

A social and economic history of the African people of Gcalekaland, 1830–1913

Jongikhaya Mvenene*

Introduction¹

The history of the African communities in Gcalekaland – the area between the Nciba (Kei) River and the Mbhashe River – is characterised by the colonial government's efforts to bring these people under colonial rule by crushing the power of the traditional leaders and undermining as "heathen" their culture, customs and traditions. Attempts were made by the governing authorities to extend their power and influence and to spread Western civilisation into Xhosaland. Failing to convert chiefs and kings to Christianity, the missionaries adopted a pro-imperial approach towards Africans. With the intent to spread the Gospel far and wide, the missionaries held the view that unless the power of the chiefs was broken no inroads could be made to Christianise indigenous Africans. This view was in full support of the government's aims of subjugating traditional African chiefdoms and kingdoms. The missionaries and colonial governing authorities worked together in the pursuit of their goals.

The origins and making of amaMfengu: debates amongst historians

For a proper historical perspective on, and understanding of, the origins of the amaMfengu of Tsomo, Ngqamakhwe and Gcuwa, one needs to trace them back to the womb of history and further to pay attention to their relations with King Hintsa and the missionaries from the 1830s onwards. The amaMfengu origins and their forced settlements are traceable to the Mfecane episode which took place in the 1830s. The Mfecane reached its zenith with the political rise and military growth of the amaZulu empire under King Shaka.

The notion of the Mfecane and the origins of the amaMfengu have prompted intense debate and polemical discussion among a wide range of scholars. Orthodox historians maintain that the Mfecane was a great series of wars and raids initiated and perpetrated by the powerful amaZulu king, Shaka, during the 1820s and 1830s.² While claiming that whites stood as helpless

* Jongikhaya Mvenene is a doctoral student in the History Department at Rhodes University. He is a lecturer in both History and Curriculum Studies in History at the Nelson Mandela Campus of Walter Sisulu University. His research interests include an economic history of Butterworth and a social history of abaThembu. Email; jmvenene@wsu.ac.za

1. This article is a revised version of a paper presented at the African Economic History Network held at Stellenbosch University during July 2012. I would like to thank participants for valuable discussion and suggestions and the discussant of the paper, Ellen Hillbom, from Lund University, Sweden, for her insightful comments. I am also grateful for financial support from the Directorate of Research Development, Walter Sisulu University, Mthatha.
2. W.D. Hammond-Tooke, "Segmentation and Fission in Cape Nguni Political Units", *Africa*, 35, 3, 1965, p 145; J.D. Omer-Cooper, *The Zulu Aftermath: A Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Bantu Africa* (Longman, London, 1966), pp 6–7; J. Benyon, *Proconsul and Paramountcy in South Africa, 1806–1910* (University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1980), p 11; J.B. Peires, *The House of Phalo: A History of the Xhosa People in the Days of their Independence* (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1981), pp. 84–85; P. Maylam, *A History*

observers, these historians also advanced the view that these wars were not only precipitated by the rise of Shaka's Zulu empire but were also an outcome of overpopulation in southeast Africa. These wars dislocated the abeNguni communities and rendered them vulnerable to piecemeal attacks. They also caused the displaced refugees to flee over the Drakensberg passes, leaving their lands depopulated and littered with bones of the dead.

The Mfecane was accompanied by deprivation because it simultaneously threw the African chiefdoms and kingdoms into disorder and destroyed their traditional patterns of socio-economic, political and cultural life. These same historians also claim that the Mfecane migrations were accompanied by conquest, raiding, dislocation of tribal organisation and orderly life, social and political disintegration and regeneration.³ Using the Mfecane as the basis for the land division of 1913 and as a justification for segregation which became the political plank on which apartheid policies were built, these historians maintain that migrations and displacements of the abeNguni communities led to tribal land settlement around the depopulated regions. This perspective on the causes, course and consequences of the Mfecane is known as the Zulu-centric approach, because it disregards all other interacting aspects of the Mfecane.

The above historians depict Shaka as a ruthless tyrant, a bloodthirsty and warlike king. He is portrayed as a "cruel monster" who found pleasure in engaging in a mission of "massacre" and "destruction", one of the most ruthless conquerors among the abeNguni traditional leaders.⁴ Brookes and Webb allege that Shaka "considered himself above morality, responsible to none and free from ordinary restraints",⁵ and equate Shaka to Napoleon Bonaparte. However, Shaka's contemporaries provide no recorded evidence of his cruelty.

The 1980s saw a different historical approach to the Mfecane and a historiographical shift emerged. When tracing the causes of the Mfecane the net was cast wider, taking into consideration other factors that may well have contributed to the massive destruction in southeast Africa. The Mfecane was now perceived as being no different from the wars fought between whites and African chiefdoms and kingdoms in the pre- and post-Mfecane era. Historians began to re-examine the Mfecane and came up with new interpretations which gave rise to the current debate on the Mfecane and the emergence of the amaMfengu.⁶ Cobbing precipitated the debate by maintaining that the concept itself was "a twentieth-century invention of European academics",⁷ who were intent on covering up white

of the African People of South Africa: From the Early Iron Age to the 1970s (David Philip, Cape Town, 1986), p 55.

