

excuse to refuse paying the tax expected from the residents. Morris realized that this disparity between the Bomvana and Gcaleka was potentially dangerous and urged Sarhili to intervene. The paramount stated that the only way to solve the issue was to give the Gcaleka land of their own. The Bomvana chief, Moni, in a visit to Morris, stated that the Bomvana needed the land occupied by the Gcaleka and that the hut tax situation was becoming intolerable to his people, thereby agreeing with Sarhili's assessment of the situation.⁷⁰ This did not happen and the tension between the two factions persisted.⁷¹

By June 1884, it would appear that Sarhili regarded his only hope of regaining Gcalekaland depended on making it impossible for Gcaleka and Bomvana to live together, as he is accused by the colonial archive



situation was exacerbated when in protest to fact that the Gcaleka decision that Sarhili had made in his 1884 annual report, to describe the Xhosa king as follows:

ats to refuse to pay hut tax.⁷² This Langa, also refused to pay the tax ves exempt from the levy.⁷³ The ment of the tax prompted Morris,

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‘The Gcaleka are a lawless tribe and are not willing to be ruled by Government. Kreli [Sarhili], although showing a disposition to work amiably with this office, is I fear little to be depended upon and will only continue as long as it suits his purpose.’⁷⁴

⁷⁰ 1/EDL 5/1/1/2, Record of a visit of Moni to CM Morris, 4 February 1884.

⁷¹ CMT, 1/51, Morris to Elliot, 19 February 1884.

⁷² CMT, 1/51, Morris to Elliot, 25 June 1884.

⁷³ CMT. 1/51, Morris to Elliot, 2 July 1884.

⁷⁴ 1/EDL 5/1/1/2, Annual Elliotdale Report, 31 December 1884.

Sarhili, even when he is seen to be cooperating with the colonial authorities, is viewed with skepticism by the colonial archive. In the quotation above, Morris stated that the Gcaleka were a 'lawless tribe' thereby effectively exonerating the paramount of any role he may have played in their renegeing of the Hut tax. This admission made it difficult for Morris to justify his ensuing comment, where he accused the paramount of only cooperating with the colonial state when it is expedient for him to do so. Sarhili had already begun his quest to be awarded more territory by the colonial state and as such, it was becoming increasingly necessary for the colonial archive to produce knowledge that would validate a decision that would reject the Xhosa king's request for more land. It was not in the interest of the colonial state for Sarhili to be awarded more territory as it would mean that more Gcaleka would be able to join their paramount chief and therefore increase the influence the Xhosa king could wield in the Eastern Cape. I have argued throughout this dissertation that the colonial archive is an apparatus of the colonial state that sought to protect its interests. It was clearly not in the interest of the colonial state to facilitate any increase in Sarhili's power.

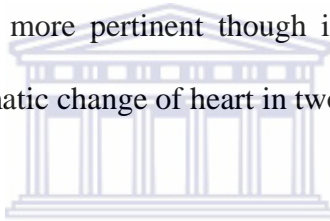
Sarhili agreed to register his subjects with the government in order to facilitate the collection of hut tax. However, he did this at a time when Bomvanaland was in the grips of a drought and appealed to the colonial authorities for some understanding if his people were unable to meet their payments.⁷⁵ The registration of the Gcaleka was completed by mid-October 1884, and oddly enough, bearing in mind the comments Morris made about the paramount in his annual report at the end of the same year, the Bomvanaland magistrate

⁷⁵ CMT 1/51, Morris to Elliot, 19 September 1885.

described Sarhili's behaviour in this process as 'exemplary'⁷⁶. In fact, Sarhili had managed to impress Morris to such an extent that he wrote:

'I have no doubts with regards Kreli's [Sarhili's] sincerity at present that the proposed cession of ground [be] carried through and that he intends to abide by conditions faithfully.'⁷⁷

It would seem as if Sarhili had been able to utilize the resistance offered by the Gcaleka to hut tax to achieve his aim of gaining more ground as his resident magistrate Morris has endorsed his request. What is more pertinent though is why had the Bonvana resident magistrate undergo such a dramatic change of heart in two months?



At this point, it is important to remain cognisant of the fact that the letters contained in the colonial archive were not available to Sarhili and he only had the word of Morris in which to place his trust. Sarhili's past experiences with the British would not have given him much confidence. It is conceivable that he did not regard it as very significant. It would therefore be understandable if he had attempted to gain land through every avenue he could conceive of. Unfortunately for the paramount, it was this distrust that was going to cost him the very commodity he most desired, more land.

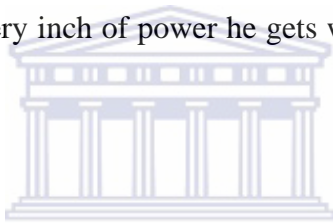
After the meeting with Morris on 9 September 1885, Sarhili waited for approximately one year before he decided to send his son, Sigcawu, to ask the resident magistrate of

⁷⁶ CMT 1/51, Morris to Elliot, 16 October 1885.

⁷⁷ 1/EDL. 5/1/1/3, Morris to Elliot, 9 September 1885.

Elliotdale, E. B. Chalmers, to take up his case for more land. Sarhili had enjoyed a reasonable relationship with Chalmers prior to the Ngcayecibi War and wanted the magistrate to intercede on his behalf to the government. However, Chalmers saw this request as a conflict of interest as this type of appeal had to be done via Morris and the fact that Sarhili had sought his intervention meant that the paramount had breached colonial protocol.⁷⁸ Chalmers proceeded to inform Morris of this violation of procedure which led to a drastic change of heart from Morris. Having learnt of Sarhili's tactics Morris wrote:

'I am afraid that there is much for us to worry about, and Kreli [Sarhili] must be kept down as every inch of power he gets will only make him fight for more'.⁷⁹



It appears from my reading of the archive that Morris had lost all faith in the Xhosa king when he attempted to gain the endorsement of Chalmers as opposed to gaining it from his own magistrate. As far as gaining more land was concerned, this was the diplomatic error that put paid to those aspirations for the paramount chief of the Gcaleka. By early 1887, Morris reports that he and the Xhosa king were at constant loggerheads as regards who had jurisdiction over certain cases. When issues involved crime, it was the duty of the magistrate to adjudicate whereas cultural matters were the province of the paramount. This was tantamount to a system of indirect rule, with a steady erosion of Sarhili's power.

⁷⁸ CMT 1/52, Personal letter from Chalmers to Morris, 4 September 1886.

⁷⁹ CMT 1/52, Personal letter from Morris to Elliot, 15 September 1886.

Several disputes arose regarding dowries. It would not appear as clear cut as other issues as payment of a dowry was regarded by the colonial authorities as a contract and therefore within the jurisdiction of the magistrate. Sarhili, on the other hand thought of this form of bridewealth as a cultural matter and therefore within his sphere of control. Consequently, any dispute regarding dowries was a constant source of dispute between the magistrate and the paramount.⁸⁰ Sarhili must have realized that Morris had undergone a change in attitude as later in that same year he approached the magistrate with a case that had personal significance to the Xhosa king.

One of the Sarhili's wives, Nonkanti, fell pregnant by a Gcaleka man named Banya. Nonkanti proceeded to abort the baby via usage of herbs. During the trial, Nonkanti testified that she had decided to abort the baby by her own accord and that Banya bore no knowledge of her decision. However, Sarhili was not convinced of this and demanded that Banya be tried for murder. Morris ruled that the case was a civil and not criminal one and ruled that Banya pay Sarhili all his cattle in compensation for his interaction with Nonkanti. Even after the trial was concluded and Nonkanti admitted Banya's involvement in the abortion, Morris was not interested in pressing criminal charges against Banya.⁸¹

Sarhili could have adjudicated this case himself if he was prepared to treat it as a civil matter. However, he instead chose to place the case in the hands of Morris, seemingly in the hope that firstly, the case would be regarded as a criminal one. Secondly, by placing his faith in Morris it is reasonable to assume that Sarhili hoped to regain some of the trust he had lost in the eyes of the magistrate. On both counts the paramount was disappointed as

⁸⁰ CMT 1/52, Morris to Elliot, 25 March 1887.

