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The Weather Of Before

Versions of the Xhosa Cattle Killings in 1856

Kim McClenaghan

A dedication. Epigraph for **Nongqawuse**. The journey back. The River Gxarha. Nothing speaks. The sounds themselves. Redness. The weather of before. The wind. The waking hours. Spirits of my ancestors. Vision. Herdboy's lament. AmaGogtya. King Sarhili has a dream. Aftermath. Sarhili's request. Esicuthini. **Nongqawuse** sees her back. Sarhili in the Cape. Old rituals. Star-crossed. Writing to her. Only night. The boatman. Iza Inyuzwanga. **Nongqawuse** sings for her. Herdboy's song in praise of cattle. Late afternoon light. Something the land taught. Every place has its own secrets. They lie just below the surface of the land, never quite sure of the story they might form. They are the unmentionables, the words that no one cares utter, but still they lie there as part of a history that remains untold. AmaGhira (witchdoctor). Ekamangeni (valley of the wild banana plant). Hamba kakuhle (go well). Inkomo (cattle). Isaxwila (Pied kingfisher). Kamanga (wild banana plant). Madala. (odd man). Umlungu (white man). The letters 'c', 'q' and 'x' are clicks. 'R' is a guttural sound which sounds like the Afrikaans 'g'. In the yard of the 'white' cottage at Qolora there is a tree that some believe to be the one under which Mhlakaza and Sarhili sat, discussing **Nongqawuse's** prophesy. The term 'amaQaba' has been used as a derogatory term to denote backwardness, when really it refers to those amaXhosa, now relatively few and far between, who worshipped their ancestors. To signal this they would paint themselves with red ochre or clay. The cattle killings divided the amaXhosa into the Believers and the Unbelievers. Because the prophecy had expressly stipulated that all Xhosa were to kill all their cattle before any results would be seen, the Unbelievers were blamed and harassed for the prophecy's failure. On the other hand, while Sir George Grey condemned the cattle killings, he offered no protection to the Unbelievers. Sir George Grey had **Nongqawuse** removed to Cape Town for their own protection shortly after the killings. **Nongqawuse** sailed from East-London on the 19th October 1858, in the schooner 'Alice Smith', and arrived in Table Bay nine days later. Although **Nongqawuse** lived for a good many years after the cattle killings and their aftermath, she would never, not once, be induced to speak of them again. After **Nongqawuse** left Cape-Town, she spent the rest of her days on a farm in the Alexandria district, some 250 kilometres from her home, which she never saw again

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THE WEATHER OF BEFORE

Versions of the Xhosa Cattle Killings In 1856

By Kim McClenaghan

MCCKIM003

Thesis submitted in fulfillment of
the requirements for the award of
the degree of

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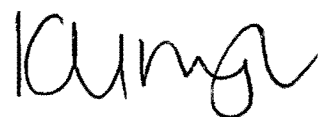
Faculty of Humanities

University of Cape Town

2001

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 work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature



Date

21/3/2001

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it was from this trip
that these poems came.

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

Every place has its own secrets. They lie just below the surface of the land, never quite sure of the story they might form. They are the unmentionables, the words that no one dares utter; but still they lie there, as part of a history that remains untold.

II

In 1856, at a place called Gxarha on the trans-Kei coast, a young girl by the name of Nongqawuse saw a vision in the pools along the Gxarha River. The story goes that her dead ancestors appeared to her, promising to rise again, and that they would help drive the white settlers into the sea. Before they would do this however, the Xhosa people were to destroy all their cattle and all their crops – as a sign of faith. When the ancestors rose again they would do so bringing new cattle, and the lands would be covered over with lush new crops.

At this stage it is necessary to provide the context that would greet these radical words. The Xhosa had just fought another grueling frontier war, and were still smarting over the loss of their beloved king Hintsá, who had been killed in battle in 1835. Their cattle had been decimated by an outbreak of lung-sickness, a disease that was new to them as it had been introduced into the area by the settler beasts.

And cruelly adding insult to injury, their lands had been struck by the worst drought in living memory.

It was out of this arena that an apparent saviour arose, in the guise of Nongqawuse and her prophecy. It appealed to a nation driven to the edge of despair, its millenarian elements offering them hope of a fresh new start. Instead, the results, in anyone's language, were disastrous beyond measure. Nongqawuse's uncle Mhlakaza, the most influential witchdoctor of the time, persuaded Sarhili, paramount King of the Xhosa, to endorse the prophecy. This he did, and set about trying to persuade all the people to kill their cattle. The reason why the killings ultimately failed, as well as the reason why people hung on in hope for as long as they did, was because the dead ancestors had stipulated all cattle. This was the excuse that Mhlakaza constantly fell back on, and which ultimately divided the nation into the Believer and Unbeliever camps, creating previously unknown unrest in their ranks – for throughout the destruction, there were those who refused to kill.

If one reduces the cattle killings to the crudest of levels, stating just the barest of facts (and even these are oft-disputed), it is thought that some 400 000 head of cattle were killed, and over the next year or so about 80 000 people died of starvation. This was the single most important

factor in bringing all Xhosa resistance on the frontier to a close.

III

The hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission have led to the re-evaluation of much of South Africa's history, and perhaps more importantly, it has resulted in a shift in thinking about just precisely what 'the truth' of what happened really is. Antjie Krog writes; "Will a Commission be sensitive to the word 'truth'? If its interest in truth is linked only to amnesty and compensation then it will have chosen not truth, but justice. If it sees truth as the widest possible combination of peoples' perceptions, stories, myths and experiences, it will have chosen to restore memory and foster a new humanity, and perhaps that is justice in its deepest sense."¹ From this it appears that what the TRC testimonies ultimately amount to, is the restoration of narrative.

That being said, the two texts that provide the most comprehensive account of Nongqawuse's visions and the devastation which ensued are Noel Mostert's *Frontiers* (1992) and J.B. Peires' *The Dead Will Arise* (1989). Both of these texts accurately provide the facts insofar as these are known (for many are *not* accurately known, and are likely to remain so, which further enshrouds

¹ Krog, A – *Country of My Skull*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1998, Pg. 16

the killings in mystery – how many head of cattle were slaughtered? Exactly how many people died of starvation?) But what is left out, almost entirely, is the voice of the prophetess Nongqawuse herself, and the witchdoctor Mhlakaza, and all the others who played a role in this history. Only *they* could answer questions such as what prompted them to deceive the Xhosa nation, if indeed this is what they did. Did they really *believe* that they saw visions of their ancestors? Did they really see visions of the ancestors? Only their voices can speak of these stories and myths. Behind the factual accounts in *Frontiers* and *The Dead will Arise* there is an almost palpable undercurrent of voices, which will at last speak out.