3. J. Guy, *The Heretic: A Study of the Life of John William Colenso, 1814–1833* (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1983), p 37; D. Guise, *Freedom for All* (Natal Publishing Company, Durban, 1993), p 5; J.A. Templeton, *Ideology on a Frontier* (Greenwood Press, London, 1984), p 103.
4. *Capetown Good Hope Government Gazette*, No. 1535, 3 May 1835, Report by W.H. Dutton, Military Secretary, on Hints, 22 May 1835; E.H. Brookes and C. de B. Webb, *A History of Natal* (University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1965), p 11.
5. Brookes and Webb, *History of Natal*, pp 33 and 40.
6. J. Cobbing, "The Case against the Mfecane", Unpublished paper presented to a seminar at the University of the Witwatersrand, 1984, p 9; J. Wright, "Political Mythology and the Making of Natal's Mfecane", *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 23, 2, 1989, p 273.
7. J. Cobbing, "The Mfecane as Alibi: Thoughts on Dithakong and Mbolompo", *Journal of African History*, 29, 2, 1988, p 487.

intrusion into African land by exaggerating black-on-black confrontation while whites stood “helplessly” as observers. Cobbing sees the Mfecane as a historiographical concept which white historians have anthropomorphised. He goes on to write that “the Zulu were never the primary stimulus of forced migrations, and most frequently were not involved at all”.⁸ He maintains that the wars which engulfed southeast Africa at the time were the result of various factors relating to already troubled relations between African societies and white colonisers.

At the core of these wars was the shortage of land and the need for labour on which white farmers were dependent for their sustenance. Cobbing maintains that it was the increase of whites in southeast Africa that led to their excessive demand for land, labour and cattle. He also points to raids by the Griqua (coloured frontier people) for cattle and labour from the 1760s onwards, which gave rise to conflict in the mid-Orange (Gariiep) and lower-Vaal River regions by the 1810s. The Griqua were targeting women and children to sell as labourers or slaves to the colonial farmers. Thus, in Cobbing’s view, the Mfecane originated in the west and spread down to southeast Africa where it impacted on traditional African societies.

Cobbing also attributes the Mfecane to the ivory and slave trade in Delagoa Bay which took place from about 1800 to 1825. As the Portuguese slave traders sought labour, land and cattle they raided their neighbours. These raiding activities led to violence and forced migrations, because the “competition of states in the interior for hunting, cattle, people and land”⁹ had intensified. The outcome was poverty among the affected nations. This perspective on the origin of the turmoil in southeast Africa, inter alia to the slave trade, is known as the anti-Afrocentric approach.

Cobbing disputes any possibility of depopulation of the interior of South Africa.¹⁰ This view is supported by other revisionist historians who also claim that the notion of the “empty land” was propagated by Natal’s settlers to justify the annexation of Natal in 1843.¹¹ These historians view the notion of the empty land as one of the perpetrated myths in the history of South Africa, and regard it as a ploy intended to justify the extension of white power into the land previously inhabited by Africans. They also claim that whites’ negative portrayal of Shaka was pursued for a variety of related reasons. For example, missionaries wanted to convince the British government of a need to annex Natal so that Western civilisation and Christianity could be used to change the character of the “savages” (contemptuously referring to Africans). Merchants wanted to influence the British government to allow traders to establish businesses in Natal. White settlers tried to justify the master-status of whites over Africans. Hence, partly as a result of these white interest groups, the region between the Thukela and the Mzimkhulu Rivers was annexed to the Cape in 1843.

8. Cobbing, “The Mfecane as Alibi”, p 517.

9. N. Parsons, *A New History of Southern Africa* (Macmillan, London, 1993), p 68.

10. J. Cobbing, “Jettisoning the Mfecane with Perestroika”. Unpublished paper presented to a seminar at the University of Cape Town, 1989, p 10.

11. Wright, “Natal’s Mfecane”, p 274; N. Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa: Conquest, Segregation and Apartheid* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1994), pp 13–14; R.H. du Pre, *The Making of Racial Conflict in South Africa* (Skotaville, Johannesburg, 1992), pp 19 and 21.

