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“Maybe Freedom Will Come from You”: Christian Prophecies and Rumors in the Development of Rural Resistance in South Africa, 1948-1961*

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Abstract

In South Africa Christian teachings and texts informed African political activity in the 1950s and 1960s particularly in the rural areas, and rumors predicting both real revolts and fantastic interventions were common. While recent scholarship concerning supernatural beliefs in African political life often analyzes the impact of fears about witchcraft or faith in the ancestors, Christianity of various types was also a significant influence on people's actions. This paper analyzes the historical background to the revolt against apartheid policies that developed in the Transkeian region of the eastern Cape of South Africa in the mid-twentieth century and pays special attention to the role of Christian influences. Christianity was consequential both in terms of how people understood their grievances and also in the kinds of predictions they made about their political future. Rumors and religion combined with material grievances to create a prophetic moment in which rebellion became a moral choice.

Keywords

South Africa, political revolt, religious conversion, rumors and prophecies

Introduction

The revolt that developed in the Transkeian region of the Eastern Cape in the late 1950s and early 1960s was an armed rebellion against the South African apartheid state. The revolt is often called the Mpondo Revolt because some of the more dramatic acts of rebellion occurred in the eastern (Mpondoland) districts of the Transkei, but in fact there was armed resistance in all districts of the Transkei, some of it before the outbreak in the Mpondo districts. Unrest in the Transkei followed violent outbreaks in other regions of the country, particularly in Sekhukhuneland in the 1940s and Zeerust and Natal in the 1950s. It also built on the political opposition led by the African National Congress and other political groups that was developing in the

major urban areas of the Rand and in Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, East London, and Durban. In the context of ongoing unrest and harsh state repression, people learned their news and spread their plans through word of mouth. Rumors flourished in this atmosphere of incipient confrontation: people reported military sightings and arms caches, and they prophesied justice, both political and eternal.¹

The material motivations behind the unrest in the rural areas were varied, although Africans had many grievances in common. The predominantly rural population of the Transkei had become increasingly impoverished over the years and had seen its few political rights whittled away by the segregationist and then apartheid state. People did not see these grievances as isolated from their religious lives, however. Religion and ideas about the intervention of various supernatural actors and forces were part of a web of social relations out of which emerged both specific grievances as well as strategies for rectifying those grievances through opposition to state policies. Some African rebels labeled black and white state officials as witches, for example, and looked to both their ancestors and to old ways of punishing witches to attack the state. Other rebels explicitly claimed a moral authority derived from Christianity as a justification for resistance and to suggest a favorable and preordained outcome to the political struggle.

Historically rumor and religion have had much in common in colonized Africa. While churches as institutions have often provided significant social and material support for communities, people's faith in the existence of divine justice, like their faith in rumors, was based on convictions that unseen actors were at work in the world and their designs would soon be revealed. Religious interpretations of events and political rumors arose out of the suppositions that many Africans made about their world, a world in which religion and politics were not distinct categories.² The meanings that people ascribed to religious imagery in the highly politicized context of rebellion in the Transkei could shift (along with the political fortunes of the revolt) from being a source of solace for victims of political oppression to being a call to arms in a righteous struggle. Rumor and religion often spoke elliptically about political power, but they were also often dangerously on point.³

Christian teachings and texts informed African political activity in South Africa in the 1950s and 1960s particularly in the rural areas, and rumors predicting both real revolts and fantastic interventions were common. While recent scholarship concerning supernatural beliefs in African political life often analyzes the impact of fears of witchcraft or of faith in the protection offered by ancestors, beliefs in supernatural actors also included adherence to Christianity of various denominations.⁴ In the South African case in the mid-

twentieth century, people combined Christianity with older ideas about their ancestors, and their certitude about the efficacy of prayer to a Christian God did not necessarily diminish their sense of the threat of witchcraft. Christian Africans integrated their varied experiences as migrant laborers, mission school pupils, and market farmers into the culture they had learned from their elders. As a result, religious convictions were not neatly walled off from people's political and social aspirations, and political discussions were laced with references to the supernatural.

Politicized Christianity had been very much a part of mainstream African nationalism in South Africa and elsewhere, but violence predicated on Christian morality in the rural areas was a significant departure from its use in, for example, founding the African National Congress (ANC), or in the petitions for political rights that characterized the moderate tactics of the ANC and other nationalist organizations through the mid-1940s.⁵ Christianity—particularly membership in the mainstream mission churches—had been a hallmark of reformist liberal politics among both whites and blacks through the 1940s, and participation in mission churches and schools was high in many districts of the overwhelmingly rural Transkei. Ethiopian and Zionist churches (also called separatist churches) were also present in these districts but were often politically quietist.⁶ But the distinctions between the particular denominations of Christianity were not terribly important, as David Chidester notes: “The spiritual politics of the African National Congress did not depend upon the legitimation provided by religious leaders or organizations in South Africa. Rather, the ANC’s spiritual politics was grounded in a detailed, coherent, and compelling worldview in which politics and religion overlapped.”⁷

The easternmost Mpondoland districts had never had a strong presence of mainstream mission churches, and those separatist churches that existed had relatively small congregations through the 1950s.⁸ Yet during the 1950s and 1960s some African Christians in the region took a more martial approach toward overthrowing the state. They held assemblies that were partly prayer meetings and partly political gatherings. The news of these meetings and rumors of the reprisals in store for those who did not comply with rebel demands outpaced activists’ own efforts to organize the revolt. This martial use of religion built on earlier religious and political movements in the eastern Cape region, and combined with the serious material grievances of the African population to create a situation similar to what historian Marcia Wright called, in her discussion of the maji-maji revolt in German Tanganyika, a prophetic moment—a moment when spiritually based revolt provided an opportunity to transcend a host of social, political, and economic ills. This

paper explores the connections between political violence and morality based on religion as the revolt in the Transkei developed.⁹

'Maybe Freedom Will Come from You'

An advertisement in the newspaper *Inkundla ya Bantu (Bantu Forum)* in 1948 gave notice of an upcoming meeting of the Transkei African National Congress. The ad was indirect in some of its language, but obliquely criticized the liberal-Christian stance of official ANC policies up to that point. It read: 'Transkei African National Congress. No race can uplift another, if it is so, let us be on our feet. No kraal [homestead] can be established without money being expended, if it be so, then let us be ready to lose'. After this call to action, the ad suggested various membership fees (payable in advance), as well as some topics for discussion at the meeting ('What has become of hereditary chiefs?'). The meeting was to be held at a school in Idutywa district, an area populated mainly by Africans who self-identified ethnically as Gcaleka or as Ndlambe, and the advertisement made specific historical and religious references to its target audience: 'Do not be surprised Gcalekas and you Mandlambe, the prophet Ntsikana began at Hohita with you. Nxele came from you. The Bible came from you. Nongqause in 1856-7 came from you. Maybe freedom will come from you'.¹⁰

The grouping together of Ntsikana, Nxele, Nongqause, and the Bible as products of local African culture is suggestive of the significance of religious prophecy to political thought. Ntsikana was well known as one of the earliest Xhosa (particularly Gcaleka) converts to Christianity. He came from a socially prominent background as a member of a family of hereditary counselors to independent chiefs. Growing up on the frontier between the expanding Cape Colony and the still-independent African states on the colony's eastern border in the late 1700s, he encountered Christian missionaries and began having religious visions himself.¹¹ He shortly thereafter converted, and began singing verses that eventually became known as his 'Great Hymn'. A Wesleyan missionary in 1826 remarked on the broad influence that the hymn had on the African population in the region east of the Kei River:

It is true some of the people sing a native hymn to the praises of Utixo, or God, but this they have learnt from an extraordinary Man [one word illegible] who died a few years ago and was considered by the Kaffers [Xhosa-speaking Africans] as a Prophet. . . . In particular he contrived to compose a native hymn . . . and having himself set it to a strangely affecting air, he sang and taught it to the people. This hymn is frequently sung at the beginning of our services at Wesleyville. Wherever we have travelled we have found a knowledge of his hymn and tune have been preserved.¹²

The historian Janet Hodgson notes that the hymn revealed Ntsikana's synthesis of Christian and African cultural identities, and she also describes him as a prophet in the Old Testament sense, 'who affirms the action of God in the historical process'.¹³ Yet although Ntsikana became a critic of the growing influence of broader Western culture—as distinct from Christianity—on African society, he was not a revolutionary in the sense of promoting armed conflict against the Cape Colony.

