

"Wife of the former Chief" : the agency of widows in 1840s Natal.

In Norman Etherington's seminal work on South African missions history *Preachers, Peasants and Politics in Southeast Africa, 1835 – 1880: African Christian Communities in Natal, Pondoland and Zululand*, Nembula Makhanya, or Ira Adams Nembula, is one of the first people to confront the reader. His family's participation in the "civilising mission" is laid out and juxtaposed with the tale of Nembula's Qwabe cousin Musi, and Musi's son Meseni.¹ This juxtaposition is used as a way into the book, an illustration of the strikingly divergent routes taken by *amakholwa* (or converts) and "traditionalists" under chiefs in nineteenth-century Natal, following the displacement of thousands from Zululand during and after the formation of the Zulu kingdom.² On Nembula's side, we see the establishment of the Adams Mission converts, and on Musi's, the revival of the Qwabe through the practice of *ukuvusa* – the purposeful resuscitation or awakening of an extinct chiefly line. This paper takes another look at these two families, and extends the discussion to include the Christian Dube of Inanda Mission, Natal. I identify a common thread connecting these families: the particular situation, and choices, of chiefly widows; and argue that the stark divergences Etherington describes can be better, or more richly understood by looking at the dynamics around particular women, their possessions or lack of possessions, their roles in homestead production, and their sons.

This emphasis, rather than ignoring the role of men in, for instance, the *ukuvusa* which brought Musi to power, opens up lines of enquiry around the interactions between widows of chiefs and male leaders of their clans. Cumulatively, the cases give a sense of the imperatives of survival and growth as felt by certain Natal clans and their elites that had moved from Zululand in the 1830s – and also how individuals in these clans responded to the presence of mission stations in 1840s Natal. Lastly, I suggest that the founding of Christian Nembula and Dube lines gave rise not only to dramatically new lives for these women and their sons and descendants, but also to distinctive missionary and convert narratives focussing on that moment of social schism.³

Recent work, notably by Jennifer Weir and Sean Hanretta, has taken a strikingly confident revisionist stance on the political role and status of women in the precolonial era, as well as in the nineteenth century. Both Weir and Hanretta counter what they see as

¹ Norman Etherington. *Preachers, Peasants and Politics in Southeast Africa, 1835-1880; African Christian Communities in Natal, Pondoland and Zululand*. (London: Royal Historical Society, 1978) 4.

² An obvious lack in this paper is discussion of scholarly approaches to the *Mfecane* – to be remedied in later drafts.

³ The parallels and contrasts between Nembula and his son John on the one hand – and James Dube and his son John on the other – can be strikingly expanded and provide ground for a whole separate study. This paper confines discussion more or less to 1840s Natal, and the dynamics out of which these families developed.

historiographical and historical narratives of Zulu women's subjugation, as well as static models of productive/reproductive relations.⁴

Guesswork surrounds any study of the African polities of nineteenth century Natal and Zululand, and the narratives presented in this paper are not posited as examples of a general and clear set of social responses. Such a claim would have to wait on more thorough collection of information on women and widows in these clans, as well as more thorough examination of the relevant literature.⁵ This paper hopes to explore specific instances of individuals' choices, and certain Natal clans' evident preoccupations, around gender, and productive relations – whilst working with the clear disadvantage of omitting information on women who were *not* related to chiefly lines, and how their experiences and concerns compared with those explored here.

This investigation straddles the convert/ “traditionalist” divide. In two of the cases being looked at (Mbalasi Makhanya, whose husband Duze was killed on Shaka's orders, and Dalida Dube whose husband was killed by Dingane), these widows of chiefs left their clans for mission stations, taking with them at least one son.⁶ In the contrasting third case, a “junior” prince was made chief of the Qwabe nation through *ukuvusa*. Jeff Guy has shown that this “resurrection” of the Qwabe was, initially at least, made possible through cattle which were in the ownership of widows, or came to Musi as *lobola* given for unmarried Qwabe women.⁷ Mbalasi, and Dalida, then – and Musi's cousin and aunts – had all lived through Shaka's reign, and fled to Natal during Dingane's.⁸ The three young men in question (Nembula Duze, James Dube and Musi kaGondolozzi respectively) were all more or less of an age; Nembula had been born in about 1825, James Dube 1830, and Musi in roughly 1828. The three examples looked at here deal with very different polities, to which some background is needed.

⁴ Hanretta, S. “Women, Marginality and the Zulu State: Women's Institutions and Power in the Early Nineteenth Century”. *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 39 (1998), No. 3, pp. 389-415 (Cambridge University Press) 389-415. Weir J. (2006). “Chiefly women and women's leadership in pre-colonial southern Africa”. In Nomboniso Gasa (ed.), *Women in South African History: Basus'iimbokodo, Bawel'imilambo/They remove boulders and cross rivers*. Cape Town: HSRC Press. [Online] accessed from: http://www.hsrcpress.ac.za/full_title_info.asp?id=2186 on Oct 16 2008. Hanretta and Weir respond primarily to Guy: see “Gender oppression in southern Africa's precapitalist societies”. In Cheryl Walker (ed) *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*. (Cape Town: David Philip, 1990). 33-47; and Guy, J. *Analysing Pre-Capitalist Societies in Southern Africa*. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 1. (Oct, 1987), pp. 18-37.

⁵ Subsequent drafts of this paper will be positioned rather more fully in relation to these sources, as well as the considerable work in the area by, for instance Jo Beall, Carolyn Hamilton, and Helen Bradford.

