

THE STORY OF NKOSASANA AMAKHAYA :

Her Continued Insertion in the Colonial Imagination

by Stephanie Victor

Abstract: In this paper I follow a two-pronged approach. Firstly, I aim to tell the remarkable story of the AmaNgqika *Nkosazana* Amakhaya and the sacrifice she was willing to make for her father, *Nkosi* Jongumsobomvu Maqoma, so that he could retain his ancestral land. This act of devotion speaks of the familial loyalty of a daughter in the year when *Nkosi* Maqoma's legacy is celebrated but also epitomises the centrality of land in her narrative.ⁱ

Secondly, I investigate a variety of colonial observers, including military commentators, evangelical humanitarians, and an English author, the wife of a career soldier, all of whom were willing narrators of *Nkosazana* Amakhaya's story. I am specifically interested in the way some of the commentators, although not unproblematic, sympathetically recounted her story, suggesting that they were 'troubled' by at least some aspects of colonial patriarchy.ⁱⁱ It is, however, a selective commentary. In both prose and rather mediocre poetry, *Nkosazana* Amakhaya is portrayed and embellished in the colonial imagination, yet her story is absent from any nineteenth century Eastern Cape newspapers or Xhosa commentary.ⁱⁱⁱ

Introduction: *Nkosazana* Amakhaya as imagined by Harriet Ward (1847 – 1851)

The story of *Nkosazana* Amakhaya was first recorded by Harriet Ward (1808–1873), an English author who accompanied her husband, Captain John Ward of the 91st Regiment, to the Eastern Cape in 1842. It is a residence, culminating in the War of the Axe (1846-1847), which establishes her as a female war correspondent providing 'the only sustained narrative of the frontier wars by a woman.'^{iv}

Ward has been criticised for being pro-settler, anti-humanitarian, and stereotyped.^v But, in a reassessment of her writing Valerie Letcher reveals an unconventional and more nuanced voice who often challenges colonial, racial and patriarchal prejudices of her time. She adopts a sympathetic approach, especially where Xhosa women in general and *Nkosazana* Amakhaya specifically, are concerned. Ward, Letcher convincingly argues, breaks new ground by imagining the thoughts and feelings of a Xhosa woman.^{vi}

Ward includes other Xhosa women in her publications, but her focus is firmly on *Nkosazana* Amakhaya. In fact, no other writer does more to immortalise and continuously reinvent the *nkosazana's* story than Harriet Ward. Her fascination with her subject was published in two periodicals and two books from 1847 to 1851.^{vii} Her first book reports on the Eastern Cape frontier during the war, whilst her second, a novel, is a fictitious account of *Nkosazana* Amakhaya. The former was also the subject of a featured article in the 2022 edition of *Toposcope*.^{viii}

Ward describes *Nkosazana* Amakhaya as a well-known beauty, a young woman who is fully aware of her royal stature and the effects of her graceful charms. She is introduced whilst living with her family near the military camp at Block Drift where her father had surrendered to the British authorities during the War of the Axe. She is, in Ward's estimation, '*the belle of the camp*'.^{ix} Her conduct is equated with that of Victorian England's socialites, who display the arts of fashionable amusements at Almack Assembly Rooms and the Royal Ascot Racecourse.

Nkosazana Amakhaya, according to Ward:

is one of nature's coquettes, and attitudinizes, exhibits her teeth, affects bashfulness, or mirth, as suits the taste of her admirers, and is as great an adept in the art of mute flirtation as any beauty at Almack's, or Ascot.

Despite his unconditional surrender and overtures of peace, *Nkosi* Maqoma was still considered a potential military threat by the British authorities. Matters came to a head when Col. JFG Campbell of the 91st Regiment informed the chief that he was to be exiled from his ancestral land, specifically to Algoa Bay, and thus far removed from the seat of warfare.^x Ward captures the chief's emotional appeal to Campbell against exile from his land of birth:

"Here," said he, stretching his hand over the beautiful territory, "my father, a great Chief, dwelt; these pastures were crowded with cattle ... here I have lived to grow old; here my children have been born: let me die in peace where I have so long lived." The chief's entreaties were, however, rejected. It is at this point when *Nkosazana Amakhaya*, 'the beauty of [Xhosa]land,' stepped forward and addressed the colonel direct

"If her father might remain in his own lands," she said, "she would be the sacrifice and guarantee of his future good faith towards the white man. She would leave her own people and follow Colonel Campbell; his home should be hers; she would forsake all, and dwell with him!"