While Cobbing disputes the notion of the Mfecane, Peires has made a substantial contribution to the debate by coming out strongly against what he terms the “Cobbing hypothesis”.¹² Peires castigates Cobbing as a “reactionary wolf dressed up in the clothing of a progressive sheep”¹³ whose ideas deprive the amaMfengu of a loud and audible voice in the re-enactment of their history. However, Eldredge neatly concludes that “neither great leaders, nor environment and ecology, nor overpopulation, nor trade (including the slave trade) and raiding alone set off the wars and migrations that plagued the area through these decades”.¹⁴

The Mfecane, therefore, should be seen in terms of the complex interplay of environment, society, economy and demands or pressures of the time. It was traders, missionaries and settlers – all pro-imperialists – who depicted Shaka in a poor light. White traders such as Henry Fynn, Nathaniel Isaacs and Francis Farewell and white missionaries like Robert Moffat and John Melvill depicted Shaka as a villain, insane, despotic and merciless for their own interests of urging the British government to annex Natal and Zululand, thereby facilitating trade and evangelism. Isaacs urged Fynn to portray Shaka and the amaZulu in a poor light by making them appear as extremely bloodthirsty.¹⁵ This kind of misrepresenting and depicting of amaZulu in a negative fashion was meant for outside consumption to justify the extension of white control into Zululand.

The effects of the Mfecane were extremely detrimental to Africans. As Guise contends,

the death of probably more than one million Blacks by war, starvation and cannibalism, the dislocation of tribal organization, the total extermination of many minor tribes, and the dislocation of orderly life by roving bands of renegades, account in part for the relative lack of resistance to white settlers.¹⁶

As a result of the Mfecane upheavals, the majority of the remnants of Madzikane and Matiwane sought refuge and merged with the amaXhosa and the abaThembu. This merging did not have the effect of consolidating these kingdoms. Others, however, became “part of the composite group known as the Mfengu”.¹⁷ The amaMfengu were largely drawn from the ranks of the amaBhele, amaHlubi, amaZizi and amaNtlangwini chiefdoms, and first set foot in Xhosaland in about 1822.

Like the Mfecane, the question of the amaMfengu and their origins have become a source of lively debate. Having been precipitated by Cobbing, the

-
12. J.B. Peires, “Matiwane’s Road to Mbolompo: A Reprieve for the Mfecane?”, in C. Hamilton (ed.), *The Mfecane Aftermath* (University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1995), pp 213–239.
 13. Peires, “Matiwane’s Road”, pp 213–239.
 14. E.A. Eldredge, “Sources of Conflict in Southern Africa, c.1800–30”, *Journal of African History*, 33, 1992, p 2.
 15. Du Pre, *Racial Conflict*, p 20; C.A. Hamilton, “An Appetite for the Past: The Recreation of Shaka and the Crisis in Popular Historical Consciousness”, *South African Historical Journal*, 22, 1990, p 144.
 16. Guise, *Freedom for All*, p 5.
 17. M. Ndima, “A History of the Qwathi People from Earliest Times to 1910”, MA dissertation, Rhodes University, 1988, p 42.

amaMfengu debate has been expanded by Webster and Stapleton.¹⁸ Webster denounces the notion that the amaMfengu were the remnants of Shaka's victims from Natal. He disputes any holding of these refugees as bondsmen by King Hintsá. He regards the story of the amaMfengu as devoid of truth and full of exaggeration. He asserts that whites invented the story to justify their extraction of labour and cattle from Hintsá's people whom whites had enslaved. He points out that whites disguised their enslavement of the amaXhosa as philanthropic activity.

The amaMfengu debate aside, it is claimed by whites that King Hintsá once called these fugitive remnants of various clans his "dogs" and expressed surprise that he could not kill them at his pleasure.¹⁹ Hintsá's allusion to these refugees as his "dogs" should not be taken in a literal sense, but should be put in the context of his times. What he could have meant was that the amaMfengu were his subjects who had the duty of providing him with protection in times of war against white intruders and other African kingdoms. The literal interpretation of "dogs" is a gross exaggeration and was used to alienate the refugees from Hintsá.

Wesleyan missionaries influenced the amaMfengu to regard their being given shelter by Hintsá as implying that they were being held in bondage by the amaGcaleka.²⁰ However, King Hintsá was known for maintaining "perfect security of life and property without even condemning any person to death".²¹ As Wilson states, the amaMfengu, though occupying a subordinate position among the amaXhosa, were "certainly not slaves".²² When they left Gcalekaland for the colony on the invitation of Reverend John Ayliff at the end of the Sixth Cape-Xhosa War, the amaMfengu drove off 22 000 head of cattle belonging to the amaGcaleka. They were settled on a land previously owned and occupied by the amaNgqika. As a reward for benefits accrued from whites, the amaMfengu aided the whites in the War of the Axe and that of Mlanjeni.²³ The influence of the Wesleyan missionaries resulted, as was intended, in the deterioration of relations between the amaGcaleka and the amaMfengu.