Nxele (also known as Makana, Makhanda, or Links) is a historical figure often paired with Ntsikana. Where Ntsikana was moderate politically, Nxele was more radical.¹⁴ Nxele lived at the same time and in the same region as Ntsikana, and he too heard Christian preaching and had visions. Although he was initially an apparently orthodox Christian convert, Nxele gradually became more than just a critic of Western cultural influences and the expansion of the Cape Colony: by 1819 he was a significant diviner or ritual specialist for the Rharhabe chiefdoms. The historian Helen Bradford depicts Nxele/Makhanda as a cultural *bricoleur* whose religious fervor attracted followers and inspired them to attack the white colonial settlement of Grahamstown on the frontier. Bradford notes that one central aspect of Nxele/Makhanda's teachings was to define the white settlers as wild animals who threatened African settlements and livestock. This depiction of whites as predators captured their essentially threatening nature and legitimated the eradication of the threat. A large group of Africans, including men, women, and children, marched on Grahamstown in April 1819: 'As hunters, [Xhosa] men possessed the right to kill "wild animals" with weapons. They did not expect to do so. English guns, prophesied Makhanda, would harm no one'.¹⁵ Thus the attack on Grahamstown was not a raid in the conventional military sense; it was instead a culturally transformative act that emerged as the logical endpoint of a chain of religious thinking. The English were wild animals and the Xhosa were a cultural-agricultural force that was using violence morally to reclaim the land. When the attack failed, Nxele/Makhanda was captured, tried, and exiled to Robben Island by the colonial state, and the colonial state transformed Xhosa chiefdoms into subject populations. Nxele/Makhanda died in an attempt to escape his prison, but among successive generations he remained a potent political figure, both as a symbol of resistance and as an ancestor who had real power in the living world among Africans struggling to regain their cultural and political independence.

The 1948 advertisement's use of Nxele invoked this political memory, and it also drew a distinctive connection between Nxele and Nongqawuse as visionary leaders. Nongqawuse was a young woman whose prophecies had momentous political impact in the mid-1850s. The apocalyptic content of her visions was part of what made her message so attractive to African cattle

owners who had lost their land to encroaching white settlement and watched their cattle die, and to chiefs who had seen their power erode.¹⁶ She too had visions in which ancestors spoke to her of an imminent return of all dead people (sometimes dubbed 'Russians', probably because of rumors of the contemporaneous Crimean War) and their herds of cattle who would usher in a new world. But before this could happen, the living had to sacrifice all of their own cattle and destroy their grain stores. The dead would then be resurrected to create a new, more just social order, displacing the current unstable frontier and sweeping away non-believers. Nongqawuse and her visions were supported by several significant chiefs who enforced her calls for cattle slaughter. The Christian inflections of Nongqawuse's visions, particularly the incorporation of resurrection and redemption, showed the impact of Christianity both on independent African thought and on political outcomes.¹⁷ When the end of the world prophesied by Nongqawuse did not come to pass, the ensuing famine decimated and demoralized the chiefdoms on the frontier. Following this disastrous outcome, 'a Nongqawuse tale' entered the South African lexicon as a caution against misplaced reliance on prophesied change, but the 1948 advertisement hinted at a different and more uplifting interpretation of her prophecies.

Christianity was as important to the political thought of Africans in the 1940s and 1950s as it had been in the nineteenth century, as demonstrated in the 1948 advertisement. The ad suggests that the Bible had also emerged from the Gcaleka, a claim that is a little more obscure than the claims about Ntsikana, Nxele, and Nongqawuse. Fully translated into Xhosa by the late 1850s, the Bible was an integral part of mission education for African students. Mission schools were common and well attended in most of the Transkeian districts by the early 1940s: there were over 1200 primary schools and approximately 130,000 students enrolled (about 9 percent of the total African population of the Transkei).¹⁸ As a result, the meaning of biblical allusions would have been transparent for much of the reading public. Old Testament stories were also the staples of sermons in both separatist and mainstream churches, making such allusions equally powerful for many non-literate members of their congregations.¹⁹ The Bible's authoritative stories illustrated the efficacy of God's interventions and themselves figured in several of the visions of both the Israelite leader Enoch Mgijima and the prophet Nontetha Nkwenkwe in the eastern Cape in the late 1910s and early 1920s.²⁰ Moreover, from the earliest missionary contacts with southern Africans up through the 1930s, white commentators were fond of noting similarities between southern African religious beliefs and those of the ancient Hebrews in the Bible. These commentators included the former chief magistrate of the

Transkei W. T. Brownlee, who suggested that there must have been trade contacts between southern Africans and the ancient Phoenicians and Hebrews.²¹ While Brownlee did not conclude that southern Africans were descended from Hebrew traders, he did suggest that contacts were extensive and cultural traits shared. As fanciful as these ideas now seem, they may have been widely discussed among both Africans and whites in the first half of the twentieth century, and may account for the advertisement's assertion that the Bible had come from the local African population. More significantly, the assertion that the Bible was of southern African origin can be read as an assertion of Africans' moral authority and agency; they were (or could be) the authors of a new, moral world.

A Prophetic Moment

Prophecies about an imminent, apocalyptic change in the world were common in the first half of the twentieth century, making the invocation of the Bible as political truth more resonant to those who read the ad placed by the Transkeian branch of the ANC. The wealth of rumors and prophecies may have been evidence of a 'prophetic moment' as in Marcia Wright's use of the term. The prophecy of Kinjikitile that helped spark the 1905-1907 maji-maji rebellion against the German authorities emerged 'as the colonial situation approached one of its sinister conjunctures'.²² The conjuncture in German East Africa included forced labor and declining market prices for African-grown crops, a leveling of social status among Africans, new and devastating human and animal diseases, as well as a general rural impoverishment. People interpreted these problems not just in social and economic terms but more broadly as evidence of the world being spiritually disjointed, and of the need to appeal to supernatural powers, as well as mobilizing social and economic networks, to create a transcendent social order.²³ The 'prophetic moment' that erupted with Kinjikitile's remarkable visions built on a number of religious or politico-religious prophecies occurring in the years preceding the outbreak of the maji-maji revolt that both explained the cataclysm of colonial conquest and economic disaster and predicted the supernaturally aided success of a rebel movement.²⁴ It was the combined impact of all of these prophecies as well as real material grievances that ultimately propelled people into the frontlines against the German authorities.

