Theories of Religion and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-1857

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DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in this dissertation from the works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signed by candidate

Date 29/1/2009

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Signature: Leah Brumer

Date: May 18, 2009

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ABSTRACT

In the study of religion, a variety of definitions of religion have been presented. These numerous definitions or theories are often divergent in focus, aim and interpretation. This can be problematic, as these definitions or theories often speak to a specific end-goal and quite clearly ignore, or fail to address, the multi-faceted issues that arise with the engagement of this endeavor. In the study of a religious event, in particular, these individual theories prove inadequate in illuminating the many varying factors that often contribute to the event's emergence. This work will address this problem and further propose that in fact many theories, or *"intertheoriality"* is necessary in order to more fully and comprehensively understand the manifestation of such an event. Different theories of religion and socio-religious movement theory, both classic and contemporary, will be employed in order to demonstrate that no one single definition or theory of religion is adequate in elucidating the numerous factors at play in relation to a specific religious event. Theories from Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Karl Marx, Mircea Eliade, and David Chidester, as well as a selection of socio-religious movement theories, will be used to explain the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-1857.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Theories are only as useful as their applicability. For centuries, scientists have employed theory to explain happenings in a great many fields, testing out ideas, working through concepts, and evaluating results in order to provide reason and understanding to some of life's great questions. In the study of religion, social scientists have produced theories of religion, which over time have been tried and tested, and discarded or improved upon, in the illusive quest for the single, inclusive, comprehensive definition of religion. In its inevitable evolution, the study of religion has presented many theories from diverse theorists, which directly reflect the era in which the theory was born, the interest of the theorist, as well as the development of thought in this field. We move from the cultural and intellectual evolutionary ideas of Edward B. Tylor and James Frazer's religion as primitive superstition, to Sigmund Freud's theory of religion as obsessional neurosis, to Clifford Geertz's 'anti'-theory of religion as a cultural system. These theories are numerous and wide-ranging, but despite endless attempts to encompass the many diverse factors that contribute to the comprehensive understanding of religion, we are still left wanting. Each theory, it seems, has failed in one way or another, leaving questions unanswered and evoking enough criticism to render these theories applicable in some respects, but useless or devoid in others; to date, no one theory has proven definitive. It is with this informed understanding that we begin our task.

In light of this situation, it is imperative to highlight and account for the various shortcomings in these theories. This is possible by recognizing that there are not only assorted criteria which ascribe these different theories of religion, but also various externalities, contexts by which our individual experience and understanding are inextricably bound; social, political, economic and cultural contexts, as well as historic and location circumstance, are all employed to construct a unique understanding of religion in a specific place and time. These external factors are not only intimately intertwined, but mutually informative. Therefore, in our study of religion, we are not

only contending with multiple and varying interpretations of religion itself, but also the unique externalities that construct the intricate contexts in which they appear. It is within this web of interpretation and context that we find ourselves at the crux of our work.

In this dissertation I will employ different theories of religion or parts of theories, as well as theories on socio-religious movements, in relation to a specific religious event. This will demonstrate that in this occurrence, multiple factors were at work and therefore must be accounted for and explained through a number of different perspectives. This process will not only illustrate this point, but will also show how these theories, although useful for unearthing certain elements and processes, are deficient in illuminating others. Despite each theory's particular agency, a predisposition towards an underlying goal renders each of these theories lacking in some way, and ultimately inadequate as a single comprehensive theory. Here I aim to present the case for how it is possible to effectively employ multiple theories or, aspects of theories, for a comprehensive "*intertheorality*" of religion, which will more effectively and efficiently recognize, address and account for the complex and diverse elements that contribute to this religious event. In this endeavor I will be using theorist Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Karl Marx, Mircea Eliade, and David Chidester, as well as a number of theories on socio-religious movements, in order to explore the different components of the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-1857.

Nongqawuse and the Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement: Brief Overview

In order to understand the Xhosa Cattle-Killing movement itself, it is important to first grasp the historical circumstances from which it was born. In 1856, the Xhosa had been at near constant war with the British for over 70 years. After eight Frontier Wars against the British, with the most recent defeat three years earlier in the War of Mlanjeni, the Xhosa were a nation distraught and desperate, quickly losing a long- fought battle against a colonial offensive which sought to destroy the Xhosa's traditional way of life. The Xhosa, who had not only lost vast numbers of

lives in these wars, but much of their sustenance to the scorched-earth policy[1] maintained by the British, were left demoralized. "The experience of defeat, the memory of thousands of brave young men wiped out by superior military technology, and the sight of the collaborators enjoying the fruits of their ancestral lands overwhelmed the Xhosa with depression and a sense of great loss."[2] However, this sense of loss was not solely in relation to the military. The consequent land lost throughout 70 years of war had serious implications for the traditional socio-economic circumstances of the Xhosa, which as a system rooted in pastoral-based patronage, was under threat of extinction.[3] While enduring this ongoing battle with the British, the Xhosa living in annexed British Kaffraria were further subjected to the attempted 'disintegration' of their way of life. Historian Jeff Peires says:

> Sir George Grey appointed British magistrates over the heads of Xhosa chiefs to break their authority and usurp their political, judicial and fiscal prerogatives. Vast public works were instituted to teach Xhosa the value of labour, and schools and missions were founded to inculcate the values of Christian Europe.[4]

The Xhosa's traditional systems were attacked from all sides. The British sought to overtake any and all Xhosa autonomy and indoctrinate the Xhosa into a corrupt capitalism in which the Xhosa could only ever partake as cheap labour. In the wake of increasing colonial subjugation, loss of political, economic and social authority, and an overall feeling of deprivation, the Xhosa nation was in an extremely fragile and vulnerable state.

In April 1856 a fifteen year old girl named Nongqawuse, residing east of the Kei River in the independent Xhosaland, communicated a prophecy which would have extreme repercussions for the entire Xhosa nation:

> Tell that all the community is to rise again from the dead; and that all cattle now living must be slaughtered, for they have been reared by contaminated hands because there are people about who deal in witchcraft. There should be no cultivation, but great new grain pits must be

[1] The British "scorched-earth" policy was a highly effective military strategy/ tactic in which the British would burn all the Xhosa's crops to the ground, as they methodically moved through Xhosa land. This would deny the Xhosa its vital food source and consequently have devastating repercussions on their military efforts.
[2] J.B. Peires, "Soft Believers and Hard Unbelievers in the Xhosa Cattle-Killing", The Journal of African History, Vol.27, No.3, 1986 p.445
[3] For a discussion on Xhosa's pastoral-based patronage system see: Timothy J. Stapleton, "They No Longer Care for Their Chiefs", The International Journal for African Historical Studies, Vol.24, No.2, 1991 p.386
[4] J.B. Peires, "Soft Believers and Hard Unbelievers in the Xhosa Cattle-Killing", The Journal of African History, Vol.27, No.3, 1986 p.445

> dug, new houses must be built, and great strong cattle enclosures must be erected. Cut out new milksacks and weave many doors from buka roots. So say the chief Napakade, the descendants of Sifuba-sibanzi. The people must leave their witchcraft, for soon they will be examined by diviners.[5]

These were the seeds of what would grow into the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing movement. Faced with some initial trepidation, Nongqawuse's prophesy was accepted and quickly spread throughout the entire Xhosa kingdom. The reactions were mixed, dividing the Xhosa into two parties; the majority *amathamba*, 'soft' ones or believers, and *amagogotya*, 'hard' ones or unbelievers. Sarhili, King of Xhosaland himself was a strong believer, and figures show that at least 85 percent of Xhosa males similarly chose to believe.[6] Despite this heavy majority, the split still acted as an incredibly derisive force within Xhosa society, aggressively pining one side against the other and perpetuating what was an already volatile and degenerating situation during the post- Frontier War period. There were many contributing factors which determined the choice of whether or not to believe,[7] but for the purposes of our overview, it suffices to say that aspects such as the effects of lungsickness, religion, age, kin, and gender, all had an effect to some extent, although none of the divisions within these classifications were entirely consistent.

In response to the prophecy, between April 1856 and February 1857, the Xhosa in both British Kaffraria and independent Xhosaland slaughtered roughly 400,000 cattle and razed their crops to the ground in the hopes of being regenerated with new cattle and crops, as well as the resurrection of their dead ancestors. What resulted was a catastrophe on such a mass scale, it saw some 40,000 Xhosa die of starvation, and those that survived, forced to relocate into labour camps meant to provide cheap labour to white colonials, who in the wake of the devastation of the

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[5] J.B. Peires, *The Dead Will Arise: Nogqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-7*, Raven Press Ltd., Johannesburg 1989 p.79

[6] J.B. Peires, "Soft Believers and Hard Unbelievers in the Xhosa Cattle-Killing", The Journal of African History, Vol.27, No.3, 1986 p.446

[7] For an in-depth analysis of believers and unbeliever, including an analysis of contributing factors see: J.B. Peires, "Soft Believers and Hard Unbelievers in the Xhosa Cattle-Killing", The Journal of African History, Vol.27, No.3, 1986 p.445

Cattle-Killing, now occupied their lands.[8] The Xhosa Cattle-Killing constituted one of the worst acts of mass destruction in South African history.

Without the external factors being specifically what they were, it is questionable whether this event would have occurred at all. However, it is undoubtedly these unique circumstances that together acted as the catalyst, engendering the action of the Cattle-Killing movement. It is important to note that there are many recent works which posit different perspectives, interpretations or even conspiracy theories, on the true meaning and intention of this event. Some understand the Cattle-Killing as a scheme instigated by the Xhosa Chiefs in order to incite their people into war against the colonials; some believe it was the enraged commoners attempt to overthrow their Chiefs;[9] while others believe it was an initiative set up by Colonel Grey and the colonials in order to crush the Xhosa.[10] There are also factual discrepancies within different historical works as far as dates, exact numbers and interpretations of the story. As history is always written by the victors, it is not always easy to grasp a clear and accurate picture of events from those who witnessed it. However, I will not account for these differences here, nor entertain these different hypotheses. That is far better left to the historians. The aim I will be working towards is a comprehensive socio-religious understanding of the event in the context from which it came. I will explore the factors that contributed to this event through a variety of theories in order to demonstrate that these unique factors must be accounted for in context of individual theories, giving us a better overall understanding of the great Xhosa Cattle-Killing movement through the employment of *intertheoriality.*

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[8] Exact numbers on the deaths caused by the Cattle-Killing movement vary slightly. I have taken my estimation from: Timothy J. Stapleton, "They No Longer Care for Their Chiefs", The International Journal for African Historical Studies, Vol.24, No.2, 1991 p.383

[9] For more on this topic see: Timothy J. Stapleton, "They No Longer Care for Their Chiefs", The International Journal for African Historical Studies, Vol.24, No.2, 1991 p.386

[10] For more on this topic see: J.B. Peires, "The Late Great Plot: The Official Delusion concerning the Xhosa Cattle-Killing 1856-1857", History of Africa, Vol.12, 1985 pp.253-279

Chapter 2

Classic Theorists

Emile Durkheim: Xhosa Religion and the Ancestors

The theory of religion proffered by the father of sociology, French sociologist, Emile Durkheim, is where we will begin our study. Durkheim's foundational theory of religion was predicated on his observations of how religion operates. Through his functional understanding of the role of religion, Durkheim was able to focus in on the necessity of a division of things. The separation between sacred and profane, embodied as the division between the social and the personal, was for Durkheim the origin for the construction of the beliefs and practices needed in order to attain religion's ultimate goal of social cohesion and solidarity. For Durkheim, "religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to scared things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden which unite into one moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them".[11] This theory of religion, as well as Durkheim's theory of totemic principle will prove an explanatory and useful tool in a discussion of the role of religion in Xhosa society, which is foundational to our understanding of the Xhosa Cattle-Killing event.

Durkheim's notion of a system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, specifically with the focus of creating a unified community is especially applicable to the Xhosa's traditional religion. The Xhosa have their own unique concept of the sacred which operates around the locus of the ancestors. The ancestors act as a sacred part of Xhosa society in that the ancestors function as a kind of 'superhuman' mediation and conciliatory entity, specifically working to proliferate and uphold the moral and social order which bind the community together. The ancestors act as sacred liaisons, who are in some respects omnipotent; they are "the 'living dead' who continue to interact and communicate with their descendants."[12] They are involved in all

[11] Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1976 p.47
[12] David Chidester, *Religions of South Africa*, Routledge, London, 1992 p.11

that happens in their respective household and act as a primary form of arbitration in these matters, passing judgment on actions of their decedents. Ancestors can and do provide protection for all those maintaining a moral life. But for those whose actions are immoral or dissolute, the ancestors' sacred safeguard may be revoked; "any serious departure from the code of right conduct will result in a withdrawal of benefits and a suspension of protection so that offenders will register the pain of physical and social disorder."[13] Despite varying interpretations as to their precise location[14] ultimately, ancestors "inhabit a world of spirit in which they are endowed with the capacity to influence mystically the orderly life of the group or individual for whom they assume structural and instrumental significance."[15] Still, at the heart of the Xhosa's ancestor religion, or 'ancestor cult' as John De Gruchy, David Chidester and others have called it, sits the main concern posited by Durkheim; that of social unity within a community achieved through the moral living constituted when adhering to the shared practices and beliefs of the group. Anthropologist Jim Kiernan confirms this point:

> For Bantu-speaking societies religion upholds and conserves the moral order. More precisely, upright living is guaranteed to yield the good life, moral deviance precipitates disaster, and religion articulates, mediates and services this connection. The ancestors, with the collaboration of diviners and the support of herbalists, are the guardians and defenders of the moral order. Their primary concern is that their descendants should behave in a manner which promotes harmony, solidarity and mutual support among themselves.[16]

Moral or right living did not solely consist of participation in appropriate rituals and ceremony, but dually identified and enforced prohibition on those things taboo or forbidden to members of the society. For the Xhosa, the opponent to moral living came in the form of what David Chidester calls "symbolisms of evil,"[17] which could appear in the form of witchcraft, sorcery or other social ills. What is important about these symbolisms of evil is not necessarily whether or not their application bore any results, but rather the role that these evils played in constructing and articulating a tangible oppositional framework to the Xhosa's moral and social norms, which