IV

What I have endeavoured to do is to write a long narrative poem – a poem for several voices -, which will retell the story of Nongqawuse. In doing so I realize that there are various pitfalls that one might fall into and the ones I mention now say nothing of the stylistic ones. Firstly, this story is still quite a sensitive and hotly contested issue; not least amongst the Xhosa people themselves. It therefore needs to be treated with the utmost sensitivity and respect. Secondly (and this, I would imagine, flows almost exclusively from the above), is the risk of opening oneself up to the criticism of how for example can I, a white

male, adopt (or even dare to adopt) the voice of a black person, and a black woman at that? In other words, what right have I to appropriate another's voice? None, many would say. But in our present post-apartheid era, the following words by André Brink point to the approach that I would humbly prefer to adopt; "In short, it would impose on the writer the literary equivalent of the politics of apartheid: *Thou shalt not consort with the Other. Thou shalt not trust thine own experience of the Other. Thou shalt deny the Other, even that part of the Other which thou findest within thyself, and that of thyself thou seest in the Other.*"²

Truth, and particularly the contemplation of truth which Krog adopts above, does not bring the voices back from the dead, but releases them from silence. If anything is to bring the voices back from the dead it is fiction, through the process of imagination – and as these speakers are all dead, this is the only way in which they may speak now.

V

But even as I adopt the voices of those long dead, I am ever mindful of my duty towards them. This duty is twofold. Firstly that, historically speaking, I remain as faithful to the events that shaped their lives as possible. Secondly, that as I

² Brink, A – *Reinventing a Continent*, Secker and Warburg, London, 1996, Pg. 13

write in their voices, I do them justice, or as Brink puts it; "Voices may speak: but unless they are informed by tongues of fire they can only babble. This is the real issue – not whether the writer chooses, through an act of the imagination, to speak in the voice of another."³ This is ultimately the ideal I have aspired to with these poems, and it is against this that I would most wish to see them judged.

These poems represent my way of telling Nongqawuse's story – they are my reaction to it. It is not, nor was it ever, my intention to provide answers to all the questions that surround her and the cattle killings. If anything, it is quite the opposite – as time moves on, we move further and further away from ever knowing what really happened at the Gxarha river. And yet, through these voices, filtered down through other languages, the many years of forgetfulness and regret, it is my hope that some sense of our collective memory loss might be restored.

³ *ibid*, Pg. 18

D R A M A T I S P E R S O N A E

Gcaleka – The founder of the original royal line, succeeded by Hintsa and Sarhili.

Hintsa – Well-respected king of the *amaXhosa*, killed and mutilated at the hands of the colonists in 1835.

Mhlakaza – Uncle to Nongqawuse and the interpreter of her visions.

Nongqawuse – The main prophetess of the cattle killings. She was then a girl of about fifteen.

Sarhili – In 1856 the ruling king of the *amaXhosa* nation.

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A Dedication

(For My Parents)

There's always this
one place that presses back
against everything I ever write –
even when I'm somewhere else,
writing of that other place,
it is that first place comes back –
I see once more it never left.

Perhaps this is so
because you're the ones
who gave this place to me,
bringing me here that first time,
when I was young.

Perhaps it was yours then,
as I've made it mine now –
when it becomes me
spoken for you, speaking of

the geography of our hearts.

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I

The Journey Back

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The Chronicles

I

The Chronicles of 1856 record
the plight of the Xhosa nation –
they had suffered heavy losses
in the frontier wars; they had even

lost their king. Hintsa was dead.
This is when the drought began,
food was scarce – but far worse
was the new disease, lung-sickness,

that was killing off their beasts.
In clipped lines the Chronicles tell
how a saviour arose. Nongqawuse,
who was not yet a girl of fifteen,

saw and heard spirits in the pools
on the Gxarha'a banks. Once they
slid below the veil of her vision
her *amaghirha* uncle told the nation:

Kill all your cattle, burn your crops –
do this as an act of faith – for then
the dead ancestors will rise again,
with new cattle – eager to do battle.

Finally Mhlakaza set a date
for the prophecy to come true –
by now the killing was widespread,
lands were left untilled. But then

the sun rose as it always did.
It was after this that Nongqawuse
began to insist: she'd never speak of
the killings, or her prophecies again.

This is what the Chronicles state,
this is history's chapter and verse –
but Nongqawuse and the old chiefs

wouldn't speak, and couldn't write.

Epigraph for Nongqawuse

I needn't read these words;
they fall from a vision

that is you in my mind's eye,
but it is that vision that

draws the words from me,
and like a hand that holds

the bones it has thrown,
tries to make sense of them.

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The Journey Back

I

The road falls over
the escarpment like waves
fall over themselves
on the shore
I drive towards
in the distance.
At last I'm approaching
the place itself,
fighting the urge
to run, speed on.

It has been raining
for days – the streams
and river-beds
are all in spate,
spilling over themselves
in their great haste
to wash over the road,
now almost impassable.

Carefully I thread
myself through the mud,
still fighting the urge
to race on ahead,
until I reach the bedrock
that was here
when this place began.

II

I park beneath
the tree in the yard,
under which, it is said,
Mhlakaza held council
with his king, persuading
him to believe
what Nongqawuse saw.

This is when
I see the wing feather
drift from the tree,
landing at my feet.

Perched amidst
 the hill-green leaves
 a giant owl sits,
 just woken up –
 its watching me,
 its eyes all-seeing.

III

I came to this place
 to see – to watch
 as I am watched.
 Perhaps if I could
 be this owl, adopt
 its eyes as a third
 eye for myself –
 perhaps then I might
 see something –
 but see what?

*Then I see
 a dead sun,
 a red sun set
 below the horizon
 of a lake or sea –
 the owl stares
 at the sun slipping,
 stares us
 unblinkingly
 at death's sinking
 sun. I think*

of Nongqawuse's
 prophecy.

But I stop myself.
 It is daylight, and
 it is raining hard.
 Such thoughts,
 in conjuring up
 what I would see most,
 will only get me
 wet – it is not
 the witching hour –
 not yet.