⁸¹ CMT 1/52, Case between Kreli and Banya, 8 December 1887.

when the paramount again requested land, in the person of Sigcawu, from Morris a year later, he was given the following endorsement by the magistrate:

‘I should not be phased to be released from the responsibility of the charge of old Kreli [Sarhili] as he is a source of worry, anxiety and annoyance, but the advisability of such a removal is a matter of grave concern. Sigcau [Sigcawu’s] request is to my mind nothing more than a scheme to regain his old country which will soon when surrounded by his own people’?⁸²

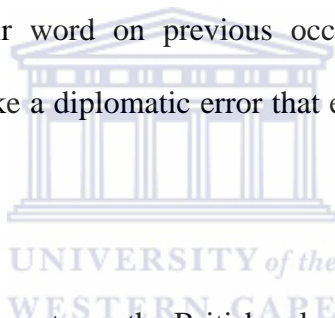
On 27 March 1889, Morris informed Sarhili that the application for more land had been turned down.⁸³ Sarhili responded to this rejection by requesting permission from Morris to ask Captain Blyth to plead his case to government. It must be remembered that Blyth had offered Sarhili a return to Gcalekaland in 1881, which the paramount rejected. Morris decided to oblige the paramount’s request. However, the response remained the same from government. Rose-Innes, the Under Secretary of Native Affairs, wrote to Sarhili via Major Elliot and stated that Sarhili gave up all entitlement to land when he accepted terms to receive land in Bomvanaland. If the land was not large enough, Sarhili was welcome to send some of his supporters to the rail works in the colony where labour was needed. Rose-Innes made it clear that the government was not prepared to entertain any more land claims from the Xhosa king.⁸⁴

⁸² CMT 1/52, Morris to Elliot, 20 October 1888.

⁸³ CMT 1/52, Morris to Elliot, 27 March 1889.

⁸⁴ 4/1/3/3, Rose-Innes to Elliot, 10 November 1890.

Sarhili had accepted terms from the British in order to escape living with wild animals in the Mbashe Forests. He had been astute enough to recognize that he could use the Gcaleka refusal to pay hut tax to his own advantage and went about orchestrating the situation to near perfection. However, when Sarhili had finally managed to gain the trust of the magistrate placed with him, he lost patience. It is only possible to hypothesize but it is my postulation that if Sarhili had not approached Chalmers for an endorsement he would most probably have received more/other land from the colonial government. Sarhili was not privy to the colonial correspondence of the time and as such he cannot be blamed for not accepting Morris at his word that he was promoting the cause of the paramount. After all, the British had not kept their word on previous occasions in the experience of the paramount. But Sarhili did make a diplomatic error that even the past record of the British could not excuse.



Sarhili was fully aware of the importance the British colonial system placed on procedure. It was therefore a grave mistake to attempt to go ‘over the head’ of Morris and approach Chalmers for help. To Morris, this would have been tantamount to treason, having one of his own charges seeking help without his express permission. It was a blow to their relationship that would leave it irreparable. Each time Sarhili made a request for more land the colonial state required a recommendation from Morris and with time these recommendations became increasingly scathing. Sarhili was never to receive additional/other land as the recommendation from Morris made it impossible for any government official to justify such an award. After Rose-Innes conveyed the finality of

government's decision to not award any other land to the Gcaleka paramount, Sarhili disappears almost entirely from the archive. The next time he reappears is when he dies.

The King is Dead.

Sarhili is reported to have died on 4 February 1893.⁸⁵ As was the case with the birth of the paramount, various other sources have detailed the year of his death at a variety of different times. In the course of investigating the archive, I was only able to find one document that confirmed his death. Sarhili was falsely reported as dead in 1885, but this report was immediately discredited by Morris.⁸⁶ Sarhili's tombstone at Tsholora has his death dated in 1902.⁸⁷ This year is credited in accordance with Gcaleka oral history. Noel Mostert regards 1892 as the year the paramount died, although he does not provide any reference to substantiate this claim.⁸⁸ The Albany Museum in Grahamstown extends the confusion, proclaiming that Sarhili died in both 1892 and 1893. In two separate exhibits, virtually alongside each other, the paramount is said to have died in both years.⁸⁹ Again, no reference is provided.

As was the case with his life, where Sarhili disappeared and re-emerged throughout the colonial archive, his death has also seems to have perplexed this colonial construction. That

⁸⁵ CMT 3/82, Morris to Elliot, 6 February 1893.

⁸⁶ 1/EDL 4/1/1/2, Morris to Chalmers, 18 May 1885.

⁸⁷ See photograph no. 2 in the appendix.

⁸⁸ Noel Mostert, Frontiers: The Epic of South Africa's Creation and the Tragedy of the Xhosa People, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1992), p. xiv.

⁸⁹ See photographs 5 and 6, taken on 3 September 2007, in the appendix.

it has been troublesome for historians to agree on the exact year of his death is indicative of the difficulty the archive has in placing the paramount within its margins. Sarhili tended to appear in the archive especially when he was perceived to be a threat to the welfare of the colonial state or the stability of the Eastern Frontier. His death would ensure that he could no longer pose any danger to the colonial government and as such it is documented haphazardly. This indiscriminate documentation is the only feasible explanation I can find for historians, who have reviewed come of the same correspondence that I have, for listing the death year of the paramount as 1892.



Chapter 6 - Re-Presenting Sarhili

The first five chapters of this dissertation have focused mostly on the way that Sarhili has been portrayed by the colonial archive. In this chapter, I will investigate the manner in which the paramount chief of the Gcaleka has been characterized by contemporary literature, public exhibitions and the Xhosa oral tradition. I have alluded to some of these representations in this thesis in previous chapters but I intend to dissect these portrayals of the Xhosa king minute detail. This is an important process as this thesis has set out to provide a biography of the Xhosa king that attempts to transcend the mechanics of the colonial archive. This process of overcoming the colonial constructions of knowledge does not seem probable in much of the existing Eastern Cape historiography.

Sarhili features in several historical works in the Eastern Cape historiography. However, even though the paramount chief of the Gcaleka is never the primary subject of these publications, Sarhili is often portrayed in very finite terms. These descriptions often manifest itself in the Eastern Cape historical literature in the form of pen sketches where the Xhosa king is 'revealed' to the reader. Most often, the details in these pen sketches are not footnoted or referenced leaving the reader with the distinct impression that the portrayal the author is attempting to convey to the reader is his/her own impressions of the Gcaleka paramount chief.¹ We might assume that the impression left on the author probably originates from the colonial archive, as this historical source tends to dominate the references in 19th century Eastern Cape historiography. When attempting to create a

¹ I have been conscientious in attempting to uncover where the particular author is drawing his/her sources from when they create these pen sketches in order to access the same informant(s) which may provide me with even more insight into the personage of the paramount.

Sarhili for the modern day reader it is imperative for the author to consider the processes that operate within the margins of the colonial archive and how these mechanisms are likely to influence any portrayal of the Xhosa king.

In this chapter, I will investigate these pen sketches of the paramount in several literary works of the Eastern Cape and attempt to unravel how much of an influence the colonial archive, and its knowledge production, has had in informing other authors of the personage of Sarhili. I will scrutinize whether these impressions created by the colonial archive have been sufficiently interrogated by the relevant authors before being conveyed to the reader. In this way, it will become possible to eliminate some of the characterizations that exist within the historiography and thereby help free Sarhili from his entrapment within the colonial archive. This new representation of the Gcaleka paramount chief cannot only be revealed via the deconstruction of existing literary depictions as the Xhosa king is exposed to the public sphere through other mediums as well.

Sarhili is also brought into the public domain via museum exhibitions. At the Albany Museum in Grahamstown, the 'Contact and Conflict: The Eastern Cape 1780-1910' display has been open to the public. In this exhibition Sarhili is featured extensively, with particular reference made to the 1856-7 cattle-killing and the Ngcayecibi War. I will investigate what the exhibition attempts to communicate to its readers and why this particular representation of the Xhosa king has been made public. This process is important as Sarhili in this form of public sphere often and as such it is unlikely that the

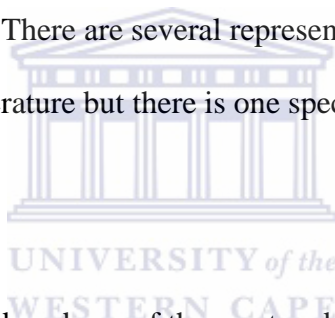
average museum visitor is able to compare this specific depiction of the Gcaleka paramount chief to any alternatives. It is crucial, if I am re-present the Xhosa king, to investigate the claims made in this exhibition and compare them with my own impressions of the material found in the colonial archive. In other words, if the depictions in the display are taken from the colonial archive with no attempt to question the motives behind the nature of the colonial correspondences that created these impressions, it is unlikely that Sarhili's personification at the Albany Museum would be significantly different from the propaganda found in the colonial archive.

The only other way that Sarhili is brought to the public eye is through the Xhosa oral tradition. Although I concede that there are many problems with oral history, it would be negligent on my part to attempt to re-present the paramount without investigating how this historical source depicts the Xhosa king. I have bemoaned the fact that Sarhili has not had a voice in the colonial archive. Even when the paramount chief of the Gcaleka did correspond with the colonial state, this communication was mediated through a colonial official and therefore does not guarantee that the voice attributed to Sarhili is actually his. Oral tradition is as close as it is possible for the modern historian to find the voice of the Xhosa king. In the same way that I proposed throughout this dissertation to deal with the colonial archive, it is also imperative to interrogate the representation in the Xhosa oral tradition. It is essential to remember that Sarhili was the king who endorsed the cattle-killing that effectively destroyed much of the Xhosa culture and as such could prejudice the manner in which he is viewed by his people. Conversely, Sarhili was the last independent Xhosa king and may represent to his people the last bastion of the 'old' way

of life that could possibly influence the manner in which he is remembered. In this chapter, I will unpack how the paramount has been remembered in Xhosa historiography and attempt to understand why he is portrayed in the Xhosa oral tradition in the way that he is.