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[13] Jim Kiernan in *Living Faiths in South Africa*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1995 p.25
[14] For a brief discussion on the possible locations of the ancestors see David Chidester, *Religions of South Africa*, p.11. Also Jim Kiernan says "There is little consensus over where dead ancestors reside- underground, in the skies, on the western horizon and so on- but a persistent feature is their consistent attachment to the living space of their progeny." Jim Kiernan in *Living Faiths in South Africa*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1995 p.20
[15] Jim Kiernan in *Living Faiths in South Africa*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1995 p.22
[16] Ibid p.25
[17] David Chidester, *Religions of South Africa*, Routledge, London, 1992 p.15

effectively worked to indoctrinate all into the standing social order. On this point, Chidester says, "the symbolism of evil can be interpreted as a set of moral sanctions that reinforced social norms. Like ancestral sanctions, witchcraft beliefs and practices provided a vocabulary for identifying antisocial behaviour. The symbolism of evil performed an important social function by encouraging people to observe basic social norms."[18] However, once the social and moral order was afflicted by such symbolisms of evil, the only way to restore balance was through the appeasement of the ancestors. This would normally take the form of a ritual where a chosen animal or, on some occasions, beer would be offered up or sacrificed to ancestors. This sacrifice served to open the lines of communication so that the social ills could be atoned for and redressed. This was the only course of action for such situations as ultimately, it is the ancestors that provide the means of renewing the moral order once it has been upset.[19]

However, ritual acted as much more than just the appeasement of the ancestors when something had gone amiss. Ancestor ritual provided the means to not only initiate communication with the ancestors for atonement, but presented the opportunity for interactions between the human and superhuman on many occasions, through a variety of different types of rituals: "Ritual attention directed to ancestors did represent a sustained, concentrated interaction with the presence and power of superhuman persons. Although some rituals were performed out of respect for the ways of the ancestors, other rituals- rites of thanksgiving, rites of healing- were clearly designed to invoke the presence of the ancestors in a communal meal that had all the characteristics of an act of worship."[20] These rituals offered the means with which to commune with the ancestors, but also through group participation, simultaneously acted as the medium with which to actively bind the community together. This social unification was absolutely central to Durkheim's understanding of religion. For Durkheim, ritual offered the means by which the "profane" individual could transcend himself and become part of the sacred. By actively participating in the central communal activity (ritual), the individual, was in essence re-affirming and re-dedicating himself to the sacred; the community itself. These group rituals were the very core of the clan's

[18] Ibid p.18
[19] Jim Kiernan in *Living Faiths in South Africa*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1995 p.25
[20] Hammond- Tooke in David Chidester, *Religions of South Africa*, Routledge, London, 1992 p.15

life together; their purpose is always to promote consciousness of the clan, to make people feel a part of it.[21] In this way, ancestor rituals not only acted as a medium for communication with superhuman entities, but more importantly functioned to promote group loyalty and solidarity, while reinforcing social norms and morals among its member.

The social norms and group solidarity reinforced and regulated through group rituals, contributed to much of the foundational structure of Xhosa society. Here it is possible to understand the Xhosa's traditional ancestor religion as a kind of "social cement"; "it is a source of social and moral order, binding the members of society to a common social project, a set of shared values and social goals."[22] These common values and goals were inspired and guarded by the ancestors, who were invested with the sacred power that only society itself can instil. This inextricable link between society and the sacred brings Durkheim to equate 'God' with society; God is ultimately whatever the society deems sacred, and it is the powerful force invested in those sacred things that creates the means by which society is bonded together.

The accessibility of the ancestors, as well as their omnipotent presence in the lives of decedents and the community alike, make the ancestors an enduring and effective authority of Xhosa life. The ancestors, the moral and social codes that they encourage and uphold, function to instil a sense of communal solidarity that underlines the necessity of right living for the betterment of both the individual and the group. The Xhosa's ancestor religion sanctions time-honoured social arrangements and disciplines deviance from them.[23] The ancestors are endowed with a powerful influence and real authority which actively influences the daily lives of those still living. In this way it is possible to understand the ancestors in terms of the powerful force articulated in Durkheim's theory of totemic principle; for the Xhosa, the ancestors function as "a uniting force; [they] possesses enormous power, both physical and moral, over the life of the clan. People respect [them]; they feel a moral obligation to observe [their] ceremonies; and through [them] they feel tightly bound to each other in deep and abiding loyalty."[24] Now, although the role and

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[21] Daniel L. Pals, *Seven Theories of Religion*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1996 p.107
[22] Michael S. Northcott, *Approaches to the Study of Religion,* Cassel, New York, 1999. p.196
[23] Jim Kiernan in *Living Faiths in South Africa*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1995 p.25
[24] Daniel L. Pals, *Seven Theories of Religion*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1996 p.103

function of the ancestors speaks to the force described in the totemic principle, the ancestors cannot however be legitimately understood as totems of the Xhosa people. Totems are not only a force, but also a symbol, the concrete, visible image of the clan.[25] Totems are mostly appropriated from nature, and occupy a more personal position and representation to and of an individual clan. This differs from the role of ancestors, in that ancestors can be invoked by individual families or entire communities and societies; therefore ancestors cannot represent or be the sole symbol of ritual worship for one particular clan. Yet still, in many respects the force and power of the ancestors can be elucidated by Durkheim's totemic principle, as the ancestors do possess "the sense of a hidden, impersonal, and powerful force."[26] This concept is actively reinforced by way of ancestor rituals, which are the focus of worship of both the ancestors and reflexively the society itself.

As we have seen, Durkheim's theory of religion which equates society as god is useful and enlightening when applied to the Xhosa's traditional religion. For Durkheim and the Xhosa alike, "religion is something eminently social,"[27] therefore those things most sacred to the Xhosa are not projected onto a deity, or located in the heavens; they are part of society itself. God is not an external entity, a divinity in a far-away place, but rather the culmination of the social. It is important to mention here that although the Xhosa did believe in a high god, uQamatha, their conception referred to a "remote, transcendent power beyond human understanding."[28] Further, Kiernan says "most portrayals of African religion begin right here, with a mandatory reference to a Creative Spirit, if only to dispose of him as being too peripheral to human affairs to merit much attention from anybody. Having set things in motion, he no longer evinces much concern with his own creation."[29] In keeping with this idea, the Xhosa's traditional religion therefore purports in no way that "religion transcends the level of purely human engagement or that it is subsumed within a design conceived by a deity, or negotiated between several deities, out of time and out of

[25] Emile Durkheim in Pals, Ibid p.102
[26] Ibid p.103
[27] Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1976 p.10
[28] David Chidester, *Religions of South Africa*, Routledge, London, 1992 p.6
[29] Jim Kiernan in *Living Faiths in South Africa*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1995 p.25

this world."[30] On the contrary, Xhosa traditional religion, effectively illuminated through Durkheim's theory, recognizes and attests to the "this-worldly", moral and social concerns taken up within Xhosa traditional religion. Kiernan says:

> On the evidence presented so far, there can be little doubt that this religion is an expression of humanism, in the sense of emphasizing human or this-worldly concerns. All its active features are essentially human agents without any pretensions to divinity. It is overtly preoccupied with the temporal promotion of physical health, economic well-being and human development. But it is equally concerned with the regulation and management of human social relations, and with the easing of social conflict.[31]

These worldly concerns, especially the easing of social conflict were of main concern during the time of Nongqawuse's prophecy. Tensions were high for the Xhosa from both internal and external pressures; the state of the Xhosa nation in terms of political power, economic status and social relations were on a steep decline between the losses incurred during the Frontier Wars and the increasing oppressive power of the colonialists. In such a state of apprehension, it would seem natural for the Xhosa to turn to religion, as a means to help mediate and restore balance during this time of great strife. In such a situation, the ancestors, imbued with the sacred in terms of Durkheim's totemic principle, would naturally be invoked for the purpose of intervention on the Xhosa's behalf.

It is important to remember here that African traditional religion quite clearly recognizes various manifestations of communication and interaction between the ancestors and the living; "... ancestors may manifest themselves as animals. [And] they can be identified in dreams, often by way of premonition against intended course of action which could prove harmful."[32] There is also a substantial history of prophecy and prophetic ideology as a mode of communication from the ancestors in African traditional religion, which we will cover in more depth later. But it should suffice to say here that W.C. Willoughby, Professor of Missions in Africa, says in his study of Bantu tribes:

> Famous Bantu "prophets" date their awareness of their prophetic vocation from a time when, after a crisis of some sort, they saw a divine person of majestic mien, or were transported to

[30] Ibid p.25
[31] Ibid p.25
[32] Ibid p.23

> the spirit world and sent back whence they came with messages of tremendous importance, or, exceptionally, heard the commanding voice of an invisible speaker.[33]

This is interesting particularly to our case study in that the strangers who imparted the prophecy to Nongqawuse "introduced themselves as messengers of Sifuba Sibanzi (the Broad-Chested One) and Napakade (the Eternal One)," and further, "Nongqawuse said that she had met with a 'new people' from over the sea, who were the ancestors of the living Xhosa." [34] In terms of African traditional belief, it is not so far-fetched then, to consider how it could be believed that the spirits or ancestors that Nongqawuse claimed to have seen could have been understood as messengers, as the ancestors were considered both superhuman or divine messengers and mediators. And further, Durkheim's theory constructively considers how Nongqawuse's prophecy could have manifested in this situation, as the ancestors would have naturally been invoked for guidance, support and mediation. If we are to follow through with Durkheim's theory, then it is possible to argue that Nongqawuse's prophecy, her communication with the messengers, can then be understood or interpreted as the ancestors' divine intervention and mediation at an extremely crucial point in time for the Xhosa people. This intervention can be attributed as a direct reaction to the despondent state of the Xhosa people during this time, which manifested as a divine prophecy from the ancestors. This message aimed to both strengthen the Xhosa's group solidarity and mobilize the community by channelling the power behind the legitimate authority of a common, sacred Xhosa entity; the ancestors.

Durkheim's theory of religion is quite useful when applied to our case study. His focus on the social nature of religion is effectively illuminated in the relationship between the Xhosa people and the social and moral order which religion works to uphold within their society. And as we have seen, Durkheim's theory on totemic principle also contributes to our unique understanding of the power and force located with the ancestors. The role of the ancestors also explicates a unique perspective on "why" and "how" Nongqawuse's prophecy could have eventuated under

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[33] W.C. Willoughby, *The Soul of the Bantu: A sympathetic study of the magico-religious practices and beliefs of the Bantu tribes of Africa*, J & J Harper Editions, New York, 1969 p.114

[34] J.B. Peires, The *Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-7*, Raven Press Ltd., Johannesburg, 2003 p.329

these circumstances. But Durkheim's theory, as we will also see with our other theories, is not without its faults. Despite its applicability here, Durkheim's theory undeniably fits into the category of reductionist functionalism. Durkheim clearly reduces the phenomenon of religion down to what he believes to be its origin, or the social nature of religion. Durkheim proffers that religion is best explained in terms of its function, rather than the many other aspects and perspectives that coalesce to create the multidimensional experience that is religion; "he reduces it away to something other than it appears to be,"[35] predicated solely on the functional role it plays in society. For Durkheim, the function of religion is the most significant factor in explaining religion; the phenomenon of religion carries no intrinsic merit of its own. The reductionist functionalism of Durkheim is an issue we see again with many theorists of his day, and it is something that needs to be taken into perspective when utilizing his theory. However, this does not negate the fact that Durkheim's theory provides a simple compatible framework for understanding the Xhosa's traditional religion, and further, affords us an informative perspective on the socially cohesive power of the ancestors and ancestor ritual, as well as a foundational understanding of the inception of Nongqawuse's prophecy.

Max Weber: The Prophet and Charisma

We continue on with our study using the work of German sociologist Max Weber, to contribute to our understanding of the role of the prophet and charismatic authority, specifically in its application for our case study. Weber is best known for his works *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, and *Economy and Society*, which offers insightful theories connecting economics and religion. Weber, like Durkheim, was a founder of modern sociology, and although he did not necessarily offer a decisive definition or theory of religion as such, his numerous works offered revolutionary ideas and fundamental concepts which linked religious ideas with economic activities and the unique development of Western civilization. These works offer vast insights; however, it is Weber's *Sociology of Religion* which we will be using here in our effort to better

[35] Daniel L. Pals, *Seven Theories of Religion*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1996 p.118

understand the Cattle-Killing event. Weber's *Sociology of Religion* covers a range of different topics, but for our purposes here we will be looking at his concepts of "prophet" and "charismatic authority" to help us elucidate the power and meaning behind these concepts and how they function within Xhosa society, and specifically in terms of Nongqawuse's Cattle-Killing prophecy.

