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Queen Mother Sutu MaMthembu Rharhabe and her rise to power

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The position of women amongst the Kaffirs is illustrated by the frequency of female regency among them, and their female regencies are usually times of prosperity to the tribes, for though the widows possess the full power and authority of the chiefs, she is not likely to be military and despotic.¹

Introduction

Queen Mother Sutu MaMthembu Rharhabe, who was also a regent, is one of the unique and yet unknown figures in the history of the southeast African region.² Her longevity placed her as a witness and participant in the drama that unfolded in her world over almost 80 percent of the nineteenth century. She was born between 1795 and 1800 and died in 1885. She was a Thembu princess of the Tshatshu House, who married into Rharhabe royalty. Both abaThembu and amaRharhabe formed the vanguard of resistance to Boer and British intrusion and invasion in their world throughout the nineteenth century. Above all, when Sutu's husband, Ngqika, died in 1829, Sutu became the queen mother in her early 30s. As a mother she gave birth, incubated, nurtured, and guided the heir to the Rharhabe seat of power. As a queen mother she also carried the responsibilities of leadership within the Rharhabe polity generally and the Ngqika House in particular. When her son, Sandile, came of age she remained his constant adviser and pillar to lean against. An early nineteenth-century observation by Alberti tells us that 'the mother of a chief retains a life-long influence upon the government of the horde... The son avails himself to the mother's

1 C. Brownlee, *Reminiscences of Kaffir Life and History and Other Papers* (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, 1896), 187.

2 Rharhabe was the most senior of isiXhosa-speaking people on their western front. Rharhabe was also eldest son in *iNdlu Yasekunene* of Palo, early eighteenth-century *Kumkani* of siXhosa speakers. Of relevance to this study is the fact that Rharhabe was the grandfather of Ngqika, Sutu's husband.

advice and takes no decision without her.’³ Alberti, ever the unrepentant racist and coloniser, refers to Africans as ‘the horde’.

The life history of Regent Queen Mother Sutu is dominated by four main themes which constitute the frame of the two book chapters about her. These cover Sutu’s life as a human, a woman and a royal mother of amaRharhabe, followed by her socio-political role in the Rharhabe polity as a Queen Regent, and specifically within the Nngqika sub-unit. A third theme is Sutu’s tumultuous engagements with the British colonial and military officers, and finally her volatile relationship with the missionaries and their Christian teaching is examined. These themes are of course interwoven and often overlap, and the multifaceted theme on her encounters with colonialism, which runs throughout her entire lifetime, will be addressed in a separate chapter. The timeline of the text is, therefore, not entirely linear because in the process of following identified themes, the timelines and periods intersect. Thus, the historical method I shall adopt in this study will be a subtle blend of the chronological and thematic approaches.

That no definitive history has been written about MaMthembu’s adult life and times which covered about 65 years is testimony to the pervading silence on African women which has characterised western dominated history of southern Africa which is part of the universal subordination of African women. Moreover, even after ‘independence’, African history has continued to be modelled around its counterpart, European history. Thus, Oladejo bemoans the fact that eight volumes of UNESCO’s *General History of Africa* hardly include women in its account.⁴

Persistent calls for the reconceptualisation of history as a discipline have been part of the bigger movement that questions the hegemony of western centric epistemology through which knowledge and its production are deemed universal despite being interpreted through a European lens. Thus, the anomalies that have dominated the search for knowledge, those which have for almost five centuries entailed an exclusion of indigenous peoples of the world, as well as women, have been exposed as fallacies to entrench European hegemony. In the case of history, the established story of a colossus European man trudging across the world has to be debunked if new histories are to come into being. This account of ‘herstory’ forms part of the search for a reconstructed history of women of African origins.

This study acknowledges and respects conventions in the production of historical knowledge. However, if there is to be any epistemological breakthrough in this field, there has to be a successful shift from the constraining Enlightenment discipline boundaries. And thus, in this research there has been a deliberate transdisciplinary approach that includes fields of study such as anthropology, sociology, linguistics, politics, languages, archaeology and African oral traditions. This is a transdisciplinary perspective that has been adopted by women scholars in West Africa.⁵ Thus, due

3 L. Alberti, *An Account of the Tribal Life and Customs of the Xhosa in 1807* (Cape Town: A.A. Balkema, 1968), 85.

4 M.T. Oladejo, ‘Female Historians and Knowledge Production for Women’s Studies: The Nigerian Example since 1874’, *International Journal of Gender and Women’s Studies*, (2018), 31.

5 Oladejo, ‘Female Historians and Knowledge’, 30.

respect is accorded to work on African women and leadership in southeast African communities which was pioneered by anthropologists. The work of Hilda Kuper during the 1940s, forged new ground in the creation of knowledge about amaSwazi.⁶ In particular, Kuper's research opened up aspects of Swazi social, religious and political systems especially in relation to the diarchy of the king, ingwenyama/ the lion and his mother, indlovukazi/she elephant. Sub-themes that have since emerged include power relations, the role of women, militarism, as well as women in leadership comprising shifts and changes in governance and African political systems. But Kuper's work on amaSwazi will be challenged by perspectives on Queen Regent Lobatsibeni postulated by Manelisi Genge in this book.

Scholars and researchers have since turned their attention to neighbouring indigenous communities. Fascinating biographical work on outstanding Zulu women, like Queen Nandi, Queen Regent Mnkabayi, Queen Monase and a few others of the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century has been produced.⁷ Inevitably, attention has also been given to regent queens like Manthatisi of BaTlokwa, another leading warrior queen of the first half of the nineteenth century as well as Queen Mother Ntombazi of abakwaNdwandwe.⁸ Most of this work has focused on royal or 'chiefly' women.⁹ A common trend in these writings is that of portraying these African women as strong characters, with military and spiritual powers. An approach of this nature can be seen as a copy of the celebration of the 'Big Man' syndrome prevalent in western-influenced history. But this is not necessarily the case because Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu's work on Queen Mother Ntombazi does not celebrate her as a strong women with military powers but questions the role of male cultural brokers and ideologues in manipulating her image and life history by according to her destructive spiritual powers. This was done because of ideological warfare between the Ndwandwe and their main rivals, amaZulu. Nonetheless, such research has opened up some doors that were previously closed and focuses on African women in general- regardless of their status. Thus, this study on Sutu MaMthembu enlightens an important and neglected aspect of South African history about African women, power and authority. We hope that such studies will lead to the next phase, research and publications about the common people during pre-colonial and colonial times.

As is often the case, we have been told that the African woman has always been oppressed by the African man since time immemorial. Yet, work has been undertaken on women in West Africa since independence and this research has expanded beyond royal women. The focus appears to have shifted from power relations and military

6 H. Kuper, *An African Aristocracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947).

7 M.Z. Shamase, 'The Royal Women of the Zulu Monarchy through the Keyhole of Oral History: Queens Nandi (c.1764–c.1827) and Monase (c.1797–1880)', *Inkanyiso*, 6, 1 (2014), 1–14.

8 S.M. Ndlovu, 'Women, Authority and Power in Precolonial Southeast Africa: The Production and Destruction of Historical Knowledge on Queen Mother Ntombazi of the Ndwandwe', in W.H. Worger, C. Ambler and N. Achebe, eds, *A Companion to African History* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley, 2019), 95–142.

9 J. Weir, 'Chiefly Women and Women's Leadership in Pre-colonial Southern Africa', in N. Gasa, ed., *Women in South African History* (Cape Town: HSRC, 2007), 3–20.

escapades to women in politics, economics, socio-cultural spaces and general human relations. Oyeronke Oyewumi, a Nigerian sociologist, directs the lens at retrieving values and beliefs in Yoruba society before the avalanche of European and Christian ideology. She bases her arguments on the teachings according to Ifa oral traditions among Yoruba.¹⁰ There are two important points about Oyewumi's work. Firstly, she empowers us to question and interrogate what has become canon. Secondly, her work can be replicated in research covering other groups in the rest of the African continent. From such initiatives it would, thus, be possible to factor in comparative studies as well, using languages, oral traditions, and cultural practices. Criticism of Oyewumi's work is that it presents a static Yoruba society and thus, by implication, an unchanging African world. However, changes in any cultural setting should be fitted within an existing cosmological framework.

On the other hand, Ifi Amadiume, also a sociologist of Nigerian background, discusses woman-to-woman relations among the Nnobi which are famously focused on matriarchy. Her oppositional stance is against what she refers to as 'European patriarchal monologist' which has resulted in the universal musicalisation of reality through language, religion etc.¹¹ In discussing matriarchy further, Amadiume explains the manner and mode of operation based on 'the women's power being based on the logic of motherhood'.¹² Amadiume's work on the Nnobi bemoans the fact that African women find themselves in the broader neo-colonialism trap which is chronic in Africa. In that condition myths are perpetuated about African women who are presented as being locked in positions of servitude, devoid of agency.

The various chapters in this volume reveal a different African woman from what has morphed since the encounter with Europe and colonisers. The significance of these initiatives is in the manner new tools have been forged in the search for buried archives. But, it is asking new questions that will yield other perspectives with a resultant history that will have 'different emphasis and orientation'.¹³ For historians, to whom sources are a *sine qua non*, innovative ways have to be devised to excavate, literally and figuratively, artefacts, re-read what written and oral sources there are for historians and others to make comparisons with existing beliefs and practices while being mindful of contamination that befalls the sources.

In the past few decades great effort has been placed on oral tradition as an alternate source for new knowledge and thinking in the construction of a new African history. While the different oral genres have been collected and integrated into academic treatises, there has been some increase of concern about the very authenticity of these oral texts. Thus, a sharper textual criticism has come about. Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu, who wrote about the Ndwandwe Queen Mother Ntombazi, covering the

10 O. Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

11 I. Amadiume, *Re-inventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion, and Culture* (London: Zed Books, 1997), 29.

12 *Ibid.*, 114.

13 *Ibid.*, 91.

period between 1750 to 1820, debunked the innocence of oral traditions and exposed how izibongo and oral traditions were manipulated by ‘Zulu cultural brokers and ideologues’.¹⁴ Ndlovu argues that the contamination of the oral traditions could have taken place from the 1820s which was after the demise of the Ndwandwe kingdom after it was defeated by King Shaka. A popular oral archive that has been used in recent years especially in the writing of Zulu history has been the James Stuart Archive recorded diligently at the end of the nineteenth and in the early twentieth century purportedly covering Zulu history before the encounter with Europeans. An observation by Carolyn Hamilton and John Wright calls for a re-look at these oral texts which are to be regarded as ‘conversations’ that Stuart had with his informers at that particular time and place.¹⁵ Finnegan’s cogent statement sums up this argument: ‘Oral texts, ... have now to be increasingly recognised as composite, multi-voiced, multi-modal, ambiguous, dynamic, ... and often co-created by multiple and possibly conflicting parties’.¹⁶

Among amaXhosa there is a body of izibongo that were performed specifically to honour royalty. Even though there is the erosion of memory and also contamination by vying ideologies and epistemologies, there are some works that have survived, especially those that were recorded in writing during the nineteenth century. These will be used in the two chapters about Regent Queen Sutu. Unfortunately, unlike Zulu women and those of other groups such as amaSwazi, there is no existing repertoire of izibongo of isiXhosa-speaking women. These issues are highlighted in this volume by Ndlovu’s chapter on Queen Regent Mkabayi. Can it be that there is a body of literature that is lost to posterity as is the case with izibongo zika Ntombazi? Even with someone of Queen Regent Mother Sutu’s profound stature izibongo that were compiled and are performed in her honour do not exist. It is only when leaving no stones unturned on isiXhosa oral texts on men that women surface as wives, mothers or sisters. For example, in izibongo, Yali-Manisi evokes a fair number of women in Xhosa history, going as far back as Nomagwayi, the mother of Nkosi Rharhabe of the eighteenth century. In the following lines imbongi asks Maqoma a rhetorical question:

Utyelwe yini ukufung Nojoli?¹⁷

Who told you to swear by Nojoli?¹⁸

Or Amabandla ka Ntsinga kaNomagwayi wase Mbo
The battalion of Ntsinga of Nomagwayi from Embo.