The River Gxarha

(the year 2000)

I stand, alone on the river's bank,
expecting something – expecting what?
Voices perhaps, wavering from the depths,
or waves of old warriors, breaking rank.

Gazing out over the historic spot,
the river flowing is the nub of so much time
since then; change is measured only
in the action of the shifting sand.
The floods of history, within their visions
of apocalypse, are only in my head.

My guide, the interpreter of a story
which is difficult to tell in my language –
any language at all – tells me
it may not be Nongqawuse's pool at all;
that there is another one, lower down,
that shifts itself under the tide's rule;

choose the one that suits your story best.

Nothing Speaks

Well here I am amidst these hills, these
silent pools – the historic spot. There is
no plaque. But I have read the books; I know
this confluence of sea and sand, of river,
tree and rock. No doubt it is beautiful,
but looks disappointing, I admit to myself –
just like any of the rivers one might see,
up or down this rugged stretch of coast.

I walked the route the ghosts should haunt,
beside the pools Nongqawuse called hers,
its tangled undergrowth – towards the sea,
its rumbles in the distance. There were noises,
yes, but I heard nothing. Nothing appeared,
nothing was said. The wind whispered,
but that was it. Emerging on the beachsand,
having walked the landscape of sadness, regret,

I felt: rock is rock – and ghosts do not exist.

University of Cape Town

The Sounds Themselves

I

It takes an hour
and a half to cross
those last few miles,
a dirt road little more
than a rutted track.
In that mud,
thick as the axles
its greased black, I drive
less and less, letting

the road's furrows
draw me slowly on
towards the coast,
knowing that now
I can't return home
until the weather clears –
and when I accept
that I'll stay until
the land dries out,

its voices began to speak –

I just couldn't hear them
yet. That would come
much later, after many
false promises, imaginings,
of voices heard in leaves –
those sounds that are
nothing but
their sounds themselves.

II

When at last,
walking out amidst
the palm-green hills,
I began to shake off
the skeins of city-life,
the sun and wind
loosening them up,
it was softly at first,
the light growing late,
its shadows stretching
themselves out,

that those sounds
began to take shape
in my ears, growing
louder, clearer, until
I thought I heard them
every time I walked
the hills, or strolled beside
the still silent pools.

This went on until
every wind's breath
in the trees was a voice,
reaching me through
the leaves, the lost years
in between. I heard
these voices crying out,
but the land itself

could find no way
to get their words out yet.

Redness

(For Craig)

The *amaQaba*
are the red people –
they smear red ochre
upon their skins,
to show they worship
ancestors gone before them –
for ancestors are
their emblems of faith

and of happiness.
The redness that is
both blood and earth
sees the beginning of life,
and causes its end.
Red is still
the colour of this world –

while all along
the *amaQaba*'s hearts
of redness knew,
their earth's blood
pulsing their veins,
what we learn and learn –
that earth and
blood are the same –

and neither of these
ever bleeds alone.

The Weather of Before

It is always this place,
this stretch or rugged coast
that hems into me
like the grassland hills surrounding it
hem in the surf.
It has always been
this place that I return to –

and then I think of you,
Nongqawuse. You made
these pools your own,
as I have done –
more so as I grow old.
But you could never
come back to your home –
it is your exile still.

I still remember
in my boyhood years
playing white as sea-sand
in the shallow lagoon
straits. It was the crispness
of the weather, the breeze
that blew in off the sea,
the deepest blues and greens –
it was these things,
made deeper still
by the grittiness of sand
and salt on young skin
that days like this instilled.
They cleansed us through.

As a boy I knew
what the sea could mean,
but it was many years
before I grew to understand
ties of earth and soil –
it took years before
I felt its raw pull, feeling
this place enter my skin,
lodging itself there. This is
a sense that never dims,
having less to do with salt
than with bones and skin.

Now I look into the pools,
as you must have done,
wondering what has changed
since this place was yours.
A cloud moves across
the pools, blurring my vision
of the stones on its bed,
and in this moment –
in the opaqueness
of the moment itself,
your presence returns –
until the cloud moves on.

It is the weather of before
that shows the pools
are as you left them –
they shimmer as if
there is something they wish
that I would tell.

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The Wind

It is through the wind
that voices speak most clearly –
even in those silent times
when there is no wind left
there is still a sound –
but it is that of sleep,
of voices hushed, gone
underground. It is only
when the wind blows again
that the spirits move,
moving up towards life.

Listen and you'll hear
softly at first, spoken
as if in a hush, the breath
of the land itself,
for the wind off the land
is more of the land
than the land itself –
it is singed with memory
of what the land has felt –
it is singed with regret.

She hasn't spoken
to me yet - not like
the spirits spoke to her
from out of the depths
of these secluded pools,
their own voices caught
in the *Kamanga* leaves
that line these banks –
they breathed life back
into their lifelessness.

But I will be patient –
I can wait. Already
if I listen carefully,
I hear a softer sound,
pressing back against
those voices that rustle
the leaves on the valley's walls.
A girl-spirit is sobbing
into the pools – sounds
that are soft enough

to hide themselves
in the land's sighs.
The pools rise up,
and then they fall –
but they will never dry out.

She hasn't spoken yet,
but it is almost time –
I know that she will.
All the other voices –
the voice of the wind itself –
urge her on, reminding her
that I am waiting here –
perhaps she has been
waiting longer for me.

From out of the depths
of soundlessness itself,
all else grown indistinct,
they are repeating, insisting,
their words grown restless
in the lack, in recent years,
of any real sea-breeze,

that she is not
to give up this place –
that if she did,
she'd be a sailing ship
rigged to leave,
her mainsails bereft

of the wind she breathes.

The Waking Hours

I

Lying awake one night,
the hour quite late,
too much wine drunk,
the moon comes up –
whole and full tonight.
Entering the room
through the half-open
window, lying in a pool
at the foot of the bed,
it invites me in –

so I step out.

II

The grass is damp
on my bare feet,
their soles quite soft –
they're cityboy's feet,
but they'll toughen up.
The usual, worn path
down to the beach
is close; pitch-dark.

In the undergrowth
I hear nightsounds –
others, far from sleep.
I consider turning
back to bed, but then

my toes touch sand
and I'm on the beach,
walking in the dark –
the moon's light
half-guiding me
towards the surf that moves,
moving towards one –
or so it sounds.

In the half-light
the familiar beach
is another landscape –
it is a landscape
less vivid than
the sounds it makes.