The prophet is a category term Weber uses to typify one form of religious authority. Weber defines the role of the "prophet" as "a purely individual bearer of charisma, who by virtue of his mission proclaims a religious doctrine or divine commandment."[36] In his description and explanation of the prophet, Weber most often compares and contrasts the role of the prophet to another type of religious authority; that of the priest. While the prophet's power and legitimacy is self endowed through personally inspired revelation and "personal gifts", the priest's power and legitimacy, on the other hand, is externally granted by the "hierarchical office that confers legitimate authority upon the priest as a member of a corporate enterprise of salvation."[37] For the priest, authority and legitimacy is very much grounded in the established traditional religious power; it is a self-perpetuation and reinforcement of the sacred traditional values and the established hierarchical authority itself. The prophet, however, conversely acts on his own personal call, preaching a divinely motivated message from God. For Weber, "the proclamation of a religious truth of salvation through personal revelation is the defining characteristic and decisive hallmark of prophecy and of a prophet."[38]

The social conditions surrounding the emergence of a prophet are of necessary significance, as it is often the specific social circumstances that engender the rise of a prophet. Professor Emeritus of Sociology, Thomas Ford Hoult, places heavy emphasis on the social climate surrounding a rising prophet, which he says is determined necessarily by a culture clash, where traditional values are challenged: "The religious leader known as a prophet typically appears when the

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[36] Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1992 p.46
[37] Ibid p.46
[38] This point is of the utmost importance to Weber. Prophets can only be personally and divinely endowed with religious authority, while priests can only be granted their religious authority through the established religious institution as part of the "corporate enterprise of salvation" (p.47) Weber, Max, *The Sociology of Religion*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1992 p.54

established values of a social group seem to be threatened by contact with alien cultures. Thus, the prophet usually appears among minority groups whose values are threatened by invaders, by assimilation, or by migration."[39] Hoult's prognosis accurately depicts the social climate of the Xhosa which, according to Hoult, would have pre-empted Nongqawuse's prophecy. The colonialists represented an entirely alien culture, not only in terms of their Christian beliefs, but also in their capitalist aims, which were accompanied by a technologically superior military force that was unrelenting in its procurement of Xhosa land. In terms of Hoult's definition, the Xhosa were not only concerned with potential assimilation or migration as a 'threat' to their established values; rather it was the colonialist's committed aim of complete and total annihilation which faced the Xhosa, and hence ripened the environment to the receptivity of a millenarian prophecy of this kind. Chidester illustrates this point:

> The British army, however, introduced the indigenous people of the Eastern Cape to a new kind of warfare- total warfare- that was targeted at the complete destruction of human and material resources... In this incomprehensible situation of death, destruction, and displacement, Xhosa prophets emerged to assume important leadership roles as religious visionaries struggling to make sense out of a changing world.[40]

This unstable environment provided precisely the right opportunity for a prophet to emerge. Faced with such dismal prospects, the Xhosa needed to mobilize around a person who could inspire a movement that would renew their hope and faith, a movement of a religious nature, as religion had always helped to make sense of the world and had seen them through all past complications and conflicts. A religious movement of this scale could only be inspired by a prophet; "The prophet comes charged with a demand for a new (shall we say) national movement. He calls people to action, to sacrifice, to return to old loyalties."[41] But it is not only this call to action in the face of conflicting values that determines the emergence of a prophet. Also important are a people who are willing to admit the possibility of charismatic insight and who feel a degree of uneasiness concerning their own and other's behavior and beliefs.[42] This introspective concern about behavior and beliefs necessarily leads to a self-examination and

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[39] Thomas Ford Hoult, *The Sociology of Religion*, Dryden Press, New York, 1958, p.122
[40] David Chidester, *Religions of South Africa*, Routledge, London, 1992 p.47
[41] W.C. Willoughby, *The Soul of the Bantu: A sympathetic study of the magico-religious practices and beliefs of the Bantu tribes of Africa*, J & J Harper Editions, New York, 1969 p.115
[42] Thomas Ford Hoult, *The Sociology of Religion*, The Dryden Press, New York 1958 p.123

reassessment of the individual and their role in society. In a way it also reinvigorates the power of the individual within society, and emphasizes the consequences of the individual's choice to participate in those activities deemed socially acceptable or those deemed "evil". In terms of the Xhosa's circumstances these evils could be represented not only by the colonial's encroaching beliefs and conduct, but also by the symbolisms of evil within Xhosa society itself which it was believed, had lead to the downfall of the Xhosa nation. Therefore, a return to loyalties and an abandonment of evil ways, especially those associated with the colonials or in effect, the repercussion created by contact with the colonials, were necessary if the promised benefits of the prophecy were to be realized. Nongqawuse's prophecy promised just such an exchange; for the personal sacrifice endured by each individual the prophecy promised not only the return of the ancestors, but eternal material restoration in the form of cattle and crops which would renew the Xhosa's traditional strength, status, and prosperity in a utopian future. Hoult says this utopian concept of a 'promise land' is directly tied to the emergence of a prophet: "Very often, if he [the prophet] is working among a disadvantaged group, the prophet promises to lead people to a "land of milk and honey" where they will find an unaccustomed material security and, what is even more important, be able to remain true to their ideals uncorrupted by alien folk." [43] This utopian future was the ultimate aim of Nongqawuse's prophecy and the Cattle-Killing event; it required the eradication of witchcraft and other social ills, so that sustenance, security, and prosperity could materialize, while the whites, along with their alien values and systems "were swept into the ocean".

However, both the inception and the fruition of this prophecy crucially depended upon the construction of a new worldview, one which meaningfully located the Xhosa people in their plight against the colonials, as well as re-organized and re-directed them within a unified cosmology which would eventually lead them to the ultimate utopian salvation. At a time when the Xhosa nation was struggling to make sense of their situation and was largely divided and undirected as to the best way forward, religion was relied upon to provide answers to questions of life and death, order and chaos, and meaning and purpose. This climate not only begged the

[43] Ibid p.124

need for change, but effectively worked to induce the right conditions that would allow for, and render others receptive to, a complete re-negotiation and re-organization of unified meaning and purpose within an ordered totality. The prophet, endowed with the power of personal revelation, can address all of these issues, breaking with the established order and instead re-orienting and systematizing both social behavior and cosmic meaning into a new cohesive religious construct. This, ideally, directs the group's action to move towards the expressed goal of salvation:

> Prophetic revelation involves for both the prophet himself and for his followers, a unified view of the world derived from a consciously integrated and meaningful attitude toward life. To the prophet, both the life of man and the world, both social and cosmic events, have certain systematic and coherent meaning. To this meaning the conduct of mankind must be oriented if it is to bring salvation, for only in relation to this meaning does life obtain a unified and significant pattern. . . . Moreover, it always contains the important religious conceptions if the world as a cosmos which is challenged to produce somehow a 'meaningful' ordered totality, the particular manifestations of which are to be measured and evaluated according to this requirement.[44]

Prophetic revelation is obviously essential to this process. However, the personal revelation must be fully developed in a manner that constructs a specific system of conduct for all its followers. Commitment to that conduct necessarily leads to a specific outcome, that outcome being salvation. Although personal revelation and a re-orientation of the normative order comprises a significant part of the prophet's mission, a decisive factor in the accomplishment of this mission comes down to a question of the prophecy's legitimacy as a moral doctrine which breaks from the established order to perpetuate radical change. If the prophecy is not considered legitimate, then it will not take hold with followers, therefore rendering the prophet ineffective and his prophecy useless. "The focus on the individual person who takes the responsibility for announcing a break in the established normative order and declaring this break to be morally legitimate, thereby setting himself in significant respects in explicit opposition to the established order. In order to legitimize his sponsorship of such a break the prophet must in turn invoke a source of moral authority, an imperative which leads directly into the problem of the conceptions of meaning and order."[45] The question of moral authority and concepts of meaning and order are

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[44] Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1992 p.59
[45] Talcot Parsons in Ibid p.xliv

essential here and is undeniably the key to a prophecy's success or failure. Although social circumstances create a space in which a prophet can materialize, the prophecy must directly respond to the situation at hand by constructing a radical and new understanding of meaning and order which can be translated into appropriate action. However without moral legitimacy this radical break is unlikely to affect change.

It is important to understand that the "prophet", in the Weberian sense, is not a concept foreign to the Xhosa's traditional beliefs. In fact, the prophet is a well recognized entity of Xhosa tradition, dating back much further than Nongqawuse. Before the prophecies of Nongqawuse, other prophets, such as Nxele and Mlanjeni, emerged within Xhosa society. These prophets professed personal revelations and commandments intended to bring about a renewed order and prosperity to the Xhosa people. These prophets were thought to have inspired communication with the ancestors, and legitimated their claim with moral and charismatic authority. Though there is no exact definition of the African term "prophet", Willoughby says, "a man or woman needs no previous training to become a 'prophet', although it appears therefore that a predisposition to ecstasy, day-dreams, and visions, is a necessary qualification. And their success depends in the main upon the intensity of their convictions, though it is often promoted by their own cleverness, by the support of some chief who makes them his political tool, or by the chance fulfillment of one of their predictions."[46] It is difficult to overlook Willoughby's overt bias, made clear here in his cynical and rather calculating perspective of the Bantu prophet. But what he implies is that a prophet would have a natural inclination towards those abilities endowed to what Chidester has termed "sacred specialists". Similarly, Weber also acknowledges that prophets very often practice divination as well as magical healing and counseling."[47] It should not come as a surprise then that other Xhosa prophets, such as Nxele and Mlanjeni were renowned sacred specialist, while Nongqawuse herself, was thought to be undergoing an

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[46] W.C. Willoughby, *The Soul of the Bantu: A sympathetic study of the magico-religious practices and beliefs of the Bantu tribes of Africa*, J & J Harper Editions, New York, 1969 p.115

[47] Weber often refers to magic when speaking of the prophet: "There was always required of such prophets a proof of their possession of particular gifts of the spirit, of special magical or ecstatic abilities." In terms of the Xhosa this could be understood as gifts of the spirit or ecstatic abilities residing with diviners, medicine men or other sacred specialist. Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1992 p.47

experience akin to the *thwasa* initiation of Xhosa doctors.[48] There can be little doubt from these descriptions, that Nongqawuse could be characterized as a prophet in Weberian terms, moved by her divine messages and personal revelations. These messages were interpreted and communicated into a unified worldview, meaningfully locating the plight of the Xhosa people at this time, and further, creating systems of order and understanding in a unique cosmology which also identified specific practices and behaviors that would ultimately lead to their salvation.

There is another key criterion to Weber's concept of the prophet which is quite visibly neglected in the characterization of Nongqawuse as prophet. Weber says quite clearly that a prophet "lays claim to his authority based on personal revelation and *charisma*."[49] Charisma provides the missing link in our study of the prophet. Sociologist Elizabeth K. Nottingham, like Weber, locates a prophet's power in their charisma: "the power of the prophets to move men and events resided in their "charisma"- an awe-inspiring quality of attraction whereby they exercised an almost mesmeric effect upon their hearers."[50] Charisma is the decisive factor needed to secure the support and devotion of followers, which in effect, endows the prophet with the moral and charismatic authentication necessary to claim moral and charismatic authority. For the prophet, charismatic authority married with a revolutionary and divinely inspired message effectively works to precipitate divine recognition and receptivity of idealized goals; "his power rests upon this purely factual recognition and springs from faithful devotion. It is devotion to the extraordinary and unheard-of, to what is strange to all rule and tradition and which therefore is viewed as divine. It is a devotion born of distress and enthusiasm."[51] This devotion to 'what is strange to all rule and tradition' which Kimmel speaks of can be considered an absolute break with tradition, in both beliefs and order, in favor of the re-distribution of order and meaning communicated in the charismatic message of the prophet. "Charismatic domination means a rejection of all ties to any external order in favor of the exclusive glorification of the genuine

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[48] Although it was not officially known whether or not Nongqawuse was in fact being initiated, there was much evidence to suggest that she was undergoing *thwasa*, specifically in term of her behavior and aspects of her description "such as her disheveled appearance." For more see J.B Peires, *The Dead Will Arise: Nogqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-7*, Raven Press Ltd., Johannesburg, 1989 p.113

[49] Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1992 p.47

[50] Elizabeth K. Nottingham, *Religion: A Sociological View*, Random House, New York, 1971 p.147

[51] Michael S. Kimmel, *Classical Sociological Theory, Second Edition*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2007 p. 240

mentality of the prophet and hero. Hence, its attitude is revolutionary and transvalues everything; it makes a sovereign break with all traditional or rational norms."[52] This is an exclusive power of charismatic authority born of charisma and the prophet's ability to transfer personal divine inspiration into tangible mobilization by way of the rejection of any and all connections with the established traditional order in favor of a new, revolutionary path which will ultimately lead to salvation.

We have already discussed the personal revelations of Nongqawuse, however the aspect of charisma seems oddly ignored or possibly non-existent in terms of the literature and research done in this area. There is almost nothing said about Nongqawuse in terms of charisma or charismatic authority. As is repeated in most literature on this subject, it was Nongqawuse who experienced the visions of the messengers. However, it was always Mhlakaza, Nongqawuse's uncle, who is credited with the interpretation and communication of these visions, constructing and promoting a doctrine of salvation engendered by his own personal charisma. His doctrine, drawn from the convictions of Nongqawuse's vision, consisted of both "do's" and "don'ts" which were essential in order to fulfill the requirements necessary for salvation. For example, Brownlee points out that, "as evidence that they had renounced witchcraft and trusted in the promise of redemption, Mhlakaza drew on the authority of his young niece's vision to instruct people that they had to sacrifice all their cattle in anticipation of the resurrection of their ancestors and the overthrow of white domination."[53] It could be argued that the charisma and charismatic authority required to inspire a movement of this measure resided not with Nongqawuse, but rather was motivated and perpetuated by her uncle, Mhlakaza. I would like to offer here, the possibility that a prophet does not necessarily require charisma or charismatic authority in order for their message to be received or for their mission to be successful, as Weber says. It could be argued, as is apparent here in our case study, for a prophet to proclaim a divinely inspired vision or message, while the mission of its fulfillment is taken up by a separate charismatic leader who then draws on the legitimacy of the prophet's divine message in order to

[52] Ibid p.240
[53] *Brownlee in* David Chidester, *Religions of South Africa*, Routledge, London, 1992 p.51

institute and actively mobilize a following to seek its fulfillment. Without Mhlakaza's charisma it is possible that Nongqawuse's prophecy would never have taken hold with followers and evolved into an event of such infamy. It was up to Mhlakaza to take on the mission and seek out a path in which prophecy could effectively infiltrate Xhosa society to instigate its fruition. Sociologist Michael Kimmel says, "the holder of charisma seizes the task that is adequate for him and demands obedience and a following by virtue of his mission. His charismatic claim breaks down if his mission is not recognized by those to whom he feels he has been sent."[54] It is possible that Nongqawuse did not possess the charisma necessary to drive the prophecy to its fulfillment, and therefore Mhlakaza took up the cause and was able, through his charisma, to claim the charismatic authority needed in these circumstances. It is also possible that this shift in leadership was essential if the prophecy was to survive. Mhlakaza's appropriation of Nongqawuse's prophecy may not have only been based on charismatic qualification, but rather necessarily on the politics of gender and seniority among the Xhosa. As a man of good standing within the society and a councilor to King Sarhili, Mhlakaza possessed the necessary social status and leadership capabilities in terms of both traditional hierarchical position and gender. As a young teenage girl, Nongqawuse would have easily been dismissed or ignored if she attempted to further her message. In essence the leadership needed to be taken on by someone of substantial rank and social standing if the prophecy was to gain any momentum. Therefore, although the prophecy came from Nongqawuse, Mhlakaza possessed the rank and position, as well as the personal charisma and the knowledge, to direct the message in a manner that would see it well received. This was crucial if the redemption born of the Cattle-Killing prophecy was to be realized.