⁶ “Clan” here refers to “a social unit made up of men and women who believe they have descended from a common ancestor, through the male line” (Jeff Guy, *The Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom: The Civil War in Zululand, 1879-1884*, (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1994) p 23.

⁷ The account in this paper draws primarily on Guy's work: “The Resurrection of Mthandeni”. Chapter in progress. 2008, 3-4. and a close reading of the 1893 succession dispute between Musi and his son Meseni. (PAR. SNA, 1/1/277, 1890-1893.)

⁸ Hughes refers to “Mayembe Dube” – Dalida's name before she was baptised. I use “Dalida” and will change this if, eg, John Dube's papers reveal that she was referred to or remembered by her family as “Mayembe”.

The Qwabe kingdom was large, and powerful in the 1820s and early 1830s, and posed a threat to the Zulu. The Makhanya were a sub-clan of the Qwabe and had become a distinct group within it in about the early 1700s. In brief summary, Pakatwayo kaKondhlo, the chief of the Qwabe who died during Shaka's reign, had no male issue. His brother Gondolozu therefore succeeded him, and was killed by Shaka in 1828. The third of the princely brothers, Nqeto, moved across the Tugela with most of the Qwabe, including the Makhanya clan, and they survived by pillaging as they went, travelling all the way to the Amampondo, with whom they clashed. But Nqeto was killed in the course of this journey, and sub clans of the Qwabe (like the Makhanya), as well as the remnants of the Qwabe royal house, retraced their steps and ended up further north again, in Natal by the late 1830s. The Makhanya established themselves "along the emaNzimtoti and ezimBokodweni rivers".⁹ In 1906 the Makhanya men under chief Mthambo – as with several other Natal clans – doctored themselves for war in support of Meseni but were reported to the Administration before they took any action.¹⁰ They arrived around the same time that the Boers were making their claims in Natal, and the earliest Natal missionaries (Congregationalists of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, here the AB) establishing themselves.¹¹

On the Qadi, Hughes writes:

Long before the rise of the Zulu kingdom, the Qadi had been a subordinate chiefdom in the large Ngcobo paramountcy, entrenched in the Thukela valley. It was amongst the first to be incorporated into the kingdom under Shaka. Under their chief Dube, the Qadi survived the first two decades of Zulu authority reasonably intact. But then, in the autumn of 1837, the polity (including Dube himself) was crushed between Dingane's 'upper and nether grindstones'.¹²

And Magema Fuze summarised the spread of refugee clans thus:

There were many clans that arrived here and settled wherever they pleased, because even those of Dube living along the Mhlathuze, and those of Sokhulu who lived below them towards the sea, ruled themselves independently under their own chiefs... there were many independent clans, large and small, which I have not enumerated here.¹³

Guy refers to the efforts of these "related but scattered groups" to re-establish homesteads and polities, and points out that they frequently had disagreements over chiefly succession.¹⁴ As "decapitated" royal houses reconstituted themselves in an entirely new place, members of royal lineages within a clan argued their greater claim to legitimacy one way or the other on the basis of bridewealth transactions that had taken place many years before – of these the Qwabe "resurrection" was by far the most dramatic. It is

⁹ AT Bryant, *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal*, Longmans, Green and Co., 1929. 188

¹⁰ D.H. Reader. *Zulu Tribe in Transition: the Makhanya of southern Natal*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966). 230-1.

¹¹ Jeff Guy. *The Maphumulo Uprising*. (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005) 35

¹² Heather Hughes, "Doubly Elite: Exploring the Life of John Langalibalele Dube". *Journal of Southern African Studies*. 27, No. 3, Special Issue for Shula Marks. (Sep., 2001), 445-458. 450.

¹³ Magema M. Fuze. *The Black People: and whence they came*. (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press and Killie Campbell Africana Library: Translation Series Number One, 1979) 19.

¹⁴ Guy. *The Maphumulo Uprising*. 36.

significant that Mbalasi and Dalida converted to Christianity, taking their sons with them, in this context: of dead chief's sons claiming their fathers' positions, often with their mothers' support and that of "commoners that coalesced around them".¹⁵ Within this network of contestation, these two royal women opted for the mission stations, as an alternative to staying in their own communities and lasting out what Deborah Gaitskell refers to as "gender-specific life-crises".¹⁶

Both Mbalasi and Dalida came to American Board mission stations at a time when the missionaries had realised that converting the Zulu kingdom in its entirety was clearly impossible. They now intended to "raise up" independent "African Congregational communities".¹⁷ Instead of chipping away at a massive polity, they would work among "small, independent tribes living near whites."¹⁸ However, those making up the large congregations that flocked to the missions on Sundays, stayed away as conversions began to take place, from Mbalasi's baptism in 1846 onward. Also, it took a long time before these conversions did begin to occur, giving rise to the American missionaries' litany of "ten long years" spent in unsuccessful evangelising. The first conversion was at Adams mission station, southwest of port natal, and between the Illovo and Umkomazi rivers in what was to become, after 1847, the "Umlazi" location.

MAKHANYA

The social status of Mbalasi Makhanya is now hard to ascertain. She was a widow of the previous Makhanya chief, Duze, who had been killed by Shaka in about 1827 or 1828 and was living amongst the Makhanya, near Amanzimtoti, under the chief Makutha, in the early 1840s. Her son Nembula was the half-brother of this chief, after whom the township of KwaMakutha is named.