The sea at night,
lying there, half-lit,
remains quite black –
laced
with a silver rim.

I wade in.

III

Standing, my back
to shore, no wind
to speak of, I allow
the ebb and flow
to wash over me,
my feet dug tight
into the sand-grit
on the sea's bed.

In its sound –
that sound I heard,
even back in town,
my ears pressed tight
against the hollow
of an old seashell –
that sound at night,
when it has become

more than a roar,
of water moving,
forced to move against itself –
when it becomes
a voice those of us,
in the waking hours
lie listening to –
lying awake still.

IV

It is a voice
knowing no silence –
and this is what,
above all else,
the land lacks.

This is why
the land needs you,
Nongqawuse –
you are its voice,
you know
what it knows.

Now speak,
Nongqawuse –
wash over me
like these waves
wash over
themselves.

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II

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Spirits of my Ancestors

I like it when I am alone by the river.
I sit on the bank and watch myself
move about in the pool, and listen
to the voices whispering in the leaves.

Thiza! but it is cold in *Ekamangeni* today.
The wind is alive in the *Kamanga* trees,
but my favourite pool is strangely still.

On the river's bank in the gathering gloom,
amidst the reeds, the wind whistles
through them, lays them flat. I wonder
what this darkness means, fearing...

*hau! yintoni leyo?... what is that?...
kukho umutu na?... is somebody there?
the voices in the leaves are gone...
amanzi equleni ayenyuka ngoku
the water in the pool is rising now...*

*I am afraid... more so than ever before...
I cannot move... nor do I even want to*

*oh! spirits of my ancestors
... what is the meaning of this?*

*I see people, half in
and half out of the water...
they're closing in...
surrounding me from the deep end...
their spears are drawn...*

*I dare not blink away this vision
that sits behind my eyes...*

oh, spirits of my ancestors, it is you!

*Gaika! Hints! Umlora!
tell me how to save amaXhosa...
before it is too late...*

*kill all their cattle?... they will never do that!
burn the crops?... there will be nothing*

*left for them to eat!...
a red sun in the sky...
it welcomes us all
as a new day dawns...*

*things I have seen before
were never this real...
my eyes roll in... I can see no more.*

*Spirits of my ancestors, leave me...
please leave me alone!*

Silence.
The silence breathes.
In the silence I hear

nothing –

except my beating heart,
which the wind takes up
and beats back at me.

I stand on in the pool – now I cannot tell
where the water stops, and my body begins.
I stand on, long after the sun disappears.
It closes the sky like an eyelid.

Vision

The spirits in the pool
 Have been quiet for a long time,
 But tonight I know they'll come.
 The moon in the pool is clear
 And whole, and out of this sphere
 The first one steps, beckoning
 Me in. Too afraid to disobey,
 But afraid even so, I wade in
 As deep as my waist, and watch,
 As rank upon rank of warriors
 Assemble on the pool's clouds,
 The moon momentarily obscured.

I made to leave at once,
 Afraid of their powers and mine;
 They were more real
 Than they had ever been.
 The individual faces I could
 Make out, so stern and grave,
 Were those from the old stories
 Of glorious and distant pasts
 I'd loved, in the equally distant
 Past, of my childhood years.

Gaika, Ndlambe, Dushane,
 Umlore, and Hintsá; standing tall
 As ever before. We stood there
 For a long, or for a short time –
 I couldn't tell. I bowed my head
 And waited for a sign, any sign
 At all, as I have done so many
 Days now, in a row. And it came;
 The thunder of our silences
 Passed, and out of the deep, old
 King Hintsá began to speak.

He spoke of the gracious ways
 Of the past, and he spoke of sadness
 And of war. Even so, his voice,
 In speaking of these things, was sadness
 Alone. When he spoke at length
 Of all his people's dispiritedness,
 He, and the other old warriors wept
 Into the depths below their feet,

And hid their faces behind
 Their sodden cowhide shields.
 Once again I bowed my head,
 And watched the levels of the pool
 Rise slowly above my chest.
 Just then, the moon, so long
 Obscured by clouds, slid out,
 And all the old warriors, still
 In perfect rank, began to subside
 Without a murmur, slipping under
 The brink of my vision once more.

Just before his head and shield
 Submerged, Hintsá began to speak
 Of trust and faith – sterner words
 Than any I'd ever heard before.
 He said *amaXhosa* must slaughter
 Every last head of cattle; set fire
 To every last field of crops.
 His people were then to feed
 On an unappetising cereal: faith.

Once this was done, the sun
 Would rise in a sky blood-red,
 And then travel half its arc
 Before turning back upon itself.
 Their new land's birth promised
 New crops weaved, leaving
 The finest new currency of cattle
 Feeding contentedly in the fields.
 Once more the ancient spirits
 Would arise, eager to do battle.

The moon is in the pool, whole
 And still, unrippled once more;
 The unnatural silence shows
 Its agility in a deafening voice,
 As their voices, an undercurrent
 In my ears, the whispering leaves,
 The ruffled wind in the *Kamanga*
 Trees, tell me how alone I was,
 Standing naked in my nakedness.

A single, solitary girl, standing
Apart from the sleeping kraal
On the hill, my life is altered
Forever when I confess; the time
It takes me to decide just how
On earth I can convince them
To sacrifice their cattle: their life.

University of Cape Town

Herdboy's Lament

I cannot, will not
do it – not to them.
I have cared for
these beasts,
as they call them,
since I was young.
I gave them names,
telling my own life,
the tale of a herdboy,
in those names
that I chose.

I have taken a spear
to a mother's throat,
felt life-blood gush,
slick upon my hands –
but she was old, lame,
she would never calf
again. My cruelty
was more than kind.

I have known death.

But cruelty like this
I have never known.
My father has said
the *iinkomo* must die –
they must die at my hands.
What he commands
I have always done –
but not this time.
He says they're just
beasts, good meat –

but not to me.
They are my friends,
lovers, wives-to-be –
lobola is the way
to attain manhood
for *amaXhosa* youths.
They are my life
in the years to come.
If they die, I die as well.

I shall die at last,
but not with honour –
it is not possible.
Shaming one's father
is a wrong too great.
It is not allowed.
This is something,
once it is begun,
can never be stopped.

University of Cape Town

amaGogotyā
(The Unbeliever)

It was a time of famine in the land,
and yet the people have feasted well;

they killed their cattle faster
than they could eat, or he could believe,

and then (he too could predict),
the air buzzed, agog with rotten flesh.

