sun broke through for a scorching hot day the next day, the main battle at last took place. The Xhosa force was discovered in the bush by Stockenström's men, prompting them to cross over the Fish River and head into

the Colony with large numbers of cattle. When Fraser's men, based at Lower Kaffir's Drift, heard the shooting they quickly joined the fighting, cutting off the Xhosa who were described as 'astonished to find themselves suddenly between two fires'.⁷⁹ After intensive fighting, the British forces captured another six thousand head of cattle.⁸⁰ Indeed, Major Holloway's fear of a rearguard action proved justified as the final battle for the Zuurveld took place within colonial boundaries. For the amaXhosa, this was clearly the moment of their military defeat.

Makhanda's surrender

The conquest of the amaNdlambe had immediate repercussions. The day after the battle, Makhanda and Ndlambe apparently made a joint offer to Stockenström to discuss terms of peace, while Chungwa, via his brother, came to Stockenström with his own offer, but 'to neither of these overtures could Mr. Stockenström listen'.⁸¹ Later that day, Stockenström allowed two women to enter his camp to speak to him. Knowing that women often played important roles in diplomacy as well as reconnaissance, he welcomed them: 'These poor half-naked, half-starved women, after a long preamble, describing the position of their people, stated that they had been sent by Makanna to beg permission to come to me to discuss matters in safety.'⁸² Stockenström pointed out that he was not the commanding officer and that he could guarantee Makhanda's life but not his liberty, as he was under orders to take him in dead or alive. Given this statement, Stockenström did not expect much, so was caught completely off-guard when the next day, at sunset, Makhanda himself, accompanied by the two women who proved to be his wives, walked calmly into the military camp. Another observer described the great surprise 'among us' when 'the celebrated Caffer prophet, towards evening of the next day, walked coolly into the camp – with an air of pride and self-possession, which certainly commanded respect'. The same report claims that Makhanda said: '[P]eople say that I have occasioned the war: let me see whether my giving myself up will restore peace.'⁸³

After eating some food, Makhanda 'entered into a conversation with the Landdrost, in which he displayed no small share of sound judgement and shrewd sagacity'. However, the voluntary prisoner became uneasy when he learned that Stockenström was not commander and that he would be delivered to Willshire the next day: 'He said he knew the Colonel too well to trust him: that he was too much the friend of his mortal enemy, Gaika, and would deliver him up to that chief, who would cruelly torture and murder him.' The officers with whom he was conversing

did not share this gloomy outlook: 'Our arguments to persuade him that his suspicion was unfounded, were unavailing. He remained sulky and indignant; so that it was deemed necessary to place a guard over him until next morning.'⁸⁴

Given Makhanda's co-operation, Stockenström was unsure what course of action to take as his reminiscences show:

'Parole' was of course out of the question. 'Prison' I had none. To secure him by the wagon chain or thongs I shrank from. I therefore placed him in a large comfortable covered Boers' wagon, as good as my own, with the sails tied down, and fed him from my own supplies, but I placed two sentinels behind the wagon and two in front: who received orders, which were explained to him, to shoot him if he should attempt to escape.'⁸⁵

The following day Stockenström rode in person to Willshire's camp to inform him of this development. A few days later Willshire, while moving his camp from the Committee's Drift area to a new site on the Mgwangqa River, passed by and took control of the prisoner. Stockenström noted, 'I was sorry to see him handcuffed between two soldiers.'⁸⁶

Whilst under Willshire's guard, Makhanda was visited by curious officers, including Sergeant Charles Lennox Stretch, who reported: 'We could not help feeling for his fallen position and surprised at his lofty demeanour and appearance. He did not speak often, except to request Colonel Willshire, with whom he was acquainted "not to continue the war on all their cattle"; Colonel Brereton had taken 20,000, and his people were starving.'⁸⁷

Willshire wasted no time in sending his most valued prisoner to Grahamstown for safekeeping while he awaited instructions from Governor Somerset as to what to do with him. 'A few days afterward' two Xhosa men came into Willshire's camp to plead for clemency and understanding from the British. Their visit was recorded in detail by an officer who participated in the event.⁸⁸ The two men were senior councillors of Ndlambe and Makhanda: 'They were, I think, as noble-looking men, and as dignified in their demeanour, as any I have ever beheld,' stated the recording officer. It was Makhanda's head councillor who then proceeded to deliver the Great Speech 'in so manly a manner, with so graceful an attitude, and with so much feeling and animation, that the bald translation which I am able to furnish, can afford but a very faint and inadequate idea of his eloquence'. He gave a detailed history of the interactions between amaXhosa, boers and British, revealing the

perspective of the amaNdlambe in great detail, which has been much quoted in previous chapters. This speech moved some to tears, but not Willshire, who ‘was made of sterner stuff than to be melted by the misery of “Caffer savages”’.⁸⁹

Whether Makhanda surrendered because of his own people’s rejection of him and the role that he had played in the war is subject to debate. Stockenström believed this was the case, saying: ‘The sufferers in their misery became enraged with Makanna, whom they blamed as the cause of the war, insisting on his going to make peace. He considered himself hardly safe among his countrymen and would not accompany those who fled across the Keiskamma.’⁹⁰ In another contemporary account, the governor reported that ‘Lynx has thrown himself upon British clemency, declaring that there was no longer any security for him’.⁹¹

However, other observers commented on the unshakable loyalty to their leaders exhibited by the amaNdlambe people. The British had declared the leading chiefs to be outlaws ‘and the inhabitants threatened with utter extermination if they did not speedily deliver them up “dead or alive”, – the Caffer people yet remained faithful to their chiefs . . . not one was willing to earn the high reward offered for his apprehension by his “civilised” conquerors.’⁹² Theal believed that Makhanda decided to surrender ‘without the consent or even knowledge of his followers, who were ready to perish with him’.⁹³ Similarly, no one betrayed Chief Ndlambe even though he was ‘proclaimed an outlaw, and ordered to be delivered up by the other Caffers. But although this was the arrangement between Gaika and the Colonial government, S’Lhambi was neither forsaken by his adherents, nor lost any of his former influence in the country.’⁹⁴ In typical colonial fashion, the Cape Town press viewed Makhanda’s surrender as likely to help bring hostilities to a close as his mysterious influence could no longer be effective:

The capture of the celebrated Chieftain Lynx, is highly important, as this man, who was a virulent enemy to the Colonists, possessed an influence of the most extraordinary nature over the Caffre Chiefs and Caffre People; they believed him to be a prophet, and their predatory incursions were chiefly regulated by his pretended foreknowledge of what the event was to be.⁹⁵

Ultimately, Makhanda was sent as a prisoner of war to Robben Island, only to die in a bold escape attempt one year later. His fate at the hands of the British was generally condemned by all historians. Thomas Pringle used it as evidence of colonial impudence:

As regards the chief Makanna, it is melancholy to reflect how valuable an instrument for promoting the civilisation of the Caffer tribes was apparently lost by the nefarious treatment and indirect destruction of that extraordinary barbarian, whom a wiser and more generous policy might have rendered a grateful ally to the colony, a permanent benefactor to his own countrymen.⁹⁶

Such sentiments were even more stridently echoed by Justus when analysing the causes of the next frontier war in 1835: 'The treatment of this extraordinary man was to the last degree infamous; a shame and disgrace to the British nation.'⁹⁷

Some writers, such as Theal, focused on the strength of Makhanda's character, having sacrificed his life and liberty for the cause of his people:

Makana now performed an act that should have entitled him to the respect of all brave men. Knowing that as long as he remained at large the Governor would not agree to terms of peace, on the 15th of August 1819, he voluntarily surrendered to Landdrost Stockenström, upon assurances that his life would be spared. His bravery and magnanimity made him deserving of a better fate than was awarded to him.⁹⁸

George Thompson in his travels not long after these events formed the opinion that Makhanda never expected to be so badly treated after surrendering voluntarily: his subsequent imprisonment was 'a fate which he appears not to have anticipated'.⁹⁹ Indeed, other contemporary cases show that hostages often formed an important part of peace negotiations but the ultimate safety of the token prisoner was never in doubt.¹⁰⁰ This proved to be the case a few weeks later when Chief Bhurhu voluntarily joined the British military camp for a few days while messages were sent to his brother, King Hintsa, about peace proposals. When Hintsa arrived, he also felt safe enough to remain within the British camp for the duration of the talks.

The clearance of amaNdlambe territory

Refusing to be appeased by Makhanda's self-sacrifice or any other overture towards peace on the part of the amaXhosa, the British forces then embarked on a campaign to clear their new territory between the Fish and Keiskamma Rivers of all Xhosa people. From their base camp at Phoonah's Kraal and a smaller camp on the Mgwangqa River, the combined colonial forces divided themselves into three columns, leaving a reserve under Major Fraser, and made many forays into the

area further south: 'The villages of the hostile clans were burnt, their cattle carried off, their fields of maize and millet trodden down, and the wretched inhabitants driven into the thickets, and there bombarded with grapeshot and Congreve rockets.'¹⁰¹ The destruction of human lives moved Stockenström to assist his second in command, Dr Robert Knox, to treat injured women and children when fired on at night by the troops, reporting that 'great numbers of them were shot and the extent of their distress was more than I can describe'.¹⁰² The grandmother of Isaac Williams Wauchope told him of how she and the baby on her back were grazed by British bullets while hiding in the forest, an experience that none of the people could understand or explain.¹⁰³ Some of the retreating men tried to return to their families: '[W]hen the Xhosa soldiers found that they were only being driven further and further from their homes and families, they tried to return in small bands, but were intercepted by Major Fraser and the Cape Corps.' Sporadic fighting took place and as the amaXhosa were driven eastward 'various skirmishes ensued, terminating always in favour of the British force, and to the prejudice of the Kaffers in the loss of some hundreds, and vast herds of cattle, with the demolition of their habitations and produce'.¹⁰⁴ Reports of these successes prompted Cuyler, writing from Uitenhage, to say to Willshire, 'I hope soon to hear of Mr Slambie & some thousands of his followers being killed.'¹⁰⁵ However, no records state just how and when Chief Ndlambe eluded the British and Thompson learned that the colonial forces never caught up with the main body of Xhosa soldiers and cattle.¹⁰⁶ The British offered hefty rewards and even planned to resort to deceit to capture or kill the fugitive chiefs, but no Xhosa people gave away their leaders and even Major Fraser refused to go along with dirty tactics proposed to trick Chiefs Habana and Chungwa.¹⁰⁷ Thompson noted that not only was Ndlambe never betrayed by anyone, but that his prestige also remained untarnished.¹⁰⁸

The British forces particularly focused their attention on the areas previously inhabited by Makhandá's people along the Bhira and Mgwangqa Rivers. Stocker described his area as 'the most populous and most cultivated. In the neighbourhood of the Beka Caffer kraals were so numerous as to occur in every square mile, and abundantly distributed in number.' The fields showed an abundance of 'kaffer corn (or millet), Indian corn (or maize), water melons, calabash, pumpkins, tobacco, etc.'. ¹⁰⁹

Making an unstable peace

By 27 August Willshire, at the time based at Trompetter's Drift, turned his attention to King Hintsá and started sending him messages about his intention to come to

the king's home, at that time still four days' travel away. The point was to show the king that the British had the power to move anywhere in Africa, making no enemies of theirs ever safe. Both sides prepared for the encounter. As messages between Hintsa and Willshire were exchanged, the former insisted that a European accompany every mission, consistent with the Xhosa art of negotiations which dictated that a representative of one's adversary be allowed to move freely among enemies as evidence of goodwill.¹¹⁰

Willshire sent Major Abbey to escort King Ngqika, his son Maqoma and about 150 armed and plumed warriors from his safe base at the foot of the Winterberg Mountains to join the colonial forces on the banks of the Kei River. Although Ngqika's men were considered to be a bodyguard for Willshire, their presence sent a clear message that they were allied with the conquering British forces, thus strengthening Ngqika's own status and position in relation to Hintsa.

In their preliminary communications, Hintsa first had to reassure Willshire that he was not harbouring the fugitive Ndlambe. However, he admitted that the fugitive chief had deposited cattle and horses with him for safekeeping prior to the British invasion. He claimed to be 'feeling very sorry that T'Slambie had ever induced him to enter into his views' and 'promised to return all colonial horses and arms which T'Slambie had left in his care'.¹¹¹

Willshire's column crossed the Keiskamma River on 11 September and then the Buffalo River on 14 September. On approaching the Kei River, they found the country heavily inhabited by the people of Bhurhu, King Hintsa's older brother.¹¹² At first, Hintsa retreated further east to the banks of the Mbashe River. While negotiations continued, the British troops were entertained by Ngqika and his men, whom Stretch recalled 'enjoyed our camp life amazingly. They ate and smoked to their heart's content, amused the young officers by showing their dexterity in poisoning the assegai before hurling it deep into an ox which Ngqika pierced through on one occasion laughing all the while with Maqoma at the white man's credulity'.¹¹³

Stretch further observed that at this time Ngqika and his party were highly suspicious of offers of alcohol: 'Brandy was unknown then to these people, and whenever the officers presented brandy or wine to Ngqika or Maqoma, they invariably made Ngqika's bushman servant taste it before they drank, and at length it became so nice to Plaatje that he did not leave much in the glass for his master'.¹¹⁴

Stocker used the time to note what he considered to be significant differences between the amaRharhabe under King Ngqika and the amaGcaleka of King Hintsa. He found Hintsa's people utterly 'uncontaminated by that predilection for spirituous

liquors in excess so objectionable in the character of Gaika's followers, and a consequence of the proximity of the latter to the Colony'. Near the Kei, 'every endeavour to make Hintza's followers drink spirits proved unavailing, and they looked upon the beguiling fluid with repugnance if not abhorrence'. In similar vein, King Hintsa's people were greatly astonished at the sight of firearms, but did not fear them; and they were 'less profusely decorated with ornaments' than Ngqika's people.¹¹⁵ As the colonial troops became increasingly bored and restless, they turned to hippo hunting in the Kei River as a pastime, slaughtering three.¹¹⁶

Eventually, faced with such a strong show of force and knowing the fate of the Ndlambe chiefs who had resisted the British, King Hintsa personally came to negotiate a settlement before the invaders could cross into his own country over the Kei River. Willshire had taken care not to allow any further military action until Stockenström could join him in his camp. Indeed, Stockenström's personal acquaintance with King Hintsa, dating back to the days of the Collins expedition in 1809, smoothed over the encounter. In a deciding moment, the two men faced each other from opposite sides of the Kei River. At first King Hintsa refused an invitation to come over to the British side. But when he saw Stockenström start to cross the river on horseback to meet him on his own turf, 'His Majesty was too quick for me; before the forefeet of my steed were wet, he was deep in the river, and in three minutes he was shaking hands with me saying, "I know you, and therefore come to you."'¹¹⁷

King Hintsa then remained in the British army camp for several days 'without even being watched'. Willshire defended the better treatment than that accorded to Makhandia by saying it was incumbent on them to treat him as they would have wished Stockenström to be treated if he had crossed over to them first. Stocker invariably compared the two kings, stating that 'Hintza is viewed as more powerful than Ngqika' and 'possesses greater energies of mind and more decision of conduct in his character'.¹¹⁸ An uneasy meeting between Ngqika and Hintsa was forced by the British in an effort to get Hintsa to acknowledge Ngqika's independent status. Hintsa, as the senior leader, however disapproving, had little choice under the circumstances but to agree.¹¹⁹

The reason for the long period of waiting was to allow time for Governor Somerset to arrive from Cape Town to bring the hostilities to a formal conclusion. Willshire met him on 12 October at Committee's Drift and gave him a quick tour of the notorious Fish River bush country.¹²⁰ Three days later they hosted a peace conference on a high peak near the Mgwangqa River (later renamed Somerset

Mount) that included King Ngqika and most of the subordinate chiefs, including those known as adherents of Ndlambe. The latter had remained in the forests until the last minute when Ngqika arrived. It was mostly a case of the British dictating the terms on which they would end their hostilities. The session started with the governor giving Ngqika a long history lesson on all the ways the British had assisted him. He went on to say that from henceforth there would be a strip of land occupied by neither the British nor amaXhosa lying between the Fish and Keiskamma Rivers, but in the north to include areas that had previously been under Ngqika. When Ngqika objected that this included the area near the Tyumie River where he had grown up, Somerset relented and allowed him to remain there. New large forts would be built deep inside the newly acquired British territory so that they could more easily take action against cattle raiders.