Weber's category of the prophet and his concept of charisma are useful tools in our study of Nongqawuse, Mhlakaza and the Cattle-Killing event. The prophet, as a well-known entity of the Xhosa's traditional religion, was undoubtedly influenced by the social conditions surrounding the prophet's emergence. Without the destitute conditions experienced by the Xhosa after the Frontier Wars, it would be significantly less likely for Nongqawuse or any other prophet to

[54] Michael S. Kimmel, *Classical Sociological Theory, Second Edition*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2007 p.238

emerge with such a message, or for it be so well received. The dissemination of the meaning and content of the prophet's message is of main importance to the success of the prophet's mission. Without a visible break with traditional order and social norms, as well as a re-orientation and implementation of practical behavior around a new concept of order and redemption, the movement around the mission would struggle to mobilize. The Xhosa needed a message as extraordinary and fantastic as Nongqawuse's prophecy in order to affect change. But as we have seen here, Weber's diagnosis of the inextricable relationship between the prophet and charisma is not necessarily as he understands it. Although charisma is essential to the propagation of a prophecy, it is not compulsory for the prophet alone to possess it. In the case of Cattle-Killing event, Nongqawuse fulfilled the role of the prophet communicating a divine legitimacy into her message, while Mhlakaza, who possessed social status and charisma, effectively appropriated Nongqawuse's prophecy and instilled the message with a strength and determination only found in charismatic authority. In essence, the Cattle-Killing prophecy was a dual effort. Much of Weber's work has been critiqued on a number of different fronts. And as we have seen here, his theory on the relationship between prophet and charisma is not infallible either. However for our purposes, his framework and qualifications for the role of the prophet and the significance of charisma are of great insight and much assistance in our endeavor to understand the inception and dissemination of Nongqawuse's prophecy.

Karl Marx: Socio-Economic Factors of the Cattle-Killing

The work of German social philosopher Karl Marx has provided us with some of the most influential and controversial ideas of our time. Marx's work covers a great many fields including areas such as economics, history, education, philosophy and religion, to name a short few. His theories have had an undeniable effect on the way we currently view all aspects of society. Marx's work and theories are extremely vast, however the scope of this essay will only allow for us to address the relevant points in Marx's theory in relation to the Xhosa Cattle-Killing event.

Here, I will assess the impact of the post-war period that led to the Xhosa Cattle-Killing event by applying Marx's idea of class division. I will also look at Marx's concept of base and superstructure as a means through which to explain how Nogqawuse's prophecy took form. I will also assess the applicability of Marx's theory for use in our case study, as well as critique his theory and account for its shortcomings.

Marx's theory emphasizes the economic basis for all social phenomena, including religion. For Marx, religion, like all social aspects of life, is determined and shaped by the economic conditions from which it was born. Economic facts "form the foundation of social life; they are the base that generates the division of labour, the struggle of classes, and human alienation."[55] To effectively illustrate Marx's point, I will briefly assess the economic circumstances of the Xhosa in the post-Frontier war period in order to put our case study into context and further apply Marx's theory of 'base and superstructure'.

There is little doubt that after the military defeat in the War of Mlanjeni, and the ensuing political, economic, and territorial loss, the Xhosa were in a serious state of deprivation and desperation. In 1854, a year after the War of Mlanjeni ended, lungsickness ravaged through many parts of Southern Africa, greatly affecting the Eastern Cape. As many as 100,000 cattle, "painfully persevered through three years of war or wearily earned in farm labour died a lingering and horrible death. Losses of 80 per cent or even 100 per cent per stockowner were not uncommon".[56] Cattle not only provided sustenance for the Xhosa, but were the locus around which their entire socio-economic structure was organized. The vast loss in cattle, by way of seizure or sickness, struck hard at the heart of the Xhosa's socio-economic system. The cattle based pastoral-feudalism of the Xhosa, was under serious threat.[57]

Cattle were not the only major loss at the time, as the scorched- earth policy held by the British during the war devastated much of Xhosaland;

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[55] Daniel L. Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2006 p.130
[56] J.B. Peires, "Soft Believers and Hard Unbelievers in the Xhosa Cattle-Killing", The Journal of African History, Vol.27, No.3, 1986 p.445
[57] Timothy J. Stapleton, "They No Longer Care for Their Chiefs", The International Journal for African Historical Studies, Vol.24, No.2, 1991 p.386

> burning all the crops and capturing all the cattle which could be found. After the fighting was over, many Xhosa were left without a calf or a bag of seed corn. Old networks of mutual assistance collapsed, men and women were forced into migrant labour on white settler farms. Absolute deprivation was aggravated by relative deprivation, for contact with colonial commerce had created new wants, so that imported manufactures such as blankets, tinderboxes and iron hoes had become socially necessary to most Xhosa.[58]

Left in a state of destitution after the wars, much of Xhosa society had no choice but to flock to the labour camps set up by the colonials to become cheap migrant labour, blindly forced to integrate into the colonialist's capitalist system. This forced integration was inflamed by the materialism of British capitalism, which only worked to perpetuate the worsening status of the Xhosa. It was not only food and shelter that they now needed, but these new manufactured objects, which were rendered 'socially necessary' for the Xhosa. This was the introduction of materialism in to Xhosa society. In order to buy these material objects the Xhosa were forced to relent and agree to work as cheap labour for the colonialists.

The Xhosa's economic situation also had serious repercussions for their social system, as the movement of migrant labour directly affected the Xhosa's traditional social hierarchy;

> such a drastic reduction in the quantity of cattle meant that the aristocracy's system of controlling their society through pastoral patronage became virtually ineffective. With the destruction of traditional society, more commoners became wage-labourers for Europeans and thereby became even less reliant on cattle lent to them by the upper class. While chiefs retained their ceremonial position, their legitimacy and real power to manipulate society was destroyed.[59]

Already under threat from the great loss of cattle and crops, the move towards migrant labour effectively incorporated the Xhosa into the colonial's capitalist system, which only increased strained ties to their traditional socio-economic system. Class distinctions within the Xhosa's social hierarchy became difficult to maintain. The Xhosa chiefs' individual power and authority was usurped by the British, allowing them very little political power, if any, within the British colony or over their own people. And with the outlaw of traditional customs such as *lobola*, the British had an growing impact on the social and cultural traditions of the Xhosa. Social divisions

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[58] J.B Peires, "Soft Believers and Hard Unbelievers in the Xhosa Cattle-Killing", The Journal of African History, Vol.27, No.3, 1986 p.444

[59] Timothy J. Stapleton, "They No Longer Care for Their Chiefs", The International Journal for African Historical Studies, Vol.24, No.2, 1991 p.389

among the Xhosa were literally 'fading away'[60]; the social demarcation was now shifting from the exclusivity of the traditional Xhosa social hierarchy, to now include and recognize a new division between the Xhosa and the colonials. This in essence created a separation of classes by power and wealth, with the British as what Marx would call the 'ruling class', and the Xhosa as the 'working class' or the 'proletariat'.

For Marx, the class division, marked by the way in which the means of production are organized in a society, creates a system where-by its social institutions necessarily promote and enforce the ideas of the ruling class; as "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas".[61] These social institutions which proffer the ruling classes' ideas, (government, education, religion, etc.,) are what Marx calls the 'superstructure' and are distinct from the 'base', which are the economic facts that are the foundation for a society. Marx posits that the economic realities that form the 'base' are what control the 'superstructure', and in response, the institutions of the 'superstructure' then maintain the 'base'. The relationship between the 'base' and the 'superstructure' is mutually informative and reinforcing; the 'superstructure', based on economic realities, necessarily justifies the class division and reinforces the status quo.

Although we can use part of Marx's theory on 'base' and 'superstructure' to elaborates the forces at work in the post-war- pre-prophesy period, we will also find it is where his theory's applicability becomes inadequate in dealing with our case study. Marx contends that it is from the 'base', which is the foundation for social life and decidedly economic, that the superstructure, or those things visible in daily life such as art, government, culture, and religion, takes its form. This aspect of Marx's theory is well illustrated by Nongqawuse's prophecy which can be seen as the 'base'- the destitute economic situation of the Xhosa- taking shape in the 'superstructure' in the form of a religious prophecy, as Marx says, "religious distress is at the same time the expression of real [economic] distress and the protest against real distress."[62] In the case of the Xhosa Cattle-Killing, this point is irrefutable; Nongqawuse's prophecy can be legitimatly

[60] Ibid p.386
[61] Karl Marx in Pals, Daniel, *Eight Theories of Religion*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2006 p.130
[62] Karl Marx in Ibid p.134

understood as an expression and protest of the economic hardship that the Xhosa were suffering in the post-war period.

However, from here, Marx's theory does not hold. According to Marx, the superstructure, shaped by the base, is also the structure that perpetually sustains the base (the economical realities of those oppressed) by providing an avenue for release of the tensions that form between the oppressor and the oppressed. For Marx, the 'superstructure' offers an arena for the oppressed to vent their unhappiness and sorrow while at the same time, giving authoritative justification to their oppressed status. This is Marx's concept of religion as the 'opiate of the people'; for Marx religion merely supplicates the masses into accepting their oppression. However, this has not proven to be the case for the Xhosa in terms of the Cattle-Killing movement. Instead of religion serving as a means in which to legitimate and sustain oppression, consequently maintaining the status quo, Nongqawuse's prophecy instigated the mobilization of the Xhosa community in the face of economic, social, political and cultural marginalization. Here, instead of the Xhosa turning to religion as medium in which to lament and in turn accept the impending colonialist domination, they found voice in their traditional religion and employed it as a means of revolution against the British in a rather Marxist fashion. This can be accounted for in that the Xhosa's traditional religion was not mediated or controlled by the Christian colonialists; in this case, the oppressor did not have the power or the opportunity to enforce its classist agenda and propaganda on the oppressed as the Xhosa's traditional religion was not integrated into the machinery of the colonialist's capitalist system. In this way, religion, by way of Nongqawuse's prophecy was quite clearly the only avenue for protest or mobilization by the Xhosa.

> It is no exaggeration to describe the cattle-killing as a popular mass movement of a truly national character, uniting both chiefs and commoners, the major social classes of the pre-colonial social order, in a communal defence of their way of life.[63]

The clash of cultures, here the traditional Xhosa and the modern British, is not accounted for in Marx's theory. In order for Marx's theory to function effectively, the entire society and all its

[63] J.B. Peires, "Soft Believers and Hard Unbelievers in the Xhosa Cattle-Killing", The Journal of African History, Vol.27, No.3, 1986 p.456

institutions must necessarily be controlled by one system, which operate to mutually inform and enforce one another. In this event, the ruling class British, who had substantial economic and political control, did not have a monopoly on the religious aspect of Xhosa life. This created a vacuum where an opportunity for the mobilization of the Xhosa could occur. Here religion, in the form of Nongqawuse's prophecy was not an 'illusion' in Marx's terms, or an 'opiate' used to placate the Xhosa into accepting their imminent working-class status, but rather the vehicle by which they could mobilize a revolution to defend their traditional way of life. The dialectical interplay between the traditional system of the Xhosa and the modern system of the British presents an area where Marx's theory is not applicable, or addressed. Although Marx's theory works effectively to highlight the significant role economics plays in this event, his theory is also functionalist and reductionist in that it only recognizes the fucntional role of religion as a direct consequence of the economic circumstances and the class struggle of the Xhosa. We cannot attempt to further our discussion of the Cattle-Killing with Marx's theory as for Marx, the religious movement has no merit on its own; it cannot be recognized as anything other than a by-product, necessarily born of the Xhosa's economic destitution. His theory does not account for other externalities that undoubtedly factor into this event, nor can his theory be used to explain the acts of the event itself, in terms of the meaning and purpose of the sacrifice of remaining cattle, and burning of crops. However, our next theorist, Mircea Eliade, takes up some of these issues which Marx's theory does not address.

Mircea Eliade: Cattle as a Symbol of the Sacred

Romanian historian of religion, Mircea Eliade, was one of the first scholars to out-right reject the previous functionalist reductionism proffered by the likes of Durkheim and Marx. Eliade was resolute in his point that religion must always be explained on its own terms, and not as a by-product of something else, unlike Durkheim's functionalism or Marx's economic determinism.

One of Eliade's most important theories, which we will use here, is on religious symbols and symbolism. Eliade understands the symbol to be medium between the realms of the sacred and profane. Eliade calls symbols the 'language of the sacred', in that symbols supply a 'world-based' form of indirect expression for those concepts and ideas which are imbued with the supernatural or the sacred.[64] Eliade says anything can be a symbol, as it is through an 'infusion of the sacred', or what Eliade terms 'dialectic of the sacred', that an object becomes a symbol.[65] Moreover, he contends it is from nature that we source most of our symbols. It is with this in mind that we can begin to understand cattle as a symbol to and of the Xhosa in the context of the Cattle-Killing movement.

Cattle were a representation of many things to the Xhosa during this era. Not only were cattle a source of sustenance in terms of meat, milk products and hides, they were a crucial and intricate facet of the Xhosa's cultural system as well. Cattle were directly or indirectly involved in every aspect of Xhosa society, "a society ruled over by chiefs and dominated by cattle."[66] Cattle factored into the economic, social, political, cultural and religious life of the Xhosa and essentially constructed a system by which all parts of society coherently functioned together. Cattle determined wealth, power and class status, as cattle were the basis of the Xhosa's pastoral feudalism.