The Eastern Cape Historiography

Sarhili appears in most historical publications about the 19th Century Eastern Cape. The extent to which he features is dependant on the subject of the work and as such I will confine this literature review to those writings in which the paramount made a significant contribution to the overall text. There are several representations of the Xhosa king that are recurrent in this body of literature but there is one specific portrayal that I intend to deconstruct.



Historian Noel Mostert has produced one of the most ambitious works in 19th century Eastern Cape historiography. In his book *'Frontiers: The Epic of South Africa's Creation and the Tragedy of the Xhosa People'*, Sarhili appears with some regularity. However, the Xhosa king also disappears from the Mostert narrative for extended periods of time in the same way that Sarhili is often absent from the colonial archive. Mostert produces several pen sketches of the paramount in relation to the political ambience of the period. These insights tend to be unreferenced by the author and therefore seem to be Mostert's personal insights into the Gcaleka paramount chief. Generally, in the existing historiography, Sarhili takes centre stage in relation to the role he played in the cattle-

killing episode of 1856-7. This is Mostert's attempt to understand the Xhosa king's endorsement of this millenarian movement:

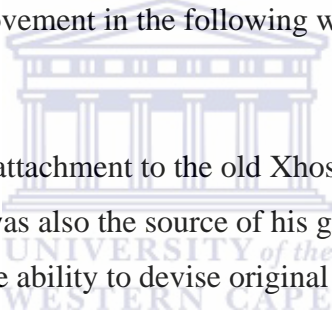
'Strong in his chieftaincy, and with a strength of personality admired by all who came to know him, Sarili [Sarhili] in his youth was regarded as a weakling, mentally and physically. Many magicians and wise men had been consulted over what should be done to give him strength of mind and vigour of body. Those qualities, however, had come of their own accord, suddenly, as can happen with sickly and puny adolescence who emerge from a chrysalis of apparent frailty in a robust transformation. It was this introspective experience of that frailty and the elusive, between material and the abstract, that helped to provide the sensibility that drew his people to him, and left him a highly impressionable man. There was another factor. Strangely, his heirs had died, one after the other, the last of them, a boy aged twelve, in 1853. All these things counted in making him vulnerable to occult influences when the pressure mounted, as they did in 1856 when Mhlakaza's vision offered a promise of salvation for the Xhosa nation'.²

The claim here is that Sarhili was a religious man who resorted to the 'occult' for assistance when pressured situations placed strain on his reign. Mostert will have the reader believe that the paramount that it was due to having endured a traumatic childhood that Sarhili had cultivated this dependence on 'magicians and wise men' for guidance when he encountered difficulties during his supremacy. As a result, when the cattle-killing prophecy emerged, in the wake of the lung sickness epidemic that had been devastating cattle herds in the Eastern Cape since 1853, Mostert argues that Sarhili's

² Noel Mostert, *Frontiers: The Epic of South Africa's Creation and the Tragedy of the Xhosa People*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1992), pp. 1184-85.

predisposition to the occult made him more susceptible to the prophecy. It is Mostert's assertion that the Xhosa king endorsed the millenarian movement as a result of his predilection to his religious beliefs, especially in the wake of the crisis that the lung sickness pandemic had created for the Gcaleka and the resultant pressure it had placed on him as their paramount chief.

Mostert is not the only historian to have made this claim. Eastern Cape historian, Jeff Peires, also argues that Sarhili endorsed the cattle-killing due to his religious beliefs. In his book, *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Xhosa Tragedy*, Peires explains Sarhili's endorsement of the movement in the following way:

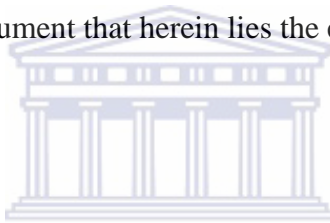


'His [Sarhili's] tenacious attachment to the old Xhosa traditions which was a source of strength was also the source of his greatest weakness. He had neither the will nor the ability to devise original solutions to the new problems which confronted him. In the depth of his complexity, Sarhili was an easy mark for the prophecies which, although in essence radically new, were expressed in familiar idiom.'³

Peires reiterates some of the thoughts expressed by Mostert in the previous citation. He states that Sarhili was susceptible to the prophecy as a result of his religious beliefs. Also, Peires shares Mostert's view that Sarhili was particular prone to resort to these beliefs when he was placed under pressure by circumstances in his kingdom. It is my contention that both these authors are guilty of creating a false representation of the paramount.

³ Jeff Peires, *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-57*, (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1989), p.86.

Sarhili had made it clear in his correspondence with Rharhabe chief, Maqoma, that he felt that the entire Xhosa political system was under threat as a result of the lung sickness that had affected the Eastern Cape. The Xhosa king argued that in order to maintain the status quo the chiefs had to present a united front that did not contradict the sentiment of the masses. Up until that point, the paramount had ordered the execution of more than twenty of his subjects for the slaughter of healthy cattle (this practice was forbidden for commoners). It would appear that Sarhili had come to realise that these orders had not altered the mindset of his subjects as the slaughter of healthy beasts continued unabated. It is my argument that the Xhosa king started to feel as if his reign was being threatened by this class revolt. It is my argument that herein lies the essence of the decision making process of the paramount.

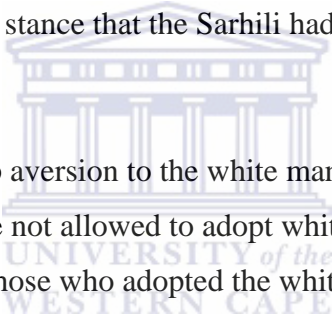


Sarhili made decisions based on either maintaining or increasing his power and influence. I concede that the Xhosa king could have reasoned that the only way to maintain his authority was to place his hope in the prophecy. However, cattle played a pivotal role in the society that Sarhili ruled over as it was the commodity that ensured the loyalty of his subjects. It is my contention that it seems far fetched to believe that the paramount would gamble his authority on the behest of a young girl. Instead, I argue that Sarhili was concerned about the manner in which his people would react if he did not support the millenarian movement. His instruction to execute several of his subjects did not stem the class insurrection that was sweeping over Gcalekaland. The best way for me to support this argument is to take a closer view of other occasions when the paramount was under

pressure due to the political climate in the Eastern Cape and investigate the decisions that he made.

During the Mlanjeni War (1850-3), Sarhili adopted a stance of neutrality in the conflict even though the war was driven by the most revered medicine man of the time, Mlanjeni. This soothsayer had gained a reputation among the amaXhosa for his uncanny ability to avoid capture by the British military even prior to the outbreak of the war. Mlanjeni preached a doctrine of 'cultural purity' and regarded the British as being 'unclean'. This prophet frowned on any cultural exchange between the colonists and the amaXhosa.

Mostert recognizes that this is a stance that the Sarhili had also adopted:



'Sarili [Sarhili] had a deep aversion to the white man's ways and culture. The Gcaleka initially were not allowed to adopt white clothes. Sarili [Sarhili] maintained that those who adopted the white man's dress were the unclean ones.'⁴

If Mostert and Peires are to be believed, Sarhili was supposedly a deeply religious man. It must be remembered that the prophet Mlanjeni preached a similar message to the paramount, so why would the paramount not commit his warriors to the Mlanjeni War? The Xhosa king, I will argue, seems to have realised that a war with the colonial military would in all probability mean the end of Gcaleka independence and therefore a serious erosion of his own personal power. Sarhili ignored the predictions of the most famous and powerful medicine man in the land in order to preserve his authority. This hardly

⁴ Noel Mostert, Frontiers: The Epic of South Africa's Creation and the Tragedy of the Xhosa People, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1992), p. 1186.

seems the actions of a man driven by his religious convictions. Peires, in his preface to *'The Dead will Arise'* undermines the assertion made by himself and Mostert best when he states:

'I believe and trust that this book will demonstrate that the Cattle-Killing was a logical and rational response, perhaps even an inevitable response, by a nation driven to desperation by pressures that people today can barely imagine.'⁵

If one was to place any credibility to this statement made by Peires, it becomes difficult to support an argument that the endorsement given to slaughter by Sarhili was borne out of religious conviction. Instead, Peires alludes to the real reason himself by stating that the pressure brought to bear on the amaXhosa made the mass culling 'almost inevitable'. Imagine the pressure that leaders like Sarhili would have been feeling if their subjects saw no other way out of their predicament save for slaughtering all their livestock, the currency upon which their entire culture was based. Yet, authors like Peires and Mostert insist on blaming the Xhosa king's endorsement of the cattle-killing on his religious zeal.