All the chiefs had to acknowledge Ngqika as their highest-ranking chief or king. Chiefs Chungwa, Krata and Habana all 'declared their sorrow for the part they had taken against the Colony and against Gaika'.¹²¹ This they did under threat of otherwise being sent to Robben Island like Makhanda. Ngqika invited these three chiefs to speak for themselves after hearing the governor's words. Chungwa said, '[H]e had always been, by right, subordinate to Gaika, but residing near 'TSambie, who was more powerful, he had submitted to circumstances and joined him.'¹²² The other two concurred.

In writing to his superiors in London later that day, Governor Somerset declared that a full peace had now been achieved as Chief Ndlambe had fled, his subordinate chiefs had all deserted him, King Hintsa declared his friendship and loyalty, and all the other chiefs agreed to submit themselves to Ngqika, the firm British ally. The terms of land settlement had been accepted.¹²³ Stocker also painted the event in a positive light, saying that all hostilities had now 'ended amicably' as 'the sable monarch ceded the country treated for, and courteously withdrew with his chiefs to occupy the country allotted him'.¹²⁴ Indeed, in colonial circles the newly acquired land was often referred to as the ceded or neutral territory, projecting an image of docile co-operation and agreement on the part of Ngqika. But as Governor Somerset explained to Willshire, the concept had purely military objectives:

The official justification given for so aggressively annexing Xhosa territory was that the clearing of this bush during the war had been an operation of such difficulty that the military officers were unanimous in opinion that

the Xosas ought not to be allowed again to get possession of it . . . Experience has shown that no number of Military Posts are effectual for preventing the Inroads and Depredations of the Caffer People upon the Colony, so long as that people have it in their power to establish themselves upon the confines of our Territory, and possess the Forests of the Fish River to secrete their Plunder in, till opportunity offers of driving off the stolen herds to the Savage Hordes in the rear, who gladly receive and conceal them.¹²⁵

Not even hunting or grazing was to be allowed in the ceded territory.

Few historians, however, believed that this end to the fifth frontier war actually solved any problems. John Milton pointed out: 'In his cavalier way Somerset did not consider it necessary to have the terms of this arrangement reduced to writing.'¹²⁶ Others have pointed out the unfairness of Ngqika's treatment. As Reyburn noted, 'Thus did Somerset sow the seeds of future frontier wars . . . the area taken from Ngqika was three times as large as that taken from Ndlambe.'¹²⁷ According to Justus' assessment: 'This treaty was forced on him by intimidation, and by intimidation we took from him a most valuable portion of his territory . . . this mockery of a treaty, a treaty with a friendly ally, whom we thus contrived to cheat out of his territory, and to make him an unwilling instrument of the ruin of his nation.'¹²⁸

Pringle described the treaty as what one would expect when 'the wolf and the lamb are the contracting parties'. Ngqika put his own case quite poignantly when he told the missionary John Brownlee, 'But when I look at the large extent of fine country that has been taken from me, I am compelled to say that, *though protected, I am rather oppressed by my protectors!*'¹²⁹ Further, no amount of meddling on the part of the British could restructure the troubled relationships among the Rharhabe chiefs. As Theal put it:

[B]eaten and humiliated as Ndlambe and his confederates were, they still refused to acknowledge him [Ngqika] as a superior, and were ready to fall on him again if he was left to his own resources alone, they continued to deny that he had any rights to make treaties with the British.¹³⁰

Though the long war for the Zuurveld had ended with the first annexation of uncontested Xhosa territory, it hardly resolved the tensions and conflicts inherent on a colonial frontier. In the interim, until the next all-out war fifteen years later, the struggles merely continued in subdued form.

Notes

1. Theal, *Compendium*, p. 190.
2. CA A378C: excerpts from the diary of Charles Lennox Stretch.
3. Theal, *Records*, Vol. 13: Stocker report, p. 72.
4. *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser* 15 May 1819.
5. CA 1/GR/16/8: letter no. 1248, circular to all field cornets from Stockenström, 29 April 1819 (translated from Dutch); CA 1/GR/9/71: Willshire, 25 April 1819.
6. Ibid.
7. CA 1/UIT/15/5: 24 April 1819.
8. CA 1/UIT/15/5: letter from Cuyler to Willshire, 27 April 1819.
9. CA 1/GR/16/8: letter no. 1259, 3 May 1819.
10. CA 1/UIT/15/5: letter no. 460, to Colonial Secretary enclosing letter from Major Fraser, 10 May 1819.
11. CA 1/UIT/15/5: 18 May 1819.
12. *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser* 5 June 1819.
13. CA 1/GR/9/71: letter from Willshire to Stockenström, 13 May 1819.
14. CA 1/GR/16/8: 6 June 1819.
15. CA 1/GR/9/71: 15 June 1819.
16. CA 1/GR/9/71: letter from Willshire on word from Colonial Secretary, 15 June 1819.
17. CA 1/GR/16/8: letter no. 1248, circular to field cornets, 13 May 1819.
18. CA 1/UIT/15/5: 10 May 1819.
19. CA 1/UIT/15/5: letter from Cuyler to Willshire, 12 May 1819.
20. CA 1/UIT/15/5: 24 April 1819.
21. CA 1/UIT/15/5: 3 May 1819.
22. CA 1/GR/9/71: 7 May 1819.
23. *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser* 25 May 1819.
24. CA 1/UIT/15/5: 24 April 1819.
25. CA 1/GR/16/8: circular to field cornets (translated from Dutch), 29 April 1819.
26. CA CO 104: Letters Received: Sundry Military and Naval Officers 1819: letter from Colonel Willshire to Major Rogers, Grahamstown, 29 May 1819.
27. CA CO 4841: letter from Bird to Cuyler, 15 May 1819.
28. CA CO 105: Letters Received, Private Individuals, 1819: H.C. van Niekerk, Grahamstown, 22 June 1819.
29. CA CO 4841: letter from Bird to Colonel Willshire, 7 May 1819.
30. CA 1/GR/9/71: 15 June 1819.
31. Ibid.
32. CA CO 2619: Letters Received from Uitenhage, 1819: from Fraser to Cuyler, 5 June 1819.
33. CA CO 104: 10 July 1819.
34. CA 1/UIT/15/5: letter no. 2358, Field Comdt J.J. Muller, Coegaskloof, 23 April 1819.
35. CA 1/GR/9/71: 7 May 1819.
36. CA 1/UIT/15/5: 12 May 1819; CA 1/GR/16/8: 7 May 1819.
37. CA 1/GR/9/71: 25 May 1819.
38. CA 1/GR/16/8: letter no. 1248, circular to all field cornets from Stockenström.
39. Ibid.

40. CA 1/GR/16/8: letter no. 1265 from Stockenström to Bird, 21 May 1819.
41. CA 1/GR/16/8: letter no. 1282 to Cuyler, 3 June 1819.
42. Theal, *Records*, Vol. 12: letter from Somerset to Captain Wauchope, 24 May 1819, p. 206.
43. Ibid: letter from Somerset to Earl Bathurst, 8 June 1819, pp. 220–3.
44. CA 1/GR/9/71: 16 November 1819.
45. CA 1/GR/9/71: 12, 15 and 16 June 1819.
46. CA 1/GR/9/71: 15 June 1819.
47. CA 1/GR/9/71: 21 June 1819.
48. CA 1/GR/9/71: 29 June 1819.
49. Theal, *Records*, Vol. 12: letter from Governor Somerset to Bathurst, 24 September 1819, p. 319.
50. CA 1/GR/9/71: 13 July 1819.
51. CA 1/GR/9/71: 29 June 1819.
52. *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser* 3 July 1819.
53. CA 1/GR/9/71: 13 July 1819.
54. CA 1/GR/9/71: 7 May 1819.
55. CA 1/UIT/15/5: letter from Cuyler to Willshire, 27 April 1819.
56. CA 1/GR/9/71: 7 May 1819.
57. CA 1/GR/9/71: 12 June 1819.
58. CA 1/GR/16/8: letter no. 1283 from Stockenström to Willshire, 6 June 1819.
59. CA 1/GR/16/8: letter no. 1293 from Stockenström to Willshire, 2 July 1819.
60. Theal, *Records*, Vol. 13: Stocker report, p. 41.
61. Mostert, *Frontiers*, p. 482.
62. Theal, *Records*, Vol. 12, p. 321.
63. Shaw, *Journal*.
64. Theal, *Records*, Vol. 13: Stocker report, pp. 40, 75.
65. CA A378C: Stretch diary.
66. Theal, *Records*, Vol. 13, Stocker report, p. 45.
67. Stretch, 'Makana', p. 69.
68. Theal, *Records*, Vol. 13: Stocker report, p. 40.
69. Stockenström, *Autobiography*, p. 118.
70. *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser* 28 August 1819.
71. Cebolikhaya Faltein, interview on 27 April 2010 at KwaNdlambe.
72. While much of the Fish River valley today suffers from deforestation and erosion, it remains too dense to penetrate and is used as a sustainable source of wood for neighbouring villages (Faltein interview).
73. *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser* 28 August 1819.
74. Ibid.
75. Stockenström, *Autobiography*, p. 121.
76. CA A378C: Stretch diary.
77. CA 1/GR/9/71: letter from Willshire to Stockenström, 11 August 1819.
78. Theal, *Records*, Vol. 13: Stocker report, p. 77; *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser* 11 September 1819.
79. Ibid.
80. Ibid., 28 August 1819.

81. Ibid.
82. Stockenström, *Autobiography*, p. 121.
83. Pringle, 'Letters', p. 74.
84. Ibid.
85. Stockenström, *Autobiography*, p. 121.
86. Ibid., p. 122.
87. CA A378C: Stretch diary.
88. The true author of this account is not named, but only indirectly referred to by Thomas Pringle who says he got it from Andries Stockenström in 1825. Stockenström's autobiography includes the same account, as if it were written by him. But a few third-person references suggest someone else was the author. A possibility is Robert Hart, who is known to have kept diaries in previous conflicts (Pringle, 'Letters', p. 74).
89. Ibid.
90. Stockenström, *Autobiography*, p. 120.
91. Theal, *Records*, Vol. 12, p. 321.
92. Pringle, *Narrative*, p. 284.
93. Theal, *History*, p. 339.
94. Thompson, *Travels*, p. 200.
95. *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser* 11 September 1819.
96. Pringle, *Narrative*, p. 288.
97. Justus, *Wrongs*, p. 85.
98. Theal, *Compendium*, p. 190.
99. Thompson, *Travels*, p. 199.
100. William Shaw accompanied Chief Kobe who was held in a British military camp whilst the other chiefs rounded up stolen cattle and deserters in 1824 (Shaw, *Journal*, p. 119). See Stockenström on Chief Bhurhu and King Hintsa remaining in the British military camp (*Autobiography*, p. 158).
101. Pringle, *Narrative*, p. 283.
102. Mostert, *Frontiers*, pp. 487–8; Stockenström, *Autobiography*, p. 119.
103. Wauchope, *Selected Writings*, p. 66.
104. Theal, *Records*, Vol. 13: Stocker report, p. 74.
105. CA 1/UIT/15/5: 23 August 1819.
106. Thompson, *Travels*, p. 200.
107. Pringle, 'Letters', p. 76.
108. Thompson, *Travels*, p. 200.
109. Theal, *Records*, Vol. 13: Stocker report, p. 49.
110. CA 1/GR/9/71: letter from Willshire to Stockenström, 27 August 1819.
111. *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser* 18 September 1819.
112. Theal, *Records*, Vol. 13: Stocker report, p. 64.
113. CA A378C: Stretch diary.
114. Ibid.
115. Theal, *Records*, Vol. 13: Stocker report, pp. 64, 65.
116. Theal, *Records*, Vol. 13: Stocker report, p. 63, footnote. The column killed three hippos in the Kei River, saw eight and wounded two others.

117. Stockenström, *Autobiography*, p. 123. Writing decades after the event, Stockenström described the Kei River as 'raging' and 'roaring'. However, Ives Stocker, who kept a daily diary, claimed 'the Kai River was so shallow that . . . Hintza's people crossed it 'with scarcely wet feet' (Theal, *Records*, Vol. 13: Stocker Report, p. 63).
118. *Ibid.*, pp. 63, 66.
119. *Ibid.*, p. 74; Cory, *Rise*, p. 397.
120. Theal, *Records*, Vol. 12: letter from Somerset to Bathurst, 15 October 1819, 'Intelligence from the Camp on the Gwangwa', p. 342.
121. *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser* 23 October 1819.
122. 'Chief Kassa died in action on the 4th – well known as a great enemy of the colonists' (*Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser* 15 August 1819). See also Theal, *Records*, Vol. 12, p. 343.
123. Theal, *Records*, Vol. 12: letter from Somerset to Bathurst, 15 October 1819, p. 337.
124. *Ibid.*, Vol. 13: Stocker report, p. 74.
125. *Ibid.*, Vol. 12: letter from Somerset to Willshire, 17 October 1819, p. 346.
126. Milton, *Edges*, p. 79.
127. H.A. Reyburn, 'From Amalinde to Somerset Mount' *The Critic* Vol. 4, No. 2, February 1936, p. 115.
128. Justus, *Wrongs*, p. 93.
129. Pringle, *Narrative*, p. 289.
130. Theal, *Compendium*, p. 191.

Escape from Robben Island

As the uneasy peace following the conquest settled in on the eastern frontier, the struggle continued for a small group of men, including Makhanda. They were held on Robben Island as prisoners of war with no promise or prospect of release. For them, the bitterness of their condition would not let them rest. The heroic memory of Makhanda finds its strongest expression in the fact that he escaped from Robben Island in August 1820, just under a year after his imprisonment there. His reputation as an early model freedom fighter was sealed by the fact that Robben Island could not hold him. In recent times, political activists have embraced his name as a symbol of the timelessness of their struggle. What he started in the early 1800s, they completed in the 1990s, they said. Indeed, some people feel that the spirit of Makhanda was reborn in Nelson Mandela. In exile, the African National Congress' Umkhonto we Sizwe soldiers celebrated every Christmas Day as Makana Day in the belief that this was the actual anniversary of his escape. Mandela himself has suggested that the name of Robben Island should be changed to Makana Island and ex-prisoners often refer to it as Makana University. Today, thousands of visitors travel to the island in a boat named *Makana*. The spirit of his resistance might have been easily recognisable to Mandela's generation of political prisoners on Robben Island, but very few details beyond these heroic legends have been passed down over the centuries since Makhanda lived.

A closer look at the scant existing records immediately suggests that perhaps the myths were simply myths. The escape did not take place on Christmas Day and Makhanda did not plan it. However, the beliefs were already popular among the amaXhosa by the late nineteenth century, suggesting that the construction of his heroic image overtook facts not long after his death.¹ The potent message within the Christmas Day myth suggests a close affinity between Makhanda and Jesus as saviours. Another significant strand of the legends about Makhanda was the belief that he would return alive to the eastern frontier. His arch-rival, Ngqika, continually pestered missionaries for information on Makhanda's whereabouts years after the escape. As the missionary Stephen Kay described it, 'Gaika smiled at the idea of his being drowned; and from his manner, it was clear that he deemed this utterly

impossible.² In 1856, when the prophetess Nongqawuse predicted that famous and beloved ancestors would rise from the dead, Makhanda was excluded on the grounds that he was not dead.³ Makhanda's own family refused to perform burial rituals until more than fifty years after he left them and were said to have been still hoping for his return into the early twentieth century.⁴ This stubborn insistence on rejecting news of his demise arose from the fact that Makhanda had told his followers that he would return at all costs. It was reinforced by the fact that the colonial government never gave formal notice of his death to the family or produced a body for burial. Indeed, the official colonial records and newspapers are silent on what happened to his body and contain no direct statement to confirm his death. This studied silence no doubt left space for legends to grow.