> Owning up to 87 percent of Xhosa cattle, the chief would lend them to his sub-chiefs on an increasing-share basis. The sub-chiefs' commoner subjects cared for the cattle in return for milk. Class lines were clearly drawn. Those who could use the royal cattle to build up private herds formed the aristocracy, which passed the cattle on to their descendants.[67]

Cattle were used as payment, as a means to settle debts, *lobola* or bride-price, and as a means of certifying class status. But cattle were also highly significant to the religious life of the Xhosa. Religious rituals often took place in and around the cattle kraal, and cattle were almost always used to propitiate the ancestors who played a significant role in Xhosa life.

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[64] Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism*, Harvill Press, London, 1952 p.6
[65] Daniel L. Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2006 p.205
[66] J.B. Peires, *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-7*, Raven Press Ltd., Johannesburg 1989 p.31
[67] Timothy J. Stapleton, "They No Longer Care for Their Chiefs", The International Journal for African Historical Studies, Vol.24, No.2, 1991 p.384

> Sacrifice [of cattle] was recognized by the Xhosa as the only effective method of communicating with the spirit world... the other functions of the sacrifice were to please the ancestors, who were known to be very fond of cattle, and to allow the beast to absorb, through its quality of innocence, the evil which polluted the homestead and thereby restore its initial purity.[68]

Cattle function here as a sacred medium by which cattle not only represented the profane aspects of worldly concerns, but also acted symbolically, as a means of supplication for communication with the ancestors within the larger realm of the cosmos. For the Xhosa, cattle, as a symbolic medium, "translates a human situation into cosmological terms; and reciprocally, more precisely, discloses the interdependence between the structures of human existence and cosmic structures." [69] The use of cattle in the various systems of Xhosa society expressed many different meanings or 'multivalence' as Eliade calls it, which interprets the multiplicity of meanings which it expresses simultaneously. It refers to a plurality of contexts and it is valuable on a number of levels.[70] The cattle, as a symbol, transcends all areas of life and transforms its meaning in each, amalgamating the economic with the social, political and religious contexts to underpin its significance in Xhosa society. The cattle as a symbol are fluid; they are simultaneously part of both the sacred and profane world where "everything holds together in a closed system of correspondences and assimilations."[71] And further, cattle represent the agency which situates and regulates the relationship of man to the universe. At one and the same time, the symbolism of the cattle clearly communicates both the sacred and profane in a form that articulates both attributes; for the Xhosa, cattle is a symbol which "communicates the existential significance which accompanies the disclosures of the deep structures of reality."[72]

During the Cattle Killing, the concept of sacrifice cloaked this act in symbolic significance and elevated it to the level of religious practice that was "usually observed during a time of divine affliction."[73] In the wake of military defeat and increasing social, economic, political and cultural deprivation and disenfranchisement, 'divine affliction', in the form of witchcraft could be faulted

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[68] J.B. Peires, *The Dead Will Arise: Nogqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-7*, Raven Press Ltd., Johannesburg 1989 p.105
[69] Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism*, Harvill Press, London, 1952 p.12
[70] Ibid p.3
[71] Ibid p.6
[72] Ibid p.5
[73] Lupenga Mphande, "Cattle-Killing as Resistance: The Dead Will Arise Reconsidered", Research in African Literature, Vol.22, No.3, Autumn 1991 p.176

as the cause of all ills and evil in Xhosa society. It is not surprising then, that Nongqawuse's prophecy directly refers to witchcraft as the cause of, and necessity for, the Cattle-Killing, which in essence had caused the Xhosa to lose divine favor and thus reap the devastating repercussions. The act of the Cattle-Killing was then a symbolic purging of the Xhosa nation, aimed to eliminate the internal dissoluteness in a bid to recreate itself and restore the nation's former glory. In the act of the Cattle-Killing, the cattle as a symbol then represented the symbolic sacrifice meant ultimately to cleanse the Xhosa nation, wiping away the depravity that had directly caused their situation, in order to begin anew.

This concept of starting over, beginning anew or recreating time, is also a significant theory within Eliade's work which is applicable to our study. Eliade first speaks of "regeneration" in terms of agricultural rites, which can also be seen as an aspect of Nongqawuse's prophesy, but can also be inferred in the act of Cattle-Killing itself. Eliade says; "the act of sacrifice for the regeneration of the force expressed in the harvest is to repeat the act of creation that first made grain to live. The ritual makes creation over again; the force at work in plants is reborn by suspending time and returning to the first moment of the fullness of creation."[74] This process of regeneration by way of destruction is applicable for both the crops that were razed to the ground and the cattle that were sacrificed. In order to start again, to begin anew, the society needed to be purged both physically and spiritually; cattle and crops provided the means with which to achieve this. In the Xhosa's attempt to restore normalcy in a time of despair and deprivation, Nongqawuse's prophesy afforded an opportunity to construct an 'end-times' scenario, which would ideally eradicate the failures of the past, in order to create a space in which a complete regenerate of cosmic time could occur, re-creating themselves within that time: in essence the Xhosa were symbolically sacrificing themselves through their cattle, for the expressed purpose of regeneration, purposefully instigating a re-creation of the original Creation that first gave them life. It is also important to note that the Xhosa did not regard the Creation as a one-off, never to be repeated event.[75] The Xhosa's cosmology clearly recognized the episodic nature of time;

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[74] Mircea Eliade, *Pattern in Comparative Religion*, Sheed and Ward, London, 1958 p.346

[75] J.B. Peires, *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-7*, Raven Press Ltd., Johannesburg 1989 p.132

"Instead of a linear unitary conception of time, there are a variety of 'times' associated with different kinds of natural phenomena and human activities. Time is episodic and discontinuous... there is no absolute 'clock' or single time scale."[76] Eliade's concept of the regeneration of time, then, was not incompatible with the Xhosa's traditional beliefs. Further, Eliade says that this concept does not occur in isolation, and is in fact persistent throughout history:

> The hope of a total regeneration of time is evident in all the myths and doctrines involving cosmic cycles; every cycle is an absolute beginning because all the past, all 'history' has been completely abolished by reverting in a single instant to 'chaos'. We see the desire and hope of regenerating time as a whole, of being able to live 'humanly', 'historically' in eternity, by transforming successive time in to a single eternal moment. This longing for eternity is a sort of parallel to the longing for paradise.[77]

Eliade mentions how this paradise is not a yearning for a spiritual realm in terms of a 'heaven' or after-life locale, but rather an earthly utopia located in the here and now. For the Xhosa, this was represented as return to a pre-colonial time, a time which acclaimed the Xhosa's former strength, prosperity and autonomy.

Eliade's theory, based in the relationship between a symbol, the individual and the community, is further grounded in a priority understanding of religion on its own terms. For Eliade, cattle can be seen as a symbol to, and of, Xhosa society, and in turn, its sacrifice, destruction for the expressed purpose of a complete regeneration of time in order to re-create the original Creation. Although Eliade's theory on symbolism is highly enlightening and useful here, his theory is also rather myopic as it does not take into consideration or account for the crucial importance of the socio-economic circumstances that undoubtedly effect and inevitably lead to this event, which Marx's theory affords us. Similarly it does not help us understand the importance of the ancestors and their role in this event, nor does it recognize the significance of prophecy or charisma, which also has an unquestionable influence on the materialization of the Cattle-Killing event. However, Eliade does provide a useful insight into the meaning of this event, by positing the conceptual importance of cattle as a symbol to and of Xhosa society, and in turn, the sacrificial symbolism of the Cattle-Killing itself. But it does not necessarily explain sufficiently

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[76] Benjamin Ray in J.B Peires, *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-7*, Raven Press Ltd., Johannesburg 1989 p.131

[77] Mircea Eliade, *Pattern in Comparative Religion*, Sheed and Ward, London, 1958 p.408

the intention behind the action's devastating outcome. As is already apparent, more than one theory is essential in order to achieve a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of the Xhosa Cattle-Killing movement. Our next theorist, David Chidester, addresses this point, and helps us to understand the intention behind the act of the Cattle-Killing through his theory of religious suicide.

David Chidester: Cattle-Killing as Religious Suicide

In his book, *Salvation and Suicide*, scholar of comparative religion, David Chidester, looks extensively into the millenarian movement, The People's Temple. Chidester's analysis on this movement is valuable in that it clearly posits the necessity for what he calls a 'religious worldview' as the fundamental means in which to understand a religious movement of this type, as well as conceptualize an understanding of religion on its own terms. Chidester also uses the concept of religious worldview as a discursive tool with which to argue that the apocalyptic outcome of The People's Temple, in what Chidester calls 'revolutionary suicide', was necessarily a result of the groups' religious worldview. Chidester says "religious worldviews create contexts for the construction of human identity within networks of symbolic classification and symbolic orientation that are intricately interwoven in the beliefs, practices, and forms of association that make up the multidimensional phenomenon of religion." [78] Chidester's aim is to uncover those systems which locate the human identity in the contexts that create it, specifically by way of symbolic classification and orientation. Chidester's dissection of classification and orientation is immense and deserves much more attention that we can adequately give here. Although an analysis of symbolic classification of person and orientation in time and space is useful, the scope of this work will not afford it. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will engage with Chidester's ideas of religious suicide, first addressing how the Cattle-Killing may be understood in terms of religious suicide, then further exploring it in terms of Chidester's theory.

[78] David Chidester, *Salvation and Suicide: Jim Jones, The People's Temple and Jonestown*, Indiana University Press, Indiana, 2003 p.48

Chidester's analysis of The People's Temples' religious worldview culminates with a discussion of religious suicide in the context of the mass suicide at Jonestown. Chidester defines religious suicide as "an act affirming certain religious values through self-imposed death."[79] It is important to preface here, that although the Xhosa did not directly commit suicide, the killing of over 100,000 cattle directly resulted in over 40,000 human deaths. As we have already established, cattle and crops constituted the primary source of food for the Xhosa. The mass slaughter of cattle and burning of crops directly affected their livelihood; it demolished their means of sustenance, gravely jeopardizing their survival. To add to this, as we have already established, to the Xhosa, cattle acted as a religious symbol. Cattle were entrenched into and were representative of every aspect of their society; cattle were symbolic to and of the Xhosa. And further, Xhosa mythology also inextricably linked man and cattle as being created together and brought to earth together,[80] giving their connection even more religious legitimacy. For these reasons, it could be argued that the sacrifice of cattle in the context of the Cattle-Killing event, be symbolically interpreted as the religious sacrifice of the Xhosa themselves; although the Xhosa did not commit suicide directly, the nature of the cattle as symbolic of the Xhosa, as well as the resulting deaths from the Cattle-Killing itself could understand the act of Cattle-Killing as religious suicide. It is with this understanding of the Xhosa Cattle-Killing event as religious suicide that I proceed with my analysis.

In the history of religions, religious suicide has presented in four main forms: ritual, release, revenge and revolution.[81] As an act of religious suicide, the Xhosa Cattle-Killing movement can be seen to incorporate aspects of each of these types. Here we will look at each of the manifestations of religious suicide to help clarify the understanding of the Xhosa Cattle-Killing movement as a form of religious suicide.

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[79] Ibid p.133

[80] Chief Mhala, one of the foremost supporters of the Cattle-Killing prophecy, (along with King Sarhili), was quoted as saying "Why should not cattle rise as well as human beings? They have spirits and were created on the same day with man." Jeff Peires, *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-7*, Raven Press Ltd., Johannesburg, 2003 p.161

[81] David Chidester, *Salvation and Suicide: Jim Jones, The People's Temple and Jonestown*, Indiana University Press, Indiana, 2003 p. 133

Chidester says religious suicide has been practiced as a 'ritual' of purification, which was a necessary response to defilement.[82] Nogqawuse's prophecy spoke specifically of the defilement of cattle "which have been reared by contaminated hands because there are people about who deal in witchcraft."[83] As a result, the Xhosa were ordered "to get rid of their cattle.... And the reason assigned is that they [the Xhosa] have all been wicked and everything belonging to them is therefore bad."[84] The defilement of cattle was a direct consequence of the impurity of Xhosa society, in which the social ills of the Xhosa resulted in the anger of the ancestors and the consequent deprivation of the Xhosa in the post-war period. Witchcraft in the form of sorcery was thought to be undoubtedly widespread in Xhosaland.[85] Witchcraft was also associated with any sort of morally wrong behavior which, being evil, constituted a polluting and harmful force in the naturally good and harmonious universe. Also, military defeat was thought to cause pollution, and with the recent memories of defeat in the Frontier wars, it is easy to see how the Xhosa's "state of mind could be associated with a yet-to-be-cleansed impurity."[86] But the Xhosa, in "a condition of symbolic defilement, could be purified through the ritual act of self-sacrifice."[87] The Cattle Killing action explicitly held the promise of purification for the Xhosa. It guaranteed a way in which the pollution and impurity now suffocating the Xhosa could be dissolved, constituting a new beginning where a "bright new order would be reborn on earth."[88] The Xhosa looked to the millennium of the Cattle-Killing. It would cleanse the impurity of their immediate circumstances and allow them to begin again; "the millennium was to be absolute and total. The future was seen through a haze of white, the colour of purity."[89]

Religious suicide as a 'release' posits religious suicide as "liberation from bondage in the world, a rest from the wearying journey of life, or as a final entrance into the ultimate peace of

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[82] Ibid p.133
[83] J.B Peires, *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-7*, Raven Press Ltd., Johannesburg 1989 p.79
[84] David Chidester, *Salvation and Suicide: Jim Jones, The People's Temple and Jonestown*, Indiana University Press, Indiana, 2003 p.124
[85] Ibid p.126
[86] Ibid p.126
[87] David Chidester, *Salvation and Suicide: Jim Jones, The People's Temple and Jonestown*, Indiana University Press, Indiana, 2003 p.133
[88] J.B. Peires, *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-7*, Raven Press Ltd., Johannesburg 1989 p.133
[89] Ibid p.133

extinction."[90] Religious suicide as 'release' functioned in two ways for the Xhosa; it liberated them from an inescapable colonial oppression and released them from a future of the unknowable and uncontrollable. As we have already established, the economic, social, political, territorial and cultural disenfranchisement of the Xhosa left them voiceless in any and all matters and decisions concerning themselves. Colonial authority reigned and made the Xhosa virtual prisoners in their own land. Religious suicide as 'release' could be seen as liberation from the oppressive colonial regime, a "death welcomed as a supreme release from a life that had become intolerable."[91] Religious suicide as 'release' would also free the Xhosa from an unknowable and uncontrollable future. In the wake of lungsickness which devastated much of the Eastern Cape, many Xhosa were already without means to sustain themselves, and those who still had cattle "began to believe that their cattle were rotten and impure, and that they might as well kill them since they were probably going to die anyway.'"[92] The inability to control the spread of lungsickness, which subsequently inflamed the Xhosa's destitute situation breaking down social ties and diminishing economic options, effectively revoked their autonomy and left them helpless in the face of a grim future. The Cattle-Killing then became a means with which to assert some level of independence; it acted as a decision made by an individual in a world they felt helpless to control. "Rather than a defeat by the natural, uncontrollable forces of life and death, which reduced human beings to nothing more than animals, a self-imposed death held the possibility for a transcendent exercise of human will and self-determination."[93] Religious suicide as 'release' offered an opportunity for choice and control in a situation where the Xhosa had neither.