14 Ndlovu, ‘Women, Authority and Power’, 103.

15 C. Hamilton and J. Wright, ‘Moving beyond Ethnic Framing: Political Differentiation in the Chiefdoms of KwaZulu-Natal before 1830’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 43, 4 (2017).

16 R. Finnegan, *The Oral and Beyond: Doing Things with Words in Africa* (Oxford: James Currey, 2007), 199.

17 Nojoli was Nkosi Rharhabe’s wife, great-grandmother of Maqoma. Nomagwayi was the mother of Rharhabe.

18 D.L.P. Yai-Manisi (transl), in J. Opland and P. Maseko, eds, *Iimbali Zamanyange* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2015), 89.

Thus, the work on Sutu/MamThembu forms part of other exciting and stimulating initiatives about indigenous women. However, the paralysis that seems to keep academia locked in the continued use of colonial languages foreign to the one used by the subject under study, remains a challenge. In this case the use of English to give an account of an isiXhosa speaking figure, Sutu, is a serious weakness of this study.¹⁹ Then, related to that issue, is the challenge of appropriateness of concepts to be used in view of the fact that the people described lived within their own eco-socio-political systems and spoke African languages different from those spoken in Europe. To break away from the European straightjacket is an undertaking that has to be achieved if academic revolution is to be attained. The reality is that the world is multiversal as opposed to the universality claimed by western-dominated thinking.

Historiography and the dearth of historical writings on Queen Mother Sutu

Queen Mother Sutu or MamThembu, the main figure of the study, lived in the nineteenth century, for a period of about 85 years or slightly more. Her life spans an epoch when her people were still independent to include an era when the British invader grabbed the land, and caused indigenous socio-political and economic systems to collapse under colonisation. During that era the white male grew to be a dominant figure while indigenous communities were under threat of their very existence. Sutu experienced all this. While all these dramatic changes were taking place in the world of amaNgqika, amaRharhabe and other indigenous communities, it is imperative to observe that there are continuities in such developments. Therefore, the encounter between African and European cosmology from the fifteenth century, and specifically in the nineteenth century, did not mean a dissolution of the African worldview. The African world continued to live and has survived, and that is one of the reasons why the concept of 'pre-colonial', or its derivatives, is an anomaly. This is because life as we know it in these parts of the world did not commence with the arrival of European colonisers.²⁰

Queen Mother Sutu was a woman of royal birth and by marriage as well. Thus, in her innermost being was an individual who occupied the upper ranks of her world. Tools used mainly by Marxian class analysts would thus lock her into a position of privilege, someone who was in contradiction and tension with the commoners. However, such an analysis is inaccurate, based solely on social relations, and founded on European feudal and capitalist systems which are foreign and misplaced and imposed by mainly white scholars in the African context and needs to be laid to rest.

19 Ngugi Wa Thiongo in his *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1986) has set the beacon to which very few seem ready to ascend.

20 N. Tisani, 'Of Definitions and Naming: "I am the earth itself, God made me a chief on the very first day of creation"', in J. Bam, L. Ntsebeza and A. Zinn, eds, *Whose History Counts: Decolonising African Pre-colonial Historiography* (Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, 2018), 16–17.

Equally, there are other binaries that tend to intrude on studies of African women. These include rural and urban divides, rich and poor, spiritual leaders and the ordinary. This is also similar to the dichotomy that dominates studies on women; it splits humanity into two – matriarchy and patriarchy under the feminist flag. These are not just two divisions, but they are posited in an adversarial mode by some feminists.

This study will show how Queen Mother Sutu operated according to her cosmological outlook steeped in the African view of the world. Her actions and thoughts should be interpreted according to the tenets of the worldview in which she lived. In her world there was royalty which enjoyed privileges and responsibilities. Then there was the rest of the populace. Yet, as in most African societies, including Sutu's, social mobility was in place which allowed for vertical and horizontal movements by all. And thus, there is this enigma in that there were not two separate groupings cordoned in by impenetrable barriers as some scholars would like us to believe. There could have been two or more divisions but these were not necessarily locked in opposition, they could be in complementarity to one another because she controlled the land on behalf of the people. Among some groups in southeast Africa, including the isiXhosa-speaking ones, women and men operated in a complementary fashion as well as in contradiction to one another. Put simply, in everyday experience of humanity, the night can be seen to be in opposition to daytime; however, there is no night without daytime, and both are locked in a oneness that cannot be separated. This approach is also adopted by Ndlovu who alluded to gender cooperation rather than gender oppression defining the relationship between people in pre-colonial times. He introduces the concept of gender cooperation by arguing:

To date, much of the scholarship reconstructing the lives of Zulu women more than 200 years ago falls within a gender studies paradigm. This academic field tends to rely on late-twentieth century feminist analyses, which are informed by women's struggles in the industrialised West to win individual rights, rather than the historical realities of everyday collaboration between sexes in precolonial Africa – a form of gender co-operation, as opposed to gender contestation, which both Zulu men and women acknowledged as essential to maintaining a collective, hierarchical society...The model of causality employed by [the gender oppression school] draws on Marxist theory, which, in turn, concentrates on the all-powerful mechanisms of class subjugation. It is this perspective of historical materialism that downplays ways in which Zulu women in the exploited ranks of 'reproducers of labour' could wield authority...²¹

This is contrary to what is generally accepted in Marxist writings, where there is often a demarcation that is used to explain the division between royalty and common people. In describing the Zulu society during the Shakan era, Shamase observes that Zulu royal women had more privileges than responsibilities as demonstrated by

21 S.M. Ndlovu, 'A Reassessment of Women's Power in the Zulu Kingdom', 111.

the presence of a class of court servants, *izinceku*, and kind of slaves, *izigqila*, who served them.²² However, this example of class division does not prove that this was the overriding structure of the Zulu society. Paradoxically, if one were to look at the word *inceku* in *isiXhosa* (which is also an *isiZulu* word) it refers to a loved one, a special person. What can then account for the sharp difference in meaning between the meanings of these two words?

Therefore, this research on Queen Mother Sutu is based on primary sources consisting of written historical accounts recorded at the time of early contact between the two worlds – Africa and Europe. These are valuable and are increasingly being located, excavated, and used. Some of these documents are housed in European museums, archives and even private collections. However, these sources are of foreign origin in that they were recorded by European observers and commentators which Mudimbe labels ‘the colonial library’,²³ or what the Comaroffs refer to as ‘the literature of the imperial frontier’. This is a reality that has to be reckoned with.²⁴ Such sources are foreign in terms of cosmological outlook; they have been celebrated through a European understanding of peoples of the world other than themselves. Premash Lulu’s pithy description of the colonial archive ‘that is made up of grammatical orderings ... invented vocabulary ... [which is guilty of] inverting reality in so far as the intruder depicts himself as the victim’.²⁵ This almost disqualifies these texts for any consideration as source material. And yet Carolyn Hamilton accuses academics and others of dismissing white writings about Zulu history as distortions of the Zulu past, and furthermore of diminishing the historical value of the collections of materials made by colonial officials, such as James Stuart, and by white missionaries. These academics, argues Hamilton, write off as mere propaganda or invention documentary sources on the pre-colonial history of southern Africa written by Europeans. She further elaborates that there is a far more complex relationship between indigenous narratives and colonial ones, and in the processes of representation in which they engage, than these academics allow. These academics, amateur historians and other ‘experts’, fail to recognise the extent to which European colonisers’ notion of African history was shaped and influenced by African oral traditions and African viewpoints. Reverend van der Kemp’s diary, to be discussed later, is a case in point. Therefore, the ‘colonial library’ and ‘the literature of the imperial frontier’ is nothing else but an abuse and distortion of the original African archive in order to suit the needs of white colonisers.²⁶

22 Shamase, ‘The Royal Women of the Zulu Monarchy’.

23 V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), xii.

24 J. Comaroff and J. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 172.

25 P. Lulu, *The Deaths of Hintsa: Post-apartheid South Africa and the Shape of Recurring Pasts* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2009), 43.

26 C.A. Hamilton, ‘Authoring Shaka: Models, Metaphors and Historiography’, PhD thesis, Johns Hopkins University, 1993. See also S.P. Lekgoathi, ‘Colonial Experts, Local Interlocutors, Informants and Making of an Archive on the

Nevertheless, fine-combing of various early texts still needs to be undertaken to gain background information on Queen Mother Sutu. A double challenge is the fact that European writers focused on African men. They only touched on women when they covered quaint themes like women's sexual organs, what Yvette Abrahams calls, 'White male sexual fantasies about Khoekhoe women'.²⁷ At times, they would make attempts at describing social economic structures of African communities. Most of the time, however, they regurgitated what had been written by their predecessors. Thus, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, which was Queen Mother Sutu's era, there were already one dimensional writings on African women as sexual objects in circulation. Travellers like Sparrman, Lichtenstein, Barrow, Paterson, Thompson and others focused on the world of Queen Mother Sutu and drew up vulgar images that morphed into standard derogatory descriptions of African women by European men.²⁸

In addition to manuscripts produced by outsiders, by the second half of the nineteenth century, historical writings began to appear in newspapers and books were published by cultural insiders on various historical events and outstanding figures.²⁹ Predictably, historiography that was evolving at the time was framed around royal figures – African men in particular – but there was very little reference to women. In the case of isiXhosa-speaking people some of these articles have recently been collected, edited and translated into English by Jeff Opland and Mtuze.³⁰

It is in this collection that there is a brief biography on Sutu written by W.D. Soga. This will be discussed in detail, below. Additionally, a collection of the works of an outstanding Xhosa historian, *imbongi* and writer, S.E.K. Mqhayi has been published. It is also edited and translated into English by Opland.³¹ This Xhosa history as constructed by Mqhayi covers mainly characters of the nineteenth century as well as those of the first half of the twentieth century. The author tackles a range of historical themes that include biographies, obituaries, accounts on historical events, and, significantly, *izibongo*. Mqhayi of the Zima clan exemplifies an intellectual as celebrated in the indigenous world. In these writings, his intellectual prowess is allowed to wander and produce wonderful intellectual insight which are not confined by the discipline divisions of European learning. In his output the astute Mqhayi thus

Transvaal Ndebele, 1930-89', *Journal of African History*, 50, 1 61–80; T. Spear, 'Neo-traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa', *Journal of African History*, 44, (2003).

27 Y. Abrahams, 'Ambiguity is my Middle Name: A Research Diary', in Gasa, *Women in South African History*, 429; Y. Abrahams, 'Colonialism, Dysfunction and Disjuncture: The Historiography of Sarah Baartman', PhD, University of Cape Town, 2000.

28 N.C. Tisani, 'Continuity and Change in Xhosa Historiography during the Nineteenth Century: An Exploration through Textual Analysis', PhD, Rhodes University, (2000), 1–24.

29 Ibid., 239–285.

30 J. Opland and P. Mtuze, eds (and transl.) *Imbali Zamandulo: Stories of the Past* (Pietermaritzburg: KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2019).