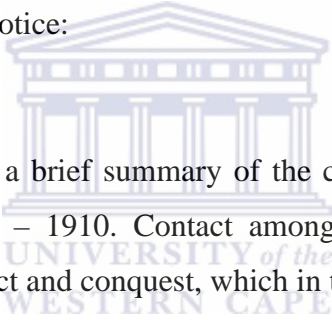
The Albany Museum

In the course of my research I was only ever able to uncover one current museum exhibition in which the Gcaleka paramount chief was featured substantially. The Albany Museum in Grahamstown currently hosts a display titled 'Contact and Conflict: The

⁵ Jeff Peires, *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-57*, (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1989), preface x.

Eastern Cape 1780-1910'⁶ in which the Xhosa king is extensively represented. Sarhili is not generally a historical figure that appears in the public domain. The way he is depicted by the Albany Museum will be the only portrayal of the paramount that most of the general public are likely to encounter. Assuming this to be the case, it becomes increasingly important that the Albany Museum ensures that their characterization of the paramount chief is not only accurate but also balanced. With this in mind I visited the exhibition to compare the way the paramount is represented in my own research.

Before entering the 'Contact and Conflict' exhibition, the visitor is immediately confronted with the following notice:



'This exhibition provides a brief summary of the complex history of the Eastern Cape from 1780 – 1910. Contact amongst the peoples of the Eastern Cape led to conflict and conquest, which in turn, contributed to the making of a modern South Africa.

People, depending on their particular social, economic, cultural and political background, will perceive and record what they see around them differently. Historians are also influenced by their own world views. This exhibition relies mostly on quotes, pictures and objects to tell a story. It is merely a stepping stone for your interpretation.'⁷

It is difficult to argue against the sentiments expressed in this statement by the museum as it is impossible to record an objective history. However, this statement does not make

⁶ See photograph no. 3, taken on 6 September 2007, in appendix.

⁷ See photographs nos. 2 and 4, taken on 6 September 2007, in the appendix.

allowance for the problem of factual misrepresentation and how the viewer is to negotiate this level of representation.

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I alluded to the uncertain manner in which the birth year of the Xhosa king is recorded by the Albany Museum. Sarhili is evidently said to be born in both 1810 and 1813 in two separate displays in the exhibition, virtually alongside each other.⁸ It is possible that this is merely an oversight by the museum researchers and perhaps not too much should be read into it. It may also be that the Albany research team decided to include both birth years of the paramount intentionally as they were unable to reach an internal consensus about when Sarhili was born. The ‘oversight’, finally, might be a product of sloppy research or the politics of the museum that seeks to mark a shift from a settler to a postapartheid institution. Some connection between what I am calling an oversight and the preface to the exhibition ‘Contact and Conflict’ display with a disclaimer, suggests that the paramount was not deemed important enough to warrant sufficient research. It similarly does not open up to a broader deliberation on why the difficulty exists in providing a definitive birth year of the Xhosa king. This despite the fact that Sarhili was arguably the most important Xhosa political figure of the 1800’s yet he was not regarded as important enough to obtain clarity about his birth year.

This contrasts sharply with the adjacent exhibition hall dedicated to the 1820 British Settlers where insignificant artifacts such as cutlery and crockery are exhibited. These displays can boast a full history of its place of origin, its previous owners and the manner

⁸ This is explained in greater detail in chapter 1.

in which it found its way to the Albany Museum. It appeared obvious, even to the casual observer, that a great deal of research had been invested into the genealogy of these inanimate objects. It is interesting to juxtapose the two attitudes that seem to emerge from the quality of research that has been conducted for the two displays.

Sarhili is incidental to the archive. And is reflected as such in the museum. This oversight of the birth date is symptomatic of the way the Albany museum comes to represent the coming together of settler and colonial histories. This is what historian Premesh Lalu argues in his work, *'The Deaths of Hintsa'*.⁹ Lalu reminds us that two separate histories emerge in the 1800's- a settler history and a colonial history. These narratives were often in opposition to each other as the interests of these two groups, the settlers and the colonial officialdom, were not always congruent. Lalu cites the work of George Cory as an attempt to forge these two narratives into one, what he refers to as 'settler colonial history'.¹⁰ In his treatment of the Hintsa's death, Lalu points out the outcry that the mutilation of the dead Xhosa king's body led to among the non-settler community. This led to the creation of a settler narrative as first written by Robert Godlonton in order to provide justification for the way that the native people of the Eastern Cape were being treated by the settlers. However, this narrative was not always congruent with the colonial version of events in the 19th century Eastern Cape thereby creating further contradiction in the colonial archive. This disparity in narrative

⁹ Premesh Lalu. *'The Deaths of Hintsa- Postapartheid South Africa and the Shape of Recurring Pasts'*, (HSRC Press: Cape Town, 2008), Chapter 3.

¹⁰ Premesh Lalu. *'The Deaths of Hintsa- Postapartheid South Africa and the Shape of Recurring Pasts'*, (HSRC Press: Cape Town, 2008), p. 116.

was understood by Cory and he set about drawing one communal history from these two histories.

‘Cory’s history is responsible for reconciling and smoothing over the disparities between settler and official colonial contests. This is the production not of a settler history but of a settler colonial history that is both sustained by and committed to the modes of evidence in the colonial archive.’¹¹

It would seem reasonable to assume that such an amalgamation of often ‘disparate’ narratives would cause some contradiction and inconsistency to surface in the history that Cory produced. This is the history that the Albany Museum has chosen to base their exhibition upon and as such can explain why such a simple issue as a birth year for the Xhosa king had produced two contradictory exhibition texts. What it also highlights is the problematic of the colonial archive as Cory attempted to reinforce both settler and colonial histories with ‘modes of evidence’ as found in the archive. However, this does not account for another display in the exhibition. This is the post-Ngayecibi War account as per the Albany Museum:

‘Sarhili fled across the Mbashe River in the Transkei. However, in 1877, the Gcaleka attacked the Mfengu who were colonial subjects. Sandile and his warriors were drawn into the conflict of 1877-78. They

¹¹Premesh Lalu. *‘The Deaths of Hintsa- Postapartheid South Africa and the Shape of Recurring Pasts’*, (HSRC Press: Cape Town, 2008), pp. 132-33.

were defeated in 1878 and Sarhili fled north again. He remained in hiding for the rest of his life, dying in 1893 at the age of 83.¹²

I spent most of the previous chapter highlighting the Ngcayecibi War and the consequences it had for the Gcalaka paramount chief. For the most part, my research during this time period was confined to the colonial archive in which Sarhili features prominently. This archive is explicit in its account of the reintegration of Sarhili from exile and the manner in which this resettlement took place. I have explained the problems the Albany Museum would have to face due to its adoption of the Cory settler colonial narrative in relation to the birth year of Sarhili however, this does not explain the inept research that is meant to account for the paramount's last days. It is my opinion that this text in the 'Contact and Conflict' exhibition was not researched in any detail as it is impossible for any researcher to argue that these colonial correspondences were not accessible. They form part of public records that anyone is able to access. Why then, would such a blatant misrepresentation of Sarhili's life form part of an Albany Museum exhibition?

One could argue that this is merely a matter of semantics. Sarhili was never allowed to resettle in Gcalekaland after the Ngcayecibi conflict and as such it could be argued that the Xhosa king was forced to live in exile for the remainder of his life. However, the text does state that he 'remained in hiding' thereby implicitly painting a picture of a king that was living in fear for the rest of his life. This is a far stretch from someone who is not allowed to reclaim the land that was previously under his/her tenure. Sarhili came to an

¹² See photograph no. 6, taken on 7 September 2007, in the appendix.

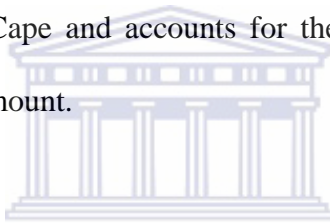
agreement with the colonial state that granted him both a pardon for his part in the war as well as a new tract of ground. He was led to believe that this pardon absolved him of any past act of 'wrongdoing' as defined by the colonial state and therefore he was able to leave the Mbashe Forest and resettle on the land awarded to him by the British. In other words, while Sarhili had spent nearly five years of his life in hiding, he did make a formal return to the political stage of the Eastern Cape and resettled on the land that the colonial officials awarded him.

At first glance it would seem difficult to understand why the museum would attempt to make such an argument. It is possible to argue that, once again, this is merely a factual mistake made by its research team that should not be read too deeply in. However, it seems too convenient that this type of error should be made again when Sarhili is the subject. Instead, I will contend that these factual inaccuracies have a far more deeply seated origin than incompetent research.

Sarhili was the last king of the amaXhosa that was independent of colonial rule, at least for the greater majority of his reign. As such, it is easy to argue that Sarhili could represent a way of life that has long since been replaced by the rigours of colonialism and apartheid. It appeared, from my time spent at the Albany Museum, that a great deal more resources has been expended in the display of its Settler exhibition than that of the indigenous people of the Eastern Cape. The Settler exhibition pays homage to settler icons like Robert Godlonton who have exposed themselves as racists and supremacists through their own writings. It is therefore my contention that the honourific nature of the

Settler exhibition exposes the politics of the museum and that the indigenous peoples of the Eastern Cape are still regarded as second-class citizens.