Religious suicide as 'revenge' is also an interpretation which can be used to understand the Xhosa Cattle-Killing. Bronislow Malinowski described revenge suicide as a means of achieving justice when one has been wronged and may have no other recourse.[94] The Xhosa indeed had been greatly wronged and did not have any other alternative; after military defeat in the Frontier Wars,

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[90] David Chidester, *Salvation and Suicide: Jim Jones, The People's Temple and Jonestown*, Indiana University Press, Indiana, 2003 p.134
[91] Ibid p.134
[92] J.B. Peires, *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-7*, Raven Press Ltd., Johannesburg 1989 p.312
[93] David Chidester, *Salvation and Suicide: Jim Jones, The People's Temple and Jonestown*, Indiana University Press, Indiana, 2003 p.134
[94] Bronislow Malinowski in Ibid p.135

and the resulting subjugation, the Xhosa's options were limited in terms of avenging the wrongs that had been done to them by the British. But the Cattle-Killing in the shape of prophecy and in its Cattle-Killing action, is not articulated in terms of revenge against the British. The only wrongs to be avenged made explicit in the prophecy were those of the Xhosa society itself. The social ills of Xhosa society, in the form of witchcraft, sorcery, sexual misconduct, and social transgressions, provided a short list of those who had caused the downfall of the Xhosa nation and thus, required revenge. The Cattle-Killing was then an effective medium for this revenge to take form. Chidester says revenge suicide "usually requires some belief that the spirit of the deceased will survive death and torment the living, and exact social penalties on the accused."[95] Since a belief in the ancestors is intrinsic to Xhosa cosmology, revenge suicide becomes a distinct possibility in our interpretation of the Cattle-Killing as religious suicide. Here, the spirits of those who lost their lives as a result of the Cattle-Killing could then take revenge on those who had caused the state of the Xhosa's deprivation, which in turn prompted the necessity of the Cattle-Killing event. In this way, religious suicide as 'revenge' acts as a self-policing concept for Xhosa society; it is a way to insure that the society does not facilitate a similar situation in the future by ridding the Xhosa of those elements which it deems evil. The Cattle-Killing movement as 'revenge' can function "as an act of retribution that may be exercised on the living through a self-imposed death."[96]

Chidester defines 'revolutionary suicide' as, "an act of revolution against overwhelming forces of religious, political and military opposition" which would ideally,"secure victory in the face of certain defeat."[97] This definition clearly articulates the Xhosa's circumstances, and does not require further elaboration except to say that the Cattle-Killing movement can be interpreted as an act of revolution against insurmountable British imperialism. However, I would like to suggest that there is a more literal translation of the word 'revolution' in terms of our concept of revolutionary suicide which is of value to our discussion. The literal sense of the word 'revolution', means a complete turnaround, or in relation to space, a complete cycle, journey, or

[95] Ibid p.135
[96] Ibid p.135
[97] Ibid p.135

'revolution' around a specific point. In this way, revolution can be understood as the completion of a cycle in time, which necessary locates the beginning point of the cycle once more. For the Xhosa, revolutionary suicide can also be understood as the point where there is a completion of a cycle of time, which necessarily places them at the beginning of the cycle once again, and would ultimately serve as a point in which a new beginning (or the re-enactment of the Creation) could take place within this new cycle of time. This interpretation of revolution, could also be understood as a restoration of traditional Xhosa society against British imperialism, particularly, capitalist integration and Christian proselytization. This could be made real through the revolutionary suicide of the Cattle-Killing, idealized in Nogqawuse's prophecy.

Chidester's theory on religious suicide is useful to our exploration and discussion of the Xhosa Cattle-Killing movement in that it recognizes the Cattle-Killing as an act of a millenarian movement in religious suicide, and illuminates the forms in which it can be interpreted. Chidester's theory also shows strength in that it takes into consideration aspects of Durkheim, Marx and Eliade's theories. Chidester connects classic key concepts in his theory of religious suicide and also focuses on his own unique clarification of categories. Chidester's theory takes into consideration the role of the ancestors, the economic situation of the Xhosa, as well as the symbolism of cattle, and constructively connects them to the Cattle-Killing as an act of religious suicide in its manifestations as 'ritual', 'release', 'revenge' and 'revolution'.

Chapter 3

Contemporary Theories

The classic theorists hold special significance for our case study in that their theories directly reflect both the problems and ideas prevalent throughout Europe and the world during the time that Xhosa Cattle-Killing took shape. In this way, the development of their theories has helped to shed light on many of the problems they were facing within the study of religion during this time. These theorists worked with the knowledge, techniques and technology available to construct informed concepts that better encapsulate what religion is, what religion does, and how these aims are accomplished. And as we have seen, the classic theorists with their wide-ranging theories were effective in the illumination and interpretation of some specific aspects of our case study, while other parts of their work were rendered less than helpful, unequivocally biased, or even useless. But it is also important to remember that although our classic theorists provided an impressive collection of foundational material, their ideas were quite clearly developed out of, and were built upon, a modern, industrial, and existing Enlightenment school of thought. However, the development of the study of religion has grown to encompass as well as link different areas of the social sciences in the expansion of the religious studies field. In our search to understand the Xhosa Cattle-Killing movement in the fullest and most comprehensive way, it will be useful to also discuss some of the more current concepts and theories coming out of the fields of religious studies, sociology of religion and social movement theory. Here I aim to show that these more recent theories give a further perspective and understanding to efficiently round out our study of the Xhosa Cattle-Killing movement.

Pre-Millennialism and Post-Millennialism

The term 'millennium' originally referred to a period of one thousand years foretold by the New Testament Book of Revelations (Apocalypse) to be the period of Christ's early reign on earth. In its most general definition, millennialism refers to "the expectation and belief of an imminent and collective earthly salvation accomplished according to a divine or superhuman plan."[98] This term has sparked the study of two specific forms of millennialism which have been termed pre-millennialism and post-millennialism which traditionally referred to the time of Christ's arrival, respectively, before or after the millennium has been established. However, the term itself has changed over time, having less to do with the literal interpretation of the time Christ's return, and instead moving towards a more non-affiliated, human focused understanding which sees pre-millennialism as "denoting a pessimistic expectation of the universal catastrophe caused by divine intervention to destroy the world as we know it and then subsequently to establish the millennial salvation", while post-millennialism refers to "the optimistic expectation that human effort working progressively according to a divine plan will bring about the millennium."[99] This more recent action-based view of the different types of millennialism is a good foundation with which to further interpret the Xhosa Cattle-Killing movement as an interesting and eclectic movement, which accesses and fuses elements of both pre and post-millennialism for use in its ideology.

Pre-millennialism, or what Catherine Wessinger terms 'Catastrophic Millennialism', is based on a "pessimistic view of humanity, society and history." Wessinger says "evil is seen as being rampant, and things are believed to be getting worse all the time."[100] This qualification is clearly applicable to the state of the Xhosa in the time preceding the Cattle-Killing event. As the Frontier Wars increasingly claimed Xhosa lives, land, cattle and crops, and nearly all autonomous power, the state of the Xhosa and their traditional society was in obvious rapid decline. For the

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[98] Catherine Wessinger in, *Millennium, Messiahs and Mayhem: Contemporary Apocalyptic Movement*, Routledge, New York, 1997 p.48
[99] Ibid p.49
[100] Ibid p.49

Xhosa, 'things were getting worse all the time.' Nongqawuse's prophecy spoke specifically of the evil in Xhosa society, which it was believed was the ultimate cause of the Xhosa's downfall. In terms of pre-millennialism, the growing discontent and increasing negative perspective of the Xhosa could only be redeemed by dramatic, catastrophic and superhuman means: "to eliminate evil and achieve the earthly collective salvation, the world as [they] knew it had to be destroyed and created anew by God (or a superhuman power)."[101] For the Xhosa, this apocalyptic event was to take place on the mid-August full moon of 1856, in what Mhlakaza named the "moon of wonders and dangers."[102]

> On the great day, two suns would rise red in the sky over the mountain of Ntaba kaNdoda where they would collide and darkness would cover the earth. There would be a great storm, which only the newly built and thatched houses would be able to withstand. Then the righteous dead-not those who had been killed by God for their wickedness through snakebite or downing- and the new cattle would rise out of the earth at the mouths of the Kei, Kwenxurha, Tyhume and Keiskamma rivers. They would be wearing white blankets and new brass rings. The English and their collaborators would retreat into the sea, which would rise up in two walls to engulf and open a road for them to return to the Uhlanga (place of Creation) whence they came.[103]

This was the foretold cataclysmic event that would see all the pure Xhosa restored as the promised ancestors and cattle would rise again, while the English were washed into the sea. Wessinger says that this type of catastrophic millennialism "is not only rooted in a pessimistic evaluation of human nature and society, but also in the pervasive human tendency to think in dualistic categories"; for example "good" versus "evil", or "us" versus "them". The Xhosa had a well-developed understanding of good and evil and formulated this duality in two ways; first the obvious duality between the Xhosa "us" versus the British "them". However, there were also the "good" Xhosa versus the "evil" witchcraft-participating, socially and morally outcast Xhosa. This dualism is effective on two levels here and works to identify boundaries and qualifications for the in-group as well as the "other", or out-group, in terms of both the British and the evil within Xhosa society itself. However these 'evil' groups were inextricably linked; one directly affected the other. It was the "evil" Xhosa who directly caused the divine disfavor which

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[101] Ibid p.49
[102] Jeff Peires, *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-7,* Jonathan Ball Publishers, Johannesburg, 2003 p.121
[103] Ibid p.121

consequently lead the "evil" British to overcome the "good" Xhosa. In these ways, the dualism created by the Cattle-Killing prophecy explicitly feeds into the argument for this movement as a pre-millennialist/ catastrophic millennialist group. One further point of interest for catastrophic millennialist groups is that they believe catastrophic destruction is *imminent*."[104] I bring up this point up as it can be interpreted two ways concerning our case study. First, for Nongqawuse and Mhlakaza and their followers, the catastrophic destruction of the world and all those who were not pure, was imminent; redemption was only available to those who had trusted in Nongqawuse's prophecy and who had aptly worked to fulfill it. But it is also possible to interpret this 'imminent destruction' as the relentless offensive from the British, which would eventually lead to the impending annihilation, if not complete extermination, of the Xhosa people. Therefore the dramatic pre-millennial concepts proffered by the Cattle-Killing prophecy would not have seemed so wild and outrageous to the Xhosa, as imminent destruction was already literally knocking at their door:

> To the believers, the cattle killing appeared as a reasonable response to the desperate conditions of the colonial frontier. They were predisposed to place their hope in a prophecy of redemption by the prolonged colonial warfare that had already turned the frontier into a region of death, as colonial troops systematically killed people, raided cattle, and destroyed crops in a campaign of extermination.... Since the world of the Xhosa had already become a region of death, therefore, it must have seemed reasonable to many believers that the dead would rise and return to reclaim it.[105]

In almost all respects, it is possible to argue the Cattle-Killing movement as a pre-millennialist movement. However, there is one aspect to this movement that is strikingly post-millennialist, or what Wessinger calls "progressive millennialist". Wessinger connects the scientific progress and technological developments of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to the rise in the belief that the millennium will arrive non-catastrophically, and in fact be ushered in with "harmonious" human participation. Progressive millennialism focuses on a "collective earthly salvation that will be accomplished by humans working in harmony with a divine (or superhuman) plan."[106] What

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[104] Catherine Wessinger in, *Millennium, Messiahs and Mayhem: Contemporary Apocalyptic Movement*, Routledge, New York, 1997 p.49
[105] David Chidester, *Religions of South Africa*, Routledge, London, 1992 p.51
[106] Catherine Wessinger in, *Millennium, Messiahs and Mayhem: Contemporary Apocalyptic Movement*, Routledge, New York, 1997 p.50

is interesting here is that this dual effort (made by humans in conjunction with the divine) is an intricate component to the Cattle-Killing event. Nongqawuse's prophecy is unarguably a divine instruction which necessitates the planned sacrifice of all cattle to secure the millennium promise. In this way, it is most certainly humans working in harmony with a divine plan, in fact, human action and cooperation is pre-requisite if the millennium is to occur at all. This aspect adds a distinctive post-millennial requirement to the overtly pre-millennialist ideology professed by the Cattle-Killing prophecy. However, the specific intentions of this unique characteristic are not clear. It is not known whether cattle-killing obligation was intended to induce signs of commitment from the in-group to the in-group, or whether this anomaly merely acted as fail-safe excuse if the prophecy did not eventuate. Either way, this crucial tie to post-millennial ideology is an interesting yet, debatable component to an explicitly pre-millennialist framework set out in the Cattle-Killing prophecy. For the Xhosa, the pre-millennial promise of "immanent destruction" was virtually upon them. However, without the explicit and purposeful action of the Xhosa, in cooperation with the divine prophecy, the promise of redemption and the new millennium could never be realized. The categories of pre-millennialism or catastrophic millennialism and post-millennialism or progressive millennialism are useful in identifying the foundational ideology, as well as constructing a framework through which the Cattle-Killing eventuated. These concepts effectively focus in on the role of human action for the instigation of the Cattle-Killing event. As we have seen, the role of human action is of crucial importance to this event, and the following section will address this issue in more depth.