In South Africa's eastern Cape in the first half of the twentieth century, a number of prophecies and material circumstances may have contributed to a similar prophetic moment. In addition to the religious sects started by Enoch

Mgijima and Nonthetha Nkwenkwe, other religious and political movements drew on the idea of an impending divine or supernatural intervention. Jehovah's Witnesses were actively preaching that the end of the world was at hand. The Wellington and le Fleur movements of the 1920s both predicted final battles between whites and Africans with, in the case of Wellington's predictions, Africans being aided by black Americans who would wield supernatural powers as they piloted their bombers over South African skies. The Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU) and its offshoot, the Independent ICU, both promised confrontations with the state that would bring about dramatic changes. And both the First and Second World Wars sparked a variety of rumors of political change aided by possible invasion and aerial bombardment by Americans, Germans, or sometimes Russians who had quasi-supernatural powers.²⁵

Stories and rumors about Africans having revelations, dreams and visions, as well as rumors spread by African prophets may have made the Bible and Christianity more immediately political for the Transkeian population. The Bible was part of a commonly understood language that the 1948 Transkei ANC advertisement used freely.²⁶ The ad suggested that people 'read Samuel Chapter 9, 16-17 carefully'. The relevant Biblical quotation—from I Samuel—tells the story of how God informed Samuel about the coming of Saul. It reads in part:

Now the day before Saul came, the Lord had revealed to Samuel: 'Tomorrow about this time I will send to you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him to be prince over my people Israel. He shall save my people from the hand of the Philistines; for I have seen the affliction of my people, because their cry has come to me.'²⁷

Building on the Biblical story of the coming of a prophetic leader, the ad suggested, 'It is in the hope T. M. Vanqa is asked to lead the race'. T. M. Vanqa was an unlikely Saul. A harness maker and shoemaker who in the late 1930s and early 1940s had a shop in the town of Mthatha, Vanqa had by the late 1940s become a builder and with other local African businessmen had instituted the South African Workers' Union, of which he was the secretary.²⁸ By 1948 he was openly advocating opposition to many of the state's rural policies of land rehabilitation, stabilization, and betterment. The Resident Magistrate of Idutywa district attached a note to the copy of the *Inkundla ya Bantu* advertisement that he sent to the Chief Magistrate:

Mr. Vanqa is at present holding a series of meetings in this District. . . . At the present time his main attack is on the proposed [agricultural] rehabilitation measures. This is

not entirely a popular subject with Natives of this district and I fear he is gaining quite a considerable following. I therefore foresee difficulties and some opposition when the time comes to commence the rehabilitation measures.²⁹

The magistrate was right: rehabilitation measures and other state policies, as we will see below, were viewed with hostility by most African farmers and they developed into one of the primary grievances that spurred the revolt in the 1950s and later.

Vanqa was not the only speaker at the upcoming meeting: another man was set to open the meeting with a prayer drawn from Exodus 4-5, a passage that contains the renowned exhortation from Moses to Pharaoh: 'Let my people go'. The resonances between the enslavement of the Hebrews by Pharaoh and the compulsory labor on betterment schemes required by the South African state were probably immediately apparent to the mostly African readers of the newspaper. The opening prayer was to be followed by Methodist hymn Number 116 that would have the meeting's attendees singing, 'Savior, cast a pitying eye, Bid my sins and sorrows end, Whither should a sinner fly? ... For thy love and mercy's sake; set my heart at liberty'.³⁰ These allusions to liberation in biblical texts and hymns may have added their own apocalyptic twist to current events: both Saul and Moses were prophets as well as political leaders and, according to the Bible, God had intervened directly on their behalf. The hymn requested a similar intervention from the Christian God. By combining Old Testament stories with the visions of Ntsikana, Nxele, and Nongqawuse, the ad suggested some momentous shift in the political landscape.

There is no indication in the archives of who attended the advertised meeting or what was resolved there. But the proposed agenda, the tone of the advertisement, and the magistrate's warning to his superiors about the meeting were all indications of the political mood of Africans in the rural areas.³¹

Resistance to State Policies and the Outbreak of Open Conflict

Early in the 1950s, overt resistance to unpopular state agricultural policies began to take shape. Agricultural rehabilitation schemes were a direct product of white supremacist ideology, and their success was meant at a basic level to facilitate the ongoing economic and political segregation of Africans. White magistrates' mission was to streamline agriculture in the rural reserves to make it more efficient, and to underwrite the continuation of the system of predominately male migrant labor.³² Initially conceived in response to the findings of the 1932 Native Economic Commission and then to the 1950

Tomlinson Commission, betterment schemes, rehabilitation measures, cattle culling, and soil stabilization measures were agricultural policies that emerged from some magical thinking on the part of white planners.

The magical thinking involved the fantasy that the rural reserves could remain more or less the same size but still (magically) carry a much denser African population. The goal in the 1930s when planners had initially mapped out the schemes had been to create a middle group of self-sufficient peasants in the rural areas, and to house the families of African workers (with access to little or no agricultural land) who would earn livings as migratory wage laborers. The unrest sparked by the first attempts at betterment in the mid-1940s stimulated some revision of the plans, but the 1948 election of the National Party to power brought an even more dogmatic approach to African affairs in the rural areas. Hendrik Verwoerd and other post-1948 apartheid ideologues wished to 're-tribalize' Africans and force them to stay in the rural areas.³³ This changed the agricultural policy into one that emphasized African residence in the rural areas regardless of the economic viability of farming. What had originally been a largely economic mission (with deep segregationist roots) to keep Africans in the rural areas became more exclusively a political mission to preserve white control and prevent widespread rural to urban migration among Africans regardless of the agricultural capacity of the reserves, a shift in emphasis that allowed state planners more leeway in implementation.³⁴

There were very real economic problems in the Transkei, as with every passing year more African families became more dependent on wage labor outside the region simply to make ends meet. The impoverishment of the rural areas began in the late 1910s in the western districts of the Transkei where agricultural land was more scarce, rainfall more erratic, and grazing land under too much pressure.³⁵ From the 1910s through the 1940s, significant shortfalls in the agricultural economy became the norm in increasing numbers of districts, although until the 1950s many of the African farms in Mpondoland districts remained economically and socially viable. Mpondoland farmers began to feel significant shortfalls in the 1950s—the same decade that many of the most coercive government policies (often grouped under the heading of 'Bantu Authorities' legislation) came into effect. As a result, African farmers in Mpondoland districts saw dramatic economic shortfalls at the same time that the state was aggressively implementing rehabilitation schemes and building up the authority of chiefs (many of whom were despised in the broader population), all to be paid for with higher taxes. These events constituted a very sinister conjuncture as far as many in the local

farming population were concerned. Dissatisfaction began to erupt into outright conflict.

In addition to implementing hated agricultural polices, apartheid officials planned to create Bantustans that would become—on paper only—self-governing. Chiefs who allied with the white state acquired additional power as the leaders of future homelands, a fact that confirmed the unpopularity of individual chiefs and the broader political agenda. A reporter for *Contact*, the official publication of the Liberal Party, observed overt defiance to the homelands policy in the Transkei in 1959:

Everywhere I went I heard the cry, '*asimfuni umasizpathe*' (we do not like Bantustans), in big and small villages, in buses and in social gatherings. In certain areas, I heard these two songs sung by children: '*sidiniwe ngu Velavutha*' (tired of Verwoerd), and '*uMatanzima no Sabatha basintengisile isizwe*' ([Chiefs] Matanzima and Sabatha—two stooges—have sold the nation).³⁶

Residents of Bizana district in Mpondoland themselves wrote to their magistrate that 'this new Government who is Chief Botha [Sigcau] is going to cause bloodshed in Bizana by attaching [seizing] our cattle and we do not know [recognize] him'.³⁷ Throughout the Transkei, white planners rarely consulted the broader African population on the nature and timing of the rehabilitation plans, and they expected chiefs and headmen (as state appointees) to assist in enforcement. Implementation was heavy-handed, thus making the analogy between Pharaoh and the apartheid state more compelling. The loss of control over their land, the interference of despised chiefs like Matanzima and Botha Sigcau in local affairs, and the leveling of social distinctions among subgroups all combined with the rumors and prophecies that circulated to create a politically explosive atmosphere.

The Revolt

By the late 1950s the revolt in the Transkei was rippling through the countryside. Rebels, both as individuals and in groups, had been undermining government authority and rehabilitation projects for several years. Acts of outright resistance were echoed by a broader refusal to comply with government measures or obey government headmen and chiefs. The rebels posed a serious enough threat to the safety of headmen and chiefs who were collaborating with the state that several fled their home districts and others armed themselves; most rehabilitation projects ground to a halt for several years.