31 S.E.K. Mqhayi, (J. Opland, ed. and transl), *Abantu Besizwe: Historical and Biographical Writings 1902–1944* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2009).

transcends divisions as he performs as *imbongi* / bard and also as historian, narrating historical accounts. In his writings he also falls back on the skills he acquired in the various occupations he held as interpreter and writer, including his close association with royal courts of Sarhili, *Kumkani* of amaXhosa and at the Ndlambe court.³² Mqhayi's works almost disappeared under missionary and apartheid censorship. His greatest work, *Ityala Lamawele* has survived, albeit, in an abridged form.³³ It has been resurrected recently in the collection mentioned above as well as in the incisive research by budding scholars.³⁴

Even though Mqhayi had been initiated into western epistemology, he retained his knowledge of African methods in the reconstruction of the past. In his writings he gives a brief genealogical outline of each individual he discusses, both women and men. Then he traces the location where historical events took place and had the skill to unravel the intricacies of the complex social systems of amaXhosa. For example, he provides invaluable information on succession issues related to royal lines and monarchies which were complicated by pliable succession tradition. As an example, in the world of isiXhosa speaking people, a successor to a ruler was not a first-born son, contrary to the western practice of primogeniture. Instead, a web of intricate lineage followed before an heir was declared. A royal princess would be declared the mother of an heir so that even if she was unable to produce a son, one would be given to her from other Houses within the royal family. In giving such detailed accounts Mqhayi draws royal women to the epicentre of political life. At the time, this was contrary to western history that deliberately drew an ideologically and racially influenced position on African history as far as African women were concerned. A point in fact is that historians of the western world knew about Queen Elizabeth and Queen Isabel who, as spirited colonialists, were at the centre of both the English and Spanish royal houses. Also, whenever Mqhayi gives an account on an individual, he provides details about the mother, wife, husband, daughters and sons. Then he includes what he has learnt from western historiography by providing dates, written accounts on events, groups as well as other individuals.

Of special significance for this study is an account on Queen Mother Sututu by Mqhayi wherein *imbali* (or historical narrative) is focused on the heroine of this study. Other figures, be they her husband, inkosi uNgqika, sons and daughters are brought in to complete her profile as an individual. It is around the Mqhayi historical framework on Sututu that this study will revolve. In this work, Queen Mother Sututu's life-history is unpacked not as isolated figure who straddles across history like some men, especially those in western political history, but as an individual who lived with other human beings, family and adversaries and was an integral part of historical events which she

32 J. Opland, 'Introduction', in Mqhayi, *Abantu Besizwe*, 1–17.

33 J. Peires, 'Preface', in Mqhayi, *Abantu Besizwe*, viii.

34 Doctoral work has been produced by scholars such as N.R. Mazwi, 'Edition, Translation, and Critical Analysis of Biographical Poems Contributed by S.E.K. Mqhayi to Early Xhosa Newspapers', PhD thesis, Rhodes University, 2016. Also, G.V. Mona, 'A Century of isiXhosa Written Poetry and the Ideological Contest in South Africa', PhD thesis, Rhodes University, 2014.

influenced, and in turn impacted upon. Mqhayi's text was written in 1932, almost a century after some of the events recorded in his account took place. The account, as Mqhayi explains, was produced at the instigation and encouragement of the public who had for some time exhorted him to write a history on Sutu. Public interest in Sutu, almost 50 years after her death, is an indicator of the high regard her people held for her. Nonetheless, as much as Mqhayi's accounts of Queen Mother Sutu's life and work are appreciated, the scourge of memory loss cannot be overlooked. In addition, it is noted that there is a strong western historiographical influence in the choice of themes and the structure of Mqhayi's text.³⁵

By his own admission Mqhayi consulted other historical accounts like the one written by W.D. Soga and published in *Isigidimi* of December 1885.³⁶ As a professional writer and teacher Mqhayi would have been familiar with accounts of Queen Mother Sutu which were produced by colonial historians like Theal. Indeed, Theal and Mqhayi shared a past of having taught at Lovedale even though it was at different times. Mqhayi would have used history books of the time but would no doubt have wrestled with the history that was taught at the colonial schools in the Cape because he did not quite fit in with the colonial missionary thinking and from time to time faced their hostility and even censorship.

Grappling with the power and authority of an African queen mother

European travellers, writers, amateur historians and commentators on indigenous people at the time worked largely from pre-existing European frameworks about indigenous people which they had built over three centuries of travel across the world. One of these involved looking for a centre of political power, and even building one if it was not clearly defined. In the area across the Nqweba/Sundays River, they searched for royalty in order to attain an easy point of contact and eventually control. They identified Ngqika/Lwaganda, Queen Mother Sutu's husband as one of the enablers. Sutu would have been born just as the eighteenth century was coming to a close – the 1790s – considering that her eldest son, Prince Sandile, was born in 1821.³⁷

The evangelical revival gaining momentum in Europe at the end of the eighteenth century saw the advent of very important European colonisers, the missionaries, in the world of Ngqika, and then Sutu and their descendants. These two colonising forces with their horses, guns, the bible and the Roman alphabet, were the two factors that wreaked havoc in Sutu's world for the eight decades of her life. A reconstruction of Sutu's life involves her engagement, directly and indirectly, with the occupying forces and the preachers of the Christian message.

35 Mqhayi, *Abantu Besizwe*, 415–420.

36 W.D. Soga, 'Iimbali yeNkosikazu u Sutu', *Isigidimi* (December 1885).

37 J. Meintjies, *Sandile: The Fall of the Xhosa Nation* (Cape Town: T.V. Bulpin, 1971), 63.

At the same time, it is tempting for scholars and researchers to use the European glare that burst in with its land grabbers and proselytising missionaries, and make the European intrusion the sole descriptor of indigenous people – as if the Africans had had no independent existence or provenance before the advent of Europeans. Yet, the indigenous peoples had lived for centuries; they had built their own systems imbued with their own worldviews. So, when Reverend Johannes van der Kemp moved into the world of Ngqika of the Rharhabe, in 1799, it was in fact an encounter of two cosmological realities. It is this biversality, or in some cases multiversality, that should inform reality after the encounter as opposed to the universal western hegemony.³⁸

Reverend Van der Kemp's significance for this study lies in the diary he left behind in which he recorded his big adventure into the world of amaXhosa, at the court of Ngqika in 1799.³⁹ A Dutchman of high erudition, van der Kemp recorded what he experienced. However, his high learning does not preclude him from falling into the same trap as his fellow Europeans – perceiving reality in a one dimensional, racist Eurocentric view. Further, as was the norm, van der Kemp relied on individuals who passed as go-betweeners, the interpreters. In the end, this practice of using interpreters doubled the distance between what he thought he saw and heard and what was. The interpreters' role in the complex Afro-European encounter remained stark as they tried to mediate between them. Van der Kemp had a 'Caffre' interpreter,⁴⁰ elsewhere he had a 'Hottentot, named Bruntje'.⁴¹ At times, van der Kemp would hire slaves. All these hirelings played a complex role in the construction of the new reality that was unfolding before their very eyes. Nonetheless, van der Kemp's record is still a treasure that opens up the world of amaXhosa to outsiders and later generations at a crucial moment in their history. It also details the fears, thoughts and activities of early missionaries as they ventured into the world of the indigenous people. In this case, we must be careful when we read such texts because the missionaries and colonisers pass as the interpreters who manipulated African history to suit themselves and their worldview.

Although it was not yet Queen Mother Sutu's era, as she would have just been born, van der Kemp's observations and comments on Ngqika's mother, who is also MamThembu of the House of Tshatshu,⁴² provide scholars and researchers with a model queen mother, *Inkosiqazi Yendlu Enkulu* in the world of isiXhosa speakers before it was diluted by European influence. This account is relevant because it defines the status of queen mothership which was later accorded to be Sutu's.

At Ngqika's court, van der Kemp could not miss noticing Ngqika's mother even though he never got to know her name other than her designation as the *inkosi's*

38 Tisani, 'Of Definitions and Naming', 26.

39 J.T. van der Kemp, 'Journey to Caffraria from the Cape of Good Hope' *Transactions of the London Missionary Society*, I (London: LMS, 1804).

40 *Ibid.*, 381.

41 *Ibid.*, 372.

42 *Ibid.*, 404.

mother.⁴³ This in itself shows that van der Kemp was operating from the European view of a woman as just having the biological role of bearing children. Oyewumi's argument that the biologisation of women, which was predominant in European thinking, presupposes that van der Kemp would not have been able to discern or understand the social and political roles of 'mother' even though there was every opportunity for him to do so.⁴⁴ Indeed, in the political organogram he drew up where he showed 'Gika' as he called Ngqika, being the 'King' who was assisted by councillors, no mention was made of 'mother' or any other woman. In the first place Ngqika was not a king in the sense which van der Kemp described him.⁴⁵ Oyeronke Oyewumi discusses how concepts like 'king' and others were introduced into the Yoruba discourse and, in the process, misrepresented Yoruba socio-political thinking particularly. This created an understanding that 'rulership of [Yoruba] polity was a male preserve'.⁴⁶ Ngqika, Lwaganda, to whom Mqhayi refers as follows in *izibongo*:

NguLwaganda ikwekwe kaYese⁴⁷ / He is Lwaganda son of Yese as inkosi,
had been installed by Kumkani / King Khawuta into the Rharhabe royal
house in the western wing of amaXhosa.⁴⁸

Ngqika exercised his rule within the belief system of inclusivity. Being a political leader, his role was not complete without cooperating with the queen mother and amaphakathi. Moreover, Ngqika coexisted with other family groups descending from an eponymous ancestor, Palo. These included imiDange, under Habane, who were semi-independent and were actually waging their border war against the colonists without Ngqika's approval. They were described by van de Kemp as 'hostile Caffres of Modankie'.⁴⁹ Equally, Ndlambe, who was the younger brother of Ngqika's father did not fall under Ngqika's political domain even though at the time of van der Kemp's visit Ndlambe was held as a 'prisoner' by Ngqika. In short Ngqika was no king and he exercised no central authority over isiXhosa-speaking people. On the very first meeting van der Kemp noted Ngqika's retinue 'stood behind him his captains and women'.⁵⁰ These women included his mother, one or two wives and attendants.

The role played by Ngqika's mother at his court, as observed by the missionary, makes a fascinating story to study. In several instances van der Kemp noted the influence of the nameless 'mother', observing: '...he [Ngqika] made it his rule never to resolve on any matter of consequence unless he had previously taken the advice

43 Ibid., 395.

44 Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women*, 1–10.

45 Van der Kemp, 'Journey to Caffraria', 464.

46 O. Oyewumi, *What Gender is Motherhood? Changing Yoruba Ideals of Power, Procreation, and Identity in the Age of Modernity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 77.

47 Mqhayi, *Abantu Besizwe*, 105.

48 Ibid., 95.

49 Van der Kemp, 'Journey to Caffraria', 384.

50 Ibid., 394.

of his mother, his uncle S'Lambi and his sister.⁵¹ Thus, van der Kemp had to report, explain, and solicit permission to move into Xhosa territory from MamThembu, the queen mother. What made matters worse to van der Kemp's discomfort and dismay was the interest shown by Ngqika's sister, princess Hoby and some of her friends in the missionaries. That Hoby was probably still investigating who Kemp was and what his business was on behalf of her mother and Ngqika was overshadowed by the white reverend's trepidation at having to ward off what he perceived as Hoby's sexual overtures. On the other hand, Alberti, in 1804, made special mention of the hospitality of amaXhosa and their 'general love of one's fellow men'.⁵²

The power and authority enjoyed by Ngqika's mother at the court can further be attested by her influence over a number of outsiders – in the sense of not being amaXhosa – who nonetheless brought skills and knowledge to Ngqika's cosmopolitan court. At the turn of the nineteenth century amaXhosa, who had had limited contact with Europeans, were about to experience the full might of the British military descending on them. Signs had already been discernible to all the indigenous communities that there were ominous changes in the offing. The most obvious of these changes was the large number of people who arrived for a variety of political, economic and social reasons. There were Dutch-speaking people, some of who were refugees from Cape colonial rule and others were indigenous people who, on being dispossessed of their land had attached themselves to the white colonists. Some had even lost their indigenous languages. There were also intrepid elephant hunters, some were indigenous like Bruntje and some were European.⁵³ It was the former group that were to serve at the point of encounter and engagement with translating and interpreting between the groups. Another group worthy of note were escaped slaves, some of whom originally came from the east and sought refuge among the indigenous communities. This group brought in a multiversal view of the world, being Easterners who had lived for some time among Europeans. Thus, Ngqika's court was not homogenous. It was a confluence of a number of cosmological streams whose main responsibility for the queen mother was to manage and control.