Oral history throws up a host of explanations for Mbalasi Makhanya's move to Dr Newton Adams' Amanzimtoti mission station; some say that she was "sent" to work for

¹⁵ Guy. *The Maphumulo Uprising*. 36.

¹⁶ Deborah Gaitskell. "Devout Domesticity? A century of African women's Christianity in South Africa." In Cheryl Walker (ed) *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*.(Cape Town: David Philip, 1990). 251-272. 253.

¹⁷ Norman Etherington "Kingdoms of This World and the Next: Christian Beginnings among Zulu and Swazi". In Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport (eds) *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social & Cultural History*. (Cape Town: David Philip, 1997) 89-106. 92 Vukile Khumalo describes the strategies and concerns of Dingane and the American missionaries, *Politics, Power and Production*, Chapter one. The 1830s had brought the missionaries nothing but frustration; Piet Retief and the Voortrekkers arrived in northern Natal, and petitioned Dingane for large areas of land, at about the same time the American missionaries were attempting, unsuccessfully, to build a strong relationship with the king, and with his subjects. Straight after Dingane's February 1838 massacre of Retief's party, the American missionaries deserted their one post in Zululand and left for Port Elizabeth, as conflict seemed imminent between the Port Natal settlers and the *boers* on one hand, and Dingane on the other. In their absence the Umlazi and Imfume stations were flattened by the Zulu army Dingane sent into Natal. The missionaries only ventured back after the defeat of the army at Blood River, in December 1838. On their return, the rebuilding of the stations began in June 1839, ahead of the British annexation of Natal in 1842 (made official in 1843), and it was now clear that the mission would have to be confined to the colony.

¹⁸ Dinnerstein, *The American Board Mission to the Zulu, 1835-1910*, 34

Adams when he needed a helper.¹⁹ Oral accounts collected in 1970 describe her son Nembula's illness as the cause of the initial move – that he had a skin disease.²⁰ The other, and “most favoured” explanation amongst these 1970 accounts, however, was that Mbalasi was escaping a planned *ukungena* marriage – a marriage to her dead husband's brother.²¹ Another account, that of Paul Lawrence Ira Kanyile, (one of Nembula's grandsons) states that Mbalasi “was one of the wives of the Chief and...because of her persecution by other chiefs' wives had to flee to Adams Mission for protection”.²² In contrast, Njabulo Makhanya, a descendant of a related line of Makhanya converts, states that Nembula was in fact meant to be the next chief of the Makhanya. How recently this account took shape is not clear. According to this account, Mbalasi would have been Duze's senior wife:

Mbalasi had only one son, named Nembula. And round about 1835-45 there were white missionaries who stayed there – [including] Dr Adams. Nembula was a very sickly child. So, as Dr Adams was a doctor he took him, and Nembula stayed there with him, and he grew up there; he worked for the Adams family and he was promised a cow. ...they stayed with this family, but still they were not converted, *because Nembula was supposed to be a king – because he was the first son of Duze*. So they stayed with this family up until... 1846 I think it was June.... Mbalasi converted to Christianity – so she was the first Zulu converted woman. And when she was converted in 1846, Nembula was baptised and confirmed also to the newly-formed Adams church. So, Mbalasi went around preaching now; preaching the gospel. As a result of that, many Zulus converted to Christianity. Not only at Adams, but at Inanda also, in Groutville, in Imfume, at many other places; churches were constituted in those areas.²³

According to this version Makutha Makhanya “took the chieftaincy” only once Nembula converted.²⁴ This is also seen as accounting for the length of time that Mbalasi and Nembula lived with Newton Adams, without converting: royalty had another claim upon them.²⁵ However, Makutha was chief already when the Makhanyas settled in the area. The oral account which Njabulo Makhanya knows is one of several that the Nembula/Makhanya family have accepted over time. This particular one, elevating Ira Nembula to the status of rightful but hesitant prince, appears to be directly influenced by the story of the Dubes' conversion at Inanda, (discussed below) and James Dube's decision not to take up his agreed-upon right to Qadi leadership.

There is a great deal of confusion and contradiction between sources on the Nembulas, regarding the family's degree of royalty and importance – dependent on Mbalasi's

¹⁹ Ephraim Silas Henry Nembula to Killie Campbell, c. 1940. Killie Campbell Collection (KCC), Uncatalogued Manuscript in “Steel Drawers”, 8639.

²⁰ Myra Dinnerstein. *The American Board Mission to the Zulu*, 41.

²¹ Myra Dinnerstein. *The American Board Mission to the Zulu*, 41.

²² P. Lawrence Khanyile to Killie Campbell. 13th September, 1957.

Killie Campbell Collection (KCC). Uncatalogued Manuscript in “Steel Drawers”. 25796, *Nembula Papers*.

²³ Interview with N. Makhanya. Weds 28th November. 2007. 11: 40.

²⁴ Interview with N. Makhanya. Weds 28th November. 2007. 11: 40.