During the revolt correspondents for *Contact* provided details of the extent of the unrest. One story from July 1960 noted that in Mpondoland 'Sundays are no longer peaceful days, but days of unrest. At night, artificial lighting is provided by burning of huts of government informers'.³⁸ In September another article reported that some of the most recent resistance to Tribal Authorities policies in Engcobo district had been sparked by a sermon given in the Wesleyan church by the Rev. Sol K. Masela who had issued a challenge to the governing body of the church to be more supportive of African political actions.³⁹

The revolt used violence and the threat of violence to undermine the state's control as well as to challenge specific policies. Through the 1950s Africans frequently boycotted meetings with chiefs and headmen whom they considered government 'stooges', and if they did show up they shouted down the chiefs and often stated outright that they would not accept government policies. Chiefs and magistrates read this disrespect as an omen of more violent actions to come. The magistrate of Xhalinga district noted his difficulty in getting headmen to serve on the local District Council because of threats and intimidation. 'In brief there have been reports that people who favour Bantu Authorities or stabilisation [policies] will be victimised. There have also been rumours that persons from other areas visit this District secretly at night for the purpose of holding meetings in various locations'.⁴⁰ Rebels and sympathizers also threatened chiefs and headmen directly:

Agitators against the rule of the white man are constantly circularising Chiefs and other Bantu exhorting them to prepare for the 'eventual and inevitable' overthrow of the white man. Expressions such as 'sticking' and 'white pigs' are used. Some roneoed [mimeographed] circulars request the recipients each to ensure that ten other people are apprised of the contents of the letters. These letters are always anonymous. Other agitators are said to drive into locations by motor car during darkness and late at night from places such as Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and East London and to disseminate anti-Government propaganda, and then they disappear again.⁴¹

These methods of intimidation, with rumors of mysterious outsiders (who were not really outsiders at all)⁴² moving about under cover of darkness, and the idea of an inevitable rebel victory were common tactics of underground political organizations. But there were also resonances with the prophecies of Nxele, Ntsikana, and Nongqawuse, with the castigation of whites as animals, the significance of outsiders seen only by the faithful local population (as was the case with Nongqawuse's ancestral sources and Wellington's black American bombers), and of the inevitability of a struggle from which the righteous would emerge as victors.

People made grave predictions and threats in this atmosphere, as evidenced by an anonymous letter sent by rebels to a chief in Qumbu district (in East Griqualand) who had collaborated with government policies:

There is always a reprisal for those who are oppressing and those who are siding with them after the failure. So, act while time still permits you... You know what? It is sickening to note that when these white pigs came to our country they were hungry and stinking so much that we felt mercy for them. But to our surprise, they are today ruling us at gunpoint, and inciting us to fight among ourselves through the sinister measures of ethnic grouping. Surely, when the time comes, they will definitely eat grass... Chief, I still put it to you that after this time, only chiefs like Hintsa, Dingaan, Moshesh and Cetywayo will survive and enjoy the fruits of freedom.⁴³

In this case there was a plot to kill the chief to whom the letter was addressed, and although the plotters were ultimately arrested, tried, and convicted, in other cases rebels succeeded in killing their targets.⁴⁴ What is striking about this letter is its call on historical memory, in a way similar to the 1948 advertisement placed by the Transkeian ANC. The historical figures in this letter, though, were Hintsa, Dingaan, Moshesh, and Cetywayo (or Cetswayo)—all independent African chiefs who in the nineteenth century had battled to maintain their autonomy and limit the depredations of encroaching white settlement. The letter writer who invoked their names believed that the revolt would sort the true leaders from the collaborators and intoned that the latter, along with the ‘white pigs’, would ‘definitely eat grass’.

Moral intentions conjoined with the use of sometimes profoundly violent means. In some districts rebels labeled headmen and chiefs who worked with the state as witches and burned their huts down at night. The magistrate of Engcobo district reported on one incident that the hut of the chairman of the local District Authority was burned down, and he and another man were later ‘brutally murdered’. Twenty-four people were implicated in the murder that resulted directly from the chief’s support for government policies: ‘To what extent subversive elements are active in the district or what proportions it might assume is difficult to say’.⁴⁵ In addition to the killings and threats issued against supporters of government policies, rebels and sympathizers also attacked the projects themselves by cutting fences, destroying dipping tanks for cattle, and refusing to move to newly laid-out residential allotments. They also refused to pay taxes, which were widely seen as providing material support to both the government and the chiefs.⁴⁶

In 1960 the unrest was at its peak in eastern Mpondoland where the rebel movement (known as Congo or iKongo) actually had effective control over the countryside for months at a time.⁴⁷ In this context, men and some

women formed Hill (or Mountain) Committees that orchestrated the revolt and took over some of the tasks of governing, such as collecting their own taxes and adjudicating court cases. As one Lusikisiki man stated (recalling his conversation with a Congo organizer):

I asked what the Congo was. He said the Congo was a new form of Government. . . . We don't want Bantu Authorities and we don't want to pay taxes. We don't want our cattle to be dipped. We want to be ruled by the Russians and each man must pay 3/6 [three shillings sixpence] to buy firearms from the Russians and to hire lawyers. Anyone who does not attend [the Congo meeting] will be killed.⁴⁸

The idea of Russians as significant outsiders who would provide assistance to the rebels may have been partly rooted in the news of the cold war that was common at the time, and it may also have emerged from the historical memory of Nongqawuse's Russians.

A Flagstaff man recalled another conversation about Congo in which he was labeled by an organizer "as being a dog" the organizer then told the Congo meeting, 'This dog must be killed, who loves the Europeans'.⁴⁹ The committees empowered young men to kill collaborators, defined as chiefs and headmen as well as those who did not attend meetings. A *Contact* reporter described the killings of an Mpondo chief (Vukayibambe Sigcau, the brother of Botha Sigcau) and two headmen: after their murders, 'the attackers, numbering about one hundred men, went about 1½ miles away to look for one of his chief indunas [headmen]'. This third headman escaped, but only because 'he had heard the *impi* [regiment] was coming, so he hid in an underground hole used for storing mealies [corn]'.⁵⁰

In another incident in Bizana the target of rebel violence was an agricultural demonstrator, an indication of just how important the grievances created by government agricultural policies were in fomenting the revolt.

Caslina Maradebe Mlomi was awakened by a gun report at 11.30 pm on 3.12.60, on investigating she found that the hut in which her husband was asleep was surrounded by a large crowd of Bantus. She ran away with the children. The next morning she found that two of the six huts at her kraal had been razed and her husband stabbed to death. Deceased was an Agricultural Demonstrator, and alleged by the attackers to be a Police Informer.⁵¹

People resented state interference into their farming practices, and they resisted specific government policies as well as the larger Bantu Authorities and apartheid legal framework. Those who committed the violence and made

the threats often explicitly stated the moral content of their actions. A threatening letter sent to a headman of Butterworth district in 1960 equated collaboration with wickedness:

You have been warned by us from time to time to refrain from collaborating with the Government regarding the implementation of the oppressive laws passed by the Government. Such collaboration is regarded by the people as wicked. The time for these warnings is now past. In short, if you do not get out of the Bantu Authorities, we, the people, are going to get you out in a quick way.⁵²

A communal sense had developed that working with apartheid authorities was wicked and that reprisals against collaborators—even reprisals that resulted in deaths—were morally justified. The rebels were using violence and the threat of violence to respond to the ‘spiritual insecurity’ of a political crisis that had economic and spiritual foundations.⁵³