This opinion is borne out by the haphazard way in which Sarhili is represented. It explains why, in my opinion, the final depiction of the Xhosa king is one of a broken man who was forced into hiding instead of the proud leader who, until the bitter end, tried to regain autonomy for himself and his people through the limited means at his disposal. It would seem that this more accurate reflection of his leadership would be in direct opposition to the type of celebratory tone that the Settler exhibition takes for the arrival of the British in the Eastern Cape and accounts for the inaccuracies in the museum's accounts of the life of the paramount.

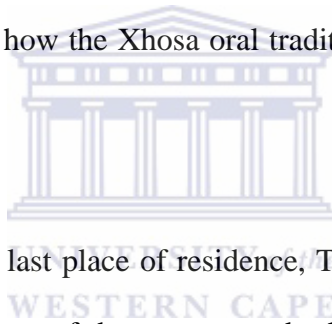


People who visit this museum having never encountered the paramount chief of the Gcaleka would leave with the distinct impression of a man that colonial pressure broke instead of a man who fought against increasingly insurmountable odds in order to retain the independence of his people. I think that this is exactly the point. It is impossible to laud the contribution of the colonial project while, at the same time, acknowledging the struggle that Xhosa leaders like Sarhili endured to ensure a continuation of their way of life. This contradiction is borne from the fact that to acknowledge such a struggle would be to admit that the struggle was for something worthwhile and therefore in stark opposition to the colonial project that is being acclaimed. As such, while the Albany Museum does have an exhibit dedicated to the indigenous population of the Eastern

Cape, this display is in accordance with the racial hierarchy that prevails in the institution that is in perfect congruence with the Cory settler colonial history.

The Xhosa Oral Tradition

As I alluded to at the start of this dissertation, much of my interest in the Xhosa king Sarhili stemmed from his involvement in the cattle killing episode of 1856-57. I have often wondered how the paramount is perceived in the modern day oral traditions of the amaXhosa bearing in mind the role he played in the millenarian event. This intrigued me to such extent that much of my research trip to the Eastern Cape in September of 2007 was geared around uncovering how the Xhosa oral tradition depicts the paramount chief of the Gcaleka.



On a research visit to Sarhili's last place of residence, Tsholorha, I started my quest for access to modern day impressions of the paramount by heading to the site of the Xhosa king's burial. In Tsholorha, we met an old chief of the region, Nomatoto. Nomatoto is regarded by the community in the area as the foremost authority on the Xhosa king. This elder, along with two of his nephews, took us on a guided tour of the burial site and after paying our respects to the Xhosa king, he was prepared to answer our questions about the last king of the amaXhosa.¹³ The first thing that attracted my attention at the gravesite was the inscription on the tombstone. The inscription lists the Xhosa king as having been born in 1818 and having passed away in 1908. My research refutes these dates, especially

¹³ The 'us' I refer to is my supervisor Premesh Lalu, our Xhosa interpreter and masters' graduate Khayalethu Ndudumane and myself.

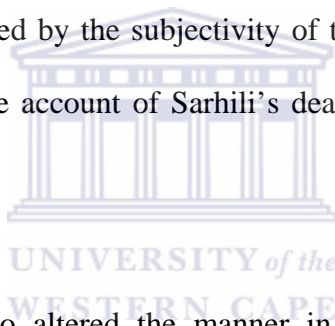
the year in which Sarhili died.¹⁴ However, when I explained to Nomatoto the discrepancy, especially regarding the year Sarhili died, he remained adamant that these dates were accurate and that any evidence to the contrary was a result of ‘white intervention in Xhosa history’.¹⁵

I have given this resolute attitude of this oral historian some thought in order to understand why in the face of such compelling evidence as exists in the colonial archive that he would not concede that the year given for the death of the paramount was inaccurate as recorded on his tombstone. It is difficult to make a convincing argument other than to state that it is impossible to deny that the presence of the colonial state in the Eastern Cape did alter the way that amaXhosa history has been told in mainstream historical circles. Essentially, I am arguing that if indeed the colonial archive has misrepresented the year Sarhili died it would not be the first time that such erroneous knowledge production could be found within its confines. It also makes sense that this erroneous depiction would be most acutely felt by the amaXhosa themselves. It therefore would make sense that Xhosa oral historians like Nomatoto would be wary of making any kind of concession to any ‘knowledge’ produced in the colonial archive. In this dissertation I have underscored numerous occasions when the amaXhosa has been erroneously portrayed by the colonial archive and as such it seems reasonable that the oral tradition displays hesitancy in accepting the colonial archive’s version of events in their past.

¹⁴ I have dealt with the dates on this tombstone in the first and fourth chapters of this dissertation. I have only highlighted it again in this chapter in order to provide the reader with some kind of insight as to where these dates originate from.

¹⁵ Interview with Nomatoto on 2 September 2007.

It is also my contention that this attitude displayed by Nomatoto is more than a mere attempt by the village elder to protect the oral tradition of his people but rather should be read as a form of resistance to the contents of the colonial archive. I think that this is exactly the point that the academy should focus upon. Although the reality of Sarhili's death year has probably been incorrectly recorded by the Xhosa oral tradition, the error should not overshadow the fact that Nomatoto and his fellow historians are attempting to tell the history of the amaXhosa independently of the colonial archive. It seems that Nomatoto is aware that no historical narrative of Xhosa history may emerge from the colonial archive that is untainted by the subjectivity of the colonial project and as such remains determined to alter the account of Sarhili's death year as provided by the oral tradition taught to him.



This encounter with Nomatoto altered the manner in which I approached the next interview I had scheduled. I had genuinely expected that Sarhili would have had his legacy tainted, in terms of the way his people remembered him, because of the nature of his involvement with the cattle killing episode. After all, more than a third of his people had died as a direct consequence of the millenarian event he had endorsed and the way of life they had attempted to defend against the onslaught of British colonial project had basically been destroyed. However, the accounts of Sarhili I had been made privy to by Nomatoto did not reflect this expectation. Instead, the last king of the amaXhosa is still revered in oral accounts of his life. Nomatoto was not the only oral historian that spoke in these terms of the paramount's life.

During our stay in the Eastern Cape, we spent the majority of our time at the Haven Hotel that is based in the Dwesa-Cebe Nature Reserve. Here we were privileged enough to meet some of the community leaders of the area, one of which was Kuzile Juza. He is an influential member of the Dwesa-Cebe Community Forum who has tasked themselves with creating investment opportunities in the region from both domestic and foreign sources.¹⁶ Juza recounted to us an offer the Community Forum had received from the European Union for a sizeable investment in the area. However, these funds would only be forthcoming if the area could create a ‘cultural village’ with which to attract tourists. It was decided amongst the members of the Community Forum to approach a Mr. A. Thaboyi, widely regarded in the area as the foremost oral historian, to write a history of the area. He was to focus specifically on the nineteenth century Eastern Cape and this piece of writing would serve as a ‘handbook’¹⁷ for prospective local tourist guides to recount local history to visitors. This piece of writing would include issues like Hintsá’s death and also the cattle killing. Thaboyi named the work ‘Hintsá’s Heritage Project’ and his account of the cattle-killing episode goes as follows:

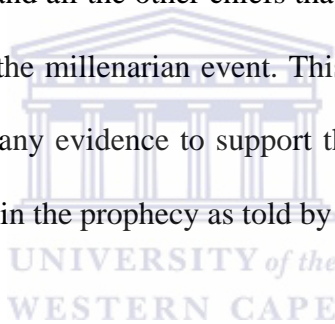
‘On that time the Xhosa was very believed to the ancestors. When one day went to the river she saw the man on river it was a vision to Nongqawuse and Nongqawuse believed.

¹⁶ The Dwesa-Cebe region is one of the rural areas in the Eastern Cape. It requires a near two hour drive to reach the region, which is a mere 40 kilometres off the nearest tar road. The infrastructure is minimal and most people rely on subsistence farming or urban based relatives to survive.

¹⁷ Interview with Kuzile Juza, 3 September 2007. Juza stated that this history would be the one that local tour guides would share with visitors.

He was Sir Gorge Grey who was staying on the river. He instructed the lady that she must go back to the people about the vision she saw on the river and told them the ancestors said that must be destroyed all cattle and the food. Nongqawuse was very proud and she obeyed the commands she go back home to her father and told him. Then Mhlakaza heard that rumours because Mhlakaza was a witch doctor and also a herbent on the river and also he was believed. He went to Sarili told him about the vision the king was believed. The cattle were destroyed ocrding to the instructions of Gorge Grey through ancestors through Nongqawuse.’¹⁸

This passage absolves Sarhili, and all the other chiefs that supported the movement, from any responsibility they had in the millenarian event. This theory has been tested by Jeff Peires but he was unable find any evidence to support the claims made by Thaboyi the George Grey had any duplicity in the prophecy as told by Nongqawuse. Peires states that:



‘Almost all Xhosa today hold Sir George Grey personally responsible for the cattle killing, believing that in some he manipulated Nongqawuse in prophesying as she did. This interpretation is very old and probably dates back to the cattle-killing period itself.