Reverend van der Kemp's interaction and engagement with Ngqika and his mother was through a Bengalese interpreter. Interpreters were a feature that eased the encounter between the indigenous Africans and European visitors. Wilson highlights their role as not just for communication but for negotiation as well.⁵⁴ However Mudimbe, dismisses most interpreters as basing their conceptual systems on a western epistemological order.⁵⁵ But the Bengalese was an Easterner, and so it has to be borne in mind that the physical point of encounter was in fact multic cosmological. Van der Kemp gave no opinion of what he thought of the important person through whom

51 *Ibid.*, 397.

52 Alberti, *Account of the Tribal Life*, 77-78.

53 Van der Kemp, 'Journey to Caffraria', 373.

54 M. Wilson, *The Interpreters* (Grahamstown: The 1820 Settlers National Monument Foundation, 1972).

55 Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa*, xv.

he had to interact. While the Bengalese interpreter seems to have kept a low profile, after some time he approached van der Kemp asking that he and his friend be part of the religious classes van der Kemp offered. Was the Bengalese perhaps on the queen mother's mission to keep track of the missionary's interaction with the people, or was he on his own journey, wishing to cross from his 'Mohajerani Hindoo' to the European world by joining their religion? That in itself suggests the many layers of meaning that were involved in the Bengalese interpretation process.

The most conspicuous and controversial character was Coenraad Buys, a refugee from the law who had fled the colony. He had managed to build a strong power base for himself as Ngqika's 'father' and confidante. Yet he retained his independence by keeping a wife and children among the 'Tambookie' whom he visited from time to time. Buys also cultivated, though still wary, a relationship with van der Kemp himself. Both Ngqika and his mother realised the importance of Buys as a bridge with all the other people, including the Boers who were running away from the war with imiDange, emissaries from colonial officials like Maynier and Dundas, and others. The queen mother and her son allowed the relationship to take a filial tone which led some researchers to claim that Buys was MamThembu's lover. With their inclusive worldview amaXhosa including amaphakathi could have allowed Buys into the inner political and social circles without causing a major disruption. On his side, Buys was non-committal and even van der Kemp could not get a clear commitment from him. Buys seems to have straddled the worlds of African and European cosmologies as he negotiated his way through diverse cultural lines.

Ngqika's mother had thus the responsibility of managing the diverse personages that had congregated in her son's polity. She wove her way through from the space of a maternal nurturer into that of a socio-political adviser. Her role was demanding as she had to walk the tightrope of political intrigues, rivalries and war mongering that were prevalent at that time. For example, Ngqika's mother, as noted by van der Kemp, cautioned her son against killing Maynier, a member of the justice system at the Cape and one who deputised for Governor Dundas. The advice, duly taken by her son,⁵⁶ shows a mind that had a full grasp of the politics of the day, in relation, particularly, to the European presence.

It has to be noted that queen mothers had always been a feature in the political landscape of indigenous communities in the southeast African region. The diarchy of mother-and-son rule exists in other polities in southern Africa although with differing practices and styles. For example, among amaSwazi, the reigning king never appoints his successor, so he has no say as to who the indlovukazi / queen mother will be. On the other hand, among amaXhosa, the queen mother is identified by isigqeba / councillors in session, while the ruler is still alive. But at the beginning of the nineteenth century the people in the southeast African region were poised to undergo a revolution of cataclysmic proportions. Sutu was catapulted into the queen mother position, placing her at the epicentre of the upsurge of the dramatic socio-

56 Van der Kemp, 'Journey to Caffraria', 408.

politico-economic changes of the beginning of the nineteenth century in the world of southeast Africans.

More records on engagements Ngqika and his mother had with Europeans throw further light on the role of a queen mother. The record left by Janssens, who after being installed as governor of the Cape Colony visited the Nxuba /Fish and Nqwaba /Sundays river region in 1801, is also enlightening. On that occasion, Ngqika, estimated at 26 years of age at the time, demanded that a cart be made available for his mother, Novile, and his four wives.⁵⁷ During the negotiations, Janssens noted a surprising 'intelligent grasp of the situation' by Novile.⁵⁸ Janssens, quoted in Meintjies, then went on to compliment Novile for being a woman of 'breeding and spirit', but could not resist inflicting a lash with his pen as he proceeded to describe her as '...eating lustily [and being] cunning'.⁵⁹ When in conference, Ngqika once again appeared with his councillors, his mother and two of his wives. Meintjies then offers his ambiguous observation about indigenous women; 'although women were never forward in Xhosa society, [they were] modest and unobtrusive, they had their say and could be powerful'.⁶⁰ Any contradiction by Meintjies on the role of Novile, the queen mother, is laid to rest by Alberti's independent observation (although he was part of Janssens's team) that 'his mother, who [was] accustomed to accompany her son at such functions ... conduct[ed] negotiations herself'.⁶¹

By 1809, all was not well in Ngqika's household. Collins, a colonial official, observed that two of Ngqika's wives were missing. He later claimed that one had died and the other had fled back to her people after being sentenced to death by Ngqika himself.⁶² The worst was still to come with the absence of Yese/ Novile. Yese was the name given to the queen mother by Mqhayi.⁶³ Things seem to have gone horribly wrong between Ngqika and his mother, Novile. During his 1809 visit Collins noted that Ngqika introduced him just to his wives. He further observed that 'the power behind the throne (his mother) had secretly left him ... to return to her own people'.⁶⁴ No reasons were given for this gaping wound in Ngqika's retinue. In all probability Novile had taken an option open to the women in most African societies, to return to her natal home once things became intolerable in her life.

The strong bond between mother and son could have been ruptured by internal as well as external factors. There are enough records to indicate that Ngqika had slowly become known as loving the white man's liquor. Another scandal, which

57 Meintjies, *Sandile*, 23.

58 *Ibid.*, 24.

59 *Ibid.*

60 Meintjies, *Sandile*, 25.

61 Alberti, *Account of the Tribal Life*, 50

62 Meintjies, *Sandile*, 36.

63 Mqhayi, *Abantu Besizwe*, 93.

64 Meintjies, *Sandile*, 36.

Ngqika has become notorious for in history, was his eloping with the wife of his 'father', Ndlambe. This was the famous Thuthula. The two had crossed a line which is viewed with intense aversion by amaXhosa, umbulo/incest. The Ngqika-Thuthula scandal has been memorialised in Xhosa oral history for the past two hundred years as recorded in an umbongo / a poem by Mqhayi.⁶⁵

The psychological and sociological impact the Ngqika-Thuthula debacle would have had on the Ngqika family and the wider amaRharhabe is immeasurable. Thuthula, though not the physical mother of Ngqika was symbolically so, as a wife of Ndlambe, Ngqika's junior father. Normally, there had to be a social distance kept between father-in-law and daughter-in-law. The distance of respect in such a case can be contrasted with the strong bond between mother and son. In her detailed discussion on motherhood in Yoruba, Oyewumi discusses the sanctity of the relationship between mother and son. She describes it as such: 'Iya – child [devoid of gender] relationship is longer, deeper, pre-earthly, pre-gestational, persisting after life'.⁶⁶ Such symbolism in motherhood in African thinking placed Ngqika and Thuthula at the level of a sacred relationship.

Worthy of note in the status and role played by royal African women in political engagements during deliberations with Europeans is the gradual change in their position. The absence of Novile greatly prejudiced the place of women in the Ngqika court even in the eyes of the visitors. Thereafter, any reference to Ngqika's wives who had accompanied him was in terms of 'gifts' for them.⁶⁷ It thus did not take long before European engagement with the indigenous people became an interaction between adults (the Europeans) who had the largesse of gifts and children (the Africans) who would even leap up in glee at the sight of trinkets. The infantilisation of the indigenous people through trinkets and over-used items began with the royal mothers, the pillars in their homes and wider society, is to be seen as part of the broader process of demeaning and dehumanising the indigenous people.⁶⁸ This question of gifts is one more example of parallel meanings that ran between the indigenous people and the white settlers. Clifton Crais points out that gifts, on the part of Africans, were seen as a form of acknowledgement of the political dominance of iinkosi.⁶⁹ It was not begging.

In 1817, Ngqika had another conference with the British on the banks of the Kat River. Lord Charles Somerset, the governor of the Cape Colony at the time, had come in person. Significantly, no reference is made to the presence of women and their

65 Mqhayi, *Abantu Besizwe*, 103–107.

66 Oyewumi, *What Gender is Motherhood?* 61.

67 Meintjies, *Sandile*, 35.

68 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 117.

69 C. Crais, *White Supremacy and Black Resistance in Pre-industrial South Africa: The Making of the Colonial Order in the Eastern Cape, 1770-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 102.

participation. Instead it was Somerset who brought along two of his daughters.⁷⁰ It was to be an extraordinarily difficult meeting for the indigenous people because the European settlers were beginning to bare their fangs as they asserted their presence and their demands. They would not hear of letting go of the land between Nxuba/Fish and the Maxelexwa/Gamtoos rivers. Then they set rules for controlling stock losses. Ngqika, without Yese, his intonga esekhosi/trusted support, was burdened with the responsibility of being the leader who would be accountable for the activities of the other African groups in the region.

As MamThembu/Novile/Yese disappeared from the Ngqika court, inevitably the focus falls on the Ngqika wives, of which Queen Mother Sutu was one. In 1800 when van der Kemp was with amaXhosa, he reported that Ngqika had married his third wife. Again, when Ngqika met Collins in 1809 Ngqika informed him that he was looking for a wife but did not have enough cattle for lobolo. An interesting possibility in this conversation is that Ngqika was hinting to Collins that he should give tribute to him as inkosi, in the form of cattle, as was done by subjects when inkosi was getting a wife. This instance depicts the two worlds again: Africa and Europe running parallel in the gargantuan encounter. So, as Ngqika was shown, and observed by the Europeans, as prancing about, he was still royalty and to himself and his people, he was gingerly exploring how he could make the new arrivals, the Europeans, recognise him for who he was as well as hinting that they should start paying their homage.

The discussion of the various engagements Ngqika had with Europeans include his meeting with the first missionary, van der Kemp in 1799; with the governor of the Cape Colony, Janssens in 1803; with Collins in 1809, and the governor of the Cape Colony, Charles Somerset in 1817. These all provide a view of what was to be the world, even if indirectly, of Sutu, the future queen mother. There are intriguing revelations of the role and place of a queen mother as well as an *in-situ* observation of other wives which Sutu would also have as a co-wife. Thus, the Ngqika era is important in this study in so far as the presence and participation of women in receiving visitors is concerned. Furthermore, their power, authority and participation in political deliberations had not yet been encumbered by the growing power and influence of the British, a phenomenon that is observable from the 1820s onwards.

Arguments made above have mainly covered Ngqika's mother and other royal wives. In writing about indigenous people there will always be challenges with regard to the appropriate use of concepts or appellations. The title 'queen mother' given in this study to Novile/Yese, and later to Sutu, has its shortcomings. In the first place Ngqika's senior wife held a senior position to amaRharhabe, but she was not queen of amaXhosa, whose senior house was in fact Gcaleka. At the same time the senior wife in the Ngqika polity holds a position of queen mother because she gave birth to the heir in a house that enjoyed seniority over other divisions of the House of Rharhabe.