State officials viewed the Mountain Committees and other rebel groups as threatening their ability to govern and tried to intimidate those who attended. One of the Committees’ meeting places was Ngquza Hill, where committee meetings sometimes involved as many as 4,000 to 5,000 people.⁵⁴ Government officials knew about these meetings and tried to thwart attendance by infiltrating the organizations and by flying aircraft over the meetings. In one May 1960 meeting, some men stood their ground as helicopters flew overhead, and reportedly shouted a song at the aircraft: ‘White men, you’re a dog, we die and we resurrect as a red dog. When you touch us you should know that you have touched those who will no longer die’.⁵⁵ This song may have been an expression of sheer bravado, taunting a powerful enemy, but the invoking of eternal life and resurrection suggests a religious dimension to their defiance. As the meetings continued the state became more aggressive in its attempts to disband them, and in one well-publicized instance in June 1960, as people met on Ngquza Hill, military planes flew overhead and a paramilitary unit of the South African police swept the area and shot and killed as many as thirty people.⁵⁶ One member of the Hill Committee remembered that they had been warned by a traditional healer that they might be attacked if they conducted a meeting that day because of ‘a sign that shows that we will be attacked and defeated at Ngquza’. Unfortunately, the Hill committee leaders quarreled: ‘Some were saying we should turn back as the traditional healer had instructed us to do while others were reluctant and insisted that we continue’.⁵⁷ The crowd at Ngquza Hill was large that day (more than 3,000 people), and many women watched in horror as their family members and friends were shot. ‘One woman... was amongst the

Mpondo men when they were attacked. She ran in between the soldiers and her menfolk, singing a Methodist hymn, “Kubo bonke ooThixo, Akakho onje ngaYe; Kuba iinceba zakhe, Zimi ngophakade”, which is sung when one experiences hardship’.⁵⁸

The killings at Ngquza Hill did not end the revolt, nor did they dampen rebels’ confidence in the morality of the revolt. The magistrate of Bizana district—a district that was at the heart of the rebellion—focused on the moral and religious element in one of his reports. ‘The Rebel movement has a religious slant’, he wrote: ‘Three of the ringleaders are Evangelists. When they start their meetings all the rebels prostrate themselves on the ground with their foreheads touching the ground. They refer to the Rebel court at their National Headquarters at Ndlovu Hill [in Bizana] as a “Holy Court”’.⁵⁹

Some rebel leaders believed that God was assisting them in finding those men who had collaborated with unpopular state policies. Congo meetings were often opened with hymns and prayers (in one case Methodist Hymn Number 9).⁶⁰ Many Africans also expected that powerful outsiders would assist them. People frequently mentioned Russians as people who had already appeared in South Africa to take part in the struggle. One African reported a conversation he had had with a Congo member: ‘This person also stated that there are Russians at Bucele near Port St. Johns and Mbotyi [in Mpondoland] and along the coast who have just arrived to come and assist the Pondos. He also stated the Russians are here to fight the Government. He stated that the Police are frightened to go there’.⁶¹ The active assistance of God and of powerful allies not only ensured the morality of the cause, it also ensured its success.

According to Victor Mnaba, a scholar who has studied the role of mainstream mission churches in the revolt, the young men of the hills (*abafana basentabeni*) chose to meet in the highlands because of the hills’ religious significance:

One may ask why the Pondos chose the mountains, of all places... [They] believe that God dwells in the mountains, and for them mountains were and are places of prayer, worship, sacrifice, and covenant... The African concept of a mountain is similar from the Jewish and Christian concepts. Africans understood mountains not only to be places of worship and praise, but also as places for performing rituals such as circumcision. They also regarded mountains as their forts during times of war.⁶²

The meetings on the hills brought the committees to a spiritual place where, in the aftermath of the Ngquza Hill killings, they could discuss their political options. For the next several months they renewed the revolt. As of mid-January 1961, the Bizana Hill Committee continued ‘to send out its *tshisa-*

tshisa (burning) gangs, now in twos and threes, to burn these people's [collaborators'] homes'.⁶³

The claims of religious motivation on the parts of some rebel leaders stood in contrast to the official stances of most of the established mission churches in the region. Mission stations became refuges for headmen, chiefs, and their followers who had been labeled as collaborators with the state and who were threatened by the rebels. A reporter for the journal *Contact* described the scene of huts ablaze in various Mpondoland districts on Christmas Day 1960, as the huts' owners fled to the protection of the police in towns and the protection of churches on mission stations. 'The Roman Catholic Mission at Flagstaff, and other missions are giving sanctuary to many of these victims, innocent or otherwise, of the "Congo" or "Hill's" anti-Bantu Authority campaign'.⁶⁴

Outside of the mainstream mission churches, however, there were other sources of Christian influence for the rebels. These alternative influences resulted from important differences in the varieties of Christianity practiced in the Transkei. Mpondoland had never had the heavy blanketing of mission stations that other parts of the Transkei had. The eastern Mpondoland districts of Bizana, Lusikisiki, Tabankulu, and Flagstaff were commonly considered by magistrates, other white officials, and some missionaries as remote backwaters where mainstream Christianity struggled to retain popularity against both older non-Christian ideas and the teachings of separatist churches.⁶⁵ Separatist churches from early on in the colonial period had staked claims to African independence in both the institutional and spiritual aspects of religion.⁶⁶

Mission churches were usually relatively well funded, however, and could commit substantial resources to schools as part of their religious mission. By mid-century, 1952, while some districts in the Transkei were reporting very high rates of children attending mission schools (88 percent of school-age children in the Thembuland district of Xhalanga for example), Bizana and other Mpondoland districts reported only 22 to 35 percent of school-age children attending school.⁶⁷ So while Christian identification existed among rebels in Mpondoland districts in the 1950s and some rebel leaders may have been products of mission schools, it is unlikely that they were leading a large number of people who had been exposed to Christianity through mission education.⁶⁸ Although there are no data on the size of congregations in separatist churches in the 1950s, Ethiopian and Zionist churches were most likely the source of much of the Christian content in the revolt in Mpondoland districts. Separatist churches had a foothold in eastern Mpondoland by 1899 (and earlier elsewhere in the Transkei), and were often the focus of political rumors.

The scholar J. de Wet has suggested that in the 1950s and later, separatist churches began to flourish in more remote parts of the Transkei, especially in Mpondoland. In these districts African-led separatist churches offered dynamic alternatives to mission churches, and frequently built on what de Wet calls the *Babomvu* world-view (equivalent to Philip Mayer's notion of a 'Red' world-view) that was resistant to erosion by 'Western' or colonial culture.⁶⁹ As a sometimes profoundly conservative *Babomvu* ideology lost its ability to protect the homestead from both government actions and economic disasters, people often turned to Zionist-Apostolic Christianity to renegotiate their identities and to shore up their 'religio-cultural resistance to Western civilization'.⁷⁰

During the years preceding and during the revolt, a hybrid set of beliefs had emerged that combined elements of older, non-Christian spirituality and morality with the ideas and community of separatist churches in some areas and more mainstream churches in others. This spirituality was a coda to the previous rumors of end-times and approaching conflicts that fed on the insecurity produced by worsening agricultural conditions and the often daily conflicts between African farmers and state officials (both white and black) over the nature of authority and the use of coercion. This anxiety was similar to the spiritual insecurity described by Adam Ashforth in late twentieth-century South Africa; people asked questions about the causes of their misfortunes, and their own spiritual suppositions provided 'plausible answers for people, answers people can live with and work with as they turn to various forms of spiritual power in search of solace and safety'.⁷¹ The prophetic moment of the late 1950s and early 1960s emerged out of the conjuncture of economic grievances and transcendent hope.