In a bid to secure the frontier, in 1835 the Cape government settled the amaMfengu along the frontier right from the Ngqushwa River to the Tyhume valley. They were later established north of the Amathole mountains to guard the frontier. While living west of the Nciba River between the Nxuba (Great Fish) and the Nciba Rivers along with the amaNgqika, the amaMfengu were not spared of white expansion into their land. After the War of the Axe of 1846–47 in which the amaNgqika were decisively beaten by whites, the amaNgqika and the amaMfengu were declared to be British subjects.

-
18. A.C. Webster, "Land Expropriation and Labour Extraction under Cape Colonial Rule: The War of 1835 and the 'emancipation' of the Fingo", MA dissertation, Rhodes University, 1991; T.J. Stapleton, "Oral Evidence in a Pseudo-Ethnicity: The Fingo Debate", *History in Africa*, 22, 1995, pp 357–360.
 19. *Government Gazette*, 22 May 1835.
 20. N. Mostert, *Frontiers: The Epic of South Africa's Creation and the Tragedy of the Xhosa* (Jonathan Cape, London, 1992), p 606.
 21. M. Wilson, "Co-operation and Conflict: The Eastern Cape Frontier", in M. Wilson and L. Thompson (eds), *The Oxford History of South Africa*, vol. 1 (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1969), p 250.
 22. Wilson, "Eastern Cape Frontier", p 249.
 23. Wilson, "Eastern Cape Frontier", p 249.

The amaMfengu who came to inhabit Gcuwa, Tsomo and Ngqamakhwe were induced by Cape Governor Sir Philip Wodehouse to leave Kamastone, Peddie and Ovkraal and to settle in what became Mfenguland in 1865. Wodehouse wanted to ease pressure in the amaMfengu locations in British Kaffraria.

AmaMfengu Chiefs Jacob Mavuso and Luzipho had shown aversion to these forced removals and met Sir Walter Currie to question the planned exodus to Gcalekaland. They expressed amaMfengu dissatisfaction towards the colonial government's failure to consult the affected people; particularly that a magistrate was to be imposed on them: "one we know nothing of has already been appointed"²⁴ by the colonial government. Their alternative magistrate was T.A. Cumming, who had been their superintendent. They stated categorically that the amaMfengu were "very much dissatisfied ... and indisposed to move"²⁵ and be forced to settle across the Nciba River.

The objection was based upon the practice that the conditions under which they were "offered land beyond the Kei through their magistrate"²⁶ had not been collectively arrived upon in consultation with their chiefs and headmen. However, Sir Walter Currie dismissed the amaMfengu reasons for objecting to the exodus as "pure inventions, without a word of truth".²⁷ He pointed out that he had warned the amaMfengu that only if they were faithful allies of the government would the government "not in silence see Kreli trample on them".²⁸ What this promise implied was that King Sarhili "would sooner or later give them trouble, as he still called them his father's dogs".²⁹ Alluding to considerable opposition posed by amaMfengu towards the exodus, Currie described them as being composed "of so many remnants of tribes [who] want organization and a white chief to prevent quarrelling with each other".³⁰ However, he estimated their military strength to be "equal to that of Kreli and Sandile together".³¹

Despite all these challenges, Currie relocated approximately 40 000 amaMfengu to Gcalekaland in 1865. About 100 of those who belonged to the Wesleyan Church were settled at Tsomo, while the rest were placed at Ngqamakhwe and Gcuwa.³²

-
24. Cape Parliamentary Papers (hereafter CPP), Correspondence with Reference to the Principles, Conditions and Detailed Arrangements on which the Fingo Exodus has been Carried out, A 14 (1867), Chief Jacob Mavuso of the Victoria amaMfengu to W.M.F. Liddle, Civil Commissioner, Victoria East, Alice, 21 June 1865, p 5.
 25. CPP, Correspondence with Reference to the Principles, Conditions and Detailed Arrangements on which the Fingo Exodus has been Carried out, A 14 (1867), W.M.F. Liddle to R. Southey, Colonial Secretary, 21 June 1865, p 6.
 26. Liddle to Southey, 21 June 1865, p 6.
 27. CPP, Correspondence with Reference to the Principles, Conditions and Detailed Arrangements on which the Fingo Exodus has been Carried out, A 14 (1867), W. Currie to R. Southey, Colonial Secretary, 28 July 1865, p 5.
 28. Currie to Southey, 28 July 1865, p 5.
 29. Currie to Southey, 28 July 1865, p 6.
 30. Currie to Southey, 28 July 1865, p 6.
 31. Currie to Southey, 28 July 1865, p 7.
 32. CPP, Correspondence with Reference to the Principles, Conditions and Detailed Arrangements on which the Fingo Exodus has been Carried out, A 14 (1867), W. Currie to R. Southey, Colonial Secretary, 25 August 1865, p 7.

The history of the origins, migrations and eventual establishment of the amaMfengu in central Gcalekaland and the debates that characterise their historiography aside, it is worth paying attention to the War of Ngcayechibi (1877–78) and its effects on the amaGcaleka and amaNgqika. The amaNgqika were resettled in Centane by the colonial government. The colonial assault on King Sarhili is also examined.