The white shards of the bones
of both these beasts and their men

cover the insulted earth,
indistinguishable from each other

as a reminder of mortality
when its opposite is asked.

In predicting this, he was wronged;
his eldest son was killed, his kraal

burnt. "All cattle are slaughtered
or you'll refuse the spirit's rise."

He was the scapegoat for the failing
of their failsafe plan,

and it did. As the Unbeliever,
he had complete faith in this.

King Sarhili has a dream,

almost nightly on the royal mats,

and these are the visions
on the inside of the king's eyes:

The beasts fall down,
and they die, taking with them

all of a man's wealth
and most womens' worth –

and that they are felled
by hands that know this best.

Each day the opposing sky
rattles its bone-dry dugs,

promising the earth – promising
soil; but nothing is tilled.

(The drought of all droughts
is in the King's heart.)

If these visions plagued him
only in the witching hours,

one could hold some hope –
but another daybreak shows

the self-same visions,
seen in normal ways –

sights that point, no doubt,
to his nation's self-made fate.

Aftermath

(A Poem for Two Voices)

I King Sarhili

Today the daylight hours
have been dark, like night –
the darkness contained
not just in the lack of light,
the poisoned clouds above,
but in the days to come –
just as there was darkness
in those just passed.
And now, in the gloom,
I feel the darkness settle
in the shadows of my heart.

It is darkness through which
I cannot sleep, sleep-walking
in those few moments I can –
even in the waking hours
I cannot escape. In the lack
of light the darkness brings,
I see what we have become –
the many ways in which
we have been undone.

Even darker than this
is my great loss. I have
no kingdom left to lose,
for a kingdom is not
a kingdom without men –
or without land. Too many
of my people are dead,
dying in waves that break
upon the hollowed earth,
cracking its brown crust.
open like it cracks the husk
of my old man's heart.

The *umlungu* are unjust,
saying that I wanted this,
saying I wanted war, strife:
they must have no faith
in me, or in faith itself –
who could ever want this?

I am *madala* now,
no longer young. I cannot run,
hiding from all those
who want me gone.
Instead I must watch
what we have become,
becoming more and more
lessened each passing day.

The spirits never rose again –
that we have all seen.
The prophecy is fading now –
sore memory, bad dream.
But I still feel them in
and around my head.
They tell me it is finished –

amaXhosa is finished: Dead.

University of Cape Town

II Nongqawuse

Being small, I walk
and walk the land,
deserting my footprints
to forge for themselves
a faint trail of recognition,
again and again.

The land is trees and wind –
the colossal space of day
that only this land knows –
could ever understand.

In being small,
I swallow myself
whole into the horizon
that is too wide
for most people's eyes.
I inhale the blood-red sky,
as the sun falls asleep
flat on her back – as if
upset at how little
of this place is left.

Beneath the tree-line
of this land, the brutality
of its shade,
I, growing smaller
and smaller,
acknowledge the futility
of trying to explain a thing:
Here my life,
a shift in the sand.

Sarhili's Request

Mhlakaza wakundala kudala –
Old Mhlakaza, you have long since been
my advisor, and were my father's before;
the things of which I speak, you know.

The *Gcalekas*, once mighty and proud,
grow weak in a land that has turned
against them – a land that has turned
into dust and sickened cows –
luthuli olubulala iinkomo.

The tribes of my house, once united,
flee and fight for what little corn
and wealth is left – less than beggars
or common thieves, the evil spreads.

Amathambo oobawo ayashukuma –
my forefathers have grown restless –
they have drawn their fighting spears.
At night they rattle and scrape them
against the gates of *Hohita's* kraal,

and I bear the weight of their scorn –
kuba kaloku igazi, ngathi bathi –
for bloodshed, they seem to say,
is where it begins, not ends.

Esiquthini

(The Island)

I

The *amaXhosa* chiefs,
the husks of them
left over from when
they ruled themselves,
languish to death
upon this island stone
where the sea, the sky,
their hearts are drawn
in shades of slate.

In this grave place
their sorrow consumes
their days, morning
moving into night,
and then back again –
they've no tomorrow
left, beyond the vista
of a foreign sun,
rising in the east –
the home they've left.

II

Still, as they walked
their prison shores,
amidst the rubble
of rocks broken up
as surely as they will try
to break them,
it seemed they could not
shake off the fear
that in many years,
other great men
would lie bound up here –
silenced in turn
by the roaring waves.

III

As the wind
moves in once more,
hurrying the sea on,
they see those chiefs,
their descendants
released – set free
in the land they own.

But then they see
that those young chiefs
have no great cattle herds –
how are they to pay
the price their freedom asks?
There is no *lobola*
for their bride-land;

it's people they sacrifice.

This should be
a vision of great joy,
their land and people
returned - but instead
their old mens' tears
splash their prison floors,

falling for this legacy
their dead beasts leave.

Nongqawuse Sees her Last

I

Because of what I have been said
to have done, and not said myself –
because of this, I will die the first
and last Nongqawuse. My name is mutely
whispered, hushed, and denotes not me,
this person, a body, flesh, but an event –
a whole nation's leap at death.

This is no longer prophecy but fact.

In what my body remembers (so little
to remember, so much to forget),
I see us, always children or parents;
never both. I robbed myself
of one, when I plundered the other;
it doesn't matter which was first.

This is where things grow unclear –
too many voices making themselves
heard. Because of what I may have done,
things I never said, to those who don't
wish me killed, I am already dead.

University of

II

I am to depart on a long journey
(I see this part clearly.) I will voyage
for many days, floating above the sea –
something quite unknown to my people
and to me.

But I will not, can never belong
where they take me. Nor can I ever
go back. I am lost to *Ekamangeni*,
and it to me. The old pools are gone –
except inside my head.

But there they will always be,
as clear as an invitation home.
No matter where they keep me
I will not be there; I'll be a shell.
I'll be at *Ekamangeni*, quite lost
inside my head - safe until the end.

University of Cape Town

Rounding the Cape

I

She was relieved when they took her away,
 saving her from death at her peoples' hands,
 their hearts attuned to the rhythms of their loss.

With her stowed on board the *Alice Smith*,
 they put out to sea, setting sail for the Cape.
 Huddled below decks, in a puddle of sick,
 she felt wilder rhythms pushing her
 over the frontier her people dared not cross.