State officials responded to both rumors and actual rebellion with a massive crackdown on rebels and the whole population of the region. The crackdown involved sweeps made by mobile police units, widespread arrests for all types of infractions from the trivial to the serious, and dramatic shows of force and brutality to intimidate the population. Detentions without trial and widespread police intimidation became the norm. In the face of such measures, a pamphlet circulated in several Transkeian districts exhorted people to continue to defy the state: 'The Nation had this desire [for freedom], as a result the country people got up and fought to break the chains of deprivation which were brought by the Chiefs'. The pamphlet (titled 'The voice of the people') declared, 'Let us crucify ourselves', and insisted that 'the shooting of the people at Ngquza [Hill] by the Police, the prosecution and the burning of kraals by the army of Matanzima and others at Mbizana' should not dishearten people. Instead,

The bravery of the Pondos will remain bright in history... [although] people are hunted like animals. They are thrown into police vans like bags of mealies, they are beaten with sjamboks, struck with the butts of guns, but despite all this the fire that burns in the breast of these men of men—men of this country does not extinguish. This is the fire that gives us strength, its warmth gives us encouragement, patience and bravery... FIGHT, FIGHT THE ENEMY WHICH IS THE EUROPEAN GOVERNMENT.⁷²

The pamphlet requested that

When you receive these notices, THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE, distribute them amongst the people. Each person who receives his notice must be sure that he passes it to at least 10 people who will read it. Each person who has read it must in turn relate the news to 10 people who did not have a chance to read it.

Despite its encouraging words, the pamphlet could not promote a rebellion powerful enough to overthrow the South African state. Although acts of rebellion continued in the region through the mid-1960s, state officials were able to repress the resistance through outright coercion combined with surveillance and ultimately a campaign of attrition. Detentions, banishments, convictions with long jail sentences and large fines combined with the ordinary brutality of life under apartheid to make resistance a very costly option for the rural population. For its part, the state did not take seriously either the spiritual, Christian component of the revolt or the material grievances; instead, it quelled the revolt in an extraordinarily violent way, operating on the assumption that communists and white agitators were responsible for drumming up opposition to the Bantu Authorities policies of the apartheid state.⁷³

Conclusion

The evidence of appeals to Christian morality lying beneath some of the resistance to government rehabilitation projects and the outbreak of open revolt in the Transkei in the 1950s and 1960s is somewhat fragmentary but highly suggestive of the fusion of religion and politics. While material grievances were the most significant impetus behind people's decisions to commit violence, they do not provide a full explanation for why the violence occurred when it did, nor for how violence came to be accepted as a legitimate and moral assertion of African political views. In the Transkei at this time there were multiple belief systems co-existing within the rural population, and

there was a long history of political (or quasipolitical) movements that emerged from religious interpretations of events. The 1950s, the decade of the revolt, constituted a prophetic moment in Marcia Wright's sense: numerous prophecies built on each other to explain a worsening material order and the loss of social stability, and some rebels used the prophecies to predict an end-times confrontation between African rebels and farmers on the one hand and the white-controlled state and its African collaborators on the other. There was a sinister conjuncture between declining agricultural incomes, deracinated rural populations, a coercive state, and a number of earlier prophetic statements that predisposed people to revolt and made revolt seem both a moral choice and a political necessity.

In the Transkei of the 1950s and 1960s war was at least partly the continuation of religion by other means. Many scholars have noted that both armed conflict and religion often involve blood sacrifices, and killings can be seen as attempts to purify the society.⁷⁴ African nationalism in South Africa had always been explicitly spiritual and strongly inflected with Christian imagery; prophetic and religious movements in the countryside had often made strong political claims. Organizers and rebels in the years between 1948 and 1961 used Christian texts, the Bible and hymns, and Christian motifs of self-sacrifice and crucifixion as part of the language of revolt. The pervasiveness of the language suggests that it was an effective appeal to a common understanding of the relevance of Christian teachings in the interpretation of the economic and political calamity that apartheid policies had created for Africans.⁷⁵

This is not a conclusive statement that religion *caused* revolt or that rumors of religious end-times drove people to resist. Virtually everyone had some kind of religious conviction, and rumors of all kinds were rampant in the countryside, from the takeover of the region in 1880 through to the present day. Not all aspects of religious life were associated with rebellion, and many Africans, even if they tacitly supported resistance to government policies, deplored the use of violence. But the evidence of how Christianity informed some aspects of the rebellion illustrates how religion among the colonized in South Africa mediated grievances to become resistance, and how rumors transformed into political facts.

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Notes

* An earlier version of this paper was presented at the North-Eastern Workshop on Southern Africa in October 2008. I benefited from the remarks of the panel's commentator, T. Dunbar Moodie, and I have also benefited from the comments from the editors and two anonymous reviewers of the *Journal of Religion in Africa*.

1. See the discussion of the religious imagery used by both the African National Congress and the Pan-Africanist Congress in David Chidester, *Shots in the Streets: Violence and Religion in South Africa* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), 112-143.

2. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Belief and History*, Richard Lectures for 1974-75 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977), 95-99.

3. Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar analyze the connection between rumors and religion in Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar, *Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 11-48. Luise White has written extensively on the meaning of rumors in African colonial contexts; see Luise White, *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). Jean Comaroff noted that religious tenets were often the basis of political resistance in Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 260-263, although her use of the term 'resistance' has been criticized as too broad in Matthew Schofeleers, 'Ritual Healing and Political Acquiescence: The Case of the Zionist Churches in Southern Africa', *Africa* 61.1 (1991): 1-5.

4. Ellis and ter Haar, *Worlds of Power*, 11-14; Peter Geschiere, *The Modernity of Witchcraft: Politics and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1997); Sean Redding, 'Government Witchcraft: Taxation, the Supernatural, and the Mpondo Revolt in the Transkei, South Africa, 1955-63', *African Affairs* 95 (1996): 555-579; Clifton Crais, *The Politics of Evil: Magic, State Power, and the Political Imagination in South Africa* (New York: Cambridge, 2002), 115-144; Henrietta Moore and Todd Sanders, 'Magical Interpretations and Material Realities: An Introduction', in *Magical Interpretations, Material Realities: Modernity, Witchcraft and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa*, ed. Henrietta Moore and Todd Sanders (New York: Routledge, 2001), 1-27.

5. Peter Walshe, 'South Africa: Prophetic Christianity and the Liberation Movement', *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 29.1 (March 1991): 30-32; Catherine Higgs, *The Ghost of Equality: The Public Lives of D.D.T. Jabavu of South Africa, 1885-1959* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1997), 51-75; Richard Elphick, 'Evangelical Missions and Racial "Equalization" in South Africa 1890-1914', in Dana L. Robert (ed.), *Converting Colonialism: Visions and Realities in Mission History, 1706-1914* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 131-133.

6. Wallace G. Mills, 'The Fork in the Road: Religious Separatism Versus African Nationalism in the Cape Colony, 1890-1910', *Journal of Religion in Africa* 9.1 (1978): 51-52; B. G. M. Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa, Second Ed.* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 302-337; C. C. Saunders, 'Tile and the Thembu Church: Politics and Independency on the Cape Eastern Frontier in the Late Nineteenth Century', *Journal of African History* 11 (1970): 553-570; Moitsadi Thoane Moeti, 'Ethiopianism: Separatist Roots of African Nationalism in South Africa' (Ph.D. diss., Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University, 1981), 255-290; James T. Campbell, *Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 149-159, 230-232.

7. Chidester, *Shots in the Streets*, 132.

8. Monica Wilson, *Reaction to Conquest: Effects of Contact with Europeans on Pondo, 2nd Edition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 562. J. de Wet, citing the 1960 census, notes that church membership among Africans living in the Mpondoland districts was approximately 23 percent, while in the rest of the Transkei church membership stood at 52 percent (J. de Wet, 'Social Change, Resistance and Worldview of a Community in

the Transkei', in *Afro-Christianity at the Grassroots*, G. C. Oosthuizen, M. C. Kitshoff, and S. Dube [Leiden: Brill, 1994], 146).