The social and economic history of the amaXhosa, 1877–1898

The War of Ngcayechibi had far-reaching results for the amaXhosa. The war is attributed to a number of factors. De Kiewiet maintains that it was “the severe drought of 1876 and 1877 [which] brought such adversity and was ultimately responsible for the outbreak of the war”.³³ Sarhili, having been rendered politically and militarily impotent by Grey and Wodehouse, could not witness his subordinate traditional leaders being reduced to nothingness by the amaMfengu in Gcuwa. Sarhili’s father had suffered tragic death at the hands of Southey – the perennial and over a century-old challenge and cause for vengeance. Added to this was his people’s loss of land and the British policy of dispossession and extension of colonial power and influence in Gcalekaland, all of which alienated Sarhili even further from the colonial government.³⁴ It was one of a series of devastating heavy blows that left Sarhili marooned in a small portion of his former land in eastern Gcalekaland where 66 000 amaGcaleka were sandwiched into a small portion of some 1 600 square miles, notwithstanding the appointment of a British resident in 1865 to take care of the amaGcaleka and “keep an eye” on Sarhili.

The War of Ngcayechibi was prompted by the amaGcaleka desire to regain their land taken by the Cape government and given to the loyal amaMfengu.³⁵ This war was an attempt by African kingdoms and chiefdoms to check the tide of white control. The amaXhosa and some abaThembu took up arms as a last desperate attempt to restore their autonomy and independence. During the war the divisive and disruptive role of white magistrates became apparent. Saunders qualifies the war as “the last attempt by an African group on the Cape eastern frontier, the Gcaleka, to escape having white rule thrust upon it”.³⁶

The consequences of the war were fatal for the amaXhosa. The majority of the amaNgqika west of the Nciba River lost their land to white farmers. Hence, Qumrha (Kongha), Cumakala (Stutterheim), Qonce (King William’s Town), East London and Cathcart were converted by the colonial authorities into white farms, and thereby served as a white man’s corridor dividing the amaNgqika from the amaGcaleka. These lands became centres of white settlement. The displaced amaNgqika were resettled in Centane, where the last Battle of Centane was fought on 7 February 1878, followed by the defeat of the forces of Chief Sandile and King Sarhili by Captain Upcher who was in command of the Centane military post. In the Battle of Centane 300 amaXhosa died. On the colonial side led by

33. C.W. de Kiewiet, *The Imperial Factor in South Africa* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1937), p 149.

34. M.W. Spicer, “The War of Ngcayechibi, 1877–78”, MA dissertation, Rhodes University, 1978, p 22.

35. Wilson, “Eastern Cape Frontier”, p 249.

36. C.C. Saunders, *The Annexation of the Transkeian Territories, Archives Year Book, 1976* (Government Printer, Pretoria, 1978), p 32.

Upcher, only two amaMfengu were killed and seven were wounded; two whites were wounded.

After the war, writes Wilson, the colonial forces seized “not less than 15 000 cattle and 20 000 sheep”³⁷ from the amaXhosa. Because the amaXhosa mainly depended for their sustenance on cattle, milk and meat, the massive loss of cattle led to famine, starvation and abject poverty. Even though a large number of the amaXhosa who were mineworkers in Kimberley from 1867 onwards had acquired guns, they were vanquished because when the war broke out they were already militarily weak and virtually powerless.³⁸

Sarhili’s land was divided into Gatyana and Dutywa districts before being incorporated into Dutywa and Mfenguland to become Transkei under the chief magistracy of Captain Matthew S. Blyth in September 1878. Mfenguland was divided into Gcuwa, Ngqamakhwe and Tsomo sub-magistracies. Gcuwa was placed under the magistracy of T.A. King. A Mr Gladwin became the magistrate of Ngqamakhwe, while Mr Pattle was appointed as the magistrate of Tsomo. However, the war being one of the bloodiest frontier conflicts, it quickened the pace of white expansionism and control of the amaXhosa kingdom. The Cape administration that was imposed upon Gcalekaland, Bomvanaland and Thembuland had no legal validity and therefore required that formal annexation be effected forthwith. Nevertheless, the Ninth Cape-Xhosa War deflated the Cape government’s motive of proceeding with annexation, and it was only after 1884 that the Cape trod slowly.