70 N. Mostert, *Frontiers: The Epic of South Africa's Creation and the Tragedy of the Xhosa People* (New York, Alfred A Knopf, 1992), 448.

The early life history of Sutu

In delving into Sutu as a person, a mother, as well as a queen mother at the Ngqika court, the discussion opens the first theme of this study. The departure point is Sutu's family background. Birth among Africans is a celebration of the arrival of a human being without specifically highlighting a gender classification. The announcement about a birth goes, *Kukho umntu omtsha kweliya khaya* / There is a new person in that homestead. Gender classification follows later as the individual grows and has been introduced to the ancestors. On getting married, among a majority of African people, a woman does not lose her identity. She retains her ancestral links on both her father and mother's lines. Although she normally moves physically to join her husband's family, she retains her father's clan name. This is an important aspect of her humanness before the gender status of a mother and a wife is foregrounded. Moreover, she keeps her links with her family for the rest of her life. At times this takes the form of her relatives coming to stay with her in her marriage home, or she occasionally visits her the home of her birth. That was the case with Sutu.

Sutu was from the House of Tshatshu which was one of the houses of abaThembu. That is where her biography begins. Her father's people were patrilineal as most southeast Africans are. Early travellers made reference to a people they called Tambookie, who resided as neighbours north of amaXhosa. It is van der Kemp who actually mentioned that Ngqika's mother was the daughter of king Tshatshu.⁷¹ In that way amaTshatshu, who are Sutu's people, form an important backdrop in this study. Sutu was royal by birth, in line with the founding story of amaTshatshu that tells of Bawana⁷² as having been Indlu yaseKunene, Right Hand House, of Thembu royalty.⁷³ Royal marital relationships often formed socio-political alliances among southeast Africans before the encounter with white invaders. Heirs to political positions were expected to trace strong royal pedigrees of the parents on both sides. Needless to say, at times marital unions could result in tensions and even wars.⁷⁴ Most probably, due to links with Sutu, amaNgqika, throughout the military struggle with the British in the mid-nineteenth century, had strong allies with amaTshatshu.

In early nineteenth-century travel writings there were frequent references to the 'Tambookies'. These, in all likelihood, were amaTshatshu of the Thembu branch that was nearer the contact area with the advancing European invaders, first the Dutch, and the British soon thereafter. AmaTshatshu and amaNgqika thus shared the same experience of carrying the burden of European invasion. Such exposure had the effect of elevating them from the status of being Izindlu zaseKunene – Right Hand Houses, to being a people that were the vanguard facing the might of the intruding force from

71 Van der Kemp, 'Journey to Caffraria', 405.

72 Most probably the same 'Pewana' mentioned in G. Thompson, *Travels and Adventures in Southern Africa*, (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1967), 185.

73 A. Kelk Mager and P.J. Velelo, *The House of Tshatshu: Power, Politics and Chiefs North West of the Great Kei River* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2018), x–xi.

74 The War of Nongxokozelo between amaXhosa and abaThembu provides an example of how the political alliances would sometimes go sour.

the western world. It was destined to change their lives forever. Thus, inevitably, the historiography has tended to be inclined towards those groups that interacted with European settlers the most, in this study, amaRharhabe and amaTshatshu. Dealing with the prolonged trauma of European invasion the people in these Houses, and many others elsewhere in the world, had to undergo multiple changes. It was not only on the military front that they suffered – the damage was at psychological and spiritual levels as well. Elevated status brought added responsibilities on Izindlu zaseKunene/ Right Hand Houses and had an impact on the position and role of the regent mothers. These women, under the circumstances in which they lived and operated, were in reality queen mothers. They began as regent mothers, then queen mothers and later still, they had a double identity, one of being absent from European sources, while they retained their respect and status among their own people.

The history of AmaTshatshu, especially during the early part of the nineteenth century, provides a backdrop of the world in which Sutu grew up. Sihele narrates historical events of battles between abaThembu of Kumkani Ngubengcuka and amaBhaca. In these wars amaTshatshu, led by Bawana, put up a brave front in support of Ngubengcuka. However, a rift developed between Bawana and his father, Kumkani/king, over the issue of war spoils. He is said to have let Kumkani Hintsu, who was Ngubengcuka's mother's people, drive off cattle that were due to amaTshatshu.⁷⁵ Thereupon, amaTshatshu of Bawana and another Thembu clan migrated westwards, over the Tsomo River, leaving Kumkani Ngubengcuka's region in the precinct of the Mbashe River. Even though Mager and Velelo give the date as 1823, by 1799 van der Kemp had already made reference to Tshatshu.⁷⁶ One would surmise that a few Tshatshu migrants had moved westwards much earlier than the 1820s. Philipps, an 1820 British settler, passed through Tshatshu lands during his tour of the region in 1825.⁷⁷

The migration of one political segment from the centre, especially the one that came from Indlu yaseKunene, is a common theme in the history of southeast Africans. That was the case with Rharhabe who had moved away from the centre of power under his brother Gcaleka. That kind of split did not create a severance from the centre. But a certain measure of semi-independence was enjoyed by the new branch. Thus, AmaTshatshu like groups similar to theirs, clung to the royal ideology as they continued to define their identity as being the Right Hand House of Dlomo, one of the early Thembu uKumkani/kings. The westward move of Bawana and amaTshatshu initially introduced them to the lands occupied by Khoisan people. Sihele does not make any reference to the indigenous people in the region. In all likelihood, he was operating from a paradigm that had progressively wiped-out the

75 Cory Library, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, MS:17119, E.G. Sihele (N.C. Tisani, transl.), 'Who are abaThembu: Where Do they Come from?'

76 Mager and Velelo, *The House of Tshatshu*, 24.

77 A. Keppel-Jones, ed., *Philipps, 1820 Settler. Letters* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter, 1960), 276–279.

Khoisan people because they were converted into a 'Hottentot' identity.⁷⁸ Wagenaar, however, makes an observation that the tradition of ingqithi/severed finger among amaThembu was probably taken from the San.⁷⁹

AmaTshatshu would either have intermarried with the Khoisan people or driven them away.⁸⁰ The Khoisan was a group that had already been decimated by the Boer settlers as invaders who had, for some time during the eighteenth century, been raiding indigenous communities. The commando system was in use – a vehicle for abducting women and children into a form of slavery. The other invading group Bawana encountered was the British who had started in earnest carving up the land and drawing up boundaries. AmaTshatshu, like amaRharhabe, had also come under missionary influence. Mavulane (sic), most likely to have been MaMvulane, was one of the early Tshatshu women who was part of the Christian band that moved in among amaTshatshu in 1828.⁸¹

Therefore, by the time Sutu joined her in-laws, she had been exposed to the ways in which the Boer and British invaded African communities. Even though she had been relatively young, and contact with these two foreign groups had been tentative then, yet it was an experience that would stand her in good stead because the white missionaries and British invaders were poised to dominate her life as the queen mother of amaRharhabe for the rest of her life. The earlier account on MamThembu, the queen mother, takes different turns rather than a chronological narrative. This follows the many and changing identities Sutu had, throughout her long life of about nine decades. It will thus be possible to portray the heroine of this study from her ontological domain and to depict her faithfully as an agent of change rather than one who was reacting to the many powerful forces that impacted on her life.

The early part of the text has focused on Ngqika's mother, Novile /Yese and other royal wives. From the early records she seems to have been a notable presence in Ngqika's court. It is therefore possible to postulate what the place and role of the Queen mother was in the Rharhabe world. Initially, Sutu missed out on a crucial, central figure – her mother-in-law, who would have oriented her to married life and to the Rharhabe-Ngqika polity. It would appear, however, that Yese/Novile did return to her marital home. During the 1830s she was described by Laing as Ngqika's mother, who was then advanced in years.⁸² Even at the advanced age of about 80 years Yese still exerted influence as she went about claiming to have powers to make rain. Coincidentally, the two women Yese and Sutu, were from the Tshatshu clan. Mqhayi gives the name of Sutu's father as Mvanxeni, who was also the father of Bawana.

78 Some groups like aMasimanga celebrate and remember intermarriage with the Khoisan. AmaSimanga's praises run, 'Abantw' abaluthuli'. See P.J. Mzimba, 'Imbali YaseMbo', in Opland and Mtuze, *Imbali Zamandulo*, 289.

79 E.J.C. Wagenaar, 'A Forgotten Frontier Zone: Settlements and Reactions in the Stormberg Area in 1820-1860' in *Archives Year Book*, 1982, Part 2, 111.

80 Mager and Velelo, *The House of Tshatshu*, 23.

81 *Ibid.*, 26.

82 Cory Library, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, MS 16 579, J. Laing, 'Journal of Reverend James Laing, 1831-1853', volumes 1 and 2.

Mqhayi further contends that Mvanxeni was the other name of Tshatshu, one who is given as Bawana's father whose name also appears in the genealogical table of amaTshatshu.⁸³

On being married, Xhosa women are given marital names. The name Sutu is likely to have been one she was given on joining her in-laws. It is an intriguing name, and it is difficult to surmise what it denoted. The word 'suthu' in the languages of southeast Africans has different meanings. The most common among siNguni speakers is that of a hut of boy initiates. But 'Suthu' or 'Sotho' emerges as a name given to a people who are said to have been assembled by Moshoeshoe during the nineteenth century. Also, uSuthu is a famous war cry of amaZulu. That MamThembu was given a name which otherwise is a place women are forbidden to visit is puzzling. Perhaps the suggestion was that she would be like the abode that incubates young Xhosa boys into manhood. The inference was that she would issue forth young men, virile and strong both from her house and for the wider royal house of amaRharhabe. Perhaps that was the mission Sutu was given by her in-laws when she joined them. Interestingly, Maqoma's mother, thus Ngqika's Kunene/Right Hand wife, who was older than Sutu, was called Notonto which also means a hut of initiates. Possibly, when the mother of the eldest son of Ngqika was given a name with such authority, a name of no less weight had to be found for the one who was to be Ndlunkulu, the Great Wife.

Continuing with the first theme, Sutu left her natal home to join her marital family and acquired a new identity as a wife and later a mother. She was further transformed by being part of the wider Ngqika family, relating to them in monarchical terms as Ndlunkulu. Sutu, even though younger by age, had to join and relate to a cohort of other co-wives who by then had been wives for almost 20 years. She thus moved into a muddle of relationships that was steeped in intrigues and rivalry as well as love and support. Equally, her children were to be part of an assemblage of siblings who journeyed under the difficult circumstances of foreign invasion with loss of limb, life and land. Ngqika's sons, including Sandile, were to be the rallying point of military resistance for no less than 50 years out of the 100 years of resistance conducted by amaXhosa.⁸⁴

There were several co-wives with whom Sutu shared the position of being a Ngqika royal wife. A study of these women in the southeast African region raises important facets about them. Various nooks and corners they occupied in the Xhosa society are revealed. Certainly, they do not fall within the bracket of indigenous women who were always associated with static images of drudgery and subordination to their husbands – what Margaret Kinsman refers to as 'Beasts of Burden'.⁸⁵ The group of

83 Mqhayi, 'Usutu', in *Abantu Besizwe*, 415.

84 There is no agreement on the number of Ngqika /Lwaganda's biological children. It should be noted that the notion of biological children did not apply and children or individuals could be moved and placed in another family line should there be no one in that particular House.