The Xhosa Cattle-Killing as a Socio-Religious Movement

In our endeavor to comprehensively understand the Xhosa Cattle-Killing movement in all of its complexity, we have discussed many of the diverse concepts proffered by classic theories of religion in order to assist us in addressing the various dimensions that contribute to such a phenomenon. But it is also essential in our task, that we grapple with another distinct and

fundamental aspect of this unique event; its construction as a socio-religious movement. Here I would like to offer the possibility that the Xhosa Cattle-Killing movement took on many distinct forms, embodying the characteristic of different types of socio-religious movements in what was clearly a multi-focused campaign involving multiple aims. I argue that the Xhosa Cattle-Killing movement assumed many socio-religious forms which accommodated its various "action-based" aims: the Cattle-Killing took form as a nativistic movement, a revitalization movement, a transformative movement with a decidedly millenarian focus, as well as a syncretic movement. The Cattle-Killing, as embodied in these different types of socio-religious movements, all proposed strategies which sought to engage the individual with the social, specifically by engendering a program of social action. It is important to note that these socio-religious movement terms are not mutually exclusive, but rather mutually informative and overlapping. In this way, the Cattle-Killing movement acted as malleable and interpretive movement medium, and thus possessed the capability to appeal to and induct a wide range of Xhosa society. Through this multi-dimensional socio-religious movement, the Cattle-Killing was able to address a variety of grievances and offer a vehicle through which personal and communal action could be engendered, to accomplish the ultimate aim; that social action could and would, effect change.

The Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement as a Nativistic Movement

Ralph Linton originally defined nativistic movements as a "conscious, organized attempt on the part of a society's members to revive or perpetuate selected aspects of its culture."[107] According to Linton, nativistic movements "occur when cultures come in contact with other cultures"[108], and as a result, produces a tangible threat to a culture; in the framework of African colonialism, the main threat posed is to the indigenous African culture. Similarly, David Barrett

[107] Ralph Linton in Nicholas A. Robins, *Native insurgencies and the Genocidal Impulse in the Americas*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2005 p.12
[108] Ralph Linton in Russell Thornton, "Boundary Dissolution and revitalization Movements: The Case of the Nineteenth-Century Cherokees", *Ethnohistory*,40:3 American Society for Ethnohistory, Summer 1993, p.361

interprets this definition in specifically African terms by adding that nativistic movements, "usually result in a rejection of European culture and a return to the old ways of traditional religion."[109] Nativistic movements accomplish these aims, Linton argued, by selecting "certain current or remembered elements of a culture", and endowing these elements with "emphasis and given symbolic value."[110] As a nativistic movement, it is quite clear that the symbolic focus of the Xhosa Cattle-Killing movement was in fact the cattle themselves. As we have discussed previously, the cattle were already symbolic to and of traditional Xhosa life, and also represented a nostalgic memory of a pre-colonial political, social, economic, cultural and religious autonomy and prosperity. The cattle were an accessible, recognizable, and crucial symbol of traditional life, as well as a powerful symbol of social, economic, and political status within Xhosa society. But with the spread of the infectious lungsickness, and relentless military purging, this symbol of Xhosa society was already under severe attack. It is not difficult then, to see why the cattle would have been chosen as the element of Xhosa culture to be the focus of revival in this nativistic movement. Not only were the cattle a symbol already imbued with traditional ideas of meaning and power within Xhosa society, but the status of cattle as a fluid currency connecting all systems of Xhosa society could be perceived as an obvious rejection to various colonial advances; rather than adopting an economic, political, social, cultural and religious system purported by the colonials, the Xhosa aligned themselves with a symbol of power that would reinforce virtually all of the Xhosa's aims, while simultaneously rebuking and resisting the institutionalization of colonial systems.

The cattle, however, were only one aspect of the Xhosa's culture to be revived for the nativistic movement. Nongqawuse's prophecy itself was also quite literally a rejection of the colonialist's hegemonic culture, which it was believed was allowed to dominate as direct result of the Xhosa's own internal societal transgressions. In this way, the prophecy was a nativistic call to return to 'right living', as it were. Until this point in history, 'right living' had perpetuated the Xhosa nation's strength and autonomous power. Right living represented a standard of life and a way of

[109] David B. Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa*, Oxford University Press, Nairobi, 1968 p.47
[110] Ralph Linton in Russell Thornton, "Boundary Dissolution and revitalization Movements: The Case of the Nineteenth-Century Cherokees", *Ethnohistory*,40:3 American Society for Ethnohistory, Summer 1993, p.361

life that has seen the Xhosa prosper. It was a lifestyle free from the evils of witchcraft and other symbolisms of evil which directly attributed to the resulting hegemony of the colonial's alien culture. But the accomplishment of one, necessarily depended on the other: in order for 'right living' to re-materialize, the Xhosa needed to re-engender the symbolic power of the cattle as well as re-orientate that power in a direction that would both atone for wrongdoings, as well as support a revival of right living, and ensure the dominance of Xhosa power once again. This revival of Xhosa power would also subsequently act as medium of rejection to a European culture that was fast infiltrating the Xhosa's traditional lifestyle and directly causing the downfall of the Xhosa nation.

The Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement as a Revitalization Movement

The Cattle-Killing movement not only took shape as a nativistic attempt to restore the Xhosa's former strength and power, but as a socio-religious movement, the Cattle-Killing also acted as both a means for redemption for the social problems which had caused current conditions, and functioned as a vehicle for action. Through this medium the Xhosa could actively construct the ideal, hand-picked society and culture that they wanted for themselves, free from societal ills and evils, as well as colonial domination. Anthropologist Andrew Wallace termed this movement-based action as a "revitalization movement", which he considered to encompass Linton's ideas of nativistic movements as well. Wallace defines a revitalization movement as "a conscious, organized effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture."[111] Wallace argues that revitalization movements are inherently religious[112], and that many of the "religious productions" i.e. myth, ritual, and dogma, are born as part of the "program or code" of religious revitalization movements. Further, Wallace says;

[111] Anthony F.C. Wallace, *Religion: An Anthropological View*, Random House, New York, 1966 p.30
[112] Wallace says:"No revitalization movement can, by definition, be truly nonsecular, but some can be relatively less religious than other, and movements can change in emphasis depending on changing circumstances" Ibid p.277

> such a line of thought leads to the view that religious belief and practice always originate in situations of social and cultural stress and are, in fact, an effort on the part of the stress-laden to construct systems of dogma, myth, and ritual which are internally coherent as well as true description of a world system and which thus will serve as guides to efficient action.[113]

Nongqawuse's prophecy relied on these "religious productions", as Wallace terms them, to actively induct individuals into the movement and instruct the movement in its aims. Many myths, such as the resurrection of the ancestors, the restoration of sustenance, as well as the Russians that were coming to help the Xhosa fight the British and wash them into the sea, provided sufficient support of the prophecy, and therefore actively encouraged commitment to the Cattle-Killing. The dogma professed by the Cattle-Killing was spelled out clearly in the prophecy, which set out the rules and regulations that must be adhered to in order for the myth to materialize. Ritual, however, was the deal-breaker. Without the expressed commitment of active participation, in the form of ritualistic sacrifice of cattle, the social action sought through the Cattle-Killing would never eventuate. The myth, dogma, and ritual constructed through and around the prophecy cloaked the Cattle-Killing in a religious legitimacy and authority which served to both build movement membership as well as direct the movement with a divine authenticity. The prophecy proposed that it was in fact due to internal societal issues that the Xhosa were in such a state of destitution and further offered an action-based doctrine, founded on the ritual of the Cattle-Killing, which would ideally correct the wrongs that had been transgressed and instigate the materialization of their utopian ideal. Wallace's concept of "religious productions" provides theory with which to understand the Cattle-Killing prophecy as the active engagement between the individual and the social with the central aim of effecting change to construct an ideal society. For the Xhosa, this society would be free from internal evils, as well as external domination.

The key to revitalization movements is necessarily the action mobilized by the movement as a result of social and cultural stresses which are often understood and explicated with the assistance of a religiously or spiritually based ideology. In his study of the revitalization movements of Cherokee Indians, Russell Thornton sums up revitalization movements concisely when he says: "revitalization movements may thus be defined as internal spiritually based efforts

[113] Ibid p.30

deliberately organized to create a better social and or cultural system while reviving or reaffirming selected features."[114] Although the concept of revitalization movements addresses the same concerns as nativistic movements, it furthers these ideas by grounding them in a religious/spiritual framework, granting an authenticity and power to the creative ability to actively construct the social ideal.

The Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement as a Transformative Revitalization Movement

Wallace's term "revitalization movement" is interesting in that it encompasses a number of relevant associated concepts which are applicable to our case study. First, Jorgensen's concept of transformative movements is insightful here. Jorgensen defines transformative movements as "organized groups of people who actively seek a transformation of the social, even natural order in their own lifetimes. Furthermore, these movements involve a radical rejection of things as they are, and some perception of the enormous force necessary to transform them."[115] Here the focus is on a rejection of the present time as well as the urgent social transformation of the group in the present, for the ideal future. The radical rejection of the present can be a reflection of Wallace's base concept of socio-cultural stresses created through culture to culture contact, which can also include the state of deprivation experienced by the indigenous group. But as with most of these socio-religious movement theories, they focus on "what" has to be done, as opposed to "how" it can be achieved. Transformative movement theory does not necessarily offer a specific avenue or medium by which to accomplish its aims. On the other hand, however, Wallace's revitalization movement "umbrella" under which transformation movements fall, also encompasses other movements such as social reform, mass, charismatic, messianic, vitalistic movements, cargo cults, religious revivals, formation of utopian communities, and sects, and revolutions,[116] so ideally, the

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[114] Russell Thornton, "Boundary Dissolution and revitalization Movements: The Case of the Nineteenth-Century Cherokees", *Ethnohistory*,40:3 American Society for Ethnohistory, Summer 1993, p.362

[115] Jorgensen in Ibid p.361

[116] Anthony Wallace in Russell Thornton, "Boundary Dissolution and revitalization Movements: The Case of the Nineteenth-Century Cherokees", *Ethnohistory*,40:3 American Society for Ethnohistory, Summer 1993, p.361

movement may take shape in any number of these forms. The urgency and radical tone inherent to transformative movements renders it applicable to the Xhosa Cattle-Killing movement in a specifically millenarian form. The emphasis on the transformation of the social order in such a radical fashion and time frame, almost suggests the necessity of a millenarian event with which to create the opportunity, both temporal and spatial, for a reordering of society on this scale. None-the-less, the transformative, millenarian movement still ideally works to accomplish the two end goals of all revitalization movements: "to provide immediate personal salvation to the presently afflicted and to reorganize the culture in such a manner that a better way of life is brought into being to take the place of the old."[117] These two "revitalization" aims were quite clearly the goals of the Xhosa Cattle-Killing movement, whose followers hoped for both personal redemption, as well the dramatic re-organization of Xhosa society for the restoration of the Xhosa nation.

The Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement as a Syncretic Movement

A further point of importance to our study is Wallace's concession that in order to construct a "more satisfying culture", a revitalization movement may include "the importation of alien values, customs, and materials."[118] This allowance seems to be clearly antithetical to the very essence of revitalization movements; however it also appears an inevitable consequence of the acculturation resulting from culture to culture exposure. Revitalization movements are inadvertently and paradoxically movements of adaptation.[119] In our case study, this ideological conglomeration is undoubtedly influenced by the personal history of Nongqawuse's uncle, Mhlakaza, the spiritual and charismatic leader of the Xhosa Cattle-Killing movement. In order to understand the ramifications here we must look back at the life of Mhlakaza.

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[117] Anthony F.C. Wallace, *Religion: An Anthropological View*, Random House, New York, 1966 p.30
[118] Ibid p.277
[119] Vittorio Lanternari in Nicholas A. Robins, *Native insurgencies and the Genocidal Impulse in the Americas*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2005 p.13

As we have previously discussed, Mhlakaza, played a crucial leadership role in the proliferation and dissemination of the Cattle-Killing movement. Mhlakaza's intrinsic charisma and prominent social status combined to provide the fuel needed to propel the divine prophecy into social action. However, Mhlakaza's influence reached much further and wider than charisma and movement leadership; rather it was his unique syncretic interpretation of the Nongqawuse's prophecy that would be his legacy. Mhlakaza's religious training was not only in traditional African religion, but he also engaged in extensive study and training in Christianity. In his younger years, Mhlakaza, taking on the English name Wilhelm Goliath, worked at Grahamstown in the colony and eventually became the personal servant of Nathaniel James Merriman, the Archdeacon of Grahamstown.[120] Peires says that Wilhelm Goliath was "a man whose religious imagination was fired by Christian teaching but frustrated by the harsh reality of his subordinate status in a colonial society."[121] He studied the Bible intensely and discussed ideas and beliefs at every opportunity:

> Often it must have seemed to Wilhelm that he was not a servant at all, but a partner in the great enterprise of spreading the Word of God. At some times, he sat up deep into the night talking Christianity with his fellow blacks long after the archdeacon had retired to sleep. At other times he delivered sermons in Xhosa to scoffing audiences, enduring the mockery and scorn of the heathen as best he could. [122]

Mhlakaza, as Wilhelm Goliath was quite obviously taken with the concepts and beliefs proliferated in Christianity, so much so that Wilhelm Goliath became the first Xhosa to ever receive the Anglican Communion, or to be confirmed as an Anglican.[123] This intimate engagement with Christian ideas and doctrine clearly influenced his own personal beliefs and later would predispose his interpretations of Nongqawuse's prophecy and further impact his leadership of the Cattle-Killing movement. This outcome was clearly not the aim of the Christian missions, who were working to convert Africans, as opposed to having their Christian teachings appropriated for use in African-based initiatives. "Rather than representing pagan reactions to conquest, Xhosa prophets appropriated beliefs and practices from the Christian missions. In

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[120] Jeff Peires, *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-7*, Jonathan Ball Publishers, Johannesburg, 2003 p.61
[121] Ibid p.60
[122] Merriman in Peires, Ibid p.61
123 Ibid p.62

their new Christian vision, these prophets demonstrated that the missions could have unexpected consequences as a result of African initiatives and innovations in mobilizing Christian resources of symbolic meaning and power."[124] This incorporation of Christian ideas into an African system of belief would have extreme repercussions for the Xhosa in the Cattle-Killing movement.