In terms of Act No. 3 of 1885, Gcalekaland, Bomvanaland and Thembuland were annexed to the Cape Colony. It should be noted that besides the annexation of Gcalekaland, the process of annexation of African kingdoms and chiefdoms was completed with the annexation of Mpondoland in 1894. As an attempt by the government to diminish kingship and chiefly control, the annexationist policy can be understood in the context of J.C. Warner, British resident in the Transkeian Territory (1865–69), who held that “until the power of the chiefs was completely broken, Christianity and civilization ... [will only] make a small advance among the Bantu”.³⁹ Clearly, the motive behind embarking on the annexation of African kingdoms was that annexation “will bring the tribes ... under the direct control and administration of the Colonial Government”.⁴⁰

In accordance with this Act, magistrates were given jurisdiction in all civil cases affecting the amaXhosa. The governor was vested with power to allot land which was to be divided into districts or wards. Each district was to be under a government-appointed headman who was responsible not to the amaXhosa chief or king, but to the chief magistrate. It was the headman who recommended to the chief magistrate who should be allotted land. Those allotted land had to pay annual hut tax to the magistrate. These strategies were among a series of colonial assaults on traditionalism and chiefly control.

37. Wilson, “Eastern Cape Frontier”, p 242.

38. Wilson, “Eastern Cape Frontier”, p 252.

39. J.W. Macquarrie (ed.), *The Reminiscences of Sir Walter Stanford, vol. 2, 1885–1929* (Van Riebeeck Society, Cape Town, 1962), p 126.

40. Chief Magistrate Thembuland 2/284, Papers Received from the Secretary of Native Affairs, Under-Secretary for Native Affairs (hereafter USNA) to Chief Magistrate Transkei (hereafter CMT), 29 April 1885, p 14.

It was common practice that a magistrate could administer “justice according to the best of his judgement”.⁴¹ The role played by magistrates was a clear indication that in all probability they were really political agents of the colonial government. Being the representative of the colonial government a resident magistrate, it was claimed, was looked upon as a “chief” by Africans.⁴²

The colonial government used headmen as its instruments of extending colonial rule over the amaXhosa. In addition to being detectives, settling disputes and collecting hut tax in their locations, government-appointed headmen were generally instructed to keep the “authorities informed of all matters connected with the administration of the people in their charge”.⁴³ One can deduce from the duties of magistrates and government-paid headmen that the power of the traditional kings and chiefs was completely shattered by 1885. Kings and chiefs were relegated to the level of government-paid servants. Their influence among their subjects declined and white magistrates gained the upper hand, dominating the kings and chiefs.⁴⁴

When the last of the independent southern abeNguni kingdoms and chiefdoms had been annexed in 1894, the Cape authorities did not open Transkei to large-scale white settlement. Instead, Transkei was transformed by the Cape government into a labour pool from which white farmers and mine owners could procure cheap black labour. Furthermore, Transkei was also used as a place to dump “undesirable” Africans from British Kaffraria (Ciskei since 1864). The fact that Transkei, unlike the present-day Ciskei, was preponderantly inhabited by Africans who had for so long lived on their land, facilitated the Cape authorities’ move to use Transkei as a labour reserve for white farmers and mine owners.

Thus, Africans were weaned from their traditional economic unit and were turned into wage earners within a money-based economy. Their drifting to farms and the mines in search of employment was likely, as it later did, to strain the ties that had held Africans coherently. Their social link with their families and traditional leaders was in many cases severely curtailed. This was accompanied by marked detribalisation and a corresponding contempt for their culture and traditions. In some cases, family ties were broken, particularly within married couples.

The impact of the rinderpest, the South African War and the Land Act

The outbreak of the rinderpest epidemic of 1896–97 was an economic disaster and a heavy blow to the amaXhosa and amaMfengu. It promoted differentiation and the unequal distribution of available economic resources and thus undermined peasant independence on herding and farming in favour of the capitalist economy. The rinderpest debilitated the peasants’ economic, social and cultural integrity. In this way, it sapped the economic and social sustenance of Africans, because most peasants were forced to exchange the cattle that had survived the epidemic for

41. CPP, Cape of Good Hope Debates in the Legislative Council, 15 April 1886, p 21.

42. Cape Archives, G27, 1873–74, Cape of Good Hope Blue Book on Native Affairs, Thomas R. Cole, Civil Commissioner, to Secretary for Native Affairs, 30 March 1874, p 58.

43. Chief Magistrate Tembuland 2/284, Papers Received from the Secretary of Native Affairs, USNA to CMT, 29 April 1885, p 14.

44. W.D. Hammond-Tooke, “Chieftainship in Transkeian Political Development”, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 2, 4, 1964, p 516.

grain with white traders. Bundy makes the following observation about the plight of the people, writing that “in some districts large sections of the population were forced into desperate straits and had to live on roots”.⁴⁵

The rinderpest resulted in huge loss of cattle and a consequent severe economic setback for the amaXhosa and amaMfengu. Cattle lost to the epidemic reduced their herds by approximately 80–90 percent. The depletion of cattle made ploughing and production of meat, milk, cow hides and grain impossible for the peasants.⁴⁶ This meant that peasants were compelled to leave their families in the care of their wives and to seek jobs in the mining and farming sector, thereby becoming dependent on wage-labour.