²⁵ Interview with N. Makhanya. Weds 28th November. 2007. 11: 40.

seniority amongst Duze's widows. Regardless of the actual events, it is clear that Mbalasi and Nembula fit into the kinds of contestations over lineages to which Guy refers; and that assertions of royal legitimacy have survived, over a century and a half later. All of the accounts in some way relate to the anomalous position of Mbalasi, as a woman like Dalida: excepting herself from a society within which, traditionally, her "productive labour and reproductive powers as daughter, wife or widow", regardless of respect she may have been accorded due to age, would have been tied to a household and "owned" by a man related to her.²⁶ The removal of her son from this round of production was very significant, in addition; his designated role of helping to support his childhood homestead until he established his own, was cut off by separation from their community.²⁷ Whatever her reasons for moving away with a young son, by doing so Mbalasi was making what her relations would have viewed as a considerable break. This break was confirmed by her conversion in 1846, evidently an extremely tense occasion, and arranged in a theatrical manner; Newton Adams stated that "the scene made a powerful impression on the assembly which witnessed it". This "assembly" was very large – Mbalasi's confirmation took place publicly; in front of "500 or more" non-Christians.²⁸ Congregation numbers plummeted after this. An increase in baptisms, though the number fluctuated from year to year, began to have a significant impact on church attendance, which diminished in Newton Adams' last years of life until his death in 1851.

Forty years after his mother's conversion, Nembula's evidence for the 1882 Natal Native Commission showed that, unlike many surrounding *amakholwa*, he had kept rigidly clear of practices like *lobola*, and would not accept cattle for his daughters (though he deplored, from his own experience, the damage this did to Christian daughters who ended up with low status in their husbands' polygamous homesteads).²⁹ It appears that the Nembula/Makhanya family were keenly aware of their heritage, that of the earliest family of converts in Natal.

Yet Nembula remembered and invoked another aspect of their heritage: the same Commission looked at the 1864 and 1875 petitions of Natal *amakholwa* for collective exemption from Native law. In the list of names (James Dube, Msingaphansi (Nyuswa) of Imfume, Benjamin, (probably Hawes of Inanda), Magema Magwaza, "Udhlonono", "Jonathan Ngidi", "John Mavuma" (the John Mavuma after whom Nembula's son was named), "George Champyana", and "Joel Hawes"), Nembula significantly signed himself as "Nembula Duze". His descendants alternated between calling themselves "Nembula" and "Makhanya"; similarly, his brother Makhubalo's descendents alternated between "Makhubalo" and "Makhanya". Thus, for Nembula to sign himself by his original first name rather than his loaded baptismal name Ira – and to call himself "Duze" rather than "Makhanya" – were strong statements emphasizing his connection to Qwabe nobility.

²⁶ Gaitskell. "Devout Domesticity?" 253

²⁷ Jeff Guy. "Gender oppression in southern Africa's precapitalist societies". In Cheryl Walker (ed) *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*. (Cape Town: David Philip, 1990). 33-47. 39

²⁸ Newton Adams quoted in Amy Bridgman Cowles, *Talk for the centenary of the American Zulu Mission*. Photocopy of typescript, April 1934. 23 (Original archival location unknown).

²⁹ Natal Native Commission (NNC). Evidence of "Nambula, Dronk Vley (Spokesman) and Makubula, Amanzimtote Mission Station". 13th February, 1882. 169-176.

These identifications complicate a sometimes oversimplified historiographical presentation of the shift from "traditionalist" to "Christian". Nembula kept to certain moral precepts that few *amakholwa* fully subscribed to, but nevertheless was completely familiar with the goings-on of "outsiders" or "*amahedeni*". The missionary Myron Pinkerton reflected proudly on this in a letter that suggests missionaries were aware of, (and especially happy to hold up a counter-example to) the image of the alienated convert. After a "circuit of itinerant preaching among heathen kraals", he wrote that the unconverted listeners "soon found that [Nembula] was well posted on all subjects which they introduced. He knew more of the chiefs and tribal affairs of the country than all of them put together".³⁰

QADI

Heather Hughes describes the senior leadership of the Qadi chiefdom in Natal in the 1840s as having been

acutely aware of the forces of destruction and opportunity that had shaped their destiny. They articulated this understanding in numerous ways, from the declamation of chiefly praises to the elaboration of strategies for future Qadi survival.³¹

Hughes describes two devastating losses the Qadi suffered in very quick succession. As we have seen, in 1837, their chief Dube was killed by Dingane, and the Qadi fled south of the Tugela led by Dube's son Dabeka. Then, in 1838 in the wake of the Piet Retief massacre, Dabeka too was killed when the Qadi and other clans marched against Dingane with white militiamen from Port Natal.³²

In contrast to Mbalasi Makhanya, there is quite clear information on how Mayembe Dube, the grandmother of John Langalibalele Dube, came to be baptised Dalida Dube and live on an American Board mission station. Like Mbalasi, she was a widow of a chief (following Dingane's 1837 attack). Dalida's children were therefore half-siblings of Dube's heir Dabeka, and were aunts and uncles to Dabeka's heirs. To avoid an *ukungena* marriage, Dalida moved to the mission station under the protection of the missionary Daniel Lindley in 1849, and was baptised that year. The social fallout was great: members of the Dube clan "attempted several times to kill her and her son for becoming

³⁰ Myron Pinkerton to Nathaniel Clark, 17 July 1875. ABCFM 15.4, vol. 8.

This engagement with Natal clans' history was clearly passed on to Norman Nembula, one of his sons, who moonlighted as an assistant to the noted oral historian and colonial official James Stuart, identifying informants for his oral history. (and was an informant: see de B Webb, C and Wright, J eds. *The James Stuart Archive of Recorded Oral Evidence Relating to the History of the Zulu and Neighbouring Peoples*. (University of Natal Press, 1976) Volume 5, p 12-19.) References to Norman Nembula are scattered throughout the *James Stuart Archive*.