This fusion of traditional African religion and Christianity through Mhlakaza's unique personal experience speaks to Wallace's understanding of revitalization movements as incorporating alien concepts and ideas; it is also known as a syncretic movement. Speaking in specifically African terms, David Barrett says "a syncretistic movement is one which amalgamates the Christian religion with traditional beliefs and concepts, and often with other non-Christian religious systems to such an extent that the revelation in Jesus Christ, and the Lordship of Christ over all other gods, is obscured, challenged or denied, leaving only an outwardly Christian appearance with a pre-Christian content."[125] In the case of the Cattle-Killing movement, there was not necessarily an outwardly Christian appearance, but rather a selective conglomeration of the two. Christian ideas were adapted and appropriated through Mhlakaza's intimate knowledge of both traditional African religion, and Christianity in order to construct the most accessible and acceptable ideology for use. Specific ideas, such as the regeneration of the earth and the re-creation of time, were already indigenous to the Xhosa. However, as Jeff Peires notes, there was something missing in the Xhosa religion, a gap through which some of the central ideas of Christianity were able to infiltrate.[126] This gap was the "deep ambivalence" about death and the question of the afterlife. This issue came to light after the smallpox epidemic of 1770, which forced the Xhosa to abandon traditional funeral rites and disrupted boundaries in not only the material environment, but the spiritual environment as well. [127]

Since the incursion of colonials on African land, the tradition to abandon the homestead where a death had occurred became a luxury the Xhosa could no longer afford. Instead the Xhosa adopted the practice of driving out their dying relatives in order "to evade the religious necessity of

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124 David Chidester, *Religions of South Africa*, Routledge, London, 1992 p.47
125 David B. Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa*, Oxford University Press, Nairobi, 1968 p.47
126 Jeff Peires, *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-7*, Jonathan Ball Publishers, Johannesburg, 2003 p.57
127 Ibid p.159

abandoning a homestead where a death had occurred. By 1850 some homesteads had been in the same locality for two or three generations."[128] This not only affected the material environment in terms of overcrowding in rapidly declining homesteads, but also had a profound spiritual impact on the Xhosa:

> Overcrowding collapsed the spatial distinctions which separated the world of the dead from that of the living. No longer were the dead safely "sent home" to a distant place of the ancestors. No longer were there deserted homesteads of their descendants. Instead, the living residents of a site must have been constantly disturbed by thoughts of their ancestors roaming the homestead that was once their own. Perhaps in no other respect did colonial dispossession contribute more directly to the Cattle-Killing movement.[129]

This point is vital as it brings us back to another theoretical perspective on revitalization movements. Russell Thornton's theory on revitalization movements suggests that "when group boundaries are in danger of dissolution in ways that are perceived as negative by the people involved, revitalizations are likely to occur."[130] In terms of the Cattle-Killing movement, there were two distinct boundaries that were in grave threat of complete dissolution; the Xhosa's cultural group boundary which was under persistent attacked by the colonials, AND consequently the internal boundaries within Xhosa society that delimited the realms in which the living and the dead could occupy. This internal dissolution wreaked havoc on the traditional designation of realms which purposefully granted the ancestors a specific sacred space. With no place to go, the Xhosa's continued occupation of the homestead would dispel the equilibrium between the living and the dead; an unintentional yet apparent desecration of the Xhosa's traditional beliefs. The dissolution of these internal and external boundaries, according to Thornton, would result in the likely occurrence of a revitalization movement. Thornton's theory adds significant perspective and weight in the understanding of the Cattle-Killing as a revitalization movement.

Although the Xhosa believed that the dead do not really die, but remain as ancestors and have a relationship with the living, death was still a frightening prospect to the Xhosa, so much so that

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[128] Ibid p.159

[129] Jeff Peires, *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-7*, Jonathan Ball Publishers, Johannesburg, 2003 p.160

[130] Russell Thornton, "Boundary Dissolution and revitalization Movements: The Case of the Nineteenth-Century Cherokees", *Ethnohistory*,40:3 American Society for Ethnohistory, Summer 1993 p.361

it offered an opportunity for the Christian belief of resurrection to take hold in Xhosa society. This trend began decades before the Cattle-Killing movement took shape. Nxele, who prophesized between 1816 and 1819, did much to popularize some of the more apocalyptic Christian ideas. Long before Mhlakaza, Nxele had fused the new Christian doctrines with established Xhosa ideas to create a new religious synthesis which was to exert a powerful influence on the Cattle-killing movement.[131] This loop-hole, as it were, also allowed for the absorption of main concepts such as salvation and resurrection which worked in support of traditional Xhosa beliefs such as of the regeneration of the earth and the re-creation of time. But this synthesis may have also had the unintended effect of transforming these beliefs into a more concentrated and volatile strain of millenarian ideology. Vittorio Lanterani says "the propagation of Christian belief can generate or reinforce pre-existing millennial beliefs through its emphasis on persecution, individual sacrifice, resurrection, collective salvation and an afterlife."[132] These Christian ideas undoubtedly had an effect on the Xhosa to a more or less extent, however many of these ideas were not incompatible or completely foreign to the Xhosa; rather it was the articulation that was new, while many of the millenarian concepts were in fact well understood in African traditional religion. In this way, both Christianity and anticolonial millennial movements have "all ... arisen equally from crisis and dilemmas, and they all convey a message of salvation and hope.... The messianic message of old appears now in new garb."[133] It is possible to argue that the acceptance of such new ideas in a syncretic ideology is not implausible, but rather feasible and probable, especially in the context of our case study. Here aspects of both African traditional religion and Christianity were integrated and used in tandem for the mobilization of social action by the Xhosa. Traditional beliefs were now articulated with a Christian influence which attempted to support or further traditional beliefs and provide an added sense of comfort, security and hope, to the afflicted. "Arguing that the return of the ancestors and cattle was no more unlikely than many stories in the Bible, believers adopted the prophetic promise as an even greater spiritual knowledge and power than the Bible because it was a new revelation that

[131] Jeff Peires, *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-7*, Jonathan Ball Publishers, Johannesburg, 2003 p.160
[132] Vittorio Lanternari in Nicholas A. Robbins, *Native insurgencies and the Genocidal Impulse in the Americas*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2005 p.13
[133] Lanternari in Robbins, ibid p.13

specifically addressed the historical situation of the Xhosa on the Eastern Cape frontier."[134] The Cattle-Killing event provided the right opportunity the create this syncretic mix of African traditional religion and Christianity which efficiently integrated concepts of meaning and power, and invigorated them with new purpose specific to the plight of the Xhosa.

While we are addressing socio-religious movement theory, it is important to also briefly engage with theory which conceptualizes religious participation in terms of "personal and collective experience of power." In John Hannigan's article on social movement theory and sociology of religion, he discusses the idea of empowerment for socio-religious movements, specifically Hegedus' use of the concept "empowerment". In her usage, empowerment is described as: "the capacity of people to intervene directly in problems they are concerned with and 'to control' the choices of their own futures; that is to decide their collective and individual destiny or simply, the choices concerning different aspects of their own lives." [135] There is much we have already discussed to suggest that involvement in the Cattle-Killing movement had a strong link to both individual and collective empowerment. As a people, the Xhosa had lost autonomous power in almost every aspect of their lives. The Xhosa's social, economic, and political authority was rapidly deteriorating and their resistance to cultural and religious advances, as we have just discussed, were not infallible either. The Xhosa were encountering less and less opportunities for individual choice in their lives, as the colonial initiative advanced. In this scenario, the Cattle-Killing movement provided the forum for individuals to make conscious personal decisions about issues which directly affected them, as well as the community, and presented a channel for action. Here, the Cattle-Killing acted as an opportunity for choice, offering the Xhosa the means with which to engage with forces beyond their control, in an empowering manner that was both proactive, and purposeful.

The Xhosa Cattle-Killing movement was a multi-faceted project with various and distinct aims. Therefore it is necessary to not only discuss this event in terms of religious theory, but it is also

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[134] David Chidester, *Religions of South Africa*, Routledge, London, 1992 p.52

[135] Hegedus in John Hannigan, "Social Movement Theory and the Sociology of Religion: Toward a New Synthesis", Sociological Analysis, Vol. 52, No. 4, Religious Movements and Social Movements (Winter, 1991), *Association for the Sociology of Religion*, Inc., p.324

imperative to address the unique action-based goals in terms of theory dealing with socio-religious movements. As we have discussed here, the Xhosa Cattle-Killing movements' multiple objectives can be recognized and understood through the movement's manifestation in terms of different categories of socio-religious movements. As a result of the culture to culture exposure, the Cattle-Killing movement evolved as a (1) nativistic response, aimed to restore the Xhosa's culture through a revival of the symbolic status of cattle and a return to right living; (2) a medium of radical rejection and social and temporal reorganization as a transformative- millenarian movement; (3) a blueprint or framework with which to construct an ideal society and future as a revitalization movement; and (4) a unique syncretic fusion of African traditional religion and Christianity, which also encouraged an active millenarian ideology. Also the Cattle-Killing can be understood as means to both individual and social empowerment. Despite variations in specific aim and process, these movements all promote an action-based agenda in order to effect change; this concept is essential in order to fully grasp the nature and meaning of the Xhosa Cattle-Killing in its context as a socio-religious movement.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

The Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-1857 is a prime example of a religious event, which in its complexity, recognizes the necessity for a multi-dimensional method of investigation in order to attain an understanding of the event which is more comprehensive and thus, more legitimate. This requires an approach that is multi-focused, which identifies and addresses the unique and diverse elements at play. As we have seen, this can be a rather daunting task, when so many theories of religion fail to recognize or take into account the numerous and distinct components that construct a religious event, such as the Xhosa Cattle-Killing movement. This observation is applicable to the phenomena of religion in general as well. Religion does not occur in a vacuum; it is a fluid construct, involved in a mutually informative and responsive relationship, with various and intricate inter and externalities which it simultaneously shapes and is shaped by. Therefore, when looking at a religious event such as the Xhosa Cattle-Killing movement, it is essential to take all variables into account, evaluate them on their own terms, and further engage them with theory that grounds them in the context in which they appear. This realizes the importance of the many individual aspects that constitute a religious event, which can be overlooked, neglected or difficult to decipher when only examined through one perspective or theory.

The difficulties presented by the complex and diverse factors that contributed to the formation of the Xhosa Cattle-Killing movement required the use of many theories, or *intertheoriality*, in order to grasp a clear, concise and comprehensive understanding of the event. In this work I have examined the Xhosa Cattle-Killing movement as a socio-religious event through the employment of *intertheoriality* using concepts and theories from theorists Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Karl Marx, Mircea Eliade, and David Chidester, as well as various socio-religious movement theories.

This technique constituted a more explorative and inclusive study of the event in its context and ultimately, worked to better explain how and why this event took place.

This type of approach is necessary when dealing with a socio-religious event of this nature, where each unique contributing factor is absolutely crucial to the event's inception. Without each one of these distinct elements occurring exactly as they did, within the particular temporal and spatial context, it is highly questionable whether the Cattle-Killing event would ever have materialized at all. With this in mind, as students of the social sciences we must then find a means of addressing all these factors by constructing a multi-theoretical method which accommodates engagement with these issues. This is important not only in the study of past socio-religious movements or events, such as the Xhosa Cattle-Killing, but it should also be a realistic consideration to those scholars and academics who are currently working to form new theories on religious events and on theories of religion in general.

On a more general level, a study of this nature has important and lasting implications for the future study of religion, and specifically socio-religious movements and events. Through my analysis, the Xhosa Cattle-Killing movement has proven a productive example with which to illustrate how a single theory is inadequate in explaining a socio-religious event, and thus requires the use of *intertheoriality* to comprehensively evaluate the diverse forces and explain the intricate factors that constitute its formation. However, similar events are still taking place in the world today, especially, but not exclusively, in the developing world. For instance, in Uganda, groups such as The Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God, and the New Jerusalem Church, have shown that religion is still currently being employed as a medium with which to interpret and explain the specific circumstances of peoples in desperate situations, and further, instigating the transformation of religious commitment into movements of socio-religious action. Often these groups, faced with little if any recourse, interpret their situation with an overtly apocalyptic ideology, which can lead to a fatal outcome. These types of events are not trapped in history but are dynamic, evolving occurrences which need to be addressed.

At present there is very little, if any, theory addressing these issues in such a wide-ranging, full-scale approach as that of *intertheoriality*. Although some work has been done by theorists such as William Sims Brainbridge and Rodney Stark, their work, based heavily in psychology, specifically covers cult affiliation and membership, rather than the formation of socio-religious events. More recently, it seems that the only in-depth research in this area has been David Chidester's work on The People's Temple. Despite Chidester's enlightening insights and applicable theories, part of which I have explored here, this area has been largely overlooked and deserves much more current consideration and attention.

However, a general consensus of the inadequacy of work in this area may hopefully inspire dialogue within the field and could ideally lead to the development of a general or standardized, social scientific framework based on the concept of *intertheoriality*; a framework constructed specifically for identifying and evaluating events of this type. The development of such a specialized method may see the use of *intertheoritical* concepts as an effective, pre-diagnostic tool, with the preventative ability to identify and evaluate possible volatile factors and combinations in marginalized or disenfranchised religious groups.

As students, scholars and academics, we have the knowledge and responsibility to both open and shape dialogue around these critical events happening in our field. Further in-depth fieldwork with current religious groups, such as those in Uganda, could be the next step forward in working towards a more grounded and specific study, giving us a more advanced understanding of these events, and with that, the power to help change them.

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