An unsubstantiated myth emerged among Africans that “the rinderpest was deliberately spread by whites to induce poverty and compel Africans” to seek jobs and work for low wages in the labour market.⁴⁷ Even although such beliefs have no factual basis, they contain a grain of symbolic truth when assessed in terms of the catastrophic outcome of the rinderpest on the economic wellbeing of African peasants. Viewed against the backdrop of missionary predictions and wishes, it can be argued that “the rumours accurately reflected motives, if not means”.⁴⁸ This view is borne out in the 1898–99 missionary reports compiled by Charles Taberer who observed:

... with the natives, the possession of great numbers of cattle is as a rule conducive to idleness. After the fields are planted, they have little to do until harvest time if they have plenty of milk and a supply of grain on hand from the previous season's crops. Now however, we have them going off in all directions to earn money to provide for their families.⁴⁹

This account suggests the general tendency harboured by the missionaries towards the tragic results of the epidemic.

In the same vein, the magistrate of Centane (Kentani), echoing the sentiments of Taberer, evinced satisfaction when pointing out that loss of cattle by peasants meant loss of economic security which rendered them less independent and more prone to seek work in the labour market.⁵⁰ Bishop Key noted:

the rinderpest has done a great deal to wean the people from their old traditions of heathenism, as cattle have always been the foundation of their whole system, social, political, and to a greater extent religious; and although they are rapidly collecting cattle again ... they will never be to them what they were in the past.⁵¹

The outbreak of the South African War (1899–1902) was another slap in the face for the amaXhosa nation. The war adversely affected the economic base of

-
45. C. Bundy, “The Transkei Peasantry, c. 1890–1914: ‘Passing through a Period of Stress’”, in R. Palmer and N. Parsons (eds), *The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa* (Heinemann, London, 1978), p 207.
 46. C. van Onselen, “Reactions to Rinderpest in Southern Africa, 1896–97”, *Journal of African History*, 13, 1972, p 78.
 47. Van Onselen, “Reactions to Rinderpest”, p 477.
 48. Bundy, “Transkei Peasantry”, p 205.
 49. Cape Archives, G 42, Cape of Good Hope Blue Book on Native Affairs, United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (hereafter USPG), 1898, p 13.
 50. Cape Archives, G 31, Cape of Good Hope Blue Book on Native Affairs, USPG, 1899, p 81.
 51. Cape Archives, G 9, Cape of Good Hope Blue Book on Native Affairs, USPG, 1894, p 25.

peasants, some of whom had lost their jobs and others earned low wages on the diamond and gold mines. When the war broke out they were still reeling from the economic decline caused by the rinderpest epidemic in which many of their herds had been decimated.⁵² The amaXhosa participated in the war in the hope that they would be given equal political rights with whites when peace was declared. The British had made vague promises of a “better deal” which Africans had seen as a post-war extension of the non-racial franchise to the former Boer republics; the regaining of access to land; and the liberation of Africans from Boer slavery. Britain also promised Africans that the war was necessary because it marked “an end to the oppressive treatment”⁵³ of Africans by the Boers which had been disgraceful, brutal and unworthy of a civilised power. Having put the Boers in a poor light and increasingly raised Africans’ hopes, after the cessation of the war, Britain did not honour its promises.

The amaXhosa and the amaMfengu participated in the war which was initially described by the two Boer republics and Britain as being a “white man’s war”. They participated as combatants and messengers, scouts, wagon-drivers, convoy guards, dispatch riders, watchmen in blockhouses, firewood collectors and trench diggers. They also served as stretcher bearers, labourers, servants and attendants for the horses.

December 1899 saw the amaXhosa, the amaMfengu and the abaThembu levies defending Transkei from the Boer commandos who sought to ravage the Transkei. Approximately 100 000 Africans aided the British on the borders of Transkei, while in the Transvaal about 10 000 Africans rendered services to the Boers.⁵⁴ Significantly, many levies were drawn from Gatyana, Gcuwa, Ngcobo and Xhalanga. The devastating effects of the war on both sides is clear from the fact that approximately 22 000 Britons died during the war, while 26 000 Boer women and children and 14 000 Africans perished in the concentration camps.⁵⁵ In this way, the South African War caused immense “suffering to [both] whites and blacks”.⁵⁶

On the economic front, Africans also bore the brunt of wage decreases, closure of mines and unemployment. In 1900, African wages were reduced to 20 shillings a month. There was a slight rise to 31 shillings a month in 1902. The year 1903 saw another rise to 45 shillings and a marked escalation of the number of mine workers. However, the onset of an economic depression, drought and livestock diseases in 1904 caused a sharp decline in African wages. Thus, the war had wider repercussions for twentieth-century South Africa and impacted negatively on the amaXhosa, amaMfengu and the abaThembu, being destructive of both life and property. It has been argued that for Africans the South African War was disastrous while for whites it was curative. Instead of promoting unity among Africans, the war “led to divisions within communities and families”.⁵⁷