9. Saunders asks similar questions about the connections between religion and rebellion in Christopher Saunders, 'African Nationalism and Religious Independency in Cape Colony: A Comment', *Journal of Religion in Africa* 9 (1978): 207-210. Crais, *The Politics of Evil*, 122-138, discusses the political use of Christianity by Africans as a kind of cultural mimicry by subalterns.

10. Cape Province Archives Depot, Cape Town, Records of the Chief Magistrate of the Transkeian Territories [hereafter CMT] 3/1471, File 42/C, Clipping from *Inkundla ya Bantu*, 1948, with translation attached.

11. Janet Hodgson, 'Soga and Dukwana: The Christian Struggle for Liberation in Mid 19th Century South Africa', *Journal of Religion in Africa* 16. Fasc. 3 (October 1986): 187-190.

12. Methodist Missionary Society Archive, Fiche Ms69, Fiche #55, Letter, December 21, 1826, from Shrewsbury, Wesleyville, Kaffirland, to 'Rev. Sir', London.

13. Hodgson, 'Soga and Dukwana', 187.

14. J. B. Peires, 'Nxele, Ntsikana and the Origins of the Xhosa Religious Reaction', *The Journal of African History* 20.1 (1979): 51-61.

15. Helen Bradford, 'Not a Nongquawuse Story: An Anti-Heroine in Historical Perspective', in *Basu'iimbokodo, Bawel'imilambo/They Remove Boulders and Cross Rivers: Women in South African History*, Nombonisa Gasu (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007), 81.

16. J. B. Peires, *The Dead Will Arise* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 124-138; Timothy J. Stapleton, "'They No Longer Care for Their Chiefs": Another Look at the Xhosa Cattle-Killing of 1856-1857', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 24.2 (1991): 383-392.

17. Boniface Davies cautions against drawing a straight line between Christian beliefs and the eschatological visions of the cattle killing in Sheila Boniface Davies, 'Raising the Dead: The Xhosa Cattle-Killing and the Mhlakaza-Goliath Delusion', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 33.1 (March 2007): 38-41, as does Adam Ashforth, 'The Xhosa Cattle Killing and the Politics of Memory', *Sociological Forum* 6.3 (September 1991): 581-592.

18. W. J. G. Mears, 'A Study in Native Administration: The Transkeian Territories, 1894-1943', D.Litt (University of South Africa, 1947), 325.

19. Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*, 279-285.

20. Robert Edgar, 'The Prophet Motive: Enoch Mgijima, the Israelites, and the Background to the Bullhoek Massacre', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 15.3 (1982): 401-422; Robert Edgar and Hilary Sapire, *African Apocalypse: The Story of Nontetha Nkwenkwe, a Twentieth-Century South African Prophet* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000), 9-16.

21. W. T. Brownlee, 'Witchcraft Among the Natives of South Africa: Suggested Historical Origin of Superstitions. Part II', *Journal of the Royal African Society* 25.97 (October 1925): 38-46.

22. Marcia Wright, 'Maji Maji: Prophecy and Historiography', in David M. Anderson and Douglas H. Johnson (eds.), *Revealing Prophets: Prophecy in Eastern African History*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1995), 139.

23. Thaddeus Sunseri, 'Majimaji and the Millennium: Abrahamic Sources and the Creation of a Tanzanian Resistance Tradition', *History in Africa* 26 (1999): 365-370; Felicitas Becker, 'Traders, "Big Men" and Prophets: Political Continuity and Crisis in the Maji Maji Rebellion in Southeast Tanzania', *Journal of African History* 45 (2004): 1-22.

24. G. C. K. Gwassa and John Iliffe, *Records of the Maji Maji Rising* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1967), 1-32.
25. Sean Redding, *Sorcery and Sovereignty: Taxation, Power and Rebellion in South Africa, 1880-1963* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006); Helen Bradford, *A Taste of Freedom: The ICU in Rural South Africa, 1924-30* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987); Campbell, *Songs of Zion*, 302-305; William Beinart and Colin Bundy, 'The Union, the Nation, and the Talking Crow: The Ideology and Tactics of the Independent ICU in East London', in William Beinart and Colin Bundy (eds.), *Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 270-320; Robert Vinson, 'Sea Kaffirs: "American Negroes" and the Gospel of Garveyism in Segregationist South Africa', *Journal of African History* 47.2 (2006): 281-303.
26. John Lonsdale makes a similar point about the relevance of the Bible to 'readers' (literate, mission-trained Africans) among the Gikuyu population in Kenya, and the way in which biblical texts sometimes became manifestos of liberation. See Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa*, Eastern African Studies (Athens: University of Ohio Press, 1992), 441-445.
27. Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger, *The Oxford Annotated Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 342.
28. Cape Province Archives Depot, Cape Town, Records of the Municipality of Umtata (Mthatha) [hereafter 3/UTA] 57, File 38; Cape Province Archives Depot, Cape Town, Records of the Resident Magistrate Umtata district [hereafter 1/UTA] 2/1/1/162, Case 362/46, B. Mpahlwa vs. D. Ngozi, 13 August 1947.
29. CMT 3/1471, File 42/C, Letter 18 August 1948, Resident Magistrate Idutywa district to CMT.
30. John Wesley, *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of People Called Methodists* (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Book Room, 1889).
31. The Transkei ANC seems to have been a short-lived branch of the larger organization. This specific branch with this group of organizers at its head makes no further appearance in the archives (as far as I have found).
32. Fred T. Hendricks, 'Loose Planning and Rapid Resettlement: The Politics of Conservation and Control in Transkei, South Africa, 1950-1970', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 15.2 (January 1989): 306-325; Anne Mager, "'The People Get Fenced": Gender, Rehabilitation and African Nationalism in the Ciskei and Border Region, 1945-55', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 18.4 (December 1992): 761-782; Lungisile Ntsebeza, *Democracy Compromised: Chiefs and the Politics of Land in South Africa* (Cape Town: HRSC Press/Brill, 2005/2006), 136-142; P. A. McAllister, 'Resistance to "Betterment" in the Transkei: A Case Study from Willowvale District', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 15.2 (January 1989): 346-368.
33. Ntsebeza, *Democracy Compromised*, 151. I am taking some liberties with the concept of 'magical thinking' as it is commonly used in social science literature; see Stuart A. Vyse, *Believing in Magic: The Psychology of Superstition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 14.
34. J. B. Peires, 'Review: Rural Apartheid', *The Journal of African History* 33.2 (1992): 342-344.
35. Testimony to the 1930-1932 Native Economic Commission by African witnesses, such as Dr. A. B. Xuma, and by resident magistrates, made it clear that agricultural profitability had declined in most districts by that time, even if many families could still eke a partial living off the land. See, for example, National Archives of South Africa Depot, Pre-

toria, Testimony to the Native Economic Commission, 1930-1932 [hereafter K]26 15, Evidence given to the Native Economic Commission by Dr. A. B. Xuma, M.D.; K26 15, File 'Records of Statements from the Transkei', Evidence of Thomas Poswayo; and National Archives of South Africa, Pretoria, Records of the Ministry of Native Affairs [hereafter NTS] 1771, File 64/276/5, Letter 24 October 1932, Resident Magistrate of Nqamakwe district to the Secretary for Native Affairs.

36. *Contact* correspondent, 'Roving Correspondent in the Transkei Hears People Talk, Sing Against Verwoerd', *Contact* 2 (22 August 1959): 3.

37. CMT 3/1593, File 79/1, Letter 16 March 1959, unsigned, to the Chief Magistrate of the Transkei; the original is in Xhosa and a copy, translated into English in the Bizana Resident Magistrate's office, is attached.