Makhanda himself had little to do with the planning of the escape, but what he stood for had everything to do with it and inspired the plotters. He had already demonstrated his determination to continue resisting his bondage by trying to escape his captors on two previous occasions. The first took place while he was held prisoner in Grahamstown as Willshire awaited instructions from the governor on what to do with his famous prisoner. The second attempted escape happened while Makhanda was being escorted from Grahamstown to Uitenhage to await a ship to carry him to Robben Island.⁵ Few details are known about these attempts except for the obvious fact that he was recaptured. Makhanda arrived at the Uitenhage prison on 26 September and was placed aboard the *Nautilus* on 29 September 1819.⁶ Even while in Uitenhage, he continued to plead for better treatment of his people. Circumstantial evidence suggests that the governor met Makhanda before issuing instructions for his care on Robben Island. Despite plans for Makhanda to be transported on the *Nautilus*, he ended up travelling on the *Redwing*, the ship that had just delivered the governor to Algoa Bay to start his negotiations to bring the war to its final conclusion.⁷ Given the governor's mission, it is highly unlikely that he did not meet Makhanda while they were so close to each other. An unusual order he gave, that Makhanda's wives should be allowed to return to their kraals to collect stored food, further suggests that Makhanda pleaded the threat of starvation as a reason for leniency, as his own councillor had already done in making the Great Speech.⁸

While it is evident that communication between Makhanda and other prisoners on Robben Island would have been difficult, events make it clear that freeing him was the point of the escape: three-quarters of those who got away hailed from Makhanda's home area of the eastern frontier. Hence the escape cannot be seen

simply as an opportunity for all and sundry to shake off the shackles of imprisonment and make a break for freedom. The commanding officer at Robben Island described it as an escape of all the Xhosa prisoners, including Makhanda.⁹ Clearly the event was linked to the recently concluded war on the eastern frontier, which had a devastating effect on the amaXhosa. The theme of heroism, bravery and determination to resist colonial oppression at all costs can be justly attributed to the many unknown men who executed the break for freedom. The telling of their story expands our understanding of the passions that drove people to take desperate and risky actions. The escape occurred in the historical context of their conquered land being filled with boatload after boatload of new settlers. At the time, in August 1820, the settlement scheme was into its fourth month and would not end until nearly five thousand new British occupants took full possession of the Zuurveld to secure the disputed territory.

Retrieving details about those who engineered the escape is not easy. The reconstruction of the event depends almost entirely on official correspondence, court records, prison records and newspaper articles. These include not only the case of those who were put on trial for their role in the escape, but also the original court cases that related to some of the escapees who were common criminals imprisoned on Robben Island. Just a few glimmers of real people, their own voices and their own ways of expressing themselves and explaining their actions come through such records. Many of the documents claim to be verbatim records of what was said either in a courtroom or in written statements taken from the accused. But the courts themselves were heavily structured to enforce colonial rule, leaving little room for creative questioning or probing into motives. The questions asked by the prosecutor showed great hostility towards a group of men who had just executed a full-scale rebellion against their guards and escaped from prison. Though many Xhosa prisoners took part in the escape, none have been referred to by plausible names. The records refer to most of them by meaningless common colonial names, such as Jacob, Jan and Klaas. Their story, however, is told through their actions, which are fully consistent with Makhanda's own fighting spirit of resistance.

Robben Island in 1820

'No island in the world can be more barren, dreary or uninteresting than Robin Island . . . the surface is covered with nothing but sand, heath and stones,' wrote the missionary John Campbell after his visit to Makhanda in November 1819.¹⁰ At that time it served two functions: as a prison for convicts and as the site of a

whaling station run by a Cape Town businessman named John Murray (the only harbour, Murray's Bay, still bears his name today). It was the presence of several small whaling boats, designed to be rowed by four people, which made the escape possible. Three years later, in 1823, the government bought out Murray's business to remove any possibility of further escapes.¹¹ Murray maintained a house not far from the harbour, kept for him in his absence by an overseer, a Khoi woman servant and male and female slaves from Mozambique.¹² A small house at the bottom of his garden became Makhanda's prison, where he was kept separately from the other prisoners out of fear that he would incite them to rebel.¹³ The main prison housed around 83 male convicts, while women were kept at the House of Correction in Cape Town.¹⁴ Apart from the Xhosa prisoners, most of the inmates had been convicted of various civil crimes, including theft, assault, fraud and desertion from service. They represented a cross-section of the Cape lower classes at that time, including slaves from other parts of Africa and the Dutch East Indian colonies, Khoi servants who had either deserted or disobeyed their masters, soldiers from the lower ranks of the British army who had committed civil crimes, as well as criminals from the poorer Dutch-speaking communities.

At the time of the escape, the prisoners' quarters included a hospital room with an adjoining sleeping room for the guards. At the opposite end of the prisoner area were barracks used to accommodate other soldiers when not on guard. A short distance from the prison was a house for the commandant of Robben Island, where food was also prepared for the prisoners.¹⁵ Cattle, probably belonging to the commandant and Murray, ranged freely in the area surrounding these buildings. Campbell claimed that apart from the prison, the commandant's house, Murray's house and the whaling warehouse, there were no other buildings on the island at that time.¹⁶

The whole place was generally run-down and in need of repair. In January 1820, the governor approved funds to renovate the commandant's house, repair the roof of the prison and build the hospital room.¹⁷ In February, the commandant requested that old locks be replaced.¹⁸ Possibly these construction projects offered the prisoners a chance to acquire and hide some tools, which they used later during the escape. A few months after the escape, the whole prison facility had to be whitewashed and new beds provided for the soldiers who served as guards because they refused to sleep in the old ones any longer.¹⁹

Prisoners of all races and nationalities lived together with no effort to segregate them. Some European prisoners found this hard to accept as they lived under

identical conditions to Xhosa, Khoikhoi and slave prisoners, sharing sleeping, eating and working conditions.²⁰ In fact, the slave prisoners may have fared better as often their masters or mistresses lobbied for their early release and return to work. Longer-serving prisoners such as Hans Trompetter, who had been on the island since 1811, enjoyed slightly higher status: he served as a foreman overseeing others.²¹ Some Dutch-speaking prisoners also received special privileges, including minor duties such as fetching the food from the commandant's house for the prisoners and, at times, jobs on shore. If not condemned to hard labour, they stayed in separate quarters at the commandant's house, where they 'have their liberty at all hours, both by night and by day'.²²

This contrasted sharply with the conditions of the other prisoners, who not only performed hard labour in the quarries but were also often scarcely clothed and never given shoes. When prison authorities purchased clothes for them, these included rough blue Kersey jackets and trousers and checked or striped shirts, plus one handkerchief per prisoner.²³ As in the twentieth century, prisoners had to work hard, mining lime and shells. This was euphemistically called public works. The rough conditions led to chronic states of ill health for some. Illness offered something of a reprieve as the authorities sent sick prisoners to the main hospital in Cape Town under special guard. The overall harshness of conditions led a young Englishman to plead with the governor for his release from Robben Island, warning that it was truly a breeding ground to train even worse criminals: 'The depravity of the island, My Lord, is almost unbounded: the unfortunate beings confined there for one crime, if they were liberated, would be ready to perpetrate a thousand others.'²⁴ These miserable conditions in the island prison no doubt led several others to join forces with the prisoners of war from the frontier areas to pull off the escape.

Although Makhandia is by far the most famous of those who escaped on 9 August 1820, it was others who carried out the planning and actions behind it. Makhandia lived about 1.5 kilometres away from the main prison, with no one but guards and Murray's household slaves to keep him company. The British viewed him as a prisoner of war, like Napoleon Bonaparte who was kept on St Helena island, during the same period.²⁵ There is no evidence to suggest that Makhandia was ever charged, put on trial, or sentenced; and everything relating to his imprisonment and daily provisioning required special letters of instruction from the governor's office.

The governor's instructions on the care of Makhanda could only have been written while he was in Algoa Bay, starting his journey to conclude the war. It instructed the commandant of Robben Island as follows:

In regard to supplying the prisoner with provisions, an assignment of the usual military rations would seem the most obvious mode, at the same time, however, the habits of the individual differing in all probability from those of civilised life, may call for some alteration, and HE [His Excellency] is pleased to authorise you to make such arrangements on this point as future expedience may dictate. You will also take upon yourself to procure such trifling articles of furniture, as may be needed for the indispensable accommodation of the Chief, in his allotted habitation.²⁶

The local Cape Town press published a short notice indicating that 'the Caffer Chief Lynx' had arrived in the *Redwing* from Algoa Bay on 10 October and was conveyed two days later to Robben Island 'where such arrangements have been made for his future residence, as will afford every comfort and indulgence which his habits may require, and which may be found consistent with the safe custody of his person'.²⁷

Three days after Makhanda arrived as a special prisoner of war on Robben Island, the British concluded their peace settlement in the frontier area. Not only did they claim Chief Ndlambe's former territories as neutral ground, but they also added large tracts of land belonging to their Xhosa ally and Makhanda's arch-rival, Ngqika. Even before Makhanda arrived at Robben Island, the victorious British army was distributing the cattle taken from the amaNdlambe to people of European descent who had assisted in the war. Once on Robben Island, Makhanda nearly went mad in his first few weeks of confinement and needed to be physically restrained.²⁸ While he was bound hand and foot on Robben Island, back at home the British started burning all Xhosa huts and kraals in the newly conquered territory and allocating captive Xhosa women and children to farmers as labourers.²⁹

On Robben Island, Makhanda's special status meant that he lived under guard in a small two-roomed house with whatever he wanted for food and furnishings. Possibly he had contact with two women and a male slave from Murray's household: Marietje, a Khoi servant, and Roosje and Bamboe, both Mozambican slaves.³⁰ He was allowed to take daily walks along the beach, but found the guard who accompanied him so burdensome that he stopped going out. Makhanda went

through a daily ritual of removing his ivory arm bracelet, which was the symbol of his status as a chief's adviser, holding it up to the sun at sunrise and sunset and telling the spirits of his anxiety over the fate of his wives and cattle.³¹ This he did in Dutch so that his guards could clearly understand his intentions.

Those who met Makhanda described him as withdrawn and taciturn until he had something to say and then he let loose with intense emotion and the conviction of his views. Curiosity and stubbornness were also his trademarks. His guards, noting his irrepressible curiosity, advised Campbell that a kaleidoscope he gave Makhanda was likely to be immediately dismantled to be better understood.³²

The British feared that any contact Makhanda had with other prisoners might somehow result in their escape and return to the frontier to continue the war. If there was any communication between Makhanda and the main prison, it is most likely to have been through Murray's labourers. Although it is impossible to say how much Makhanda could liaise with the other prisoners, their desire to liberate him clearly played an important part in the escape plan.

The rebellious prisoners

By August 1820, Robben Island housed eighteen other Xhosa prisoners. Like Makhanda, they were prisoners of war who had not undergone trials or sentencing. Unlike his case, however, the governor made an executive decision to treat them exactly as if they were normal convicts. Without trial records, it is impossible to know what brought each one to the island. They would have had no way of knowing how long their stay was to be, nor if they would ever return home. Eventually they sailed back to Algoa Bay in June 1827.³³

Their imprisonment represented the somewhat desperate efforts of the British authorities to impose colonial rule in the newly conquered Xhosa territory. This included orders to arrest any Xhosa person found within the new boundaries without permission. In an attempt to hold the amaXhosa back from their former territory, the British also passed an ordinance in January 1820 prohibiting the employment by Europeans of any Xhosa males or Gonaqua Khoi people in the Colony.³⁴ Females, however, presumably remained popular and legal as domestic servants. African people suspected of not complying with this ruling could be shot on sight. Despite this, reports appeared of whole villages of Xhosa families still settling within the boundaries of the Colony.³⁵

Once the influx of English settlers started in April 1820, the government had to act with increasing force to maintain its tenuous control over the Zuurveld. In a

few instances, Xhosa people were indeed shot just for being in the area while others who violated the colonial proclamations were rounded up and sent to Robben Island. This meant there was a slow but steady trickle of newcomers to the island, bringing their reports on the latest developments. For Makhanda and other prisoners, it became clear that not only were their people militarily defeated, but their former lands were rapidly filling with newcomers from Britain. A further reminder of their subjugation came in July 1820, when their former Robben Island guards were replaced with new ones direct from duty on the eastern frontier.³⁶

Most Xhosa prisoners probably fell into British hands in ways similar to Jacob Msimbiti, who told his story to British sailors a few years later.³⁷ In his youth he had spent much time working for Dutch-speaking farmers in the Zuurveld area, acquiring their language and learning the ways of the settler economy. In the closing days of the 1819 war, he entered the Zuurveld to trade ivory for cattle from Khoi mission converts. Since they knew that such trade was illegal, they reported him to the authorities, had him arrested and then confiscated his ivory. He claimed that he had been jailed in Grahamstown for this at the same time as Makhanda after his surrender.³⁸ However, he did not arrive at Robben Island until July 1822 so would not have been part of the escape.³⁹ A few months later, the captain of the ship he had travelled on made arrangements for Msimbiti's release so that he could serve as an interpreter for an expedition to the country of the Zulus.⁴⁰

By the end of 1819, shortly after the peace was concluded in October, the British began sending what they considered Xhosa trespassers to Robben Island. Shipping records show that eight Xhosa prisoners arrived in Simon's Bay (Simonstown today) on the *Queen* on 22 December 1819 and another eight on the *Loyal Briton* on 9 January 1820.⁴¹ One of these prisoners, Jacob No. 1, defiantly told the court after the escape that he was a warrior of Chief Ndlambe. At the time, Ndlambe was still considered the Colony's number one enemy. Another escapee, Jacob No. 2, described experience working for Dutch farmers, from whom he picked up some knowledge of their language.⁴² Although his story sounds much like that of Jacob Msimbiti, his Dutch was poor enough to justify use of a translator during the post-escape trial. He died shortly afterwards.

The governor's January 1820 ordinance, which prohibited any employment of Xhosa and free Khoi people in the Zuurveld, came as an afterthought to what was already happening in practice. This proved to be a particularly thorny issue as both King Ngqika and the missionaries reported that large numbers of their followers had crossed into the Colony to seek employment. The commanding military officer

on the frontier (Willshire) had already arrested twenty-two men described as Gonah Kaffers (mixed Khoikhoi and Xhosa) for taking employment with white farmers.⁴³ Most of these were converts from Joseph Williams' mission station who had sought refuge with white farmers during the war. Their new employers had convinced them that they would fare better under Christians than by remaining among the hostile Xhosa.⁴⁴ Even as the twenty-two men were being transported towards Grahamstown following their arrests, they heard rumours that they were to be shipped to Robben Island, inducing some of their number to escape. Those who had trusted in the good intentions of their white Christian friends, however, found themselves on Robben Island by the beginning of 1820. Their wives and children were scattered into service with Dutch farmers far to the west of Algoa Bay (Port Elizabeth today), under instruction that none of them should be placed anywhere east of the Gamtoos River to make sure they would not try to escape back into Xhosa territory.⁴⁵

However, the protests of the missionaries resulted in the return of most of those twenty-two prisoners to the frontier by May 1820. Willshire had to apologise to the governor for having imprisoned them without following the due process of law.⁴⁶ The governor gave instructions that those being returned should also have their wives and children restored to them. Three of these prisoners, described as Hottentots, implying Khoi people who had adapted to colonial life, asked to remain in Cape Town to find jobs. The governor expressed outrage when he learnt that one of the twenty-two had been an official messenger for Chief Ndlambe, taken prisoner while performing his duties.⁴⁷ His imprisonment violated every norm of military protocol. The governor gave instructions for a special military escort to return him to his people. Of the twenty-two, only one remained on Robben Island and he took part in the escape in August. Piet was well known to the magistrate of Uitenhage, Colonel Cuyler, for having posed as a worker while laying plans to free his mother from Cuyler's service.⁴⁸ She had been with Cuyler since 1812, suggesting that she was forced into labour in the aftermath of the expulsion of the amaNdlambe.