For she was never a child of her time,
 but of her place –
 the land is what she knew best,
 it is where she lived all her life –
 the red, cloying soil along the Gxarha
 and Qolora banks, their mysterious pools –
 not this unending blue vista of death.

They sailed until there was no land left.

II

She could see him long before
 they broke into the bay, rounding
 the Cape. Slitting her eyes against
 the spray, the sting of cooled salt
 drifting in, cooling still, she stared,

aghast, at the hunched vertebrae
 of the peninsula, buttressing its cliffs
 against the sea. Sailing nearer still,
 she saw the arthritic claws, shod
 with rock, holding the weather
 and the sea at bay, holding them

apart – all the colour of shale
 and slate one finds in places where,
 against themselves, rock and sea
 weather – wearing each other down.

III

They call it the Cape of Storms
when his cracked brow frowns,
frowning upon the trade amidst
the fynbos scrub – all beaten back
by his sandstone foot. Adamastor
fights those arriving here by sea,
fuelling the treachery of this coast:

The deck heaves under water's weight,
of waves deepening their troughs,
the grey swells towering up, their bulk
hurled upon the rising continental shelf –
this worn battleground we call shore,
where he ignores her protests as she cries –
flinging her about the slats on deck.

IV

This girl-woman of the land knows
no place other than her pools – but now
she cannot consult them, as she sees
Adamastor is just as much weather
as he is headland stone, and in that stone

she sees her fate, embedded beside his.
It is no less lonely knowing she is not
the only one caught in the bad weather
of the past, storm clouds up ahead.
Under the cover of his rainstorm
she invites death, wishing she'd drown;

to sink into the sea – to leave no trace.

III

Old Rituals

University of Cape Town

Old Rituals

I

She would wade in
like a heron, midstream,
very, very slowly –
he didn't like fast movements.
And then naked,
submerged to the waist,
she'd stand perhaps longer

than necessary.
He'd smile his appraisal
from the reeds,
and put down his shield.
Then she'd slide back in
and begin to wash;
an old ritual in itself.

Through the months
she showed him her changing body;
the curve of new hips,
her breasts filling out
in plump, ebony skin.
They were to be married,
she had predicted –
and it would be soon.

II

But they kept telling her
King Hintsá was dead –
he had died in battle
on the Nqabara's banks,
before she was born.

They told her too
she had no *lobola* –
there were no cattle left,
they'd killed them all,
just like she'd said.

While the elders wept
under the undreamt yoke
of her advice to them,
she escaped them again.
Her leadening belly
and breasts convinced her
she was carrying
King Hintsá's son.

University of Capetown

Star-crossed

I

It is not
implausible
across the years

dividing us,

star-crossed,
I should fall
in love with you,
Nongqawuse –

or that I
be jealous
of your previous
(even imagined)
love affairs –
with a dead
King no less.

But it is not
what I know of you,
what you lead me
to believe of yourself,

in your silence,
your refusal
to speak.

It is all the selves
you are
in my head
and in my heart –
these are what
I love most.

II

A rise and fall
that saw us drifting
to other shores, distant
from us as we were
from ourselves, yet
dripping from me
as fluid you are,
undulating, blue,
your body lending mine
small tricklings of love,
every hour or so.

For the rest,
I have nothing
that moulds you,
shaped and unflowing;
neither these hands
nor even my words
can hold you, tides will
and must push in.

At a single drop
the surface breaks:
my unmoored words spill
over you, again.

Writing to Her

I

As the hours darken,
 one by one,
 the sun dips beyond
 the ocean steeped
 in the wind's breath,
 its chapped white lips.

On the wind-shelled beach
 I sit quite still, not quite
 sure of why I'm here,
 of what I've done –
 for lost in the shadows

beyond the hills, their palms
 upturned, her descendants live.
 They spend whole mornings
 in the pension queues
 at the local trading stores –

how can I write to her?

II

The beach, the sand,
 this late, windy afternoon –
 they are all old,
 as they lie on this coast,

forming its coastline
 in its shifting repose –
 while lying in flux,
 from primordial times

the river begins to speak.
 It speaks in the voice
 of a king, a warrior,
 the voice of a bull. It sings

in the *lithwa* bird's song,
 a woman tending her land.
 And then it speaks
 like a dying man.

And what they all say
is this: What's not
suffered to its end
comes back –

what's not concluded
brings those sorrows on.

III

This day, this place,
they're old, will remain so –
the river is the same
at the bridge, at the mouth,
and at its source. It speaks
in the voices of others,
but its real voice
is yours, Nongqawuse.

It is the same
at the bridge, at its source
because while it flows,
it does not flow – it is old,
does not become more so.

Every tide, every time
remains in this place –
it is our future you remember
Nongqawuse. Release us
from your past, and ours.

Only Night

Night, the mother-milk
into which I sink, coats my skin
and gluts my throat, until
I am drunk on the tastes
of other animal-beings,
wishing I was one of them.

Then night consumes me,
disgorging me in that other place,
where I grow slowly accustomed
to the lack of light on the eyes,
and embrace it through fear,
and need; a fear of need,

until I am at last spewed out
into someone else's day –
where the shadows point only
to what night paints;
the stars, the lovers,
the sounds that they convey.

Of this stranger
and her concrete shadows
I so furtively pursued –
my visits to these pools –
I can write with ease, but
my own half-formed ghosts
beg some attention of their own.
They question whether
I write to live,
or live, to write of life.

Only night knows everything
of the ways of night.

The Boatman

(For Gordon)

The night is clear, we're under sail.
The skiff's bow knifes the sky in half –
half the harvest of stars lies above us,
the other half lapping at us below.

We're still – the wind dies a few miles
off the mainland, rounding Lighthouse Rock.
Before too long he has the oars out –
the dip and splash, in time with his breath,
charts our course as we make for shore.

Under the roving, refracted beam
the ghosts from the algaed graves I see
are closing in. They rattle and scrape
the chains that chain them to the quay –
their blistered, nameless bows and prow
heed the ancient call to put out to sea

once more. Uneasy, I ask the boatman
about this place, why ships in distress
are always those at rest. He rows us in.
The waves, grown greased and slack,
fall back on themselves, disgorging
a catch of rotten fish. He is taking me
where time and life, he says, are stopped.

I ask him please turn about at once,
steer the skiff into the bay once more.
But the boatman is at the helm of a ship
no longer rigged for sail. In the mist,
I beckon his unclear face as he sounds

the final horn. It sounds a farewell.
Again the beam's sickle swings around –
I see unmanned oars trail back,
welcoming me in ports I row through
on the nights when I am most alone.