³¹ Heather Hughes, "Doubly Elite: Exploring the Life of John Langalibalele Dube". *Journal of Southern African Studies*. 27, No. 3, Special Issue for Shula Marks. (Sep., 2001), 445-458. 450

³² Hughes, "Doubly Elite" 450. and Magema M Fuze. *The Black People and Whence they Came*. (Pietermaritzburg and Durban, Univeristy of Natal Press, 1979) 76, 170

Christians, and often she slept in the forest to escape assassins.”³³ Lindley was excited by the arrival of such a prominent convert; a formal church for Inanda was immediately constituted around her, with nine charter members. As at Amanzimtoti following Mbalasi's conversion, the large, interested congregations fell down to virtually nothing. Hughes writes

It is not clear why [an *ukungena* marriage] should have been arranged so long after Dube's death; it was possibly to provide cattle for her son's lobola, since he was approaching marriageable age himself. Mayembe was not quietly opting out of the social order, as the handful of other converts had previously done; she was challenging the very sense of order within that domain. Moreover, she took with her not only her children, one of whom was James Dube [then called uKakonina], a brother to [the dead chief] Dabeka, but eight head of cattle, five of which she had purchased from the sale of *amabele* she had grown, and three belonging to James, given him by his father.³⁴

If Hughes's surmise is correct, the *ukungena* marriage that Dalida objected to was perhaps part of the urgent project of growing the reduced Qadi on Natal soil and, more specifically, strengthening and expanding its royal homesteads. The likelihood that this was the case will appear when we examine the manner of the purposeful regeneration of the Qwabe royal house. (see below). An older woman like Dalida was probably not meant primarily to bear children, and Hughes posits that her family may have intended to give her son more of a foothold from which to expand *his* own homestead. Another possibility, however, is that the *lobola* from her *ukungena* marriage was intended for the Qadi chief.³⁵ Instead of marrying, she broke with the productive relations of the Qadi, took her own hard-won cattle and those of her son and left. It can be argued that both the planned *ukungena* marriage, and Dalida's actions (in selling maize to accumulate cattle, and leaving her clan) were indications of the Qadi elite's objectives in Natal, and of the Qadis' changing world. Natal clans needed cattle; as Hughes shows, the Qadi had had little security or wealth in Natal until 1843 when Mawa, Mpande's aunt, and her people came fleeing out of Zululand and lost their cattle to grasping Natalians.³⁶

Dalida, whose "husband and relatives were slaughtered in conflict with Zulu chief Dingane" was not the only one of the nine initial Inanda church members to be marked

³³ Marable Manning. *African Nationalist. The Life of John Langalibalele Dube*, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Maryland (1976). 26

³⁴ Heather Hughes, *Politics and society in Inanda, Natal: the Qadi under Chief Mqhawe, c. 1840-1906*. (London: unpublished PHD thesis).

³⁵ I am still to ascertain Mqhawe's period of rule: Hughes asserts that Mqhawe was chief "from the early 1840s until his death in 1906" (Doubly Elite, 450) but Mesham's letter here shows Mahlukana was chief in 1857.

³⁶ Hughes, "Doubly Elite" 451 quotes a Qadi noble, Madikane Cele, as saying "It is with those cattle that we had established ourselves, we of the white men's country". (Madikane in the *James Stuart Archive* volume 2 pg 56)

by the upheavals of the decade before, in Zululand.³⁷ John Mavuma, the oldest man among these charter members, had been a soldier under Shaka and under Dingane.³⁸ He had angered Dingane, who ordered that he be put to death, and Mavuma had narrowly escaped and made the long journey south.

Hughes writes that Dalida Dube “never remarried”.³⁹ In fact, by 1857 she was making preparations to marry another Christian. Once more the issue of ownership of cattle came up, and once more Dalida refused to defer to a Qadi chief. In that year, Mesham, the first magistrate of Inanda location, wrote to the Reverend Daniel Lindley as follows:

A man named Faku residing I believe on your mission station applied to me some time ago for permission to marry "Talita" formerly the "Inkosikazi" of the Amaqadi tribe⁴⁰ – This application I forwarded to the Diplomatic Agent, and received that Officer's reply thereto, together with certain instructions which I was desired to see carried out before the marriage occurs. I accordingly summoned Mahlukana (the chief who now represents the Amaqadi tribe) and Talita to appear before me to make the necessary arrangements according to my instructions – Certain conditions were drawn up and distinctly understood and agreed to by them both in my presence – One of the conditions agreed to was that Talita should deliver over the cattle to Mahlukana – This, Mahlukana has just sent over to inform me, she has refused to do, notwithstanding he has applied twice to her, as well as to her son "Kakonina", the latter alleging that I had told him that the cattle belonged to him and not to Mahlukana. If Kakonina said this (and I have no reason to doubt Mahlukana's messenger), he gave utterance to a direct falsehood, for I distinctly told him that the cattle must be delivered to Mahlukana, that "Talita" could not marry unless they were given up, and that he could not claim them now, he being an "Umfana" – Having also been informed that the Banns of marriage between Faku and the said "Talita" have been already published by you two successive Sundays I have the honour to request that you will be pleased not to consummate the marriage between above named parties until you hear further from me on the subject.⁴¹

Whatever the exact "instructions" were that Theophilus Shepstone gave Mesham, it seems that Shepstone was aware of the political sensitivity of Dalida's actions both in

³⁷ Marable Manning. *African Nationalist. The Life of John Langalibalele Dube*, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Maryland (1976). 26

³⁸ Mavuma, baptised at some point between 1847 and 1849, was the namesake of Dr. John Mavuma Nembula, Nembula kaDuze's child. The sharing of a name between these men – a former soldier in Shaka's army who travelled far to come to Inanda, and a young man who was born at Adams mission and travelled to America, qualifying as the much-touted “first Zulu doctor” – is striking. From the 1840s, significant namings (both of converts' children and on the occasion of adults' baptisms) shed light on the close interconnections (and preoccupations) between converts, and between converts and missionaries, of the American Zulu Mission stations – more on this below.