The Xhosa prisoners proved to be a rebellious and feisty lot. They first attempted an escape in March 1820 by enlarging a window of the prison block. The first man out, however, was severely wounded by a guard's bayonet, and required long hospitalisation.⁴⁹ This deterred the others. Possibly this failed attempt increased their resolve to come up with a more viable plan. At the time of the great escape in

August, the commandant's report that all the Xhosa prisoners took part confirms their determination as a group to leave the island, taking Makhanda with them.⁵⁰

Two of the key role players in the escape were veterans of the Khoi struggle against European colonial encroachment. Both David Stuurman and Hans Trompetter had been in the forefront of the Khoi-led war of 1799 to 1803 in the eastern frontier districts. Both established reputations for being uncompromising with the peace settlement, choosing to live among the free Xhosa rather than submit to British colonial rule. In that war, which raged in the vicinity of present-day Port Elizabeth, Stuurman distinguished himself by leading an attacking force towards Cape Town, getting as far as Mossel Bay. The British authorities arrested both Stuurman and Trompetter in 1809 in a bid to avert a resurrection of the previous Khoi war. Trompetter received a ten-year sentence while Stuurman was charged only with 'suspicious conduct living in a kraal near the boundaries of the Colony'.⁵¹

Not only was Stuurman a veteran of colonial wars, but also of escaping from Robben Island (as recounted in Chapter 4). His first confinement there lasted only four months before he and another prisoner successfully escaped by whaling boat to the mainland.⁵² He travelled back to the eastern frontier where he lived among the amaXhosa and was known to frequent Makhanda's kraal. Colonial authorities considered him particularly dangerous, fearing that he had enough power and influence to incite another uprising of Khoi servants against their masters. Stuurman remained at large for ten years until after the 1819 frontier war, when he was recaptured and sent back to Robben Island with the first batch of Xhosa prisoners in December 1819.⁵³ His identity as the escaped prisoner was not detected until he was already en route to the island. Trompetter emerged as the ringleader of the 1820 escape, when his actions revealed his special determination to free Makhanda. This suggests that he remained loyal to his previous alliance with the amaXhosa and the joint efforts of both amaXhosa and Khoikhoi to eradicate their homeland of foreign invaders.

Three of the active participants in the escape were Khoi convicts imprisoned for their desertion of colonial masters in the northern areas of the eastern frontier zone. Jan Swart deserted his master William Kruger in the Graaff-Reinet district in February 1820. He collaborated with other deserters to form a small gang that survived by stealing cattle and through other forms of theft and fraud.⁵⁴ At the time of the escape, he had been on Robben Island for about a month. Abraham Leenderts and a prisoner known only as Kiewet also came from the north-eastern frontier districts. Like Swart, both had absconded from the service of their masters,

Jan and Jacobus Pretorius. They also joined other runaway servants to form a gang. Their first victim was a trekking Dutch-speaking farmer who was viciously attacked. They then made their way into Xhosa territory, kidnapping a few other Khoi herders as they went, building their group to eight. Eventually a commando from Graaff-Reinet caught all the marauders and returned them to town for a trial on 17 January 1811.⁵⁵ At first sentenced to hang, Leenderts and Kiewet later had their sentences commuted to life imprisonment doing public works on Robben Island. Both escaped while being transported overland to Robben Island, but were soon recaptured. By the time of the 1820 escape, both had been on the island just over nine years.

Many of the prisoners on Robben Island in 1820 were slaves who had deserted their masters, mostly from the western Cape farming districts where slave labour was common. Large numbers of slaves had been imported from other parts of Africa and Indonesia. Like their Khoi counterparts, they regularly escaped their servitude seeking freedom in the mountains and hills not yet fully controlled by Europeans. Three participants in the escape fell into this category. The first two became notorious as leaders of bands of escaped slaves before being captured, tried and sent to Robben Island. Saloman of the Cape had deserted his master, C.S. Erasmus of the Swellendam district. Along with his concubine, Spacie, he formed the nucleus of a gang of six runaways who committed several thefts to support themselves.⁵⁶ He received a one-year sentence of hard labour and once on Robben Island was noted to have frequently socialised with the Xhosa prisoners.⁵⁷

Similarly, Absolon of the Cape started his criminal career in October 1818, when he stole 43 different items of food and clothing from his absent mistress, Widow J. du Preez, before heading off to take refuge in the Drakenstein Mountains in the Stellenbosch district.⁵⁸ He was accompanied by Mina, another slave of a different master, who was also his concubine. While he was at large, the general public was warned by the Cape Town press to look out for him. The newspaper described him as 'slender and of a middle size, dark brown in complexion, and long black curly hair; had on at the time of his desertion, a striped shirt, a blue kersey waistcoat, and ditto trousers'.⁵⁹ Sentenced on 25 November 1819, he was flogged, branded and then sent to Robben Island for five years.⁶⁰ In both these cases, the women gang members received sentences of flogging in prison and were then released.

Jan of Mozambique claimed to play a minor role in the escape, only hearing about it the previous night from William Holmes and doing nothing more than

herding the cattle once it was under way.⁶¹ He clearly was less of a leader than the other two slave participants, serving a five-year sentence for a second conviction for theft and desertion.⁶²

Two Europeans played central roles in the escape. Lower-class soldiers and sailors from Europe at times ran foul of the law as they tried to improve their conditions in the colonies. Little is known about Holmes, who emerged as one of the central planners. Since he died before reaching shore, no details of his personal life and background came out at the subsequent trial. Johan Smidt showed great zeal in effecting the escape, even though he was only confined to Robben Island temporarily. Born in Mannheim, Germany, he enlisted with the Dutch East India Company as a private soldier. Left behind by his ship in Cape Town, he then found employment as a constable in the Court of Justice.⁶³ In early 1820 he was charged with committing fraud and forgery, apparently trying to duplicate army discharge papers so that he could be free to seek employment with farmers in the interior. Found guilty on 7 February 1820, he was sentenced to ten years' banishment from the Cape Colony and to remain on Robben Island until transportation elsewhere could be arranged.⁶⁴ Possibly, since nothing had happened to remove him from Robben Island, he might have despaired by August and actively collaborated with the amaXhosa and Khoikhoi who were so eager to escape. His role as the lead man in the action suggests that he must have had a central part in its planning. He clearly appreciated the value of firearms and did not hesitate to use them right up to the time of his capture.

Rebellion and uproar

How long in advance the escape had been planned is not known. At the ensuing trial, one witness claimed that he had informed the commandant about a plot 'to capture, bind and slaughter' the guarding soldiers some months earlier.⁶⁵ Other participants claimed they were only informed the previous night. Many other prisoners did not take part, suggesting that it was only the boldest and bravest who dared the attempt. Several who remained behind gave evidence at the trial. The plotters chose the moment when the guarding defences were at their weakest – at daybreak before most of the soldiers had risen. It started when Smidt punched the guard William Wood as he stood sentry at the door leading from the prisoners' quarter to the guards' quarters.⁶⁶ Smidt dragged him into the room used as a hospital, taking his rifle and ammunition. He went back into the prison area and returned with a number of other prisoners.

The rest of the soldiers were still asleep in their beds, but William Alpass heard sounds outside the door and opened it. Smidt forced his way through the open door, stabbing Alpass in the stomach. The prisoners rushed through the sleeping quarters to the back of the room where the weapons and ammunition were stored overnight and seized them all, wounding several other rousing soldiers on the way. Private Robert Greenhill suffered two slight cuts to his head while lying in bed, presumably from the bayonet that Smidt had commandeered. Private John Finnegan also suffered bayonet wounds to the back of his head. During this first fracas, Hans Trompetter stabbed Private Thomas Brohan in the head with the back edge of an old saw, leaving a wound 11.5 centimetres long and dividing his scalp, while the Xhosa prisoner Halala (also referred to as Batty) struck Brohan on the shoulder. Private Ralph Mountford was seriously wounded, receiving two blows to the head during this attack and died of his injuries by two o'clock that afternoon.⁶⁷

Then, a number of other prisoners used a newly acquired bayonet to chop a hole in another wall of the prison, allowing them to escape directly to the outside of the building. This group, led by Trompetter, moved along the outside wall to another room in which Sergeant John Jones and ten other soldiers slept. The convicts hoped to seize the remaining guns and ammunition. Smidt allegedly called out, 'Kill that bloody sergeant first!' However, Jones, standing in his doorway, managed to fight off Smidt giving the soldiers behind him time to arm themselves. Several of the escaped prisoners nevertheless forced their way into the room, injuring more of the soldiers. Patrick Mullany suffered a blow to the head from a blunt object, delivered by one of the Xhosa prisoners. Like other soldiers, he forced his way through the melee to the outdoors, where he then was shot by a musket ball which shattered his right thigh bone, passing clean through. This left him in a critical condition.

The prisoners also retreated outside, where they engaged in an exchange of fire with the soldiers who followed them out. By now they had been joined by the first group of escapees, who were well armed. Jacob No. 1, the 50-year-old veteran Ndlambe warrior, also received a musket ball through his thigh. Some prisoners without arms, Salomon the slave and an unnamed Khoikhoi, also threw stones at the soldiers. During the skirmish Alpass, though severely wounded, tried to make his way to Sergeant Jones' quarters but was struck on the head by two Xhosa prisoners and rendered unconscious for some time. Soldiers John Mountford, Brian Finnegan and Patrick Kennedy also came to the defence of the sergeant's quarters

but were too exhausted from previous struggles and injuries to be of assistance. Corporal Edwards was shot in the leg. The soldiers attempted to defend themselves from a terrace next to the building.⁶⁸

Smidt and a few other escapees placed themselves strategically at a spot between the prison and the commandant's house to prevent communication between them. When Commandant Frederik Carel Petrie heard shouts of 'Murder!' and 'Mercy!' from soldiers who were running towards his house, he came rushing out, whereupon Smidt shot at him.⁶⁹ He narrowly missed Petrie, but instead instantly killed the man standing next to him, Jan Davidse, the baker. Two prisoners who had come to the commandant's house to fetch food for the other prisoners witnessed Davidse's killing first hand. One was Stephen Guery, an Irish convict who had earned the status of foreman among the prisoners. Smidt shouted a warning at him to stand aside when he shot Davidse. The other was a slave convict named Carollus, who claimed he sought protection from the commandant at first hint of the escape.⁷⁰ When the soldiers tried to run to Petrie's assistance, Smidt also shot at them wounding Private Patrick Kennedy in the leg. Smidt also shot twice at Private Greenhill, but missed. Altogether the prisoners seized nineteen guns and most of the ammunition, and injured eight soldiers.

All of this took five minutes. Then the escapees headed for Murray's house, seizing cattle along the way, which they drove ahead of them to use as shields in case of further resistance. When they arrived at Murray's house, they called out to Marc Bryant, the farm's overseer and clerk, to surrender himself. This he did, throwing his gun down to the ground before coming out of the house. Smidt grabbed Bryant by the chest and demanded that he hand over his ammunition as well, which he then did. Smidt armed himself with Bryant's double-barrelled gun and a smaller rifle. With these arms, he forced Bryant to take him from room to room in Murray's house, explaining what all the contents were.

Hans Trompetter led a group of fourteen amaXhosa to the place where Makhanda was kept, taking Bryant with them. The two sentries guarding Makhanda fired a few shots but Bryant convinced them to lay down their weapons without a fight lest they be 'cut to ribbons'. Once Makhanda was freed he joined the others, who returned to Murray's house. Here Bryant was held in one of the front rooms where the escapees took turns guarding him. During this time he received a blow on the side of his head from Makhanda, suggesting a history of animosity between them. Smidt wanted to kill him, pointing a gun at Bryant's forehead, but relented when David Stuurman and Jan Swart persuaded him not to. They told Smidt that

if Bryant was killed, he too would be killed. Smidt repeated his threat five more times but was deterred every time by Stuurman and Swart. The escapees remained there 'for a considerable length of time' ransacking the house of its goods.⁷¹ The slave Roosje tried to calm things down by pleading for the lives of all Murray's staff and giving bread to Smidt at his request.⁷²

The rebels then went out and seized four boats, putting them all into the water. One immediately shattered on the rocks and could not be used. As they were about to push off in the others, Commandant Petrie, a lieutenant and five soldiers, all fully armed, made their way towards the boats. One, under the command of the convicts Holmes and Kiewet, departed anyway. But the men from the other two boats leaped into the water and returned to the shore, hiding near Murray's house. They successfully ambushed the commandant's group, forcing them to retreat and allowing the first boat to get away safely. During the fighting, Trompetter held Bryant against the wall of the house to prevent the soldiers from shooting in that direction, saying, 'Now you can be killed by your very own people. See those are your people – the first bullet is yours!' A musket ball narrowly missed Bryant's head. When Trompetter released him, he took refuge inside the house. Petrie then retreated to his own house, claiming he did not 'wish to squander his shot and powder fruitlessly'.⁷³ Only six of the ten guns his men still had were working and the ammunition had run out. This allowed the rest of the escapees to board the remaining two boats and get away. The last boat to leave contained Makhanda, Stuurman, Trompetter and a number of other Xhosa men. The fleeing prisoners took with them Murray's Mozambican slave Bamboe with his hands tied.⁷⁴

The freedom enjoyed by the prisoners as they rowed the 7.5 kilometres across the Atlantic to the nearest shore at Bloubergstrand was to be short-lived. The first boat to depart, containing Holmes, capsized in rough surf near Jan Biesjes Kraal. Only three men survived by swimming ashore, including Kiewet, Jacob No. 1 and another unnamed Xhosa.⁷⁵ The second boat landed safely at Melkbosch (Melkbosstrand today) allowing all twelve of its occupants to disembark.⁷⁶ No doubt Smidt used his experience and skill at sea to make the safe landing possible. Well armed, the group headed immediately for the near side of Joostenberg valley. Murray's slave Bamboe managed to make his way safely to Cape Town.

The last boat, containing Makhanda, drew near to the shore at Bloubergstrand but also capsized in the rough seas. The poet Thomas Pringle wrote: 'Several of his companions who escaped relate that Makana clung for some time to a rock, and that his deep and sonorous voice was heard loudly cheering on those who were

struggling with the billows, until he was swept off and engulfed by the raging surf.⁷⁷

An independent Xhosa oral tradition, championed by the Gcaleka royal house, claims that Makhanda did not drown but was shot on land by his pursuers, who then threw his body back into the sea.⁷⁸ Both stories could only have been confirmed by eyewitnesses, who unfortunately left no written account. The missionary Stephen Kay reported that while he was in Cape Town waiting to travel to the eastern frontier, Makhanda's body washed ashore.⁷⁹ Though it may be impossible to say which story is true, clearly Makhanda did not survive his escape. Both versions, however, cast him in a heroic role as one who never gave up, preferring to die in freedom than suffer at the hand of his enemies.

Four of the escapees who travelled in Makhanda's boat managed to make it ashore alive. These were Trompetter, Stuurman and two Xhosa named Jan Gawula and Halala.⁸⁰ Heavily armed, they fled into the neighbouring hills. The survivors of Makhanda's boat apparently remained together, as Trompetter, Stuurman and Gawula were all captured on 11 August.

Recapture and punishment

The authorities wasted no time in trying to apprehend the escaped prisoners. One of the privileged Dutch-speaking prisoners on Robben Island, Jacob Kloppers, volunteered to assist in rowing a boat from Robben Island to the mainland to carry Commandant Petrie's report of the escape, which reads as follows:

Sir, I have the honour of informing you that the whole of the Kaffers together with several of the Convicts made their escape with Mr. Murray's boats this morning at Day light when the prison door was opened they all rushed out knocking down the sentinel and ran into the soldiers barracks took possession of 19 arms and ammunition wounded eight of the soldiers and went over to Mr. Murray's place . . . they however contrived to get them away and got out of the range of our arms, they went over to Blue Berg . . . they have taken with them the Kaffer Chief Lynx.⁸¹

For this, Kloppers was rewarded with his freedom from a life sentence imposed in 1809.⁸² A notice was quickly drafted for the local newspaper to warn the public that a number of armed and dangerous convicts were at large, and letters urgently

sent to the magistrates of what were then called the Cape Districts, including Rondebosch and Stellenbosch.⁸³ The escapees were first sighted by a farmer named Wessels on the evening of 9 August. He reported this to his friend Brink, who in turn informed the Field Cornet of Rondebosch, Coenraad van Eyssen, that two boats had come ashore with a number of amaXhosa, some of whom had drowned and one of whom was arrested. The survivors had been seen in the Joostenberg valley.⁸⁴ By the next day, Van Eyssen received formal instructions from the magistrate of Cape Town to form a commando to track down the escaped prisoners.⁸⁵ Magistrate Ryneveld of Stellenbosch also quickly formed a commando and joined in the manhunt.