I have looked very closely into all the surviving documents, including the private correspondence and his chief subordinate Maclean, and must state unequivocally that there is no documentary evidence whatsoever in support of this view.’¹⁹

¹⁸ This is taken from ‘Hints’s Heritage Project’. I have not amended the grammar or spelling as I think that it is more authentic in its original form. See photographs 7 and 8, taken on 4 September 2007.

¹⁹ Jeff Peires, The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-57, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg: 1989), pp. 316-317.

I have encountered most of the same documents that Peires has read and agree with his position. I have not read any correspondence that has led me to be suspicious of George Grey. This leads to inevitable question: Why would the Xhosa oral tradition attempt to place the blame of the cattle-killing at the feet of Grey?

I think that two possible answers present themselves when attempting to answer this question. Firstly, as I have mentioned in the third chapter of this dissertation, Sarhili has to assume a fair degree of responsibility for the events of 1856-57. However, when Xhosa oral tradition apportions most of the blame to Governor Grey, the paramount appears to be almost completely absolved. But why would this be important to the amaXhosa? It could be argued that as Sarhili was the last independent king of the amaXhosa he became a symbol of a past life that was no longer available to his people if they so chose it. This construction appears to be nostalgic. Sarhili is remembered by oral tradition as well as the colonial archive as an ardent nationalist who did his best to maintain Gcaleka independence. He was the last independent chief in the Eastern Cape. This would add to the nostalgia and aura of his person. But there is more.

The other reason I can offer for the Xhosa oral tradition account of the cattle killing is that it provides an opposition to the colonial archive. While I agree with Peires and dismiss claims that Grey instigated the slaughter of the livestock I do this based on evidence found in the colonial archive. The Xhosa oral tradition serves to remind the historian that the knowledge production in this archive is not necessarily a reflection of reality and as such could justify an alternative narrative. In other words, due to the

processes at work in the colonial archive, the historian is forced to take any alternative narrative seriously, or at the very least interrogate the content of the archive more intensely.

Re-Constructing Sarhili

I have dedicated this entire chapter of my dissertation thus far to dispelling representations of Sarhili that I have found, through my research, to be misleading. I have taken several sources in the public domain to task for their misrepresentation of Sarhili throughout this dissertation. However, it is much easier being destructive than constructive. The remainder of this chapter will re-construct the paramount and recognize the occasions when other sources have depicted the Xhosa king in a seemingly accurate manner and also introduce some perspectives of my own.

Sarhili had a traumatic childhood caused primarily by the strained relationship between his mother Nomsa and his father Hintsu.²⁰ The differences between his parents resulted in Sarhili opting to spend very little time in his father's court. As a result, by the time that the future king underwent his initiation and accompanying isolation, Hintsu felt that his son had not been in his court often enough to have learnt how to effectively govern. However, it is my contention that this lack of exposure in the royal court did not temper the ability of Sarhili to manage his people effectively in the manner expected of his station. Peires sums up Sarhili's leadership as follows:

²⁰ This relationship is placed under scrutiny in Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

‘A master of the Xhosa style of oratory, etiquette and court ceremonial, celebrated for his knowledge of custom and precedent, Sarhili was celebrated by all the other chiefs, who were guided by him in matters concerning law and ritual, and who regarded him as the very epitome and model of chieftainship. Above all, Sarhili was a king who was loved by his people. Unlike his father Hintsá, who won respect through fear, cunning and manipulation, Sarhili enjoyed the spontaneous loyalty and affection of his subjects. He was an accessible ruler, unfailingly pleasant and courteous. His judicial decisions were renowned for their fairness and tact, and he made a point of softening a harsh judgment with words of humour and sympathy.’²¹

Although Sarhili had spent only about a year making himself a regular presence in his father’s court before Hintsá’s death, it seems obvious from the above quotation that the Xhosa prince had learnt his lessons well. Sarhili seems to have excelled in those aspects of leadership that his father showed concern about as he had largely been absent from the royal court in his youth. The Xhosa prince was to demonstrate in his reign that he was unrivalled in his knowledge of Xhosa custom, thereby illustrating that his father’s concerns were unfounded.

Although Sarhili proved to be the equal to the challenge of his office, the fact that his father had raised these concerns in a public forum was to have repercussions for the Xhosa prince, both in terms of the beginning of his reign and his leadership style.²² After Hintsá was killed at the hands of the British, his most important advisors tried to delay

²¹ Jeff Peires, The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-57, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg: 1989), pp. 81-82.

²² In chapter 1, I make reference to the speech that Hintsá made to his people when Sarhili returned from his initiation, and how these words were to cause Sarhili problems after his father died.

Sarhili's rise to power. This attempt to thwart Sarhili's birthright was successful as the new Xhosa king decided to leave Butterworth in order to establish his own legacy. He seems to have been aware that he would be living in the shadow of his father if he surrendered to his advisors. The need to prove himself was to remain as an integral aspect of Sarhili's leadership throughout his reign. Due to the opposition that Sarhili was forced to endure by these advisors, he never underwent the coronation ceremonies that were traditional for his new station.

It could be argued that these ceremonies were largely cosmetic and that the fact that Sarhili did not undergo any of them did not diminish his power.²³ However, it would seem as if the new Xhosa king did not share this sentiment as there is evidence that as late as 1873, thirty seven years after Sarhili succeeded his father as king, that he still wanted to undergo these royal rites of passage. I think that this indicative of an insecure leader. In the near fifty seven years of Sarhili's rule I have not found any evidence that has led me to believe that his reign was ever under threat from any rival clansman. Even at the start of Sarhili's sovereignty, when he was placed under pressure by those elders who were close to Hintsa, I have not found any evidence to suggest that there was a serious threat to right to rule his people.

It is possible to argue that Sarhili wanted to undergo these ceremonies as a matter of tradition and therefore does not reflect any form of insecurity. After all, according to Peires, Sarhili was renowned for his knowledge of custom and may have felt in the face

²³ For a different argument about the coronation of a Zulu king and the power it bestows see Carolyn Hamilton, Terrific Majesty: the powers of Shaka Zulu and the limits of historical intervention, (Cape Town and Johannesburg: David Philip, 1998).

of the colonial cultural onslaught that he wanted to reaffirm Xhosa cultural convention. However, it must be remembered that by 1873 Sarhili had lost most of his land and his influence among the amaXhosa was increasingly diminished.²⁴ Also, Sarhili's counselors used their influence on the king to advise against these ceremonies as they felt that it could possibly force Sarhili into military action if other chiefs did not pay him proper tribute.²⁵ It would seem that the paramount's counselors were afraid that this reversion to tradition was not only unnecessary but also a way for Sarhili to massage his own ego that could potentially prove catastrophic to Gcaleka independence.²⁶

At this point, I want to return to the death of Hintsá at British hands. Irrespective of what version of events the historian wants heed to two facts of Hintsá's death are irrefutable. Firstly, British soldiers, irrespective of their reasons for shooting the king, killed Hintsá. Secondly, the fact that Sarhili was taken prisoner with his father, under the guise of entering a military camp to negotiate, was to leave some form of impression on the future Xhosa king.

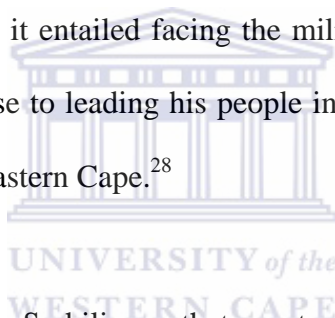
It is my opinion that this encounter left two indelible impressions on the paramount chief of the Gcaleka. Firstly, Sarhili came to the realization that the British military was far superior to anything his own people could offer resistance to. After entering the D'Urban's military camp, it soon became apparent that the both Sarhili and Hintsá were

²⁴ Throughout this thesis I have focused on the increasing inroads the colonial state was making in the Eastern Cape and how these inroads had served to isolate and decrease the power of Sarhili. By 1873, Sarhili was the only independent Xhosa chief in the Eastern Cape and the political interference he was subjected to by the British was serving to place increasing strain on his reign.

²⁵ This episode in the life of the paramount is dealt with in more depth in chapter 3.