³⁹ Hughes, “Doubly Elite”, 449.

⁴⁰ Faku's request to marry Dalida must have been made no earlier than 1851, the year when Mesham and three other magistrates were placed over Natal "locations". Despatch: Sir H.G. Smith to Early Grey, December 22, 1850. *British Parliamentary Papers*, 1851, p 57.
re "the Inkosikazi": Missionary sources tended to refer to both Mbalasi and Dalida as the undisputed chief wife of their respective clans, when other sources and the course of events suggest that they were not.

⁴¹ L. Mesham to D. Lindley, 16th April 1857, PAR SNA 1/3/1.

1849 and when about to wed Faku – and he was aware of what the Administration's response would have to be. She had already deprived the 1849 Qadi chief of cattle he saw as his; and then denied she had an obligation to Mahlukana in 1857. Her royalty meant that her *lobola* would be greater than that given for a commoner.⁴² Mesham's letter shows that Shepstone's Administration (in its early days) backed a chief's claim to Dalida's lobola, edging out her son's claim to it – though the outcome is unknown. Guy has argued that this "accommodation of patriarchs", based not only on diplomatic need but also on shared views, was fundamental to the working of Shepstone's Administration.⁴³

Magistrate Mesham simultaneously brought the missionary in line, and "into the loop", exposing in the process the frequent conflict between the Administration's political expediency, and missionaries' attitudes toward the rights of "their" converts.

Weir strikingly shows that, in nineteenth century southern Africa, many royal women were wealthy and owned cattle in their own right.⁴⁴ Dalida's actions do not fit in with the list of known conditions (compiled by the 1853 Commission which investigated the circumstances of Africans in Natal) under which women did own cattle.⁴⁵ This makes the situation of nineteenth century widows in Natal all the more interesting – some of these women, as we will see in the case of the royal Qwabe widows, held cattle which had belonged to their husbands, or had been given (to their fathers) on the occasion of their marriage. Dalida's cattle seem to have been "held in trust" for her children, especially her son James, at a time when many converts required an injection of capital to begin their entrepreneurial projects.⁴⁶

Dalida Dube's cattle surfaced once more as a source of tension between her family and the Qadi chief, apparently after her death. When her son James died in 1877, according to Hughes, the chief Mqhawe took advantage of this and "made a final bid to recover the cattle he believed had wrongfully been removed by Dalida Dube 28 years earlier."⁴⁷ The missionary in charge of Inanda at the time, Stephen Pixley, "ensured that the property of James's widow Elizabeth would be secure from customary law, even though James had not been exempted."

This James Dube at different times played a diplomatic role in the relationship between the Qadi and the mission station, and fought the Qadi chief for the right to cattle. He

⁴² From the letter, the indications are that Faku was a Christian. It was common for Natal Christians to pay *lobola*, and missionary attitudes toward this varied.

⁴³ Jeff Guy. *An Accommodation of Patriarchs: Theophilus Shepstone and the system of Native Administration in Natal*. paper presented to the History and African Studies Seminar Series (University of Natal)1997.

⁴⁴ Weir J. "Chiefly women" 5-8, critiquing Guy "Gender oppression in southern Africa's precapitalist societies".

⁴⁵ Weir. "Chiefly women" 5-6. Quoting the *Proceedings and Report of the Commission Appointed to Inquire into the Past and present State of the Kafirs in the District of Natal, ...1853*.

⁴⁶ see Etherington, N. "African Economic Experiments in Colonial Natal, 1845-1880". *African Economic History*, No. 5. (Spring, 1978), 1-15.

⁴⁷ Hughes points to: Stephen Pixley to Acting Secretary of Native Affairs, 21 November 1877, SNA 1/1/29 896/1877, PAR. I have not yet seen this document and believe it will shed further light on the attitudes of the Qadi leadership to Dalida Dube's defection, and contestation surrounding her cattle.

became the third black preacher ordained by the AZM, and Nembula (Mbalasi's son) the fifth, ordained within months of each other.⁴⁸ James had a successful transport-riding business, like many *amakholwa* at this time (it seems quite possible that Dalida's cattle were used in starting this up), and Nembula was a pioneering sugarcane farmer who also went into transport-riding shortly before his death. Neither of these men attained exemption from Native Law, but some of their sons did – in a time when (as Etherington has shown) many of the advantages conferred by exemption were being whittled away.⁴⁹ The shifts in production that came with the move from homestead to mission station life have been demonstrated amply and in detail in studies of particular missions.⁵⁰ This shift clearly had implications for how cattle, and women's labour, were viewed. Further investigation remains to be done on this – for instance, given that *ukulobolisa* survived amongst many converts even whilst some mission stations introduced a new gender division of labour and a new, peasant mode of production. The intersection between these two worlds of production was complex. Peasant production was not confined to mission stations, as indicated by Dalida's sale of maize.