During the day of 10 August, one of the commandos found Smidt's group deep in the mountain bush and engaged in a shootout with them. Two of the escapees died in this battle, while on the colonists' side only one man suffered a superficial wound in the neck, but his horse had three teeth shot out before it was stolen by Abraham Leenderts.⁸⁶ As darkness fell, Smidt and the others melted away into the forest and then had to be tracked down individually. Over the next ten days the escaped prisoners were captured one by one: first Smidt on 12 August, then Salomon on 14 August, Absolon on 16 August, and the amaXhosa including Halala, Jan, Klaas, Jacowa and Jacob on 20 August. Ryneveld took credit for all these arrests.⁸⁷

All the prisoners were taken to Cape Town prison on 28 August and stood trial for three days from 31 August to 2 September. Prior to the trial, each prisoner, each soldier, the men involved in the commando, and the slaves and servants of John Murray all gave depositions as to their role in the escape. From these, an indictment was drawn up. All of the prisoners were charged with

conspiracy to and complicity in public armed violence against the Servicemen in His Majesty's Service who were stationed on Robben Island, and of robbing the aforesaid Servicemen of most of their weapons and ammunition, as well as driving away a great number of cattle belonging to private individuals, and of committing armed violence and robbery at the residence of John Murray on Robben Island.⁸⁸

The escapees Smidt, Stuurman, Trompetter, Absolon, Jan of Mozambique and Salomon, as citizens of the Colony, were also charged with high treason. Smidt and Trompetter were further accused of being in command of the conspirators.

Smidt was charged with the murder of Jan Davidse and attempted murder of Commandant Petrie and several others, while Trompetter alone was charged with 'leading a Band of Prisoners of War in the act of removing by armed force the Prisoner of War, the Kaffir Chief Lynx, from the detention of His Majesty's Forces, and setting him free'.⁸⁹ When the trial concluded, all the accused were found guilty. As the most active participants and ringleaders of the escape, Smidt and Trompetter were convicted and sentenced by the court as follows: 'Crime: creating a rebellion and uproar accompanied with armed violence, robbery and plunder; to be hanged – afterwards the head to be separated from the dead body and exposed on a pole at Robben Island.'⁹⁰

The records list the others as 'accomplices to Smit and Trompetter' guilty of assault and battery, sentenced 'to witness the execution, to be severely scourged, confinement in irons on Robben Island for 14 years.'⁹¹ Stuurman received special consideration for his role in preventing Smidt from killing Bryant six times. After witnessing the executions, he was to be 'transported for life to New South Wales'.⁹² By 11 September, Smidt had lodged an appeal against his death sentence, based mostly on the grounds that evidence had been inadequately gathered for the trial. Ultimately, his appeal failed because he submitted no new evidence.

Two of the escapees remained at large longer than the others and so had separate trials. Piet, the Xhosa son who had freed his mother from Magistrate Cuyler in Uitenhage, was apprehended on 15 September and held on charges of suspected burglary and theft and being without a pass. The arresting officials at first did not know that he was one of the escapees, but by the time he was placed on trial in November 1820 he was listed as 'accomplice to Johan Smit and Hans Trompetter'.⁹³ His sentence was the same as the other escapees who were not ringleaders.

Abraham Leenderts, who had stolen a horse during the fighting at the time the others were recaptured, remained free until 20 October 1820. When his trial started on 25 November, the prosecutors were determined to prove that he had played a leading role in the whole escape. Indeed, in his absence, he had been often cited as an important leader by the other prisoners during their trial in September. However, he persistently and hotly denied such a role for himself. He claimed he only learned of the escape plot from William Holmes the night before it took place.⁹⁴ He insisted that he had not taken part in the storming of the guards' sleeping quarters because he had gone back into the prison to fetch his rations. He went to Murray's house with the others, where he was given a gun, suffered being shot at by Makhanda's guards, but did not take part in the looting of Murray's house. His main role, he

insisted, was only in preparing the boats for departure, a role that did not injure anyone. When confronted by the commando on shore, he took a horse because he had been injured in both legs and saw no other way of surviving. He had dropped his gun into the water at Robben Island, so was not armed at the time. When asked why he should receive any clemency, given that he had twice before been sentenced to death, he argued that he did not commit any violence during the escape and that he had been punished enough ‘inside and outside’ and could simply ‘hold out no longer’ under the conditions at Robben Island.⁹⁵ All this was to no avail: his name was added to those who were to be hanged and beheaded.

Although the wording of the charges changed over time, the last recorded crime of all the escapees was ‘creating a rebellion and uproar’. Prison authorities carried out all the sentences on 16 December 1820. Stuurman was eventually sent as convict labour to Australia, where he lived as a model resident until his death in 1830.⁹⁶

The great escape revealed a number of shortcomings in the administration of the prison on Robben Island. Commandant Petrie received a severe reprimand from acting Governor Donkin with a warning that he would be relieved of his post should there be any further problems.⁹⁷ Then it was revealed that no prisoners were kept in leg irons even though so sentenced, because of a shortage of leg irons.⁹⁸ In his own defence, Petrie ordered that the hinges and locks on the door through which the escape had been made should be changed, blaming the success of the escape on a door that opened in the wrong direction.⁹⁹ The most significant factor that had made the escape possible was addressed in 1823 when government bought out John Murray’s whaling station, thus removing small boats from the harbour. Murray received compensation of £1,116.7.6d.¹⁰⁰

It is not known if all the escapees served out their entire sentences. However, seven Xhosa prisoners were granted freedom in September 1822 when the ship captain William Owen secured their services as translators for an expedition he was organising to explore the area occupied by King Shaka of the Zulus. Prominent among them was the Xhosa prisoner Jacob Msimbiti, known to them for his knowledge of Dutch. Since the English explorers only recorded the continuing service of Jacob and another Xhosa man they called Fire, it can be assumed that the remaining five who were released from Robben Island found ways to return home and tell the story of Makhanda and the great escape. The ships they travelled on regularly called in at Algoa Bay, the nearest port to their home territory.

Significance of the escape

This massive escape from Robben Island deserves to be seen as an important chapter in resistance history in South Africa. The main body of support for this highly risky exercise came from the eastern frontier prisoners, all of whom were on Robben Island because of their refusal to co-operate with colonial rule. The main core of Xhosa prisoners had already demonstrated their desperation to escape in an attempt a few months earlier. The important role played by Hans Trompetter, and to a lesser extent David Stuurman, shows the solidarity of the Khoikhoi, who were also effectively political prisoners from an earlier generation of anti-colonial wars. It cannot be seen as a coincidence that Stuurman, Trompetter and several other Xhosa escapees all rallied around Makhandá and travelled in the same boat with him.

The Europeans who took part, William Holmes and Johan Smidt, may have added their planning skills as well as the ability to handle the boats, but the escape ultimately succeeded on its strength in numbers. The scheme worked. The combined forces of European planning and knowledge of firearms and boats, the Khoi tactic of using cattle as shields and the sheer fighting capacity of the amaXhosa, who were so frequently named as assailants during the trial, all added up to a successful getaway from Robben Island. For those who knew of his reputation as their *itola* (spiritual adviser to the chief), the presence of their prophet and general Makhandá also no doubt inspired action of extraordinary resourcefulness.

Oddly, the written records reveal a conspiracy of silence about Makhandá's fate. The very records that provide so much detail about everyone else remain awkwardly silent on this question. Given the amount of attention focused on Makhandá's arrival, his special care and living arrangements, and the general recognition of him as a highly significant prisoner of war, the absence of detail about what happened to him is particularly striking. Though the authorities meticulously kept autopsy records in those days, including those of every unknown body, there is no mention of anyone fitting Makhandá's description. Perhaps the confirmation of his death in British hands was feared as a trigger that could ignite a renewal of hostilities on the frontier just as the new British immigrants were settling in the Zuurveld. What the records fail to show, however, oral tradition and popular memory kept vividly alive for generation after generation right up to the present.

Notes

1. I.W. Wauchope, 'U. Velelyama' *Imvo* 7 January 1892 and 'Iziganeko 1795–1828' *Imvo* 27 January 1898, 18 May 1898 and 6 June 1898 in Wauchope, *Selected Writings*, pp. 102 and 121.
2. Kay, *Travels*, p. 44.
3. Burton, *Sparks*, p. 56.
4. CL, Manuscript 968, COR 3: Interview with Mdandala, 26 January 1910.
5. W.K. Kaye, 'A Native Interpreter' in Grey Collection, South African State Library, no. 172C, p. 9.
6. CA CO 2619: 27 September 1819 and 29 September 1819.
7. *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser* 16 October 1819.
8. Theal, *Records*, Vol. 12: letter from Lord Charles Somerset to Earl Bathurst, enclosure 'Establishment of the Colonial Corp.', 15 October 1819, p. 344.
9. CA CO 122: Letters Received: Sundry Military and Naval Officials 1820: from Capt. Petrie, Commandant Robben Island, 9 August 1820.
10. Campbell, *Travels*, p. 212.
11. CA CO 202: His Majesty's Commission of Inquiry 1823: letter from Commissioners to Governor Charles Somerset setting the value of Murray's property at Rixdollars 14 885 or £1,116.7.6d., 21 September 1823.
12. CA CJ 613: Te Regtstelling Van Johan Smit (Bill of Indictment against Johan Smit and 12 others), 31 August 1820, p. 102; and CA CJ 614: Documents in Court Cases, November–December 1820: trial of A. Leendert, 25 November 1820.
13. Campbell, *Travels*, p. 212.
14. *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser* 22 April 1820.
15. CA CJ 613: Bill of Indictment, pp. 948–9.
16. Campbell, *Travels*, p. 212. Campbell probably did not see the house allocated to the lighthouse keeper visible on late eighteenth-century maps.
17. CA CO 6009: Day Book November 1819–January 1820: letter to Fiscal authorising construction, 6 January 1820.
18. CA CO 122: letter from Capt. Petrie, 15 February 1820.
19. CA CO 122: letter from Capt. Petrie, 31 October 1820.
20. CA CO 105: letter to governor from Michael Coogan, 23 April 1818.
21. CA CJ 613: Bill of Indictment, testimony of H. Trompetter, p. 1012.
22. CA CO 105: letter to governor from Michael Coogan, 23 April 1818.
23. *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser* 22 April 1820: notice of tender for clothing for 'Convicts at Robben Island'.
24. CA CO 105: letter to governor from Michael Coogan, 23 April 1818.
25. Campbell, *Travels*, p. 211.
26. CA CO 4841: letter from Henry Ellis (Deputy Secretary) to Captain Petrie, 11 October 1819.
27. *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser* 16 October 1819.
28. Campbell, *Travels*, p. 210.
29. CA 1/AY 8/68: Papers Received from Miscellaneous Private Individuals and Bodies, 1812–19: letter from Landdrost Cuyler to Captain Somerset, 4 November 1819.

30. CA CJ 613 and CA CJ 614.
31. Campbell, *Travels*, p. 210.
32. Ibid.
33. Holt, *Greatheart*, p. 69.
34. CA CO 5819: Proclamations, Government Advertisements and Notices, 1820: 28 January. At the time, the name Gonaqua implied Khoi people who were still living their traditional lifestyle and not in service to white farmers.
35. CA CO 2626, Letters Received from Uitenhage, 1820: letter received from J.B. Raedoff from Rautenbach's Drift on his intentions to form a commando to eradicate Xhosa huts near the Bushman's River, 20 March 1820; CA CO 2625: Letters Received from Graaff- Reinet, 1820: from Landdrost A. Stockenström, 8 and 15 March.
36. NA WO 17/344: Monthly Returns, 38th Regiment – 48th Regiment, 1820. Paylist Report August 1820 shows, for example, Lieutenant Richard McCarthy moved from service on the frontier in July to service on Robben Island in August 1820. The previous guards were from the 72nd Regiment.
37. See N. Isaacs, *Travels and Adventures in Eastern Africa*, edited by L. Herrman, Vol. 2 (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1937), p. 225 for a detailed description of his interpreter, Jacob; Etherington, *Great Treks*, p. 148. Jacob described in detail a forty-day journey from Algoa Bay to Cape Town, which is confirmed in the shipping records as having ended on 29 July 1822.
38. H.F. Fynn, *The Diary of Henry Frances Fynn*, edited by J. Stuart (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter, 1950), p. 181.
39. CA CO 6087: Register of Ship Arrivals and Departures, 1822. Notes indicate that the ship *Salisbury* under Captain James King had been damaged in Algoa Bay, losing her bow anchors and the 'greater part of her cables'. The ship took from 23 June until 29 July to sail from Algoa Bay to Table Bay, normally a journey of seven days, and had to signal for help from a French ship along the way. The Xhosa prisoner Jacob Msimbiti described this journey in great detail as the occasion when he first became known to the British ship captains as bilingual. See Fynn, *Diary*, p. 181.
40. Ibid.
41. *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser* shipping notices, 1 January 1820; CA CO 6086: Register of Ship Arrivals and Departures 1816–22. An additional single Xhosa prisoner arrived on *La Belle Alliance*, 29 June 1820.
42. CA CJ 613, Bill of Indictment, testimony of Jacob No. 1 and Jacob No. 2, p. 1071.
43. CA 1/AY 8/69: Papers Received from Miscellaneous Private Individuals and Bodies, 1820: letter from Colonel Willshire from Fort Willshire on banks of the Keiskamma River, 25 September 1820: 'Gaika (Ngqika) complains to me that some of his Kaffers, with their wives are at present in the Colony, he supposes in the service of the Boors, and begs to have them taken up and sent back to him.'
44. Holt, *Joseph Williams*, pp. 130–2.
45. CA CO 2626: letter from Landdrost Cuyler, 14 January 1820.
46. Ibid.
47. CA CO 4843: Letters Despatched: General, January–October 1820: to Colonel Cuyler, 27 April 1820.

48. CA CO 2626: letter from Landdrost Cuyler, 13 May 1820.
49. CA CO 122: letter from Captain Petrie, 22 March 1820.
50. CA CO 122: letter from Captain Petrie, 9 August 1820.
51. CA CO 16: Letters and Papers Received: Fiscal Court of Justice and Port Office 1809: List of prisoners confined and punished in the different prisons of the Colony between 1 April and 30 June 1809. During the trial following the 1820 escape, Trompetter claimed he had a life sentence to Robben Island, suggesting that he might have been resentenced for bad behaviour during the intervening years (CA CJ 613, Bill of Indictment, testimony of H. Trompetter, p. 1012).
52. Malherbe, 'David Stuurman', pp. 55–6.
53. CA CO 6086 records 'one Hottentot and 8 Caffer prisoners' arriving at Simon's Bay 22 December 1819 on the *Queen*, Captain John Graham, p. 109.
54. CA CJ 813: Criminal Sentences, 1820: Case of Jan Swart, alias Platjie Zwart, Hottentot, p. 360. After an initial escape from detention, he was tried and sentenced to be tied to a stake, severely flogged and then perform hard labour on Robben Island for five years.
55. CA CJ 804: Criminal Sentences 1811–12, pp. 29–44. Philip Schulte was travelling with his family, livestock and worldly goods. When fired upon, Schulte returned the attackers' fire, triggering a general shootout in which his young son was injured. Almost comically, the ambush ended up in friendly negotiations about whether the attackers wanted cattle or commodities, with Leenderts' gang eventually agreeing to take seven balls of powder, bread and tobacco.
56. Ibid.
57. CA CJ 815: Sentence in the Criminal Case of V.A. Schonberg Esq. Landdrost of Swellendam, Prosecutor against Salomon and Three Others, pp. 168–77.
58. CA CJ 815: Sentence in the Criminal Case of J. Van Rynveld, Esq, Landdrost of Stellenbosch, Prosecutor against Absolon of the Cape and Two Others, pp. 609–11.
59. *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser* 8 April 1820.
60. CA CJ 815: p. 630.
61. CA CJ 613: Bill of Indictment, p. 945.
62. CA CJ 813: pp. 655–65. His owner was Jurgen Crous of Swellendam.
63. *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser* 11 November 1820; CA CO 124: Letters Received: Fiscal, 1820: List of Criminal Prisoners for February 1820; CA CJ 613. In one court case Smidt is said to be 23, and in the other to be 39, making it impossible to know his correct age. The legal records give three different spellings for Johan Smidt's name, including Smit (CA CJ 613) and Schmidt (CA CO 126). Smidt appears in all the records of the fiscal's office, which is taken as the highest authority. The Bill of Indictment (CA CJ 613) for the escapees contains numerous errors in the spelling of names, both African and European.
64. CA CJ 813: Criminal Case against Johan Smit, 7 February 1820, p. 16.
65. CA CJ 613: Bill of Indictment, testimony of Appolos, p. 1168.
66. Ibid., p. 939.
67. Ibid., pp. 940–2.
68. Ibid., pp. 942–5.
69. Ibid., p. 949.
70. CA CJ 613: Bill of Indictment, testimony of Carollus, pp. 1125–7.