Right: Major-General John Francis Glencairn Campbell, c1870, probably the Lt-Col Campbell addressed by *Nkosazana Amakhaya* at Block Drift. Drawing from T MacLauchlan, J Wilson & JS Keltie, eds, *A History of the Scottish Highlands, Highland Clans and Highland Regiments*, vol 2 (London, A. Fullarton, 1875), p746.



Ward is at pains to explain the moral consequences of such an offer to her English readers:

It may here be observed that the young girls of [Xhosa]land are brought up with strict notions of female propriety; to forfeit their reputation, is to entail on themselves severe punishment, and on their families perpetual disgrace.

The astonished Campbell refused her offer, and she followed her father to reluctant exile in Algoa Bay where they remained for the rest of the war. But it is *Nkosazana Amakhaya* who is Ward's subject of attention. She sympathises with her situation and admires her filial devotion. Ward captures something of the enormity of *Nkosazana Amakhaya*'s sacrifice; the young woman's quest for human dignity for her father and his people. She is, in Ward's rendition, worthy of 'a lofty cause.'^{xi}

Edward Elers Napier and Buck Adams: Contemporaries of Ward (1849)

Ward was the first, but by no means the only colonial observer who portrayed *Nkosazana Amakhaya*'s story. Lieutenant-Colonel Edward Elers Napier (1808-1870), a career soldier and contemporary of Ward's, also published his recollections of the War of the Axe. He had been sent to the Eastern Cape as a special field officer, in charge of organising and commanding Xhosa and Khoi levies during the war.^{xii}

It is Napier, and not Ward, who provides the necessary background, albeit in a rather biased account, behind *Nkosi* Maqoma's predicament which, in turn, contextualises *Nkosazana* Amakhaya's subsequent actions. He claims eyewitness status. He was present when Chief Maqoma surrendered at Block Drift on 10 November 1846 and frequently visited the chief and his family.^{xiii}

Napier is thus able to report that the chief's loss of ancestral land, the fertile Mancazana basin, situated in the Kat River was, 'a theme of constant grievance and complaint.'^{xiv} It was the chief's childhood home and, subsequently where, at the base of the Katberg Mountains, he established his first 'great place' (*ikomkhulu*), the traditional home and the seat of power of the amaJingqi royal house. But his father, King Ngqika, had been forced to 'cede' the area between the Fish and Keiskamma Rivers, including the Mancazana Valley, to the Cape Colony in 1819.^{xv} *Nkosi* Maqoma sporadically returned to the Kat River, but always on uneasy terms based on colonially subjugated ideas of 'good behaviour.'^{xvi} For *Nkosi* Maqoma the restitution of the Mancazana Valley was always foremost on his mind.

Napier explains that at Block Drift *Nkosi* Maqoma:

had brought with him his whole "hareem," consisting of about a dozen wives, queens, or concubines, with no end of little [Maqomas].

He mockingly describes *Nkosazana* Amakhaya who is known for:

the deepest flirtations with her many admirers, among our young officers ... [We can] relate the conquests achieved in camp by the captivating "Miss" [Maqoma] - the number of hearts she seared with her piercing glances, or the proofs of affection she could show, duly embodied ... and safely secured in the shape of drams, tobacco, and sixpences. ... [She] was as complete a flirt, and as thorough a coquette, as ever issued from the most fashionable "seminary for young ladies."

Napier denigrates the admiration of the soldiers and their small gifts, but his account does confirm the historical veracity of Ward's narrative:

An officer of rank used to be much bantered on the subject of "Miss [Maqoma];" but he constantly avowed the attachment to be purely "Platonic."