Again, both James Dube and Nembula lived in the same area as their half-brothers who had become chiefs of their clan. Missionary sources, and some current-day descendants of early *amakholwa*, invoke the royalty of both Dube and Nembula.⁵¹ The missionary William Ireland, writing on the occasion of the 1885 Jubilee celebrations of the American Zulu Mission, made separate reference to the royal connections of the two men. He quoted this passage on Dube, from the letters of the missionary Daniel Lindley:

James Dube is the son of Dube, who was Chief of the tribe, and James is the half brother of the present chief. While he has renounced every rag and tatter of heathenism, he is still greatly respected by his people.⁵²

Conversion of royal women lent weight to the missionary enterprise and counteracted the image of early converts as powerless social "flotsam and jetsam". For missionaries, women like Mbalasi and Dalida were held up almost as trophies; as Hughes puts it, "a rare convert among the rare" – sufficient reason to form an official church, and to up and move the mission station entirely if necessary.⁵³ In representations of Mbalasi, despite indications that she experienced social marginalisation, there is a very frequent emphasis (both in missionary accounts and accounts of her descendants) upon the factor of her *royalty* as underlining the significance of her conversion. Yet this royalty has been as

⁴⁸ William Ireland. *Jubilee of the American Mission in Natal*, (Horne, 1886) 41-42.

⁴⁹ Etherington. *Preachers, Peasants and Politics*. 177

⁵⁰ see Sheila Meintjes, *Edendale 1850–1906: a case study of rural transformation and class formation. in an African mission in Natal*. Thesis (PhD) 1988; Khumalo, C. V. *Politics, Power and Production: An historical investigation of African Sugar Cane Production at Umvoti mission Reserve 1844-1905*, (MA Thesis, University of Natal, 1997).

⁵² Daniel Lindley to Clark, (location unknown) quoted in William Ireland. *Jubilee of the American Mission in Natal*. 41.

⁵³ Hughes, "Doubly Elite: Exploring the Life of John Langalibalele Dube", 456.

important for *amakholwa* themselves. It has been part of a narrative that trundled forward, constructed between missionary and convert, now in oral form, now in written form, and driven along according to the converging and diverging interests of these different players in the maintenance and meaning-making of the mission station. Women's pressured choices have become narrative capital; the ground upon which a proud, "mora" new mission station tradition was to be founded. In the 1870s, attending Inanda Seminary at the same time, were two girls both named Dalitha (and variously referred to as "Talitha", Dalita" and "Dalida"), from two of the oldest convert families on the American Board mission stations.⁵⁴ Dalitha Hawes studied and then worked at the Seminary, from 1869 to 1885, and Dalitha Isaacs graduated in 1881.⁵⁵ This indicates the force Dalida's story continued to have at Inanda.

QWABE

As discussed above, the Qwabe ("after a series of epic conflicts and journeys") arrived in present-day Natal in the late 1830s. There was at this point no longer a strong royal house to which sub-clans, like the Makhanya, could pay tribute; the three sons of Kondhlo – Pakatwayo, Gondolozu and Nqeto were all dead. Pakatwayo's unmarried daughter Hetshepi was still alive in Zululand, and so were her aunts, Kondhlo's daughters, who had lost their husbands to the conflict with the Zulu: among them Ziyendani and Ziqgili.⁵⁶

The rich Evidence of the 1893 succession dispute between Musi and Meseni reveals that a powerful set of practices and beliefs were at play, surrounding women's role in political leadership, and in production and reproduction.

The surviving male and female members of Pakatwayo's court both played significant roles in the *ukuvusa* or awakening of the Qwabe: an induna named Nkonyapi, managed to bring Hetshepi and her surviving aunts to Natal from Zululand, to live in a homestead he called after Pakatwayo's old one: eMthandeni. Then,

Hetshepi asked the men to go to Zululand to bring in Musi because she was a woman and could not succeed [to the Qwabe throne] and Musi was the one to succeed in that case. Several of the headmen of the Amaqwabe tribe had already settled down round the Emthandeni kraal [in addition to] Nkonyapi. ...Musi [was fetched and] returned with these four men from Zululand [in Fokazi's account, contradicted by other accounts, these men were Gamfe, Nkonyapi, Tshika, Mdhladhlan] – he was then only a boy. When Musi came to the Emthandeni Hetshepi said, pointing to Musi, "He is my own self and he is the one to stand in my place as the heir of Pakatwayo". The men to whom this was said expressed their satisfaction and consent. Musi brought no property with him at all, there were some cattle in the Emthandeni kraal received for three of

⁵⁴ Meghan Healey. "A World of Their Own: Community, Power, and Resilience at an American School for South African Women, 1869 to Recent Times". Draft Phd introduction (working paper) presented to the History and African Studies Seminar, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 29 October 2008. 13. and 13n

⁵⁵ Healey. "A World of Their Own" 13.

⁵⁶ PAR. SNA, 1/1/277, Fokazi kaGodolozu, 20 February 1893. 122-123. And Guy, "The Resurrection of Mthandeni", 2.