IV

**There Was
Something**

University of Cape Town

Iza Ingubizwanga (It Comes Unbidden)

I

These days past
I have been urging
Nongqawuse to speak –
begging her, cajoling,
threatening her as best
one threatens the dead.
I need her
to avow my presence
as I have done hers,
but she has said nothing,
letting others speak out –

I must hear her voice.

I have heard
whispers – snatched
at hints and portents
in the valley's leaves,
their wind-sounds.
They leave me haunted
by her spirit's voice
sounding its presence
in this valley of ghosts.
But it tells me
nothing of herself.

I want to hear more.

I ask this, beg
of you one last time –
please talk to me,
Nongqawuse.
I leave your valley
in a few days – then
the distance between us
will be too great.

You must speak now.

||

*I was telling them
the truth, telling them
they lied. They said
the truth was theirs –
it was written down.*

*There is nothing
I can say to that –
they wouldn't translate
what I meant to say.
It was my choice then –
I gave my voice up.*

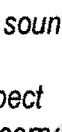
University of Cape Town

III

*Now many years after
another one comes,
telling me speak out.
But these are things
best lost – the words
that speak of them
can do no good.*

*I have spoken to him,
at length about other things –
testing him. He seems
quite deaf – as if
he hears the words,
but not their sounds.*

*Does he expect
to hear “I’m sorry,
it was all my fault?”
I cannot say this.
I am beyond lying –
this is the one
great truth of death.*

University of  Town

IV

*I can tell of a girl
far too young in years
to ever know, to begin
to understand
the weight of a nation –
its sad fate set down
in her cupped hands.*

*I can tell how,
in time, that weight
fell from her hands –
and how that nation
picked it up – fixed it
securely to her back.*

*I can describe
that hunched back
no longer a child's –
an old woman's now,
the child long gone –
long before its time.*

*This is how it was –
the scale of my suffering
not grand, my story
too mundane amidst
the lands' sad tales
of sickness and death.
But these are my facts;
write them down.*

V

The words this girl,
woman of silences
speaks, are not those
the chronicles use –
her stories tumble
from her tongue,
telling this tale in ways
it has never been told –

nor will again.

She is ready
to go on. Listen –
her words begin
to tell us more.
They drag me in.

University of Cape Town

VI

*I could tell you
nothing of that girl,
making my silence
more complete.*

*I could tell instead
of a land weeping
as it bled – blood
seeping from its heart –
its beasts and fields
crusted with drought.*

*If these are not
words you will hear,
if you've heard them before,
I have others, far sadder,
I might tell you –*

*but of that thing
you all ask me of,
praying that I tell,
I must, in truth say
I've forgotten all.*

*It is as if
I was never there –
or if I was,
something in me
slept right through.*

VII

After this tale
her thin voice falls
back into silence,
lost in the noise
of windswept leaves
breathing beside
the shimmering pools.

She is under
the surface of the pool,
making towards
its deep end –
moving just above
the algaed pebbles
lying on its bed.

I think she makes
to speak again –
but the soft sound
is only her wet sobs.

She is repeating
something too soft
for my dull ears,
repeating it to herself.
I wade in slowly
until I am quite
submerged – lost
in those currents
she ignores, lost
in her underworld.

In this place
below the surface
her voice is louder.
It repeats
and rejects itself,
again and again.

The pool pushes in
its gradual tides.

VIII

*But all of what
I have just told
is one great lie –
it is the lie
of all lies. I re-
member it all;
how could I not?*

*That day breaks,
as it always does –
the day my prophecy
failed all of us.
I cannot stop it –
the rise and fall
of the familiar sun,
the ritual of
its half-day climb.
I cannot stop it
coming back to me.*

*It is always
the same day comes,
beginning once more
with the day before
the day before –
then the day before –
then the day itself.*

*It comes unbidden
like a bad dream.*

*Iza Ingubizwanga
okwephupha elibi.*

It is a bad dream.

IX

*I do not know
 what it was I saw –
 I will never know
 for sure – it has stopped
 appearing to me now,
 as I appear before you.*

*I saw something –
 I know that for sure.
 There was something
 that day in the pools.*

*When I saw it first
 I felt relief – they had
 been urging me
 to see for weeks,
 just as this one
 urges me to speak.*

*But every time
 I think myself back
 beside those pools
 I see nothing clear –
 as if I wasn't there –
 as if another self
 stepped in –
 then told me later
 what it had seen.*

*There was something.
 There must have been.*

*Bekukho into.
 Bekumele ukuba
 ibikho.*

*There was –
 something.*

IIX

I found myself
down in the valley
again, sitting beside
the pools and you,
dropping small stones in.
I watched them sink,
looking for signs of life
in the shallow pools
that might disturb
a reflection of you:
the meniscus of time.

The pools are beautiful –
that is beyond doubt.
but to those who know
what they mean – have meant –
in the years since you,
we choose to remember
by pretending they don't exist –
we choose to forget.

We live above and beyond
the land for as long
as breath is drawn, learning
so little of where we come from,
this earth – learning
so little about ourselves.

There is a shadow that moves
below the surface of the pool,
beckoning me in –
beckoning still.

In seeing this I see
that in choosing not to belong
to a place, to say that nobody
calls this place home,

we snub the antidote of life.

V

Hamba Kakuhle

University of Cape Town

Nongqawuse Sings For Sleep

(For Fi)

I sing our song
as singer,
singing life
as I imagine it –
only the dead
really see
the true spirits
in things.
Only we know
the answers
about life –
we know
they don't
exist.

It is late,
too late
for many songs –
but our song
goes on,
must carry
on for those
who can't belong
in a place
like this –
can't belong
in a place
at all.

So hush,
just hush –
let the waters
of the spirit join
the water-spirits
as they flow –
I swam in them
long before
I could yet swim.

I sing also
in the *Isaxwila*
bird's shrieks,
mourning

I must sing
as traitor
and as victim –
just as he shrieks
above his stream
as hunter
and the hunted –
my song
will never deny
what I am,
what I became.
But hush,
let the water-
spirits enter one –
drink deep
as I have done.

Now I sing
for all who listen,
listening for
our song without
words –
its with them
we share
a little of the life
we've left
in *Gcalekaland* –
and in turn
we teach them
how to sing –
sing how life
is a little,
little thing.