Napier does not identify the 'officer of rank' referred to in the above passage, but Ward does, and Napier's book is littered with references to Lt-Col. Campbell who was stationed at Block Drift. Ward, on the other hand, claims to have interviewed Campbell and states her narrative is 'in their main features, true.'^{xvii}

Another contemporary eyewitness, Private Buck Adams, also confirmed *Nkosazana* Amakhaya's story but, like Napier, it is her flirtatiousness and not the sacrifice she was willing to make that is foregrounded. Adams describes her as: 'quite a lark in the extreme.'^{xviii} In short, both Napier and Adams lack any pathos for the young lady's predicament.

Ward often used the *Grahamstown Journal* as a source of information for her writing, but although the *nkosazana's* narrative is clearly based on an historical figure, there are no references to her in this pro-settler newspaper.^{xix} *Nkosazana* Amakhaya's narrative also fails to find expression in any late 19th century or early 20th century Xhosa publications. This is even more remarkable when one considers that published Xhosa authors of this period are certainly not silent where female Xhosa royals are concerned.^{xx} Tim Stapleton's oral interviews among Chief Maqoma's descendants also do not mention *Nkosazana* Amakhaya.^{xxi} Her narrative, I argue, is exclusively inserted, and reconsidered in the colonial imagination.

Another possible source has recently come to light. Rev Albert Kropf lists 'Nomaqeya,' born of *Nkosikazi* Fatase, a concubine of *Nkosi* Maqoma, under the chief's genealogy.^{xxii} It is entirely possible that Nomaqeya and Amakhaya refer to the same person. *Nkosazana* Nomaqeya married Madikana, son of Mtsotso of the Qadi, thus providing us with an important historical lead to the *nkosazana* herself.

Napier produces the first attempt to immortalise her narrative in rather appalling verse, a tradition that became firmly established over the following decades. Telling her story in both prose and poetry, I argue, does say something about the fascination held for the *nkosazana*'s story:

*On the banks of Chumie water, when summer time did fall,
Was [Maqoma]'s lovely daughter – darkest of them all.
For his bride a soldier sought her – a winning tongue had he;
On the banks of Chumie water, none so dark as she.*^{xxiii}

Freeman (1851) and Thomson (1858): The Evangelical-Humanitarian Perspective

Harriet Ward's rendition of *Nkosazana* Amakhaya's story is also used in Rev John Joseph Freeman's (1774-1851) *A Tour in South Africa*. He copies her narrative at length, but Freeman takes matters one step further. His writing, firmly embedded in the evangelical-humanitarian perspective, indelibly links the *nkosazana*'s offer to *Nkosi* Maqoma's loss of land and, by extension, serves to criticise British colonialism. In Freeman's estimation:

this story stamps merited reproach upon the ill-considered policy of a great civilized nation ... of these most pitiable exposures of our common humanity.^{xxiv}

Freeman was secretary of the London Missionary Society and visited the Cape in 1849 at the behest of the society's directors. He closely aligned himself with Rev Dr John Philip and the publications of the evangelical humanitarians.^{xxv} He is critical of Ward's 'hostile' treatment of 'the coloured race,' but does appreciate her keeping 'a woman's sympathising record' where the *nkosazana* is concerned. He compares her to 'our own unhappy Boadicia' who also suffered under:

an act of the most condemnatory of wars of conquest..., but not a hundredth part so touching as those of [Maqoma]'s daughter.

Rev William Rodger Thomson (1832-1867), then a theology student in the Netherlands, published '*The Ballad of Amakeya*' in 1858 as part of a collection of translations and original prose. Like Freeman, he writes from the same humanitarian background but attaches something of his love for Africa. He was the son of a missionary, Rev WR Thomson of Balfour, and thus the sole commentator who was colonially born. Like Chief Maqoma and his daughter, he was raised in the Kat River. This is perhaps the reason why *Nkosazana* Amakhaya fascinated him. The land and its people mattered to Thomson, especially the Eastern Cape which he described as the '*glorious land*.'^{xxvi}

He was troubled by the suffering of war and commented on the destruction of the communal life of the Xhosa.^{xxvii} Like Freeman, Thomson is critical of the imprint of colonialism. He writes in a private letter:

There is something radically wrong with our colonial system; you must come to the Frontier to see that ... we have polluted and degraded and not elevated the natives.