Kondhlo's daughters and these became his property – this was the first property he came into possessing. Hetshepi [got] married when Musi was there and Musi received the cattle. Musi on his arrival at once took his position as chief of those men of the tribe who were about the Amanzimtoti.⁵⁷

The Qwabe presented Musi to Theophilus Shepstone in about 1846 and petitioned for him to be recognised as their rightful chief – establishing “a crucial precedent: that whatever the strengths of their hereditary or tribal claims the *amakhosi* held their authority by virtue of their relationship with the colonial government”.⁵⁸

Among the Qwabe, and in this particular place, Hetshepi did not take up the chiefship – Musi became the proxy for both her and her father Pakatwayo. The succession dispute came to revolve around the question – to what extent was Musi in fact a proxy? Was he a "bull", meant to "raise up" real sons for Pakatwayo (who were, then, not Musi's sons), or was he Pakatwayo's heir in his own right? As with other features of the clan's Natal history, the narrative of Hetshepi's approval, and the terms of that approval, were unclear and manipulated by both sides to their advantage. The Evidence brings up the question of the degree of passivity or action taken by the royal women, and seems to veil the answer.

Guy writes:

Cattle for Musi's marriages, in other words for the development of Mthandeni and the Qwabe chief lineage, were obtained from the homesteads of the now dead Qwabe chiefs – held in their name by the daughters of Kondhlo and the daughter of Godolozzi, either from those her father had received them when he 'raised seed' for his brother the *inkosi* Phakathwayo, or from her own *lobola*....The *lobola* for his first four wives was obtained in this way and the subsequent six from his people, nominally and predominantly Qwabe, but also from the many others who acknowledged him as chief and lived on land which was therefore under his jurisdiction. [the *lobola* for his fifth wife] was raised by the people.⁵⁹

The implications of these *lobola* transactions were delicate: in the succession dispute, there was uncertainty around whether or not Meseni's mother, Masimai, had been acknowledged as Musi's chief wife, and Meseni as, therefore, Pakatwayo's rightful heir. Various indunas who gave evidence, especially those who supported Meseni, said that the same cattle which had been received by Musi for his cousin Hetshepi's marriage, had then been given as *lobola* to enable him to marry Masimai, which would have conferred Pakatwayo's royalty upon Meseni as her eldest son. Meseni would then have been seen as being “born for Pakatwayo”. (The cattle given for Pakatwayo's daughter Hleyaphi were also said to be of "Pakatwayo's estate"⁶⁰). Paqa, an induna on Meseni's side, stated in addition that some of the cattle given for Masimai were from the *lobola* of Musi's widowed aunt, Zigqili which would also have conferred royalty upon Meseni: asserting

⁵⁷ PAR. SNA, 1/1/277, Fokazi kaGodolozzi, 20 February 1893. 121-122.

⁵⁸ Guy, “The Resurrection of Mthandeni”, 3.

⁵⁹ Guy, “The Resurrection of Mthandeni”, 3-4

⁶⁰ PAR. SNA, 1/1/277, Fokazi kaGodolozzi, 20 February 1893. 126-127

that “The cattle given for her [Masimai] were ... cattle received for Hetshepi kaPakatwayo and Zigqili kaKondhlo”⁶¹

Among other complaints about Meseni, Musi stated that he had for a spell gone to live with another chief, taking his mother and sisters with him, and when he came back had without Musi’s permission “acquired and used the cattle from his sister’s lobola”⁶² It can be tentatively suggested that for many of these royal women (and especially toward the late 1880s, when the fight for the Qwabe throne gained heat), political involvement was centered on a set of now-hidden machinations. These machinations related to their support for – and perhaps the gathering of commoners' support for – either Musi or Meseni. The support of the people meant their willingness to offer up cattle for a particular leader, to enable him to marry and expand his own homestead. Cattle existed for Musi initially in the form of widows' cattle, and came into his homestead via his cousin Hetshepi's marriage and through donations from his people. Meseni's appropriation of this resource base was a source of indignation and distress, and a sign of Musi's diminishing control.

In the 1840s, Natal Africans were trying to recover from dislocation. Where chiefly lines had been cut short or altered by violence, strong imperatives existed, keenly felt by lineage elites, around the productive role of women and their young sons. Within this, royal women and their sons were of especial interest to elites.

Royal women who had seen the upheavals in Zululand, many of whom were widows, were confronted with the problem of how to move forward, and what would become of their princely sons or relatives in Natal. They did this in different ways, amongst the reconstituting fragments of their original polities and amidst the multitude of different players and interests at work in Natal –. Mbalasi, seemingly a junior wife (and so a more vulnerable widow) of a strong subordinate clan took her only son with her to Newton Adams in reaction to some kind of now-uncertain persecution or possibly the prospect of an *ukungena* marriage. Her grandson was qualified as a doctor before the end of the century, but he and the rest of her family were unable to shake off poverty. Hleyaphi as the only child of Pakhathi put her word and her cattle behind the teenaged Musi to revive a chiefly line; the male indunas of the old kingdom, in some sort of conference with her and with Musi's widowed great-aunts, arranged cattle for him.⁶³ In contrast to women who gave up their cattle to the greater glory of their clan, Dalida Dube moved both children and cattle onto a mission station, and incurred the anger of two successive Qadi chiefs. Yet her children and grandchildren formed an important and strategic link with the Qadi leadership in the decades to follow, working for this clan’s survival in the face of a new barrage of changes and pressures.⁶⁴

⁶¹ PAR. SNA, 1/1/277, Paqa, 20 February 1893. 141

⁶² PAR. SNA, 1/1/277, Musi kaGondolozu, 114.

⁶⁴ Hughes, “Doubly Elite”.