85 M. Kinsman, 'Beasts of Burden: The Subordination of Southern Tswana Women ca 1800-1840', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 10, 1 (1983), 39–57.

women which Sutu joined, 'chiefly women', were a special sector. They mingled with both politicians and other royals as well as with the ordinary people.⁸⁶

Notonto was one of the well-known wives of Ngqika. Like Sutu, she lived to a ripe old age and features in most missionary and colonial writings of the nineteenth century as well as in oral tradition. Notonto occupied Indlu YaseKunene, the Right Hand House in Ngqika's court. From iKunene a leader emerges, one who then becomes the right hand of the monarch as he leads in the military, and political spheres of the polity. In the Xhosa world, the position and authority of the two houses seem to have been guarded jealously. But rivalry was unavoidable.⁸⁷ Perhaps Notonto's fame emanates from her illustrious son, Maqoma. He is one of the best-known figures in the history of amaXhosa, particularly in the resistance against British invasion. Jeff Peires describes him as 'the greatest fighter, strong-willed and decisive'.⁸⁸ Maqoma's biographer, Timothy Stapleton, gives a brief overview of the changing perceptions scholars and researchers have had of Maqoma over time.⁸⁹ With Maqoma's character being what it was – he was a brave and fiery nationalist – there could not have been any vestige of agreement between him and the 'children of the foam' (the frail Europeans). Suffice it to say that Notonto's name has been indelibly etched in Xhosa izibongo as iimbongi continue, to the present day, to pay homage to the mother as they praise the son: Injalatya kaNothonto, the sprightly one of Nothonto.

Notonto was of the Ngqosini clan. From oral tradition there is a view that amaNgqosini are held in awe by amaXhosa as the people of the Ngqosini, Cihoshe (a pool). Thus, in spiritual terms, they are respected and seen as connected with the mysteries of rivers and water generally, and as water people, they are part of the religious beliefs of amaXhosa. Still, another oral narrative cited by Gqoba in 1885 attributes amaNgqosini as having been the people who introduced bows and arrows.⁹⁰ So, though Notonto was not of royal blood, she commanded a presence and respect because of the power and awe enjoyed by her family. Indeed, in later life Notonto claimed to be a rainmaker which fit in well with the belief about her people as abantu bomlambo/people of the river. When van der Kemp wrote about Ngqika, the women accompanying him in his many meetings would be his mother and two or three of his wives. Notonto could have been one of those wives as Meintjies suggests that her eldest son, Maqoma was born in about 1800. In a way, there would have been a big age gap between Sutu and Notonto. One could have served as a surrogate mother rather than a co-wife.

86 Weir, 'Chiefly Women', 8.

87 Mqhayi gives an intriguing story of how Maqoma tried to make his Right-Hand House son, Kona, an heir to the throne, and was successfully resisted by *amaphakathi*. See Mqhayi, *Abantu Besizwe*, 143.

88 J.B. Peires, *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-7* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1989), 67.

89 T.J. Stapleton, *Maqoma: Xhosa Resistance to Colonial Advance, 1798-1873* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2016), 3–9.

90 Gqoba, *Isizwe Esinembali*, 215.

Rain making seems to have been a skill and knowledge that royal women veered towards from time to time. Being a rainmaker suggested an ability to control and influence the source of an essential aspect of life, water. Van der Kemp notes that Novile/Yese, Ngqika's mother, was 'the chief witch for procuring rain in this country'.⁹¹ When there was a prolonged drought, however, Novile/Yese approached van der Kemp to bring the rain. Almost 30 years later, Yese, still practised as a rainmaker. It would appear that rainmaking was also an area which amaXhosa sought to test the power of the god of missionaries. When it was cultivation time and rains had not come, Ngqika's brother-in-law added his voice in asking van der Kemp to make it rain by opening the hole from which rain originated. In all, rainmaking was said to be a strong power base. Undoubtedly Notonto would have been a powerful rival for Sutu, someone she had to contend with over quite some time.

Nonibe was another well-known wife of Ngqika and therefore a co-wife to Sutu. She was in *Exhibeni*, a support house of Nosutu. Nonibe's House is known as imiNgcangathelo.⁹² Nonibe held an inordinately elevated position among the other Houses because she was Inkosikazi Yakomkhulu – Ikowabo lakuloNgqika,⁹³ one who was 'in charge' at Ngqika's home. This means that Nonibe was placed in the House of Mlawu, Ngqika's father. In many ways that gave her authority and seniority among other wives. Nonibe's added responsibility was the fact that it was into her house that Europeans, missionaries and others with no clan lines, were grafted into Nonibe's House. This is how Europeans came to be known as Amabandla akoNonibe/Nonibe's clan.⁹⁴ Mqhayi goes on to narrate that as Nonibe was settled at Tyhume River, the river was given another name, after her, ithambo likaNonibe/the bone of Nonibe. This name was in reference to the fact that even though the English land grabbers had been given a 'mother' to look after, and to look up to, they did not desist from laying claim to the Tyhume River. They grabbed ithambo likaNonibe from its owner, tragically, in the war of 1846-1847. In a few words Mqhayi sums up this tragedy: Bamphakamisel' sitende/They turned their heels on her (betrayed her), UNina wabo uNonibe/their Mother, Nonibe.⁹⁵ The phrase also means turning one's back to somebody with disdain. This act would have been yet another baffling experience for Nonibe, Sutu and amaNgqika ... collectively they had hoped for some measure of social cohesion with the white settlers.

The complex story about Amabandl'akoNibe, the Europeans, who did not comprehend the honour that had been bestowed on them by amaXhosa, best demonstrates the context of the socio-political system of isiXhosa-speaking people and other related groups. Within the social relations system an identified lack, gap or even a vacuum would be rectified through ukuthetha / making a pronouncement

91 Van der Kemp, 'Journey to Caffraria', 423.

92 Mqhayi, *Abantu Besizwe*, 33.

93 Ibid., 33.

94 Ibid., 13-14.

95 Ibid., 15.

to a relevant authority. There are a number of examples where such a new reality could come into being through being ukuthethwa, pronounced, through a spoken word. This was usually related to shifting the power bases within the royal family and, maintaining the balance – which was a key factor in the politics of indigenous communities. Often a royal prince, and sometimes even princess, would be grafted into another house, different from that which they had been born into. Such a house would usually be that of a deceased royal personage, one which had been left vacant through death. In the absence of a successor, it was a common practice among amaXhosa to place one royal son, not just to inherit the house, but to cease being what he was previously been. He had to embrace the new identity. There is a detailed account of this process, ukuthetha/pronouncing a new reality. It could also be created/ukudala. An example that clarifies the idea of Amabandl' akoNibe, relates to the story of European castaways who were stranded on the beach and were rescued and cared for by amaMpondo. From these people, amaMolo, even though they looked different physically, being of European stock, a new clan yadalwa/was created. The people of the new clan were grafted into the Mpondo socio-political clan system and henceforth lived, married and died among amaMpondo. It is also intriguing that Nonibe was granted the task of looking after the white invaders in the same way Yese/Novile, Ngqika's mother, had been tasked to look after van de Kemp's party in 1799.

AmaRharhabe respected and honoured the task that was given to Nonibe's House, imiNgcangathelo, to look after the missionaries. This is further confirmed by the fact that when the old Lovedale mission station was burnt down during the war in 1835, the missionaries of the Glasgow Missionary Society led by a convert, Gciniswa Noyi approached Nkosi Tyhali, Nonibe's son, to ask for a new site.⁹⁶ The request was favourably received as they were granted the land on which Lovedale Seminary was built and, 80 years later also became the site of The South African Native College/Nokholeji or IKholeji kaJabavu, later to be named Fort Hare University. Ten years later, Amabandl' akoNibe tore up whatever agreement had been made with Tyhume as the boundary, as they crossed the river, pouncing and running off with the thambo lakoNibe. Nonibe's bone, by building a fort at Block Drift later to be called Fort Hare.⁹⁷ In so doing they would not allow Nonibe's cattle to cross or even drink from Tyhume River. 'Lwehla ke udiwu' / That is when the war broke out.⁹⁸

Thuthula, already alluded to, was yet another 'wife' of Ngqika. Her case, however, was hugely controversial because it touched on the value system that had to be respected by all. Consequently, her name cannot be erased from the history of amaXhosa. It continues to exist in izibongo/oral poetry, iimbali/narratives and even songs. In recorded sources the myth and mystery emerge in settler sources and in contemporary writings. Ngqika is said to have sent two of amaphakathi, Bongwe and

96 According to Ntantala, the incident of asking for land from Tyhali was part of her mother's oral tradition. She was a Balfour. See P. Ntantala, *A Life Mosaic: The Autobiography of Phyllis Ntantala* (Sunnyside: Jacana Media, 2006), 16.

97 Colonel John Hare was the Lieutenant Governor of the Eastern Districts. He also had the oversight in the building of Block Drift, later Fort Hare, across the Tyhume River.

98 Mqhayi, *Abantu Besizwe*, 35.

Folisa,⁹⁹ to abduct Thuthula who was a young wife of Ndlambe, his 'Tat' omncinci, and took her as his wife. This aroused consternation in the whole Xhosa world. The act was an abomination because incest was abhorrent in the extreme among the indigenous people. It is not quite clear what happened to Thuthula in the end. Philipps, an 1820 settler, purports to have met Ngqika and Thuthula, who he called 'Tate' in 1825.¹⁰⁰ Philipps further claims to have met the two in an area across the Nxuba / Fish River as they were preparing to go to a fair at Fort Wilshire. This seems unlikely to be true even though Mostert also falls for it, quoting Philipps at length.¹⁰¹ The Thuthula affair had dire consequences for Ngqika and for Rharhabe relations, generally. The House of Rharhabe actually went to war against one another.¹⁰² Many of Ngqika's followers deserted him and some went to join Ndlambe. Ngqika then sent Thuthula home otherwise she would have faced the scorn and derision that is always reserved for women in an adulterous situation. Both she and Ngqika were shamed.

On this point Mqhayi asks sarcastically in one of his poems: Kazi ngunobanin' igama lomzi lakhe?¹⁰³ Oh, I wonder what her marital name is?¹⁰⁴ Even though Sutu joined amaNgqika after the actual Ngqika and Thuthula debacle, she would have had to live with the scar that had ripped the Rharhabe family apart.

Other wives of Ngqika and co-wives of Sutu would be lost to history were it not for the names of their sons that surface in historiography from time to time. Anta was Sandile's confidante and brother-in-arms especially during the war of 1850-1853. Then there was Xoxo who came from iqadi of Nonibe. His shooting by the British in 1835 set the world of amaNgqika ablaze. There were also the likes of Matwa, and Tente who, as sons of Ngqika, also featured in different ways in the history that was unfolding among their people.¹⁰⁵ There is also mention of one 'Umtinjana' referred to as son of Ngqika. From the life stories of their sons these women deserve accolades as brave women in their own right.

The status of a queen mother was respected and celebrated among isiXhosa-speaking people. Nojoli was the grandmother of Ngqika and thus not quite a contemporary of Nosutu. She too had been the queen mother of amaRharhabe. She continues to be celebrated in izibongo in contemporary times. Mqhayi, in trying to explain the depth of pain, grief and loss suffered by the African people at the news of the sinking of Mendi in 1917, reverts to the eighteenth-century queen mother saying:

99 D. Ntsikana, 'Imbali YakwaXhosa', *Imibengo*, 11–16.

100 Keppel-Jones, ed., *Philipps*, 287.

101 Mostert, *Frontiers*, 574–576.

102 Ntsikana, 'Imbali Yakwa Xhosa', 13–15.

103 Mqhayi, *Abantu Besizwe*, 105.

104 Opland has missed the sense in the question when he translates it as, 'I wonder what his (sic) home is called.' See Mqhayi, *Abantu Besizwe*, 104.

105 Laing, 'Journal of the Reverend James Laing', volume 2.

Savakala isililo sikaNojoli...Intokazi kaNogwayi waseMbo.¹⁰⁶ A shrilling cry of Nojoli was heard...Nogwayi's daughter from eMbo.