52. Cape Archives, G 25, Cape of Good Hope Blue Book on Native Affairs, USPG, 1902, p 8; USPG, G 42, 1898, p 18.

53. P. Warwick, *Black People and the South African War, 1899–1902* (Cambridge University Press, London, 1983), p 11.

54. J. Pampallis, *Foundations of the New South Africa* (Maskew Miller, Cape Town, 1991), p 46.

55. Warwick, *South African War*, pp 60–61.

56. Worden, *Modern South Africa*, p 30.

57. Worden, *Modern South Africa*, p 29.

It was another heavy blow that the Union of South Africa government, in its determination and sustained commitment to counteract and deal with the “swart gevaar” passed the Natives Land Act, No. 27 of 1913. This Act promoted the migrant labour system and thus destroyed the “economic self-sufficiency”⁵⁸ of the reserves and eroded the last vestiges of political independence of the amaXhosa. The Natives Land Act was designed to deprive Africans of the right to own land outside the reserves. Similarly, whites were barred from buying land in the reserves. Africans were restricted to 8 percent of South Africa’s land surface. This was raised to 13 percent in 1936. Yet, of the total South African population of 5 973 394 at the time, Africans numbered 4 019 006 (67.3 percent). The number of whites was 1 276 242 (21.4 percent); that of coloured people 525 943 (8.8 percent); and there were 152 203 people of Indian descent (2.5 percent).

It was paradoxical that the majority of South Africans, who formed 67.3 percent of the population were given such a small percentage of land. In terms of the Natives Land Act, Africans were barred from buying land in so-called “white areas”; they had to live in the overcrowded reserves.⁵⁹ As these reserves could not support them owing to increased soil erosion and overgrazing, Africans had to move to white areas in search of work. Even there they could only stay outside the reserves if they were providing labour for whites. As far back as the cattle killing episode in the 1850s the amaXhosa had lost their independence; they were now driven into the overcrowded, barren and impoverished reserves and obliged to become wage labourers.⁶⁰

Judging from the aims of the Native Land Act, it can be argued that this Act was one of the first pieces of segregation legislation passed by the Union of South Africa government designed to cripple Africans economically. It was one of the Union’s attempts to entrench white supremacy over Africans. Having had no voice in the planning, formation and administration of the Union, Africans found themselves a pariah in their fatherland. The Natives Land Act was the basis for territorial segregation and, like subsequent legislation passed by successive white governments it ensured “the subordination of traditional chiefly power to the central government”.⁶¹

Conclusion

The interference of the colonial government and the missionaries in amaGcaleka relations with the amaMfengu caused the downfall of the amaGcaleka. The War of Ngcayechibi left the amaGcaleka badly bruised because it had sapped their economic and political power. The social, cultural and economic impact of the rinderpest proved tragic for the amaXhosa and amaMfengu who had to resort to the labour market to subsist, meet their cash demands for taxes, debts, and other consumption needs. Linked to this were the economic effects of the South African War and the Natives Land Act of 1913.

58. A. Stadler, *The Political Economy of Modern South Africa* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1987), p 129.

59. Stadler, *Political Economy*, p 129.

60. Guise, *Freedom for All*, p 11.

61. Stadler, *Political Economy*, p 129.

Abstract

This article examines the history of the people of Gcalekaland from the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. Primacy is given to factors which led to abject poverty and the subjection of the Gcaleka kingdom by the colonial governing authorities, such as the social and economic consequences of the wars of dispossession; the interference of the colonial government and the missionaries in the relations between amaGcaleka and amaMfengu; the rinderpest of 1896–97; the South African War of 1899–1902; and the Natives Land Act of 1913. All these factors contributed to the demise of the House of Gcaleka.

Keywords: AmaGcaleka; amaMfengu; Nciba River; Mbhashe River, rinderpest, abject poverty.

Opsomming

‘n Sosiale en ekonomiese geskiedenis van die Afrikane van Gcalekaland, 1830–1913

Hierdie artikel ondersoek die geskiedenis van die Gcalekaland se mense vanaf die negentiende eeu tot die vroeër deel van die twintigste eeu. Die fokus val op die faktore wat tot kruipend armoede en die onderdanigheid van die Gcaleka koningryk deur die koloniale regering gelei het, soos die sosiale en ekonomiese gevolge van die oorloë van onteining; die tussenkoms van die koloniale regering en die sendelinge in die verwantskap tussen amaGcaleka en amaMfengu; die runderpes van 1896-97; die Suid-Afrikaanse Oorlog van 1899-1902; en die “Wet of Naturelleground” van 1913. Hierdie faktore het tot die ondergang van die Huis van Gcaleka bygedra.

Sleutelwoorde: AmaGcaleka; amaMfengu; Nciba-rivier; Mbhashe-rivier; runderpes; volslae armoede.