He wrote his ballad in the Victorian mould. Its sentimental slant is, on occasion, uneasy on the modern ear, but it is Thomson's ability to evoke the universal emotions of home and the loss thereof which is incisive and reverberates into the 21st century.

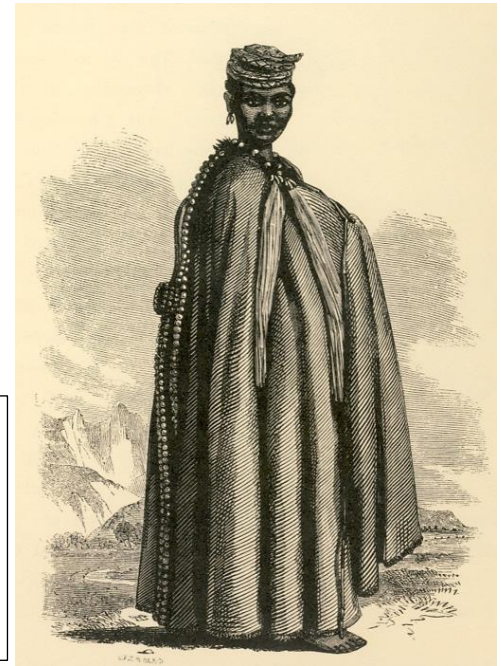
According to Thomson:

*Those large emotions of the heart,
Which home and kindred wake*

Home and exile are also present in his imagined conversation between chief and daughter:

*Poor Amakeya! dost thou hear?
In vain, in vain we crave;
We have no home! come, let us go
And seek some unknown grave!*

Right: *Nkosikazi Nofelele*, Maqoma's daughter-in-law, who was incarcerated with *Nkosazana Amakhaya* at Algoa Bay, 1848 - Sketch by George Angas, *The Kafirs Illustrated: A Facsimile Reprint of the Original 1849 Edition of Hand-Coloured Lithographs* (CT: Balkema, 1974), p. 22. Courtesy of the Amathole Museum, Qonce.



The last poem featuring *Nkosazana Amakhaya* is by an Irish-born, colonial soldier and magistrate, Major David Blair Hook (1838-1920). It is entitled '*Macomo's Daughter*'.^{xxviii} The mocking sarcasm in both Napier and Adams's accounts is noticeably absent in both Thomson and Hook.

They are clearly both inspired by Ward's writing. Hook loosely borrows several of Ward's exact phrases, especially in his descriptions of the *nkosazana* herself.^{xxix}

Hook's poem does, however, emphasise that Ward's continuing influence on the narrative is evident more than fifty years after she first published on *Nkosazana Amakhaya*. This is a position that is highly unusual for a woman in this time frame.

Conclusion:

In this paper I tell the story of *Nkosazana Amakhaya*, the circumstances around *Nkosi* Maqoma's loss of ancestral land, her proposed intervention on her father's behalf, and their reluctant exile to Algoa Bay. I also focus on her colonial commentators, especially Harriet Ward, the first author to introduce *Nkosazana Amakhaya* to a British audience.

Ward's writing has been criticised as stereotyped and 'overtly racist' but in a reassessment of her work Valerie Letcher convincingly argues that, given the historical context, she is rather, an important alternative voice who counters Napier and Adams' mocking accounts of *Nkosazana Amakhaya*.^{xxx} The latter two authors do, however, provide historical veracity to the narrative.

Ward attempts to understand the *Nkosazana's* circumstances and admires her proposed sacrifice. Like Thomson and Freeman, Ward challenges colonial (masculine) thinking. This is especially clear where *Nkosazana Amakhaya* is concerned. This paper argues that Ward's account remains instrumental in the creation and subsequent reconstruction(s) of the *Nkosazana's* narrative. It is, however, a selective commentary, based solely on the colonial imagination. *Nkosazana Amakhaya's* narrative is noticeably absent from any late 19th century or early 20th century Xhosa writing or Eastern Cape newspapers of the same time frame.