In izibongo, when recounting the Wars of Dispossession, Yali-Manisi goes back to Nomagwayi as he sings the praises of amaRharhabe. He says: Oxaletyline kwiinkalwana zonke, Amabandla kaNtsinga kaNomagwayi waseMbo.¹⁰⁷ They rushed in haste into all the gorges ...Ntsinga's troops, [son] of Nomagwayi from eMbo.

All these women, and many others not covered in this discussion, lived their lives and carried out their responsibilities in the socio-political spheres of the world of indigenous people as fully involved and expressive individuals in their respective societies.

The handful of names that fall within recollection do not nullify the fact that there are multitudes of women whose names have been swallowed up in amnesia. The challenge is to 'exhume'¹⁰⁸ the lives of these women from the fate they suffered mainly because there was a new form of remembering that was introduced as a result of the 'Encounter' with Europeans, capitalised here because it had such a catastrophic outcome for the indigenous societies. On their arrival, settler observers and recorders began to build their own European images, informed by their own disposition towards women. Christian teachings equally, influenced by Evean ideology, helped build a new understanding of indigenous women, partially mirrored by the attitude of Europeans towards their own women and also constructed from the picture they had of indigenous women over the previous three centuries in their travels and escapades around the globe. In their limited understanding of the systems of the indigenous people, what was different was not good enough. It was in that light that the visitors viewed polygamy with disdain and would often report encountering Ngqika with numerous wives. At times the women who were in the company of Ngqika could have been his sisters or daughters. Descriptions given of these women, including Sutu herself, bore the stereotypes Europeans entertained about indigenous women. Sometimes the discourse was expressed through words used to describe animals. Then they would be described as 'prancing' around in a wild dance, gluttonous and drinking lustily. Make-up with red ochre was also seen as odious.¹⁰⁹ The physical description, in the mind of Europeans, hardly ever failed to refer to an extended behind.¹¹⁰

There is no certainty about the date when Sutu joined amaNgqika as a wife. It can be assumed to have been in the early nineteenth century because her first child,

106 Mqhavyi, *Abantu Besizwe*, 481.

107 Briefly the poet is referring to the resistance put up by the troops of Rharhabe, the son of Nomagwayi. See Yali-Manisi, in Opland and Maseko, eds, *Iimbali Zamanyange*, 92.

108 Oyewumi, *What Gender is Motherhood?* 1.

109 In particular, the missionaries detested red ochre and therefore conversion also meant washing the red powder off. Hence those who refused to accept Christian teachings were referred to as *amaqaba*, i.e., those who smear ochre.

110 See Abrahams, *Colonialism, Dysfunction and Disjuncture: The Historiography of Sarah Baartman*.

Sandile, was born in 1821. Whatever the exact date, what is important is the epoch when the Tshatshu-Thembu princess was brought to the Ngqika inkundla/court by her people, a ceremony which Alberti described at the beginning of the nineteenth century.¹¹¹ Weddings were a time of great festivities lasting for days. There is, however, profound meaning that has to be unravelled from the goings on in an African wedding. Families are enjoined, not two individuals. The couple become one entity, *iindonga ziwelene* – two walls have collapsed into one. Two has become one. The resultant equation has a major project of creating a home, bearing children and nurturing them within the ambit of full family membership that includes grandparents, siblings, and other members of the family. Importantly, the involvement and presence of ancestors is invoked unceasingly

One of the significant religious activities that is observed in a wedding ceremony is when the bride *uhlaba umkhonto exhantini*/throws a spear at the gatepost of the cattle byre proclaiming, *ngumzi wam lo!*/I proclaim this to be my homestead!¹¹² Once again, the European observer could only portray the bride as one who is being tutored, rather than a woman who has come to claim her own. The proclamation by Sutu at Komkhulu, Great Place, of the Ngqika court has a particular significance and poignancy. Mqhayi explains that Ngqika's Komkhulu was at the Tyhume valley. He gives the actual location of iKomkhulu at that time to have been at what later became known as Kwa Sikhutshwana – Atwell's farm [at Alice].¹¹³ Thus, for Sutu, and for many other women elsewhere and in later times, colonial invasions and land appropriation interfered with sacred spaces at a deep spiritual level. This would include places where the children's umbilical cords were buried. Tyhume, therefore had a particular significance for Sutu. It is in that context that the wars of 1835, 1846-1847 and 1850-1853, to be discussed later, should be viewed.

At this juncture focus on Sutu moves specifically to her biological role as a wife, mother and grandmother within the Ngqika family. In this study, the biological responsibility of childbearing is not questioned or viewed as a constraint on women. No other creature can perform that task. As Gasa contends, one has to be wary of a feminist thinking that pushes one way of seeing things, and one that also emanates from outside.¹¹⁴ The search is for an understanding of the journey a young woman faces in an indigenous community. The thrust is also to plot her life as she travels in the Rharhabe royal institution. Sutu's identity, like that of others, was never static. It underwent changes brought on by factors within her, her family and the broader circumstances she faced, particularly the overwhelming and eroding presence of settler Europeans. The different epochs in her life's journey cover biological motherhood

111 Alberti, *Account of the Tribal Life*, 64.

112 The ceremony of *Ukuhlaba umkhonto*, is an instant where African thinking transcends boundaries as when a newly wed gets into a cattle byre which is normally out of her boundaries and also when she is given an assegai of her in-laws to use.

113 Mqhayi, *Abantu Besizwe*, 415.

114 N. Gasa, 'Feminisms, Motherisms, Patriarchies and Women's Voices in the 1950s', in Gasa (ed.) *Women in South African History*, 211

of her own children and because of her socio-political status, motherhood to those of the broader Rharhabe family. She could not suspend or postpone her role and identity as *Nosizwe/* Mother of the Nation as she was Ndlunkulu/ Great House of amaRharhabe. Then, in particular, there was Sutu as the Mother of the Nation in the military clashes with European settlers. The motherhood in this epoch was beyond physical nurturing of children. It was confronting the enemy that threatened the very existence of the nation. This was a bravery demonstrated by all living creatures in defence of their young. Finally, the spiritual encounter Sutu had to deal with was the pervading and eroding influence of missionaries in her immediate family and the wider Rharhabe family.

Thus, Sutu went through the changing and challenging stages of being a mother. Motherhood could not have the same meaning all the time. In a cogent argument about the concept of motherhood, Oyewumi, proffers a thesis that confining motherhood to physical mothering is in accordance with European gendering, thinking through which 'scholars [have inflicted] gender dichotomies and male privilege on Yoruba culture'.¹¹⁵ Oyewumi's argument is posited within Yoruba philosophy that is pre-Christian, and pre-Islam. For the most part it is propounded, according to Ifa, a system of knowledge on all aspects of Yoruba life. In the Ifa tradition, Iya symbolises motherhood, yet it is not a gender category.¹¹⁶ Oyewumi accuses western-trained scholars, researchers and 'expert' commentators who have built up a body of knowledge that portrays Iya as a woman. All humans are born of Iya, and with another name, who incubates, and gives birth, a process more spiritual than physical.

This intriguing thesis, especially in the mind of those who have been steeped solely in an empirical mode of knowledge, is baffling. Yet epistemology in African cosmology expands into the metaphysical realm. An exploration of the concept of motherhood in the world of indigenous people in the southeast African region is thus called for. Western binary thinking is the one that locked humanity into a physical woman and man category in all spheres of life. As alluded to earlier, thinking in the African worldview is not about pre-set patterns that are often in contradiction or even opposition. The African bride may cross the threshold into the cattle byre while it is taboo for women to do that. There is a flexibility that allows for complementarity as well as cyclicity, as opposed to linearity. Therefore, the two elements – femininity and masculinity – could at some time complement one another and become a new reality. For example, in a marriage between Africans what is highlighted is the oneness that has brought two separate and different families together, not the two individuals, woman and man. The unity in purpose, 'ukuvumelana komntu oyindoda noyinkazana / mutual agreement between a man and a woman', that is how Jolobe opens his essay in *Imibengo*.¹¹⁷

115 Oyewumi, *What Gender is Motherhood?* 35.

116 *Ibid.*, 59.

117 J.J.R. Jolobe, 'Umsebenzi Wabafazi Kwisizwe EsiNtsundu', *Imibengo*, 185-187.

With advancing years, at some time in African communities, a woman especially among amaXhosa, ascends to a new level that is genderless. An outward symbol of this stage is when she is allowed to enter the cattle byre in her marital home, a place which she previously had no access to. A dramatic entrance by Namba's mother into the cattle byre is given on the occasion of the death of Namba.¹¹⁸ By then, her motherhood entails symbolic ukufukama / includes the wider family, grown-up women and men as well as girls and boys. She enjoys close contact with izihlwele / a host of ancestors that include her own and those of her husband. At that stage she heads family meetings and works closely with inkulu yomzi. The disregard of this stage of genderless motherhood inkonde, is evident among westerners when she is shipped off to an old-age home, as a useless non-productive being.¹¹⁹ Thus disrespect of indigenous women by Europeans took different forms often resulting in ridiculous customary laws, especially under apartheid. But it is crucial to note that some westernised Africans are now also sending off their elders to old-age homes.

Sutu and Ngqika had five children. Their firstborn, Sandile, already mentioned briefly, was born in 1821, a year after the arrival of the settlers from Britain. Mqhayi specifically states that Sutu went back to her natal home to bear her first child.¹²⁰ This seemingly innocuous report has a special significance in the child-bearing process in the African world. According to Oyewumi, the mother-to-be returns to reconnect with her Iya and other women, dead or living, to help in incubating the baby for the last three months of pregnancy and during the birthing.

Mqhayi's suggestion that the name of Sandile could have been a corrupted form of Alexander (the Great) is not plausible. In fact, the name Sandile simply means 'we have grown in numbers', in isiXhosa. That would have been an appropriate name for inkulu yakamik, Ngqika's heir. After Sandile another boy, named Dondashe, was born. As Mqhayi suggests, the name might have been taken from Admiral Dundas who was the new landdrost in Grahamstown and with whom Ngqika had to interact. Often, the naming of royal sons had a particular meaning and significance. The practice of taking the name of an individual was common among amaXhosa. The parents of the boy could have been appropriating the authority and energy of that said person, Dundas, which he sought to exercise over amaXhosa. At the same time, it could also mean that the supposed powerful individual could be reduced to that of a newborn infant. Dondashe seems to have lived under the shadow of his elder brother, Sandile. His image flickers dimly in the passing drama of his times as he, for example, appears in Laing's 'Journal'.¹²¹

Sutu and Ngqika had three daughters: Nottoli, Mhakazi, Mili, the beloved Ngqika princesses/amakhosazana. Often in missionary records the young princesses appear in their expected role as mothers-to-be. In that respect, Laing notes in his

118 J.A. Chalmers, 'Wokubhubha kuka Namba', *Imibengo*, 61-69.

119 B. Magoqwana, 'Repositioning uMakhulu as an Institution of Knowledge' *Whose History Counts*, 80.

120 Mqhayi, *Abantu Besizwe*, 415.

121 Laing, 'Journal of the Reverend James Laing', volume 2.

diary the marriage of a nameless daughter of Sutu, possibly Notobi, to Pato of amaGqunukhwebe. When one considers how the very same Pato would sometimes pitch his soldiers against his mother-in-law, Sutu, throws some light on the pain and trauma she sometimes experienced as a mother in her socio-political life. Later, circumstances changed in her favour. For example, during the war of 1850 to 1853, Sandile used Pato as a negotiator for peace with Smith.¹²² There is no evidence that Sutu bore children after Ngqika's death even though she was still of child-bearing age. Childlessness among royal women in southern Africa seems to have been expected among some groups. Weir cites an instance where a queen mother among amaNdebele was expected to be barren, adhere to 'symbolic celibacy'. But childlessness was not a norm, and some royal women would continue to exercise their biological right of bearing children. That was the case with Yiliwe, Ndlunkulu/Great Wife of Mapasa of amaM'Tshatshu.¹²³

By virtue of her position in the Ngqika House, Sutu was also Mama Omkhulu to the children of the co-wives. There was, for example, a Ngqika princess, who was one of Sutu's 'daughters' who looms large in history. She was Nongwane, daughter of Notonto and Ngqika.¹²⁴ Moreover, she was the twin sister of the illustrious Maqoma. Nongwane was thus part of Sutu's broader family. What affected her also had an impact on Sutu and her daughters in later years. Nongwane's name features prominently in missionary accounts. She married Kama, a younger brother of Pato, 'being the ukumkani of amagqunakwayibe (amaGqunukhwebe)'.¹²⁵ The missionary, William Shaw, was mistaken in claiming that Kama was ukumkani/king. In fact, Kama came from iKunene/the Right Hand House of Chungwa.¹²⁶ This couple, Kama and Nongwane, were a celebrated prize of the missionaries. Shaw recorded baptising them at a mission station, Wesleyville in 1826. Both Kama and Nongwane's baptism provided the missionaries with an entry point into the two royal families, amaGqunukhwebe and amaRharhabe and their people, generally. The name Nongwane would probably have been given to the Ngqika princess when she joined her in-laws. It is possible that she was so named by her in-laws at the time when amaNngwane made their appearance in the southeast African region, resulting in their attack by Henry Somerset in 1828 at Mbolompo.