²⁶ It must be remembered that all the chiefs who were expected to pay homage to Sarhili were under British protection and any military move made by the Gcaleka if the paramount was disrespected would be tantamount to war with the colony.

being held prisoner. It would appear that any attempt by the combined military forces of the amaXhosa to free them was not even considered. This would make sense if one considers that Hintsá is reported to have attempted to escape from a military escort on a mission to round up cattle to pay the British in reparations for the frontier war raging at the time when he shot. Sarhili realized that any future military engagement with the colonial army would be futile on the part of the Xhosa and would only result in more loss of land and livestock. Not surprisingly, Sarhili opted for the Gcaleka to remain 'neutral' in both the 1846 and 1850 frontier wars. In fact, Sarhili is likened by Spicer as 'the reluctant warrior'.²⁷ However, this description is not entirely accurate. Indeed, Sarhili was a 'reluctant warrior' when it entailed facing the military might of the British army. However, Sarhili was not averse to leading his people into war against other indigenous factions that also lived in the Eastern Cape.²⁸



The second impression made on Sarhili, one that was to stay with him until he died, was a deep mistrust of the British. It must be recalled that Hintsá was invited into D'Urban's camp under the pretext that he was going to negotiate some kind of settlement with the British and ended up being killed. The colonial archive is littered with various accounts of Sarhili being unwilling to meet with any colonial official outside of his own country. Even when war with the Mfengu, and by extension the British, looked inevitable in 1877, something that Sarhili wanted to avoid at all costs, the paramount chief of the Gcaleka was unwilling to meet Governor Bartle Frere on 'neutral' grounds and possibly avert the impending conflict. Sarhili knew that if he lost a war with British that would mean the

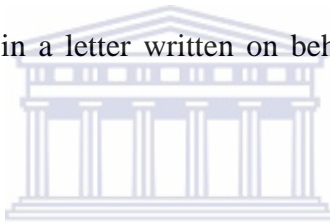
²⁷ Michael Spicer, *The War of Ngcayecibi, 1877-78* (M.A. Thesis, Rhodes University, 1978), p.81.

²⁸ This is best illustrated in 1872 when Sarhili led the Gcaleka into Thembuland after the behaviour of Ngangelizwe started threatening his authority.

end of Gcaleka independence and even so he refused to attempt to reach some form of diplomatic solution with Frere as he was too fearful of British treachery. Spicer writes:

‘If Sarhili had hesitated to meet his new Resident in his own country in 1876, it was absurd of the whites to expect him to meet the Governor in enemy territory with war trembling in the balance’.²⁹

Although Sarhili did not trust the colonial state, it would appear that this did not necessarily translate into personal relationships with ‘white’ people. West Fynn regarded himself as a personal friend of the Xhosa king and the sentiment was to be echoed by Mcotoma Kreli, Sarhili’s son, in a letter written on behalf of the Gcaleka people long after Sarhili died:



‘Fynn’s services were such as to win you the confidence of the native people and the respect and esteem of our late chief Kreli, in token of which among other evidences his last wish was that his favourite assegai and arm-ring should be delivered to you by the hand of his eldest son, the late chief Sigcawu, who commanded his father’s forces during the war, which duty was faithfully performed.’³⁰

However, despite this respect for individuals Sarhili maintained an intense dislike for western religion and culture. Sarhili shared his father’s suspicion of missionaries. This should not come as any surprise when one bears in mind that Reverend Ayliff had played a pivotal role in the defection of the Mfengu to British rule in 1835 after Hintsu had

²⁹ Michael Spicer, *The War of Ngqayecibi, 1877-78* (M.A. Thesis, Rhodes University, 1978), p. 94.

³⁰ Cory Library, MS 2018: Mcotoma Kreli and others to Fynn, 16 August 1911.

granted them land and cattle in the Eastern Cape. Sarhili was very reticent about allowing missionary stations being settled in Gcalekaland and was probably the reason that he had such a patchy relationship with Maphasa, the chief of the Tsonyana Gcaleka. Maphasa had allowed a missionary station to be posted on his land without consulting with the paramount and their relationship remained strained until Maphasa defected to the British just prior to the break out of the 1877 War. However, Sarhili was not averse to using missionaries for his own purposes. After his first exile, following the cattle-killing, Sarhili had allowed more missionaries to be stationed on his land in the hope that he could use their influence to get him more land.

Sarhili's distaste for western culture became apparent by the late 1840's where the colonial archive makes reference to the Xhosa king having 'disdain' for those Xhosa converts who adopted western style dress. Sarhili is recorded to have regarded this form of dress as being 'impure' for his people, a sentiment shared by the prophet Mlanjeni. Although Sarhili was prepared to make some diplomatic concessions³¹ to the British, he was opposed to any compromise of his own culture and traditions. Bearing in mind that Sarhili had gained widespread recognition, both from his own people and the British, for his diplomatic skill, why is it that he clung so vociferously to Xhosa culture?

This is the crucial question, in my opinion, and the one that best sums up Sarhili. I have already stated my impressions in other chapters of this dissertation about what was the primary motivating force that drove the paramount in his decision making. It is my

³¹ Sarhili, for example, built a special meeting room close to his own homestead in which to receive colonial authorities as per suggestion by residents in his country.

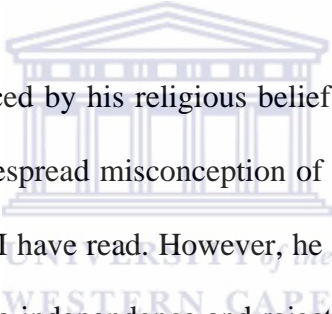
opinion that Sarhili made decisions based on the preservation of his own power. I have motivated this postulation in prior chapters and therefore feel it unnecessary to do so again. However, it is also my position that Sarhili was aware that his position in Xhosa society was justified through the tradition and customs of the amaXhosa and as such, if he wanted to remain unchallenged in his authority he could not allow this culture to be eroded by colonial intervention.

I concede that this impression may seem cynical at first glance. It is conceivable that Sarhili, knowing that he did not want to resist the British on the military front, thought that the maintenance of Xhosa culture was a form of resistance against the colonial advance. However, even within independent Gcalekaland, as early as the 1850's, it became apparent that Xhosa customs were being ignored by the populous as can be evidenced, for example, by the slaughter of cattle by the commoners.³² Sarhili must have realized that any major changes in custom could be tantamount to a *coup de tat* for him. In other words, it is possible to read Sarhili's traditionalist approach as a form of resistance to colonialism. However, it is my position that such a reading is superficial in that it does not take into consideration the consistency of Sarhili's political decisions for the duration of his reign and chooses instead to evaluate the conservatism of the paramount in isolation.

³² As mentioned in chapter 2, commoners were not allowed to slaughter cattle. It could be argued that these cattle had been infected with lungsickness, however, the colonial archive contains several reports of healthy cattle being slaughtered by commoners. Sarhili responded to this slaughter by sentencing more than twenty of his subjects to death but the killings continued unabated.

Introducing Sarhili

This chapter, 'Re-presenting Sarhili', sets out to dispel what I consider erroneous depictions of the paramount, reinforces those portrayals of the Xhosa king in other works that I found to be congruent with my research and also introduce perspectives of Sarhili that I have not encountered in other historical works. I have, to a large extent, kept these impressions focused on the public life of the paramount as it would be difficult to gain any real insight into the private life of the Xhosa king with the sources that are available. So who was Sarhili?



Sarhili was not unduly influenced by his religious beliefs in matters of great concern to his people. This is a fairly widespread misconception of the paramount that has endured in several historical works that I have read. However, he was an ardent Xhosa nationalist who sought to maintain Gcaleka independence and rejected the advances of Christianity. Sarhili was under no illusions when it came to the military might of the British army and sought to avoid any armed conflict with the colonial state. However, this military temperance did not translate itself into disputes with other indigenous factions in the Eastern Cape as Sarhili was prepared to attack these groups if they provoked him. Naturally, Sarhili would not attack a faction that were British subjects as that would be the equivalent to declaring war on the colony itself. In other words, any personification implying that Sarhili was a 'reluctant warrior' would not reflect the reality of his military policy.

Sarhili has been characterized as a king who died in exile while in hiding from the British. To some extent, this statement can be defended. However, my understanding of the term 'exile' does not reflect Sarhili's post-Ngcayecibi War reality as although he was not awarded his old country back by the colonial state he was granted alternative land and did not have to remain outside of British jurisdiction in fear of some colonial reprisal for his involvement in the war. Instead, Sarhili tried to get his a portion of his old land back via diplomatic means and although these attempts were unsuccessful it was a far cry from a broken king eking out an existence in fear of his life on a foreign piece of land.

Sarhili was widely recognized by his contemporaries, Xhosa and British, as having exceptional diplomatic skills. The best way to illustrate this is point out that he was able to maintain Gcaleka independence from the British for more than 25 years longer than any other Xhosa faction was able to. This is even more remarkable when one considers that after the end of the Mlanjeni War in 1853, the colonial authorities regarded Sarhili as the greatest threat to both the colony and peace on the frontier. However, the British were unable to justify any military incursion into Gcalekaland that would crush Gcaleka independence even though many false reports found their way into the colonial archive serving to alert the colony of 'impending' Gcaleka military action.