Herdboys' Song in Praise of Cattle

Walking out on the hills
 one day, the light grown late,
 grass clipped short by the herd
 grazing against the makeshift sky,
 the sun off the sea in my hair,
 I heard two voices singing
 as they worked, one louder, more
 distinct in the salt-cooled breeze –
 as resonant as the land itself.

There was something
 in the sound of those lone voices,
 accompanied by the wind
 noticeable only in the leaves,
 the whispering palm trees –
 something in them suggests
 time bypasses these grassland hills,
 the grass disturbed
 only by the soil of grey molehills.

One of them sings:

*The iinkomo are all
 on the hillside, bowing
 their heads to eat.
 Their honey-brown sides
 are taut against
 the skin-drum of their gut –
 the fat of the land
 is measured in the weight
 of its milk and meat.*

The longer I stood there,
 the light slipping to shadow,
 night approaching along the coast,
 listening to that old song,
 the more I wondered just how far
 wrong things must have gone
 for them to kill their cattle –
 to begin killing themselves off.
 The *iinkomo* were theirs,
 in life as well as death.

This is when the other voice
 grows louder, as if in answer,
 rising from the earth itself,
 moving across the valley walls –
 its singing of the darkness
 that lies in those dark times.
 It is another herdboy sings
 of how things were back then –
 although he is long dead:

*The iinkomo are down
 in the valley, bowing
 their heads to sleep –
 never to rise again.
 Their dun-brown flanks
 hang slack against
 the brittle twig-like ribs
 as their breath rattles –
 rattles as they spit.
 The fat of the land
 has wasted away – soon
 there will be no meat –
 no meat or any milk left.*

And then both voices join,
 together for the first time,
 as if for one last chorus,
 singing softly, rising up
 to sing for all of us –
 lamenting what they lost
 in that one year,
 now many years passed:

*The more of them they kill,
 the more our voices sing –
 and then those yet to join
 will rise – they will all join in –
 these songs of praise,
 these songs we sing go on –
 the song itself will never cease.*

The Late Afternoon Light

Padding out into the late
 afternoon light, the old
 canoe pulling the meniscus
 of the lagoon back,
 freeing it from the rippled
 breath of water moving
 against itself, pulling it
 until it stills –

until it is a stillness
 only water has, as it lies
 amidst these green hills –
 the lagoon's water-spirits
 at peace with themselves.

It is these times,
 when the lands still too,
 that it asserts itself most –
 these are the times
 when it seems something's
 returning, claiming the place
 back. These times
 are moments in light –
 the first and last light
 of a day – those moments
 before the transition
 is complete.

It is those moments
 when these green hills
 appear greener than green,
 the light unclear, unreal.
 These are moments when
 the land appears possessed –
 moments someone says,
 out loud in light –
 this place, these hills:
 They're ours.

Something the Land Taught

The tides have turned
upon my brief time here,
upon this half-forgotten coast.
All too soon the land
claims its spirits back,
as I take my leave
of Nongqawuse's pools,
brimming with the spirit-
life she instills in them.

Closer to the beach,
the tides push over
the canvas of beach-sand,
erasing the shallow prints
of seabirds, and of man.
They wash themselves clean
of me, returning at once
to how it always is –
the sea learns something
of what the land taught.

But it is the sea
and the land together,
seamed as one
on a coast like this,
in a togetherness
that lasts as long
as they remain apart –
it is this frontier –
this resurgent coastline
of the past –
that shows us
the weather of before
restored, brought back
for us once more.

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G L O S S A R Y

amaGogotya – unbelievers
amaGhirha – witchdoctor/prophet
Ekamangeni – valley of the wild banana plant
esiquthini – the island
Hamba kakuhle – go well / farewell
Hohita – Sarhili's Great Place
iinkomo – cattle
Ilithwa – Crowned Hornbill
Isaxwila – Pied Kingfisher
kamanga – wild banana plant
lobola – bride price (paid in cattle)
madala – old man
umiungu – white man

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NOTES TO THE POEMS

Pronunciation: The letters 'c', 'q' and 'x' are clicks. 'R' is a guttural sound like the Afrikaans 'g'.

*

The Journey Back: In the yard of the Fowlds' cottage at Qolora there is a tree that some believe to be the one under which Mhlakaza and Sarhili sat, discussing Nongqawuse's prophecy. Maybe it is; maybe it isn't.

Redness: The term *amaQaba* has been used as a derogatory term to denote backwardness, when really it refers to those amaXhosa, now relatively few and far between, who worshipped their ancestors. To signal this they would paint themselves with red ochre or clay.

amaGogotya (The Unbeliever): The cattle killings divided the *amaXhosa* into the Believers and the Unbelievers. Because the prophecy had expressly stipulated that all Xhosa were to kill all their cattle before any results would be seen, the Unbelievers were blamed and harassed for the prophecy's failure. On the other hand, while Sir George Grey condemned the cattle killings, he offered no protection to the Unbelievers when they begged him for it.

Aftermath – Sarhili: Sir George Grey, Governor of British Kaffraria at the time, ludicrously maintained that the cattle killings were an attempt by the *amaXhosa* chiefs to incite their people to further warfare against the British.

Sarhili's Request: King Sarhili is believed to have been a very superstitious man; when all else had failed, he prevailed upon Mhlakaza to save the *amaXhosa* nation.

Esiquthini: The Xhosa word for island, but even in the 1850's it was widely known which island it referred to. The Believer chiefs were kept on Robben Island for a number of years.

Nongqawuse Sees Her Last: Sir George Grey had Nongqawuse and the Believer chiefs removed to Cape Town for their own protection shortly after the killings.

Rounding the Cape: Nongqawuse sailed from East London on the 19th of October 1858, in the schooner *Alice Smith*, and arrived in Table Bay nine days later. The title is taken from Roy Campbell's wonderful poem by the same name.

Old Rituals: This is purely a product of the imagination. King Hintsa had died many years before Nongqawuse saw visions in her pools. This poem plays on the description of her as 'an imaginative young woman', where the dead spirits are to her more real than ordinary men.

Iza Ingubizwanga (It Comes Unbidden): Although Nongqawuse lived for a good many years after the killings and their aftermath, she would never, not once, be induced to speak of them again.

*

Postscript: Nongqawuse: After Nongqawuse left Cape Town, she spent the rest of her days on a farm in the Alexandria district, some 250 kilometres from her home, which she never saw again.

*

All photographs were taken on or around the rivers Gxarha and Qolora.