Telling the story of *Nkosazana Amakhaya* is a tradition that is strongly represented also in verse. There is, arguably, no other Eastern Cape woman who is immortalised in three separate poems stretching over a period of more than fifty years. *Nkosazana Amakhaya*'s proposed sacrifice captured the imagination of a variety of 19th century colonial commentators and, in the process, challenged the patriarchal and colonial boundaries of the time.

About the Author:

Stephanie Victor works as a historian at the Amathole Museum in Qonce (formerly King William's Town). Her PhD from Rhodes University, entitled: 'A Study in Female Power: Xhosa-Speaking Women of Royalty in South Africa's Eastern Cape,' is the culmination of 10 years of research.

xxxix NOTES

Nkosazana in isiXhosa refers to "princess", emphasising her royal stature which separates her from ordinary Xhosa women.

- i In 2023 the Eastern Cape Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture celebrates 150 Years of the Life and Legacy of *Nkosi Jongumsobomvu Maqoma*.
- ii Quote: Valerie Helen Letcher, "Trespassing Beyond the Border: Harriet Ward as Writer and Commentator on the Eastern Cape Frontier" (Ph.D. thesis, Rhodes University, 1996), 4.
- iii An online search was conducted on the Readex platform using alternative spellings of her name.
- iv Marion J. Baker, "Representatives of the 'enemy' in military narratives of the South African Frontier Wars of 1834, 1846 and 1851" (Ph.D. thesis, WITS University, 2014), 115.
- v Richard Price, *Making Empire: Colonial Encounters and the Creation of Imperial Rule in Nineteenth-Century Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 161; Baker, "Representatives," 34, 116, 132 and Timothy J. Stapleton, *Maqoma: Xhosa Resistance to Colonial Advance 1798 – 1873* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1995), 140.
- vi Letcher, "Trespassing," 2, 4, 87, 104, 113-118, 230-2. I am indebted to her for challenging my thinking on Ward's writing.
- vii See Harriet Ward, "The Present War in Kaffirland." *United Service Magazine and Naval and Military Journal*, Part II (June 1847): 232; *Five Years in Kaffirland with Sketches of the Late War in that Country*, vol.2 (London: Henry Colburn, 1848), "Amakeya: A Tale of Kaffirland," *New Monthly Magazine and Humorist* 85 (1849): 15-21 and *Jasper Lyle: A Tale of Kaffirland* (London: George Routledge & Co, 1851).
- viii Rod Hooper-Box, "Harriet Ward 'Five Years in Kaffirland,'" *Toposcope: Journal of the Lower Albany Historical Society* LIII (2022): 68 - 82.
- ix All Ward's quotations are from *Five Years*, 2: 278-280.
- x D.A. Webb, "Kraals of Guns and Redoubts of Authority: Military Conflict and Fortifications in the Wars of Dispossession and Resistance in South Africa's Eastern Cape, 1780-1894" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Fort Hare, 2015), 322, identifies him as Col. JFG Campbell. Stapleton, *Maqoma*, 136 refers to a Col. Campbell who was commander at Fort Cox whilst the chief was living there. In December 1846 Campbell joined the 1st Division at Block Drift, a month after the chief and his family had surrendered. See E. Elers Napier, *Excursions in Southern Africa including a History of the Cape Colony*, vol. 2 (London: William Shoberl, 1849), 452.
- xi Quote from Ward, *Five Years*, 2: 279. See also Letcher, "Trespassing," 234-235.
- xii Napier, *Excursions*, 2. See also *Dictionary of National Biography, 1885-1900*. Accessed at https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Dictionary_of_National_Biography, 1885-1900/Napier, Edward Delaval Hungerford Elers
- xiii Block Drift was built in 1836 as the home of Captain CL Stretch, British diplomatic agent to the Ngqika. The house and adjoining lands were subsequently purchased for Lovedale Mission and renamed Domira.
- xiv Quote: Napier, *Excursions*, 2: 151. See Stephanie Victor, "A Study in Female Power: Xhosa-Speaking Women of Royalty in South Africa's Eastern Cape" (PhD thesis, Rhodes University, 2022), 264-265.
- xv "Ceded" territory is a debatable phrase – it was a dictated outcome of war. See Julia C. Wells, *The Return of Makhandla: Exploring the Legend* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2012), 184, 209-210.
- xvi This quote and the subsequent extracts are from Napier, *Excursions*, 2: 149, 155-156, 116 and 161.
- xvii Quote from Ward, "Amakeya: A Tale of Kaffirland," 15. She thinly disguises Campbell as "Glencairn" who, she claims, personally related the incidents to her.