71. CA CJ 613: Bill of Indictment, testimony of Bryant, pp. 954, 1143.
72. CA CJ 613: Bill of Indictment, testimony of Roosje, p. 1150.
73. CA CJ 613: Bill of Indictment, testimony of Bryant, pp. 957, 1143.
74. CA CJ 613: Bill of Indictment, testimony of Bamboe, p. 1149.
75. *Ibid.*, p. 959. Holmes and Afrikaner Dirk were listed as drowned from this boat.
76. *Ibid.*, pp. 957–8, 960. The occupants of the second boat were Johan Smidt, Absalon, Jan of Mozambique, 6 Xhosa: Jacob No. 2; Jacowa; Jan Klaas; 2 unnamed who all survived, recaptured; Abraham Leendert who survived, escaped on horseback, recaptured; Cobus Cora killed during recapture; Bamboe (Murray's slave) who survived, walked to Cape Town.
77. Pringle, *Narrative*, p. 288. This detail was not included in Pringle's first publication about Makhandia published in 1827, but appeared only in his book in 1835. If the other detainees were returned to the eastern districts in June 1827, it is possible that Pringle could have learned this information from missionaries such as John Brownlee, with whom he maintained a correspondence.
78. Personal communication, Zolani Mkiva, professional praise singer, July 2003.
79. Kay, *Travels*, p. 44.
80. CA CJ 613: Bill of Indictment, p. 960. The correct spelling of the prisoner listed in the court records as Goula is Gawula.
81. CA CO 122: letter to C. Bird from Captain Petrie, 9 August 1820.
82. CA CO 125: letter from Fiscal's Office to Colonial Secretary Bird, 25 September 1820; CA CJ 613: Bill of Indictment, testimony of J. Kloppers, p. 1171. Kloppers claimed he lived on the mainland in the slave quarters of the previous assistant commissioner, Stael, but had heard of the possibilities of an escape from other prisoners when visiting Robben Island some months before. He also helped identify bodies of the deceased who had washed ashore, mentioning only Jan Swart by name.
83. CA 1/STB/10/53: Landdrost Stellenbosch: Miscellaneous Letters Received, July–December 1820: letter 272 from Fiscal to Landdrost Van Ryneveld, Stellenbosch, 9 August 1820.
84. CA CO 2622: Letters Received from Cape Districts, 1820: from Landdrost's Office, Stellenbosch, 10 August 1820; CA CJ 613, Bill of Indictment, testimony of C. Van Eyssen, p. 1160.
85. *Ibid.*, compiled from numerous testimonies. Some of the participants in the commando included Van Eyssen's two sons, William Adriaan van Schoor, Mr Stadler and his two sons Matthys and Fredrik, Mr Coetzee, Mr Bester and Mr Neethling of Tygerberg farm.
86. *Ibid.*
87. CA CO 125: List of Civil Prisoners for August and September 1820.
88. CA CJ 613: Bill of Indictment, p. 963.
89. *Ibid.*
90. CA CO 125: List of Criminal Prisoners for September 1820.
91. *Ibid.*
92. CA GH 49/19: Government House: Criminal and Civil Pleadings, 1820: Letters 171 and 180 from Fiscal to Governor, 26 September and 2 October 1820.
93. CA CO 125: List of Civil Prisoners for September and November 1820.
94. CA CJ 614: Criminal Cases, pp. 249–405.

95. Ibid. Leenderts received the death sentence for his first offence on 2 March 1811, but it was commuted to confinement for life on Robben Island. Owing to other offences he committed while on Robben Island, he was again sentenced to hang on 28 May 1818, but this sentence was also commuted.
96. Malherbe, 'David Stuurman', p. 61.
97. CA CO 4843: letter to Captain Petrie from C. Bird, 16 August 1820.
98. CA CO 126: letter from Chief Justice to Acting Governor, 14 September 1820.
99. CA CO 92: Letters Received: Sundry Military and Naval Officers, 1820: from Commandant Petrie to C. Bird, 15 August 1820.
100. CA CO 202: His Majesty's Commission of Inquiry, 1823: letter from Commissioners to Governor Somerset, 21 September 1823.

The legend embraced

This study has been an exercise in checking the merits of popular versions of the story of the battle at Grahamstown and the heroic image of Makhanda against historical records, both written and oral. Through an in-depth analysis of such accounts, much detail has been retrieved, allowing for a deeper understanding of the events, the people and the dynamics of the times. This has shifted the focus away from the belief that African superstitions underscored the conflict, leaving a clearer grasp of the more universal dynamics of conquest and resistance in the era of colonial expansion. Ultimately, the story of the battle at Grahamstown and Makhanda's leadership role is about the day and hour that African people realised that their own ways of doing things could not prevail over the superior technologies of the Europeans. It was a lesson that could only be learned by pitting the two contenders in an ultimate test. The amaXhosa knew full well their ability to drive out invaders house by house and farm by farm. But could the largest force they could possibly muster finally drive out the enemy even from its strongest base and headquarters? The answer was clearly no.

The British also learned important lessons from this event. First and foremost they had to come to terms with the fact that no number of treaties, bribes or alliances would ever bring peace to the contested territory of the Zuurveld. Their own designs to control more land, its people and resources were simply incompatible with such compromises, as they would never be accepted by the very people they tried to subdue. The British learned they could only prevail by using maximum force and that this force would have to be sustained as a constant reminder of what would happen to unco-operative subjects. The most efficient way to keep control was clearly through the massive settlement of thousands of British subjects, which indeed they did within a year of the battle. Thus a turning point in the very nature of the British colonial presence in Africa came as a dramatic consequence of the battle.

This study also demystifies just how the conquest by outsiders took place, exposing it not as a single process by cruel and determined adversaries, but as something that took many twists and turns, trials and errors before the ultimate

commitment to a military solution emerged. Hopefully, both sides of the conflict become more humanised in the retelling.

The historians reconsidered

A closer scrutiny of previous historical writing on the era reveals two schools of thought, both of which aimed to trivialise and minimise the actions of the amaXhosa in general and Makhanda in particular. Writers with strong pro-colonial views have been widely critiqued by revisionist historians worldwide and those who addressed themselves to events in the Zuurveld show few differences from the common pro-colonial pattern.¹ They view the indigenous African people as weak, disorganised, unreliable and prone to theft. Makhanda's profile as a spiritual leader left space for such writers to add superstition to their list of Xhosa shortcomings. From there on all these limitations are used as justification for colonial expansion, which is viewed as bestowing a favour on the unenlightened locals.

This analysis goes further, however, to identify a school of writing from early African intellectuals who emerged from the first converts to Christianity in the eastern Cape.² They saw themselves as natural leaders of their own people and provide much more intimate information about events than their colonial counterparts. A critique is offered about how Ntsikana influenced subsequent generations of writers in their thinking about Makhanda. By tracing the origins of this school of thought right back to Ntsikana, who had a strong personal rivalry with Makhanda during their lifetimes, it is possible to see that the writers who come from this community started out with their own package of biases. Their approach was to vilify Makhanda using the world view of Western missionaries, weighing his African spirituality against their own preferred standards of Christianity. Since such writers had access to printing presses and other media, their views dominated all early African writing on the subject. In fact, the assumptions of these two schools of thought, the pro-colonial and early African Christian, fed into and reinforced each other over time, creating a rather formidable negative historical record.

Once the biases inherent in the earlier, mostly late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century records and historical writing are fully understood, a fresh critique of a third school of thought, the late twentieth-century historians, becomes possible. Though clearly sympathetic to an African point of view, writers such as Peires, Hodgson, Mostert and MacLennan can be understood better.³ They relied heavily on the first generation of African writing without fully appreciating its subjective

nature. Hence we see these historians trying to construct one coherent story even when the information they use contains clear contradictions. Revisionist historical writing of the late twentieth century tended to lump all African sources together as reliable and factual, whereas it is now better understood that they, too, need careful review and analysis. Nomathamsanqa Tisani's doctoral thesis and the work of Jeff Opland and Abner Nyamende make substantial subsequent contributions to the deconstruction of early Xhosa writing.⁴ Such works make it possible to disentangle the ways that each successive generation of historians has used the available sources. Ezra Tisani's work opens the door to a far more Xhosa-centred view of Makhanda's role as a spiritual leader.⁵ No doubt the next study of Makhanda will draw together the insights of all these revisions, including this one.

From these more careful analyses it can be seen that any of the writing that comes from Ntsikana and his descendants must be understood to contain elements of his personal rivalry with Makhanda. This includes the source material contained in the Grey Collection, dating back to the 1850s, which contains wild allegations about Makhanda's erratic personality, laced with historical impossibilities.⁶ Since this collection was used so heavily by the late twentieth-century pro-Africanist historians, its limitations need to be clearly understood. The same careful scrutiny can also be applied to other highly esteemed Xhosa writers such as John Knox Bokwe and Isaac Williams Wauchope.⁷

An awareness of the early schools of thought also assists us in interpreting the information conveyed by the earliest Western gatherers of oral testimony. Thomas Pringle, who collected information in the early 1820s, George McCall Theal, who worked in the 1870s, and George Cory, working in the 1920s, would have had easiest access to Xhosa informants associated with the mission stations, churches and schools.⁸ Hence their accounts reflect elements of the biases of the African elites. However, the information gathered particularly by Pringle and Theal often shows a more mixed quality, no doubt coming from informants who were not heavily steeped in any historiographical tradition, but sometimes simply telling what they had experienced and remembered, or had been told by their elders. Similarly, Wauchope passes on his family oral traditions in a way that shows degrees of independence from the well-rehearsed written narratives that he otherwise fully champions.

Further, the considerable writings of both Walter Rubusana and S.E.K. Mqhayi might be said to reflect biases in the opposite direction.⁹ Both were close to the Ndlambe royal family and are viewed as protagonists for a much more pro-Ndlambe

and pro-Makhanda slant. As most of their work was published only in isiXhosa, it has often been overlooked by non-isiXhosa-speaking historians in the past. Incorporating their work into the overall analysis helps balance the picture.

This study has also used both archival and missionary written sources as comprehensively as possible. The archives of the British administration within the Cape Colony were consulted as well as those of the British government that are housed in London. Although clearly preoccupied with how to make the British colonial agenda work, these sources also yield unexpected fragments of insight and special information about the people they engaged with on a regular basis. The eyewitness missionary accounts of events in the 1810s were heavily used by Noël Mostert in his exhaustive history *Frontiers*. However, they too contain enormously valuable details that contribute to a fresh interpretation of the period. Surprisingly, the only newspaper of the day, the *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser*, has been little used by previous historians. It also provides useful information gathered by its reporters and informants on the scene in Grahamstown.

At all times, this fresh look at the events surrounding the frontier war of 1819 has been informed by engagement with living Xhosa experts on their own history.¹⁰ They have been available for both formal and informal questioning, ranging from recorded oral history interviews and organised workshops to occasional conversations over the phone or at special events. At times they have provided invaluable leads to obscure written sources as well as their own interpretation of those sources and of the oral traditions handed down to them.

Myths exploded and replaced

When the battle at Grahamstown is placed in its fullest context as the epic conclusion to the forty-year struggle for the Zuurveld, then no myths are needed to explain it. The conflict centred on Xhosa determination to secure land that they felt was theirs, pitted against the powerful dynamics of colonial expansion and conquest.

The first great lesson of this study puts to rest the empty land myth, which claimed that the amaXhosa and the Europeans arrived simultaneously in the Zuurveld, leading to the long conflict over who would dominate. While it is clear that Rharhabe settled in the area only in the late eighteenth century, this does not mean that the land had been empty prior to that or that the Xhosa royalty occupied a position as new and superficial as that of the arriving Europeans. Nomathamsanqa Tisani and Pawuli concur that the Rharhabe's coming signified the extension of direct rule by the Xhosa royal house, consolidating existing chieftaincies into a

more unified state.¹¹ Conflicts between Africans did not end in total annihilation and ruin. The Xhosa relation to the indigenous Khoikhoi was a mixture of military conquest, planned inter-marriage and forms of payment in cattle for sharing the land. All of these strategies formed part of the consolidation of royal Xhosa rule.

By contrast, the earliest itinerant boers who came into the area remained mobile, unsettled and willing to withdraw in times of conflict. Their efforts to lay claim to the territory were shallow and tenuous at best. Since the colonisers used their own sense of a legitimate claim to this territory as justification for all their actions, it is important to explore the full nature of those claims. Much was wishful thinking, based on Cape Town-based proclamations more than anything else. A closer look at available information tells us that the amaXhosa as a whole never considered the area to belong to the Europeans in any form. This is shown by their continuing use of the land for grazing, hunting and settlement, proving that whatever agreement Governor Van Plettenberg thought he had made about the Fish River as a boundary in 1777 carried no legitimacy or authority. The successful extension of control over the Zuurveld by the royal Tshawe clan rendered ineffective any such discussions with minor chiefs.

For many generations, the European claimants to the Zuurveld produced eyewitness accounts of unoccupied and unused land from earlier days. Although such claims would be meaningless in the face of the subsequent Rharhabe presence in the area, clues about the sources of those claims also come to the surface. At times, portions of land were deliberately left empty of human occupation as hunting zones, providing a form of sustainability. Also, in times of war people simply moved into mountains and forests for security. Other areas were left for the exclusive use of the earlier Khoi inhabitants, who were itinerant pastoralists. All these practices could leave the impression to visitors that land was empty.

The colonial claim to the Zuurveld was also premised on the myth that the Dutch farmers were the unfortunate victims of relentless Xhosa raiding of their cattle. Although much raiding and warfare between them clearly took place, this assertion denies the larger reality of early frontier dynamics. Evidence suggests that many decades passed in which Africans and Europeans lived together amicably side by side, sharing prosperity in their wealth in cattle. Periods of mutual trust and respect also existed, but were seldom noted. This study gives glimpses into the situation before conquest took place.

The very strength of the Xhosa presence in the region shaped the way the incoming boers lived. While both Khoikhoi and Xhosa people could be induced to

work as labourers for such farmers, the ever-present possibility of their leaving to find sanctuary among the amaXhosa in the face of poor employment relations tempered tendencies towards abuse. Runaway servants and slaves worried the boers as much as cattle theft.

In fact, the Zuurveld frontier from the 1770s until 1820 was extremely dynamic and culturally fluid with the Xhosa polity always offering an alternative to the European one. Numerous Khoi political leaders chose to identify with the amaXhosa in preference to the Europeans as is shown by the pivotal role played by David Stuurman and Hans Trompetter in Makhanda's escape from Robben Island. The amaXhosa also provided refuge to numerous runaway slaves, Khoi farmworkers, and Dutch East India Company and British army deserters. All of these categories of people contributed to the course of the conflicts between Africans and Europeans during the long struggle for the Zuurveld.

The times of peaceful co-existence between black and white rested on the acknowledgement of the sovereignty of the Xhosa chiefs. Indeed, the first three frontier wars effectively re-established that sovereignty, which the boers had tried to challenge. The amaXhosa repeatedly accused the boers of being the ones to break the peace through ever-larger and more aggressive cattle raids deeper and deeper into Xhosa territory. These triggered endless acts of retaliation, which took the form of both small raids and more orchestrated wars.