38. *Contact* correspondent, 'East Pondoland Flares Up', *Contact* 3 (2 July 1960): 3.

39. *Contact* correspondent, 'Now the Tembus Resist', *Contact* 3 (24 September 1960): 3.

40. Cape Province Archives, Cape Town, Records of the Xhalanga magistrate, Transkei [hereafter 1/XAA] 5/1/168, File N1/9/2/1, Letter headed 'Control of Agitators', Resident Magistrate of Cala (Xhalanga) district to CMT, 31 March 1958.

41. Emphasis in the original. National Archives of South Africa, Pretoria, Archives of the Bantu Affairs Department [hereafter BAO] 5/514, File F109/1282, Letter Bantu Affairs Commissioner Qumbu district to the Chief BAC, 4 March 1961.

42. For the most part the people who came from the towns were people who had grown up locally and had moved to an urban area to work. They often became more politicized at some point and joined organizations—the Pan-Africanist Congress, the ANC, or the All-African Convention. They then returned to their home districts to organize opposition to government policies and provide material support, but as members of organizations that were usually under police surveillance, if not banned outright, they had to do their political work secretly.

43. CMT 3/1471, File 42/1 'confidential', Letter 16 February 1961, anonymous letter addressed to Chief Sandi Majke, Guro School, Qumbu, titled 'The Winds of Change'. See also reports of threats to various chiefs in CMT 3/1471, File 42/1, 'Monthly Situation Report: Qumbu', South African Police, 22 March 1961.

44. CMT 3/1471, File 42/1, Letter 25 March 1961, Resident Magistrate Qumbu district to CMT. For further evidence of successful strikes against people deemed collaborators see: CMT 3/1472, File 42/Q, Letter marked 'Confidential', 4 July 1960, Resident Magistrate Bizana district to CMT, and Cape Province Archives, Cape Town, Records of the Resident Magistrate Bizana district [hereafter 1/BIZ] 6/47, File C9/6/C, Memorandum submitted by the Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Bizana, dated 11 July 1960.

45. CMT 3/1471, File 42/1, Reply to CMT's circular, Engcobo Bantu Affairs Commissioners to Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner, 18 February 1961. See also CMT 3/1477, File 42/1/8, Reports from South African Police, Bizana district, May and June 1960; BAO 5/514, File F109/1282, Letter from the BAC of Matatiele district to the CBAC, 13 March 1961, and CMT 3/1478, File 42/6, Letter from the South African Police Umtata District, 22 June 1960.

46. Redding, *Sorcery and Sovereignty*, 175-200.

47. ICongo or Kongo were names used by the rebels to describe the rebel movement in Mpondoland. The origin of the name is unclear; it may be a version of 'Congress'—short for the African National Congress—or a derivation from widely disseminated reports on political events and revolt in the newly independent Congo; see South African

Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa: 1960-1970* (Cape Town: Zebra, 2004), 181.

48. Cape Province Archives, Cape Town, Records of the Resident Magistrate Lusikisiki district [hereafter 1/LSK] 1/1/16, Case 700 of 1961, The State vs. Themba Njolweni and seven others, 12 June 1961, testimony of Monaty Mejelo.

49. Cape Province Archives, Cape Town, Records of the Resident Magistrate Flagstaff district [hereafter 1/FSF] 1/1/37, Case 297 of 1960, R. vs. Tanduxele Mkathaze and 2 others, 1 November 1960.

50. *Contact* correspondent, 'Pondoland—Latest', *Contact* 3 (17 December 1960): 3.

51. 1/BIZ 6/61, File N1/9/2/1, Reports of Bantu Unrest by the South African Police, received by RM Bizana on 7 December 1960.

52. Cape Province Archives, Cape Town, Records of the Resident Magistrate Butterworth district [hereafter 1/BUT] 7/1/88, File N1/9/2, Letter 23 December 1960, BAC Butterworth to the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner with enclosure of translation of document in Xhosa.

53. In discussing the 'spiritual insecurity' of late twentieth-century life in South Africa Adam Ashforth has noted that people often see their own violent actions as moral in the sense that they are either defending themselves against attack or are eradicating a source of evil, such as witchcraft. This was often true in the 1980s and 1990s as people battled apartheid and political rivals, and continues to be true today (Adam Ashforth, *Witchcraft, Violence, and Democracy in South Africa* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005], 243-310).

54. CMT 3/1478, File 42/5, Typescript of interview with Keith H. Wicks, 4 January 1961.

55. Victor Molisi Mnaba, 'The Role of the Church Towards the Pondo Revolt in South Africa, 1960-1963', thesis for degree of Master of Theology (Pretoria, South Africa: University of South Africa, 2006), 80, note 7.

56. *Contact* correspondent, 'East Pondoland Flares Up'; Timothy J. Stapleton, *Faku: Rulership and Colonialism in the Mpondo Kingdom (c. 1780-1867)* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001), 137.

57. Interview by Victor Mnaba with C. K. Gxabu, quoted in Mnaba, 'The Role of the Church Towards the Pondo Revolt', 81-82.

58. Mnaba, 'The Role of the Church Towards the Pondo Revolt', 84; Mnaba translates the verse (in note 9) as 'Of all gods, there is no one like Him, because His grace is everlasting'.

59. 1/BIZ 6/47, File C9/6/C, Memorandum by BAC Bizana district, 11 July 1960.

60. Verse three of the hymn reads: 'Ready the Spirit of his love. Just now the stony to remove, To apply, and witness with the blood, And wash and seal the sons of God' (Wesley, *Methodist Hymnal*). 1/LSK 1/1/16, Case 700 of 1961, The State vs. Themba Njolweni and 7 others, testimony of Reuben Tshazi.

61. CMT 3/1478, File 42/5, Statement by James Ndumiso Cetywayo to SAP, dated 7 December 1960.

62. Mnaba, 'The Role of the Church Towards the Pondo Revolt', 45.

63. *Contact* correspondent, 'Pondoland Terror at Its Height', *Contact* 4 (14 January 1961): 3.

64. *Contact* correspondent, 'Pondoland Terror at Its Height'.

65. CMT 3/54, 'Annual Blue Book Report for 1899 District of Bizana', dated 31 January 1900.

66. Union of South Africa, *Report of Native Churches Commission* (Cape Town: Government Printers, 1925), 22-29.

67. CMT 3/1451, File 38/A, 'Report of the Chief Magistrate, Transkeian Territories, for period 1st July 1951 to 30th July 1952', dated 30 September 1952.

68. As late as 1960, J. de Wet reports that approximately 23 percent of people in Mpondoland districts claimed to be affiliated with a church.

69. de Wet, 'Social Change, Resistance and Worldview of a Community in the Transkei', 137-164.

70. de Wet, 'Social Change, Resistance and Worldview of a Community in the Transkei', 137.

71. Ashforth, *Witchcraft, Violence, and Democracy in South Africa*, 311.

72. BAO 5/514, Pamphlet, 'The Voice of the People. The year of Blood and Tears—1960', enclosed in a letter from the BAC of Cofimvaba district to the CBAC, 22 February 1961; emphasis in the original.

73. Govan Mbeki provides the classic account of the repression in Govan Mbeki, *South Africa: The Peasants' Revolt* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), 111-134. See also Redding, *Sorcery and Sovereignty*, 195-204; Crais, *The Politics of Evil*, 168-212; and *Contact* correspondent, 'Bloodshed. How Government 'Restores Peace'', *Contact* 4 (14 January 1961): 3.

74. Barbara Ehrenreich, *Blood Rites: Origins and History of the Passions of War* (New York: Macmillan, 1998), 7, 23-31; Paul A. Cohen, *History in Three Keys: The Boxers as Event, Experience, and Myth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 119-145.

75. Chidester, *Shots in the Streets*, 118-122.