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- xviii *The Narrative of Private Buck Adams, 7th Dragoon Guards on the Eastern Frontier ... 1843-1848*, ed. A. Gordon-Brown (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1941), 246-7.
- xix Teja Varma Pusapati, "Crossing the Final Frontier: Harriet Ward as Mid-Victorian War Correspondent," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 49, no. 2 (Summer 2016): 311, www.jstor.org/stable/26166569
- xx This includes the Rharhabe Queen Suthu, the Rharhabe *Nkosikazi* Ntsusa and the Thembu Queen Nonesi. See Victor, "Female Power."
- xxi Stapleton, *Maqoma*. See, for example, 17-18, 138, 223.
- xxii Albert Kropf, *Das Volk der Xosa-Kaffern im östlichen Südafrika nach seiner Geschichte, Eigenart, Verfassung und Religion* (Berlin: Berliner Evangelischen Missions Gesellschaft, 1889), 53.
- xxiii Napier, *Excursions*, 2: 88. The poem derived from a ballad, "On the Banks of Allan Water" possibly written by Matthew Lewis (1775-1818). The Allan Water is a Scottish river popularised in Thomas Hardy's *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874). See <https://digital.nls.uk/braodside/view/?id=1648#..> Accessed 16 January 2023. The author of "On the Banks of the Chumie water" has not been identified.
- xxiv All quotes from John Joseph Freeman, *A Tour in South Africa, with notices of Natal, Mauritius, Madagascar, Ceylon, Egypt and Palestine* (London: Snow, 1851), 207-208.
- xxv This includes Justus [Ambrose George Campbell], *The Wrongs of the Caffre Nation* (London: James Duncan, 1837) and John Philip, *Researches in South Africa*, 2 volumes (London, James Duncan, 1828).
- xxvi All quotes are from William Rodger Thomson, *Poems, Essays, ad Sketches* (Cape Town: Juta, 1868), xxv (foreword) and extracts from "Ballad of Amakeya", 30, 33 and 38. For more on Thomson's thoughts on colonialism see Donovan Williams, *Umfundisi: A Biography of Tiyo Soga 1829-1871* (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, 1978), 39-41.
- xxvii F.G. Butler, "The Ballad of Amakeya," in *Footprints Along the Way: A Tribute to Es'kia Mphahlele*, ed. Peter N. Thuynsma (Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1989), 196.
- xxviii See David Blair Hook, "Macomo's Daughter," in *With Sword and Statute: On the Cape Frontier* (Cape Town: Juta, 1906), 90-93. There is also A.G. Visser's poem "Amakeia." The similarity in naming, location, war and sacrifice by a black woman points to a clear connection, but the narrative is different. Thank you to Sue Gordon for pointing me to Visser's poem. See https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/viss052vers01_01/viss052vers01_01_0122.php
- xxix Hook plagiarises Ward without any reference to her. See his use of "belle", "coquette", "mute flirtation", "crowded with cattle"; "let me die in peace where I have lived so long", "astonished at the sacrifice she offered" and "her finely moulded arms folded before her."
- xxx Quoted from Stapleton, *Maqoma*, 140 and 138. Stapleton comes to this conclusion whilst specifically refuting Ward's references to *Nkosi* Maqoma's drinking. Ward's references to *Nkosazana* Amakhaya are, however, not "overtly racist." Stapleton himself accepts Ward's description of the *nkosazana* without question or comment.
- xxxi