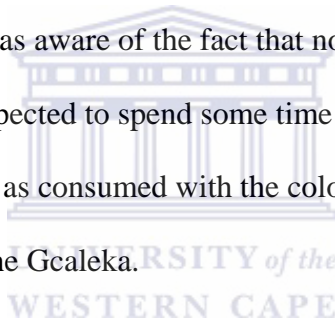
Sarhili was a somewhat insecure ruler. He tended to make his decisions along the lines of 'path of least resistance'. On the two occasions when his rule was placed under severe pressure he bowed on both occasions (the cattle-killing and the 1877 War) to the will of the majority knowing that the consequences of his decisions would have dire

repercussions for himself and his people. These decisions also revealed the primary driving force behind Sarhili's decision making- Sarhili made decisions that were meant to ensure that either his power was preserved or enhanced. If he had contradicted the will of the people it was conceivable that he could have usurped from power all together. Therefore, instead of making the best decision he made the popular one. I am aware that this is a contentious statement but this is the only way I can account for some of the choices the paramount made. I would even argue that Sarhili embraced Xhosa tradition for expedient reasons to establish the legitimacy of his reign and guaranteed the maintenance of his influence. But to arrive at this conclusion we are called upon to read his entry in the colonial archive with a grain of salt.



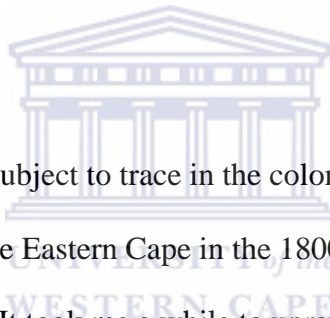
Conclusion

This dissertation started out conceptually to be a biography of the last chief of the amaXhosa. It was initially fuelled by my encounter with the cattle-killing movement of 1856-57 and a desire to understand why any king would preach a form of self-inflicted genocide to his people and what his subsequent life would be like afterwards. I wanted to know how his people reacted to him in the knowledge that his direct endorsement of the movement added so much momentum to the movement that one third of the population died of starvation. I wanted to know how Sarhili was remembered today by the oral traditions of the amaXhosa. I was aware of the fact that no biographical work had been done on the Xhosa king so I expected to spend some time in the archive. What I did not know was that I would become as consumed with the colonial archive as I have with the life of the paramount chief of the Gcaleka.



I have always been aware of the fact the colonial archive has long been regarded as the hegemonic source in historical writing by the academy. I also knew that its contents would be tempered with a specific world view and that I should read it as such. However, I was unprepared for the operability of this source and was forced to withdraw myself from the archive in order to understand the way that it functions. Consequently, I started reading about its functioning in order to prepare for myself a strategy that would allow my work to supersede the obvious pitfalls this source could provide to my writing. There are many strategies one encounters in the academy when reading works based on the colonial archive. I chose to read the archive ‘along the grain’ as I felt that this tactic

would best serve to free my work of the boundaries set by the archive. I attempted to get beyond the limits the archive tries to place not only in what one can say, but also what one cannot. I think that this was the most challenging part of my dissertation. Many of the opinions that I deliver in this thesis are based on what the colonial archive chooses to omit from its margins as opposed to what it includes. I have chosen this route specifically in order to highlight how one is able to think outside of the intellectual confines the colonial archive tries to impose on its reader. It is my opinion that this approach is useful as it combines the legitimacy the colonial archive offers the historical work in the academy while not allowing the archive to curtail any narrative with its own prejudices and knowledge production.



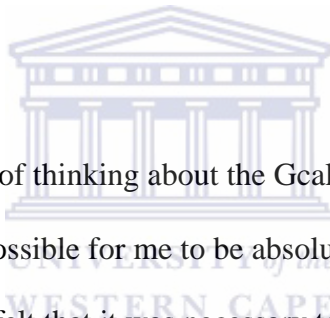
Sarhili was a particularly hard subject to trace in the colonial archive. Bearing in mind the key political figure he was in the Eastern Cape in the 1800s, he is a very sporadic presence within its boundaries. It took me a while to unravel this phenomenon, as I expected him to be everywhere. However, it soon became apparent, having understood that the function of the colonial archive is to support the will of the colonial state that the Xhosa king featured most prominently when he regarded by the colonial officials as being a threat to the welfare of the colonial state. Once I understood this I soon realized the problem the British faced when dealing with Sarhili. Sarhili, being the Xhosa king and the paramount chief of the biggest grouping among the amaXhosa, the Gcaleka, was potentially the greatest threat to the stability of the region and the safety of the colony. However, the first time Sarhili 'led' any military sortie against the British was some forty

one year after he had succeeded his father as king. However, the archive is littered with accounts of impending Gcaleka attacks on the colony as early as the mid 1840s.

This is the problem the colonial archive will always have with a subject such as Sarhili. The archive supports the colonial state unconditionally and thus must reflect a reality that justifies whatever action the state may sanction. The problem with Sarhili arose in that his actions did not fit into 'aggressive native' narrative the colonial archive was reporting. When he did eventually become involved in a war with the colonial military it is because he has lost control of his subjects and even this the colonial archive attempts to skew. Sarhili tends to disappear from the archive when some other Xhosa chief(s) are regarded by the state as posing a greater threat than the Xhosa king. However, even when he disappears it is only to re-appear as a threatening force once again. It is irrelevant whether these reports were reflective of any reality because the state remained all too aware that at some point the independence of the Gcaleka would have to be compromised if the Eastern Cape was to be controlled by Britain. The effectiveness of this ploy is evident in the fact that unless you read significant portions of the colonial archive it is not obvious that this tactic is at work.

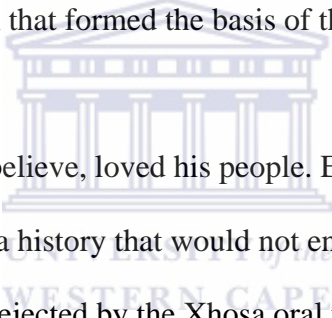
I think the most telling episode in this thesis, when attempting to understand the colonial archive, is found in the second chapter when Harry Smith responded to the Ngqika attacks on military convoys near the Amathole Mountains in 1850. The colonial archive took six years to record the fact that Smith had proposed to restore the old power of the chiefs that had been subjected to colonial magistrates since the 1846 War of the Axe. No

reason is offered why it took the archive so long to record this statement and it is not dealt with by the colonial archive in any way save that Smith is accused of not ‘thinking clearly’. It would be regarded as regression if the colonial authorities had returned power to the chiefs in question, as it would correspond with a decrease in control that the colonial state could exercise over these particular clans. The British colonial project is characterized by the degree of control it tries to exert over its subjects. In other words, such a decision would compromise the wishes of the colonial state. I have argued throughout this dissertation that the colonial archive serves as an apparatus to support the welfare of the state and this example illustrates the operationality of the colonial archive the best.



I have offered alternative ways of thinking about the Gcaleka paramount chief in this dissertation. Although it is impossible for me to be absolutely sure of some of my portrayals of the Xhosa king, I felt that it was necessary to dismiss those characterizations that I felt misrepresented him. I do not find it strange that authors like Mostert and Peires attribute religious beliefs to Sarhili’s endorsement of the cattle-killing. For the greater part, they were viewing Sarhili only in relation to this millenarian event and have probably not applied their minds to other pressured decisions that the paramount was faced with during his reign. I have attempted to paint a broader picture of the life of the Xhosa king in order to make it easier to understand how it came about that the paramount endorsed the mass slaughter.

Bearing in mind that I had never heard of Sarhili prior to my reading about the cattle-killing, I was particularly interested in the how he was portrayed in the public domain. My trip to the Albany Museum realised my worst fears as the settler tradition of the museum continues to influence the way in which the indigenous people of the Eastern Cape are depicted. Sarhili, probably the most influential player on 19th century Eastern Cape political stage, is virtually incidental in the museum's 'Contact and Conflict' display. The exhibition texts that have been produced in relation to the Xhosa king either contradict each other or convey to me a severe lack of serious research. Even the disclaimer that the museum proudly displays before entering the exhibition hall does not justify the incompetent research that formed the basis of the texts of the Xhosa king.



Sarhili, with all his flaws, I do believe, loved his people. Even though the colonial archive has attempted to create a history that would not endear the paramount to his people, this narrative has been rejected by the Xhosa oral tradition. Instead, the Xhosa king is still revered by these oral historians who produce a narrative that not only pays tribute to Sarhili, but also absolves him of any responsibility for his role in the cattle-killing episode. I have argued in the previous chapter that this absolution could have been resultant from some form of resistance to colonialism and apartheid but it must be remembered that for 42 years of Sarhili's reign he would have been the symbol for amaXhosa independence. It should therefore not be surprising that in contemporary Xhosa oral tradition that he is still portrayed in that way. Sarhili, the king who never stop fighting for the independence of his people.



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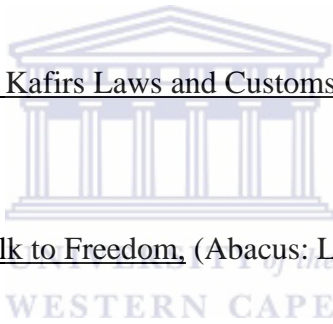
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