What is new here is the attempt to view this long struggle through the eyes of the amaXhosa. They viewed the Europeans as unable to honour their co-existence and as the ones who initiated aggression in the form of claiming land and stealing cattle. This resulted in the ongoing low-grade warfare of continuous harassment of boers who tried to settle there, taking the form of stock theft. This can be viewed as a Xhosa statement about their own sense of injustice.

The final takeover of the Cape Colony by the British in 1806 marked the beginning of a transformation in dynamics. Though not mysterious, these changes are often glossed over and treated lightly as a simple given. While the Dutch East India Company was at its weakest by the end of the eighteenth century, British strength and influence as a global colonial power was on the rise. Though engaged in the long Napoleonic wars in Europe, the British could still find the military means to use force to consolidate their new colonial acquisition. The 1808 account of Magistrate Cuyler confronting not only Chief Ndlambe but also his followers in their villages and insisting that they move out of British territory is almost laughable. It took the hawkish recommendations of the Collins report in 1809 to map out a

comprehensive strategy for gaining final control of the Zuurveld through the three-pronged approach of first expelling by force all African residents, offering incentives for Dutch-speaking farmers to return, and then, finally, filling the area with large numbers of British colonists.

The first, the expulsion of amaXhosa, took place in 1812, but the second did not enjoy enough success to secure the area, resulting in the war of 1819. In its opening months, the conflict involved the clearing out of all scattered boer settlements. Only after this war, the biggest on the frontier to date, were the British settlers secured in 1820. In short, Xhosa resistance was strong enough for the policy to take another eleven years to implement. To succeed this required unprecedented levels of commitment of resources and manpower on the part of the British. The conclusion of the Napoleonic wars in 1815 freed military resources for use in the colonies. But it also meant that fears of cutbacks in military funding produced new aggressive practices by insecure officers to help justify maintaining positions, as was seen in the Brereton era.

The period from 1806 through 1818, however, clearly reveals a variety of non-military approaches first attempted by the British. When efforts to negotiate calmly with Chief Ndlambe failed, they turned to Chief Ngqika as a more responsive potential ally. The colonial authorities found a number of ways of trying to build such an alliance, including generous gifts, trying to bolster his power and authority among the chiefs, offering trade monopolies and incentives, and then ultimately promising military support when he needed it. All of these tactics aimed to construct a profitable and peaceful trading relationship that could thrive without heavy investment in either colonial administration or military presence.

The introduction of the spoor law at the Kat River meeting in 1817 was a desperate attempt on the part of the British to shift the weight of enforcing frontier cattle theft onto the shoulders of King Ngqika. When he failed to carry out this task, the British felt justified in using stronger and stronger means of force, from the Fraser raid in January 1818 to the Brereton raid in December 1818, culminating in the full invasion of July 1819.

The commercial motives of the British in securing full control over the Cape Colony's eastern frontier have been heavily downplayed in previous histories. This study confirms that there was never any other intention than acquiring the area as a colonial possession. Conquering the eastern frontier was not about helping a few boers, but gaining control over new territory. This becomes clear by considering

the reports of the various reconnaissance missions about rivers and ports as well as the nature of the climate and soils. The potential for economic benefits was consistently raised in the governor's correspondence to both his superiors and inferiors. The eagerness with which frontier officers snapped up properties indicates their expectations of remaining for a long time. The execution of the 1819 war lays bare the aggressive colonial agenda. This is exposed in the formulation of fully fledged invasion plans long before the major events unfolded, including the attack on Grahamstown. In addition, the ready abandonment of the British ally King Ngqika, taking his own lands and creating a fictitious ceded territory, confirms their true intentions.

Any notion that the Xhosa royal leadership assisted the British conquest of the Zuurveld while they feuded with each other has also been seriously challenged by this study. While previous generations of historians blamed Chief Ndlambe for failing to accept the leadership of his nephew Ngqika, a closer reliance on collected oral traditions reveals the opposite. Most of the tension between the two leaders appears to have been generated by Ngqika, who was jealous of the continuing indirect power and influence his elder uncle continued to enjoy. The first armed conflict, which drove Ndlambe into exile, was initiated by Ngqika. This ultimately led to war between the amaGcaleka and amaRharhabe in 1796, which ended in both Ndlambe and Hintsá being taken prisoner by Ngqika. Both conflicts ended in Ndlambe physically distancing himself from Ngqika in the interests of sustaining peace. The second war over Thuthula in 1807 can only be blamed on Ngqika, who suffered heavy losses when most of his own people turned against him for his incestuous behaviour.

This research shows that despite these acts of aggression, Ndlambe remained steadfast as the senior adviser to the younger Rharhabe ruler. Although missionary reports starting in 1816 reveal high levels of distrust and tension between the two, they are nevertheless portrayed as continuing to engage with one another. Chief Ndlambe's firm backing up of the quaking Ngqika at the Kat River meeting in April 1817 stands as a vivid illustration of the kind of co-operation they sustained despite all other tensions. It shows that whereas Ndlambe placed the greatest amount of importance on unity among the Xhosa chiefs, Ngqika could be easily distracted by the special treatment he received at the hands of the British. Brutal as the battle at Amalinde was, it ultimately drove Ngqika into a mountain refuge from which he had to negotiate his own future with those over whom he should have been ruling.

The enormously complex relationship between the young Rharhabe king Ngqika and his elderly uncle Ndlambe dramatically demonstrates the pressures felt by the amaXhosa in the face of a mounting British colonial presence. On the one hand, the newcomers brought unprecedented opportunities for trade, offering a wide range of consumer goods in return for skins, ivory and cattle. Over time, the introduction of alcohol would play a particularly destructive role. On the other hand, the British need to find a co-operative African leader through whom they could exercise a form of indirect rule led them to cultivate a special relationship with King Ngqika. Meeting him in 1807, defeated and impoverished after the Thuthula debacle, they found him highly responsive to their offers of friendship and support. What started as co-operation in trade matters, including offering the young ruler a monopoly over goods and trade fairs, soon grew into a relationship of mutual dependence in which the British had to give their ally military support while hoping in vain that he in turn would control cattle raiding and the harbouring of deserters. These issues had permeated frontier dynamics for decades without resolution. As the new colonial overlords in the area, the British pushed to find solutions, which indeed forced the amaXhosa to make decisions about how to respond.

Rather than seeing the relationship between Ngqika and Ndlambe as a fatally flawed personal power struggle, this study suggests that it should rather be viewed as the struggle of the amaXhosa to define how to respond to the British presence. Ngqika's behaviour stands as a lesson in what happens when one is too easily seduced by friendly enemies, who in this case raised expectations and forced him to turn against his own people. For a time he was seduced by new material goods and the promise of a quick leap to higher status.

Yet the period concludes with strong evidence of ultimate unity between the traditional leaders. A closer look at the evidence shows that unifying tendencies and principles were always present, even though seriously challenged in three civil wars. It is instead more a story about the unity of the amaXhosa than about the tragedy of divide-and-rule. The uncle and nephew showed that they could co-exist in a clearly defined royal hierarchy, which follows the same pattern as practised even today. The amaNdlambe recognise the traditional authority of Ngqika's descendants as the rulers of the Rharhabe people, while the amaRharhabe acknowledge the seniority of the Gcaleka royal house among all isiXhosa speakers. The hierarchy that operates today was consolidated and clarified in the days of Ndlambe and Ngqika. It has proved to be durable and respected by all for over two hundred years. The lesson of the need for unity was learned and never lost.

All of these events explode the myth that the fifth frontier war in 1819 was based on Xhosa religious superstition. The first half of this forty-year struggle saw three wars erupt between black and white. In each one it was the amaXhosa who prevailed, successfully clearing the Zuurveld of scattered white settlers. These repeated clearances confirm that the attempt to do the same at the time of the attack on Grahamstown in 1819 was nothing new and certainly did not need a misguided prophet to call men into action. It was simply a continuation of what had already been going on for the previous forty years.¹² This study places the land issue firmly at the centre of all explanations of the events of the war of 1819.

Although the series of events that led up to the eventual attack on Grahamstown have been thoroughly explored by other historians, this account highlights the ways in which they confirm the central role played by aggressive British policies in handling frontier matters. The Kat River meeting in 1817 was carefully designed to establish fear and awe of British power in an attempt to minimise the need for military expenditure. Travelling quickly by horseback and well protected by abundant arms, the governor's entourage more than made its point by camping virtually adjacent to Ngqika's Great Place. In fact, such theatrics ultimately resulted in achieving the opposite of what was intended. The chiefs rallied together in a brave show of unity in the face of such an audacious enemy and then merely gave lip service to what was demanded due to the climate of fear and intimidation. Had they been left to negotiate genuinely with the governor, they are highly unlikely to have ever agreed to anything as simplistic and unfair as the new spoor law. Subsequent events attested to their rejection of its principles.

The chiefs would have had no way to imagine what the use of full military force on the part of the British would mean, but the fact that they united against Ngqika at Amalinde revealed that they could clearly see that his collaboration with the British was taking them all in a disastrous direction. The view that this most vicious of all civil wars in Xhosa history was in fact only about condemning Ngqika's role towards the British comes from many voices from within the Ndlambe community over the generations, ranging from Dyani Tshatshu to Walter Rubusana to today's chiefs and their historians. Other historians have tried to portray it as either due to Ndlambe's relentless pursuit of personal power, as revenge for the Thuthula affair, or, coming from the more conservative school of thought, simply due to a Xhosa propensity to warfare and bloodshed. All of these minimise the essence of colonial expansion and the way it was perceived and responded to by the Xhosa chiefs.

Further, a careful study of the battle at Amalinde reveals a good deal about the nature of the way the amaXhosa conducted warfare in those days. As a carefully planned, premeditated event, it shows the difference between a war, or fighting on a large scale, compared to a raid, which is much smaller and depends on surprise and secrecy. This becomes significant when assessing the tragic outcomes for the amaXhosa of the battle at Grahamstown. Many historians blame Makhanda for choosing a bold daylight attack that ultimately failed, whereas a surprise night raid would surely have succeeded. By studying the rituals and conduct surrounding the fighting at Amalinde, it becomes easier to understand that the attack on Grahamstown bore many similarities, placing it squarely in the category of war.

Both Governor Somerset's 1817 commitment to pursuing the settler option and Major Rogers' orders to prepare for a full-scale invasion of Xhosa territory prior to the battle at Amalinde, the Brereton raid or the attack on Grahamstown also show that the British intended to move into full colonial conquest regardless of the behaviour of the Xhosa chiefs. All of these events have been traditionally taken as reasonable provocation for the British to invade Xhosa territory in order to secure peace, rather than as evidence of British aggression.

Few, if any, historians view the Brereton raid and its seizure of twenty-three thousand head of Ndlambe cattle as justified. This study, however, takes the matter further by looking at the somewhat eccentric character of Colonel Brereton himself, as well as the massive logistical problem he created by looting so much livestock. It is noted that this deed openly exposed the aggressive nature of British colonial policy and stood as a declaration of war against the Ndlambe people. In a time of dwindling support for military activities and the reduction of troops on the part of the British, the raid can be seen as nothing more than a ploy to trigger a war that would justify far greater British investment in its frontier forces than ever before. Only those with little knowledge of frontier dynamics imagined that Ndlambe had been effectively punished and would slink off into obscurity, bringing a new era of peace. To experienced officers such as Stockenström, Brereton's raiding could only result in one thing: unprecedented counter-attack from the amaXhosa, which in turn would provide an excuse to remove all restraint from British tactics.

Most historians have focused on the dramatic events of the huge battle at Grahamstown without fully understanding it as the product of a sharp escalation of all forms of struggle. Very few acknowledge the careful orchestration of the war from January through April 1819 that triggered the British panic and Colony-wide state of emergency. Indeed, this study highlights the fierce intensity of the first

phase of the Xhosa war against the British. The strength and effectiveness of Xhosa efforts to regain the Zuurveld prior to the attack on Grahamstown come to the fore. Their success in once again clearing the Zuurveld of a European presence, prompting Fraser's emergency ride to Cape Town, stands as further evidence to reduce the religious aspect of the war. There has been little prior recognition of the fact that the state of emergency was part of the larger invasion and annexation plan formulated by the British. The centrality of the land issue becomes clear as the massive efforts to regain territory are brought to the fore.

Obsession with the spiritual aspects of Makhanda's personality seriously obscures the planning and execution of the battle at Grahamstown. While the all-out daylight attack on Grahamstown can only be seen as a failure on the part of the amaXhosa, it can be much better understood by viewing it as a carefully orchestrated act of formal warfare. The massive preparation in gathering an army, equipping it with weapons and warriors' attire, not to mention the complex logistics of moving, feeding and sheltering such numbers, all indicate that this was a clear shift away from the previously used tactic of guerrilla raiding. There is nothing unusual in the fact that such a momentous gathering of soldiers would be subject to spiritual invocations of the power of the ancestors. No doubt the British army chaplains also asked their troops to pause for prayer, even in the midst of preparations for the defence of the town. Both sides are likely to have made strong motivational speeches about the rightness of their cause.

The final myth put to rest here is the notion that the British conquest of the amaXhosa in 1819 was relatively swift and easy. Efforts to negotiate treaties, agreements and alliances amounted to very little when these were counteracted with the aggression that comes with colonial expansion. This research shows how desperately stretched colonial forces became when trying to deal with Xhosa determination. When looking closely at the detail of the events that ended in conquest, the pivotal role of superior weapons becomes clear, as does the use of horses and the ability to call on a large number of soldiers from within and without the Colony. Far from being a glorification of British might, it could be taken as an exposé of their inherent weaknesses and the limitations they faced when trying to assert their authority. Events before and after the battle at Grahamstown can clearly be seen as a major turning point in African history. It marked the first time that British military forces entered territory that had always been indisputably considered Xhosa land and seized it at gunpoint. This was a far cry from the previous pattern of commando raids that took cattle and then left.

Most South African history books treat the arrival of the 1820 settlers as a detached, virtually separate, phenomenon. The settlement of large numbers of British citizens in the disputed territory within a year of the conclusion of fighting can no longer be taken as a different and new chapter in history. It becomes a central condition of the conquest, which otherwise was impossible to secure. The settlement of whole families solved several problems. Not only did they stimulate economic activity, but they provided large numbers of men who could be called on to defend their homes, as well as support and reinforce the formal military establishment. Indeed, this study shows that while the war of 1819 brought peace necessary for white settlers, it was difficult to implement in the early stages. The stories of what brought so many amaXhosa to Robben Island, from where they escaped with Makhandla, reveal the extent to which conditions remained unsettled. A buried history emerges of the harsh punishment meted out to African trespassers, enslavement of women and children and the ongoing Xhosa raids along the Fish River boundary. For both sides, nothing would ever be the same again.

Rediscovery of Makhandla

All of the above revisions in historical thinking and the demolition of myths allow us to get a fresher and clearer sense of the historical Makhandla and why his name carries so much meaning for people living today. The critical historiographical review allows for a new measure of sifting and sorting, discarding information that is clearly tainted by strong biases while confirming the reliability of others. This critique of sources makes it possible to take the haunting words of what is here referred to as the Great Speech as coming as close as possible to Makhandla's own understanding of the history of the world in which he lived.¹³ A deeper understanding of the social and political context in which he lived also helps to fill in large gaps in the written records.

If it is taken that Makhandla was of mixed Xhosa-Khoi parentage, then it could also be said that he was a child of the dynamic and evolving frontier, born into a world where the Xhosa royal family was consolidating its control over areas to the west of the Kei River, including the Zuurveld from the 1770s to the 1790s. Much of his mother's Khoi indigenous knowledge and spirituality shaped his own personality. Yet, through his father's kinship networks, Makhandla had access to the world of Xhosa leadership where he felt at home and became a central role player. If Makhandla spent part of his early life on a Dutch farm near Uitenhage, then he also would have had a very clear understanding of the role of the boers,

their attitudes towards their labourers and at least a hint of their understanding of Christianity. As it is clear that Makhanda never visited the missionaries at Bethelsdorp, the cow he gave to Johannes van der Kemp could only have been at Debe Nek in 1799. This confirms that he was clearly established as a man among the amaXhosa by that time. His curiosity about the religion of the Europeans was already leading him to explore its various meanings and manifestations. The gift of a cow is surely a token of appreciation, acceptance and a willingness to assist. In short, Makhanda was the living embodiment of all the complexities and diversities of the eastern frontier melting pot.

If that is so, the arrival of the British with their more aggressive intentions to achieve colonial expansion and control came as a harsh intrusion. Up until the time of British intervention, his world was one where the amaXhosa had repeatedly been able to assert their dominance through the first three frontier wars. Even the third frontier war (1799–1803), the rebellion of Khoi servants against their masters, ended when they effectively secured Xhosa assistance, which was decisive. The British came in as latecomers whose role was to negotiate a peace settlement that left Chief Ndlambe in place near Alexandria, the Stuurmans established along the Gamtoos River and promises of legal protection against excessive abuse of workers by employers. Though many workers returned to their jobs, the outcome was a far cry from any form of colonial expansion. Boers had to fend for themselves among their dominant African neighbours. The final struggle for the Zuurveld marked something entirely new and different. It started with Colonel John Graham's expulsion of all amaNdlambe in 1811–12 (the fourth frontier war) and was not resolved until Governor Somerset came to dictate terms in October 1819 to conclude the fifth frontier war. It signalled the willingness to use new levels of force to achieve new levels of control.

It can be assumed that prior to this era Makhanda was essentially a normal *inyanga*, a traditional healer and spiritual leader. Nothing is directly recorded about his earlier career. No available evidence indicates whether or not he was part of the Ndlambe community that was expelled or whether he was living within Xhosa territory at the time. By 1816, however, when the missionaries first started recording their encounters with him, it is clear that he had emerged as a prominent leader within the Ndlambe community. As such, he would have been immersed in the suffering and hardship caused by the expulsion, which appears to have affected him very deeply.

Prior to James Read's well-documented visit to Makhanda in April 1816, two significant stories about him emerge. The first is his efforts to seek out the Reverend van der Linde, the former LMS missionary who had become the British army chaplain in Grahamstown. His relentless quizzing of the clergyman on all kinds of issues relating to both religion and politics reveals the intellectual side of Makhanda. He had a burning curiosity to learn more about what he did not yet understand. As a true child of the frontier, he was open and welcoming of what he could learn from those of different cultures and backgrounds. In time, it would appear that his quest for knowledge was all bent in the direction of securing justice for the amaNdlambe.

The warm welcome extended to the exploratory expedition of missionaries under Read's leadership was no doubt a product of Makhanda's diplomacy. The fact that the entourage was first met by Makhanda's warriors suggests that he was the one who had planned the journey from the start. Read's own description of having lived as a guest in Makhanda's kraal for several days further confirms the central role Makhanda played in inviting the missionaries to come. As Xhosa oral tradition records, it was not hard to see the LMS missionaries Van der Kemp and Read as representing an aspect of European culture that was significantly different from both the boers and the British military.

The second key event in Makhanda's earlier life was the affair at Gompo Rock, most likely in 1814 or 1815. His calling together of his people to await a miraculous arising of the ancestors from the sea can only be seen as a millenarian failed prophecy. In retrospect, while the details cannot be confirmed, it reveals perhaps a pre-political stage in Makhanda's career. The essence of the story is an attempt to invoke a strictly African spiritual solution to the pain of dispossession. However, the failed prophecy did not result in the prophet's disgrace or rejection. Rather, it appears to have assisted him to turn towards a more worldly solution, which took the form of uniting the splintered amaXhosa so that they could more effectively deal with the might of their aggressive colonial neighbour. This he pursued relentlessly to the end of his life.

By early 1816, he clearly commanded huge respect and prestige among the amaNdlambe. He had been elevated to the equivalent power and authority of a chief and functioned as one of Chief Ndlambe's closest advisers. During the year he married one of Ndlambe's nieces, a sure sign of strengthening his status and prestige. In his visit to Joseph Williams' mission station in August 1816, he felt

powerful enough to give King Ngqika a thorough scolding and dressing down in front of everyone.¹⁴

Once the first-hand accounts of the missionaries end, there is little left but conjecture about the details of Makhanda's role and influence. The broader record of events suggests what his role might have been, based on somewhat vague oral traditions that ascribe to him very great influence over Chief Ndlambe. Indeed, it becomes impossible to differentiate between the two when reviewing such key events as the Kat River meeting, the subsequent turmoil related to the spoor law and the eventual war against Ngqika at Amalinde.

The Xhosa sources indicate that Makhanda had one goal only: to unite the Xhosa people. The records show that over time several key figures crossed over to join his cause including Mnyaluza (Ndlambe's brother) and Mdushane (Ndlambe's disaffected son). The only written sources that attempt to explain this shift come from within the early twentieth century pro-Ndlambe school of thinking, which clearly states that it was the land issue and the need to counter British aggression that brought everyone together. Events confirm this. The battle at Amalinde was the first step, neutralising Ngqika's undermining tendencies, followed by the clearance of the Zuurveld of boers before attacking British headquarters directly. Indeed, the massive concerted attack against Grahamstown can be seen as the ultimate show of unity among the Xhosa people, involving not only the Gcaleka royal house, but many elements from within Ngqika's own following. The complicity with Makhanda's forces of Ngqika's trusted interpreter Ngcuka stands as the most dramatic confirmation of this. Even among the British officers commanding the frontier, Ngqika's complicity was so strongly suspected that it justified disenfranchising him as much as Ndlambe at the conclusion of the war in October 1819.

Makhanda's name re-emerges clearly in connection with the attack on Grahamstown. Even then, the only available reports come from English sources, which place huge importance on the spiritual aspect of his leadership. Xhosa sources, however, confirm him as playing a central role in the planning. What stands the test of all scrutiny, though, is a clear indication that he is credited with being the mastermind and inspiration behind the attack, in which he clearly took part as a leader. As has been already stated as the central theme of this study, the amaXhosa needed no religious prompting to go to war against the British. The struggle for the Zuurveld had already been under way for a period of more than forty years. The

attack on Grahamstown by the fully united Xhosa forces simply indicates the extent to which that struggle had escalated before it could be finally resolved.

The execution of the attack on Grahamstown also reflects the thinking of a true son of the frontier. The united Xhosa forces had appropriated what they could of European military capacity. Though limited in scope, they showed that they had started trying to use their acquired guns and horses for their own ends. It was a gunshot that signalled the start of the battle and, even as the fighting raged, further horses were stolen. The amaNdlambe had first used horses effectively against Ngqika's forces at Amalinde. It is impossible to assess the role of British army deserters in advising Makhanda, but there certainly were several who had taken refuge with him and who could easily have assisted in the preparations. The well-planned attack, using four different columns for strategic advantage, was sophisticated and awe-inspiring for the British who were watching. Makhanda's own role as the energetic leader, urging his followers on and on during the intensive fighting at the barracks, confirms his strength and charisma in the heat of battle.

The events that followed the tragic attack on Grahamstown give us further insight into the nature and quality of Makhanda's leadership. The main body of Ndlambe's forces entrenched themselves along the Fish River a mere 50 kilometres away from Grahamstown. This confirms their confidence in their ability to use the rugged but familiar terrain to their own strategic advantage against all the might of the British. Indeed, the final battles of the war took place on the British doorstep, even involving a brief invasion into colonial territory. Previous generations of historians have portrayed the ending of the war as a simple melting away of Ndlambe's followers as the British advanced unmolested up to the banks of the Kei River. This has now been corrected.

Perhaps the most dramatic known deed of Makhanda's life was his voluntary surrender to the British. This gesture can be taken as an indication of his willingness to offer himself as a hostage so that peace negotiations could start. It implies that he fully accepted that his people had been militarily defeated and would have to come to terms with a new arrangement with their conquerors. If indeed he did not inform most of his followers that he intended to surrender himself, the deed stands as the only confirmed time that he acted independently. We can surmise that he believed that only his personal surrender would bring an end to the hostilities and the beginning of talks. This suggests that perhaps others were not yet convinced of the inevitable outcome; or, perhaps, in their defeat they had little opportunity to consult and plan.

When Makhanda's councillor and others appealed to Stockenström in the Great Speech, they indicated that the freeing of Makhanda would bring peace. However, if this were not done, their willingness to be killed to the last man shows the depth of their despair and their unwavering commitment to their cause and leader. There is no reason to think that Makhanda saw his surrender as anything other than an offer to be a token hostage while a settlement was being concluded. His repeated efforts to escape his imprisonment, once it became clear that he was instead being treated as a prisoner of war worthy only of jailing, suggests that he refused to accept calmly the British betrayal of his trust. Once the trust and honour had been broken, his fighting spirit returned and he did all in his power to resist his ill-treatment.

The fame and force of his reputation as an unyielding defender of African rights in the face of colonial expansion certainly fuelled the determination and planning that went into the major escape of prisoners from Robben Island in August 1820. The detailed analysis of the sequence of events during that escape and the profiles of those who participated in it confirms the centrality of the importance of freeing Makhanda as motivation for the brave but highly risky actions. It cannot be seen simply as an ordinary attempt by prisoners to free themselves but rather as highly politically motivated by men who had been in the forefront of the frontier struggles dating back decades. For them, Makhanda was a leader of paramount stature, for whom it was worth risking their lives.

While he lived, Makhanda was recognised by his people as the embodiment of commitment and determination to secure justice. There is virtually nothing that the historical written records tell us about his use of spirituality to achieve his goals, but the impact of his example and his reputation have survived the test of time. The love and appreciation of Makhanda shines through the years. The warmth of remembrance that Theal described in the late nineteenth century did not go away.¹⁵ His name has remained synonymous with the fighting spirit of freedom right up to the present. This study has endeavoured to bring to the fore the context and events that moulded him as such a leader.

The rebirth and re-popularisation of the story soon after the arrival of democracy in South Africa is logical. This full historical study confirms what the artists of Egazini and others always sensed: that it was a major struggle whose importance and proportions can be easily grasped today; that what Makhanda stood for fully resonates with the spirit of the new democracy. The story also teaches an older

lesson about the futility of attempting physical separation of the races in southern Africa. The early attempts at geographical separation were no more realistic or viable than the twentieth-century form of formal apartheid.

Postscript

What was the long-term outcome of the bitter and protracted struggle for the Zuurveld? Both sides had put their strength to the ultimate test, the amaXhosa giving it their all-out best effort by attacking Grahamstown and the British with their plan to invade Xhosa territory in full force for the first time. The British military victory, the one-sided declaration of the ceded territory, the surrender and imprisonment of Makhanda and the imprisonment of Xhosa trespassers on Robben Island, all signalled the advent of a new stage of direct colonial conquest. The intruders from overseas had proved that they could back up any claim that they made with sheer superior military force. Never again would the amaXhosa choose to put that to the test in open battle. The matter finally settled the forty years of uncertainty during the struggle for the Zuurveld.

But many other lessons were learned by all those who participated. The chiefs learned how to continue functioning as best they could under the new ruling order, finding new ways to maintain their authority and dignity. They adapted, but did not collapse. Mdushane returned to the scene of the battle at Grahamstown and went to church with the English settlers there.¹⁶ Ndlambe finally sat down face-to-face and made his own peace with the British commanding officer on the frontier, Major Somerset, in January 1824.¹⁷ Thomas Pringle attached his signature to the 1833 British Act of Emancipation, finalising the end of the slave trade in London, just before his death in 1834.¹⁸ Years after his experience fighting as a British soldier to save Grahamstown from the massive Xhosa attack, Charles Lennox Stretch donated land for the first African institution of higher learning in the eastern districts, naming it Lovedale. Andries Stockenström, after three years of self-imposed exile, poured out his heart, pleading for true justice as the only cure for frontier tensions. For this, he got a promotion and returned home as Lieutenant Governor. James Read took his Khoi wife and grown mixed-race son to London to teach the English about frontier dynamics. Dyani Tshatshu, using his childhood friend James Read Junior as a translator, swept London and its parliamentary commissioners who listened to him ‘with breathless attention’ as he explained the dynamics of the frontier from the rich perspective of being both the first African

Christian and a hereditary chief.¹⁹ Together, white, black and brown, they indeed persuaded the British government to keep the land of the ceded territory for African occupation only, blocking the rapacious appetite of the British settlers west of the Fish River. Further support for reconsidering the role of the British during the time of the fifth frontier war came from the writings of John Philip, Thomas Pringle and Justus. The sharp denunciations of British action in the era of Nxele's war in fact served to hold back the tide of colonial expansion for a short while.

Life for the amaXhosa would never be the same again. Along with the arrival of the 1820 British settlers came a new flood of missionaries and traders. Regular trade fairs at Fort Willshire on the banks of the Keiskamma River, deep in the ceded territory, offered opportunities for black and white to meet and exchange goods on a regular basis. During the decade of 1820s, while both Ndlambe and Ngqika still lived, the front line of conflict with the British shifted steadily northward into Ngqika's territory. Future anti-colonial struggles would be taken up by his militant son Maqoma, in much the same spirit as those of Makhanda.

The ceded territory went through many different incarnations under British colonial control, eventually becoming part of the Ciskei Bantustan under the apartheid government. It only became fully part of the rest of South Africa in 1994 with the new democratic dispensation. Over the centuries it remained reserved for African occupation, with only limited white settlement. Effectively the Fish River stood as a boundary right up to today, where it divides Amathole District Municipality from Cacadu District Municipality.

Within the institution of traditional leadership, the dynamics that were so sorely tested in the times of Ndlambe, Ngqika and Hintsá remain as those events resolved them. The Ndlambe chiefs see themselves as different and somewhat separate from the amaNgqika, but maintain full allegiance to the Rharhabe royal house under the latter's leadership. In a similar spirit the Rharhabe nation, though proud, progressive and innovative, always acknowledges the seniority of Hintsá's descendants now ruling the Gcaleka royal house. The ancient hierarchy remains intact and each chief and kingdom understands fully how to relate to the others.

Finally, Makhanda's return is symbolic and spiritual in nature. This feels only appropriate for the penultimate *inyanga* of Xhosa history. His name has become synonymous with a proud spirit of determination to find justice.

Notes

1. Holden, *Past*; Sheffield, *Story*; Cory, *Rise*; Metrowich, *Frontier*; Milton, *Edges*.
2. Included in this school of thought would be Isaac Wauchope, John Knox Bokwe, John Henderson Soga and others who contributed to the first newspapers in isiXhosa.
3. Peires, 'Nxele'; Peires, 'Ngqika'; Peires, *House*; MacLennan, *Proper Degree*; Mostert, *Frontiers*; J. Hodgson, *The God of the Xhosa: A Study of the Origins and Development of the Traditional Concepts of the Supreme Being* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1982).
4. N. Tisani, Continuity; Wauchope, *Selected Writings*.
5. E. Tisani, Nxele.
6. Kaye, 'Kafir Legends'.
7. Bokwe, *Ntsikana*; Wauchope, *Selected Writings*.
8. Pringle, 'Letters'; Theal, *Compendium*; Cory, *Rise*.
9. Mqhayi, 'Battle'.
10. Special mention should be made of the Mda, Makinana and Pawuli interviews; and Island Maqoma, interview, 19 November 2003 at King William's Town.
11. N. Tisani, Continuity; and informal conversation with Pawuli in August 2005.
12. It is notable that the Eurocentric histories of the period refer to the fourth frontier war in 1812 as having ended in the clearance of the Zuurveld, highlighting the British removal of the amaXhosa. The term deserves a broader meaning that attests to the Xhosa determination to do the same to their rivals.
13. The first published account appeared in Pringle, 'Letters' and later in Stockenström, *Autobiography*.
14. CL Council of World Missions, Box 6, Williams Report, 15 June 1816 and 7 August 1817.
15. Theal, *History*, p. 329.
16. Kay, *Travels*, p. 90.
17. Shaw, *Journal*, pp. 115–17.
18. Pringle, *African Poems*, p. xx.
19. CL Council of World Missions, Box 9, engraving of Jan Tzatzoe giving evidence at the House of Commons. Also a printed account of the occasion, 'Jan Tzatzoe and the African Witnesses before a Committee of the House of Commons', p. 103.

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