It can be assumed that Notonto's twins would at one time or another have conferred over a number of issues including the Christian faith. Firstly, though Maqoma never adopted the Christian religion, it appears that he recognised the Christian God as the

122 Meintjies, *Sandile*, 220.

123 Mager and Velelo, *The House of Tshatshu*, 78.

124 D. Crafford, ed., *Trail-Blazers of the Gospel: Pioneers in Missionary History of South Africa* (Bloemfontein: Pro Christo Publications, 1991), 30.

125 W. Shaw, *Memoir of the Reverend William Shaw, Late General Superintendent of the Wesleyan Missions in South-Eastern Africa* (London: Forgotten Books, 2018).

126 D.S Yekela, 'The Life and Times of Kama Chungwa, 1798-1875', MA dissertation, Rhodes University, Grahamstown (1988).

God of Kama and as such deserved respect.¹²⁷ So when a Mdushane princess was sent to Kama as a bride in 1828, Kama would not take her because he was not prepared to be a polygamist, having adopted Christianity as his religion.¹²⁸ Secondly, during the 1850–1853 War, Kama was a ‘Christian soldier’ fighting with the British. He attacked or ‘defended’ a Moravian mission station. But when the British invited Kama to ‘fight against the Gaikas’, he balked.¹²⁹

There is another instance, cited by Mostert, where a daughter of Ngqika showed interest in the teachings of missionaries.¹³⁰ This incident pitted Maqoma against Calderwood, a missionary who was stationed at Maqoma’s place at Blinkwater near Fort Beaufort. Calderwood gave shelter to the nameless young woman when she sought refuge at the mission station. Notonto, Maqoma’s mother, then intervened and fetched the young woman from the mission station. This incident, which took place at the beginning of the 1840s, shows just where things were regarding missionaries with their teachings and the stand taken by royal mothers, in this case by Notonto, against church intrusion into family affairs. In later years, when the balance of power had tilted to the advantage of the missionaries, these once powerful women, like Sutu, witnessed the interference of the church in their family affairs. Missionary interference and influence in Sutu’s life will be discussed in detail.

Sutu was thus a mother of five biologically, as well as caring for the welfare of those children within the Ngqika line. Sutu nurtured her children and as they entered adulthood, both boys and girls, they were initiated into adulthood through ceremonies that were a wider family responsibility. For the royal children, this also involved the wider nation. The girls would have to go through intonjane, a ceremony that was dominated by women but there was also room for the fathers. Missionaries had a strong aversion for these ceremonies. The absence of reports on the intonjane of the three young women would suggest a deliberate effort by Xhosa women to exclude the prying eyes of missionaries and other European observers. For example, in 1842 Laing observed in his journal that Dondashe, Sutu’s younger son, had stayed away from school because of intonjane.¹³¹ No clarity is given on whose intonjane it was. Quite possibly, it was Mili’s, one of Sutu’s daughters, because Laing notes that there had been festivities at the Great Place on Sunday 22 February 1842.

However, the coming of age of Sandile could certainly not have been kept a secret. The event took place in 1840, ngomGca,¹³² the name amaXhosa gave for the 1841 comet. Meintjies, Sandile’s biographer, has given a detailed account of the initiation

127 Maqoma seems to have been fascinated by Christianity. In later years he enjoyed arguing with missionaries using Christian teachings. On occasion he would attend services where he would weep loudly.

128 Kama is quoted as having said, ‘*Ma Igoduke intombi kaMdushane, uKama ugqobhokile*’ / Let Mdushane’s daughter return home. Kama is now a Christian. See Yekela, ‘The Life and Times of Kama’, 79.

129 H. Ward, *Five Years in Kaffirland with Sketches of the Late War in that Country to the Conclusion of Peace* (London: Henry Colburn, 1848), 246.

130 Mostert, *Frontiers*, 831.

131 Laing, ‘Journal of Reverend James Laing’, volume 2.

132 Mqhayi, *Abantu Besizwe*, 491.

ceremony.¹³³ Meintjies has a good understanding of the import of that moment. Even some early recorders like Alberti provide detailed accounts of the circumcision rite.¹³⁴ On the other hand, some scholars and researchers of the period choose to ignore the event, perhaps because it was one of the activities that missionaries detested. On the surface, missionaries would complain about the disturbance of the schooling of the pupils concerned, saying the youngsters were distracted with all the activities involved in the initiation ceremony or had run off to join the prince. To rub salt into the wound Cory, quoted by Meintjies, observes that the high number of cattle stolen from the 'colony' in 1840 were taken for the ceremony.¹³⁵

For Sutu, the regent mother, the coming of age of Sandile was yet another moment in her life. She was a proud izibazana, the mother of an initiate. She had produced a man, and especially for her, she had presented amaNgqika with Inkosi Enkulu/ the most senior. The event was also of great political importance to Sutu and Sandile. She was a regent mother for life. But when Sandile attained his political power, she was affected too. Her biological role was done, and a new chapter had opened up.

The two powerful brothers, Maqoma and Tyhali, who had acted as Sandile's guardians relinquished their power according to Xhosa law. Rubusana has given a record of what the two brothers are purported to have said. Tyhali noted: 'Nabo ubukhosi siyakunika namhla kuba besesibuhelille ngokuba nathi singabantwana bakaNgqika', meaning, 'Receive authority to rule. We are returning it to you even though we had got used to it, for we also are Ngqika's children'. Maqoma added his own words: '...Nabo ubukhosi. Kambe uze wazi ukuba umhlaba ngowakho, abantu ngabakho, ...neenkomo zezakho, yonke into yeyakho', thus, 'Take the authority to rule. You must remember the land is yours, the people are yours, ...the cattle are yours; everything belongs to you'.¹³⁶

The theme on Sutu's socio-political life among amaMbombo, amaNgqika and amaRharhabe generally helps to unveil Sutu's journey as she trudged across her changing world carrying the responsibilities that nature, social and religious structures had put in her path. Thus, Sutu's socio-political life among amaRharhabe underwent changes as her life cycle moved from one epoch to another. Sutu's status and stature changed as Sandile attained manhood and she became an adviser as Nosizwe/the Mother of the Nation. Her role was akin to what the early European observers recorded about Novile/Yese, Ngqika's mother. In later years as a grandmother and sage, Sutu's reverence did not diminish in the eyes of her people.

An important, but tragic, phase for Sutu was the time of widowhood. She would have been in her late 20s when Ngqika died on a Saturday 14 December 1829

133 Meintjies, *Sandile*, 115–116.

134 Alberti, *Account of the Tribal Life*, 39.

135 Meintjies, *Sandile*, 115.

136 W.B. Rubusana, ed. *Zemk' iinkomo Magwalandini*, 2nd ed (London: self published, 1906), 243.

according to a letter by Ross to her father.¹³⁷ There seems to have been a general consensus among the observers of the day that Ngqika was killed by alcohol which he got from the British military posts. Indeed, by the end of his life Ngqika had become heavily addicted to alcohol. For example, in 1825 Philipps, a British settler, narrated how Ngqika would volunteer to dance with his wives and retinue in exchange for wine and brandy.¹³⁸ Rose added his voice about the degradation of Ngqika alluding to the unimaginable, that Ngqika would sell his 'wives' for brandy.¹³⁹ Ngqika was relatively young when he died and his contact with the European invaders was in no measure an indirect cause of his untimely death. When Philipps met Ngqika in 1825, he described Ngqika as an athletic man who looked 20 years old though he was 50 years old.¹⁴⁰ So his decline just took four years.

The degradation to which Ngqika is said to have descended at the time of his death would have left a negative legacy for his descendants to deal with. Therefore, in tracing the trials and tribulations of amaRharhabe under the leadership of Sutu, iinkosi, amaphakathi and the indigenous people generally, cognisance has to be taken of the negative view of their father figure, especially in the eyes of settler-invaders. Nonetheless, the point of encounter operating in a cyclical motion did throw out victims, and cripples from all groups. Only a few emerged stronger. Commenting about some of the British settlers, Rose described them as having 'sunk in hopeless indolence [living] in hovels, the abode of despair and drunkenness'.¹⁴¹ Mrs Ross, writing in 1832 from the mission station where she lived in with her husband, commented about traders who were all over 'Caffe land' and how 'they behave badly...which gives Caffres no good idea of white people'.¹⁴²

As a widow Sutu and the other wives had to observe mourning rituals. These included withdrawal from other people and moving into a secluded space. At a given time, the women could re-join the community.¹⁴³ It was a new phase in Sutu's life. There was a shift from mothering and nurturing to social isolation and later to political jostling within her family and the wider polity. Further, Sutu entered the period of widowhood at a time of great difficulties in the world of indigenous people, especially for a woman. The British had already shown their greed for land. She was of Indlu Enkulu, the Great House, and mother to an eight-year-old heir. Coincidentally, the political crisis facing amaNgqika of entering an interregnum, seems to have confronted other Rharhabe Houses as well as the neighbouring Thembu polities.¹⁴⁴

137 U. Long, *An Index to Authors of Unofficial, Privately Owned Manuscripts Relating to the History of South Africa, 1812–1920* (London: Replika Press, 1947), 235.

138 Keppel-Jones, ed., *Philipps*, 290.

139 C. Rose, *Four Years in Southern Africa* (Leiden: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1829), 94.

140 Keppel-Jones, ed., *Philipps*, 287.

141 Rose, *Four Years in Southern Africa*, 117.

142 Long, *An Index to Authors*, 236.

143 Alberti, *Account of the Tribal Life*, 96.

144 Tisani, 'Continuity and Change', 100.

In 1828 the sage, Nkosi Ndlambe had died at an advanced age leaving Mhala, his heir, to take the seat of power. Mdushane, one of the heroes of the attack on Grahamstown in April 1819, from the Right Hand House of Ndlambe also died in 1828, leaving a young heir, Siwani. Thus Nonibe (of imiDushane) became regent.¹⁴⁵ She was a mother who stood to give all possible support and advice to her son. For example, during the 1850-1853 war, Siwani, together with Nonibe, went to negotiate with Cathcart, the then governor at the Cape.¹⁴⁶ Then the whole Xhosa polity was struck by a catastrophe in 1835 when Richard Southey, a British soldier gunned down Kumkani Hintsa.¹⁴⁷ As the heir to the Gcaleka House, all amaXhosa, which included amaRharhabe, amaNdlambe and other many houses fell under his rule. The heir apparent to the Xhosa throne was Sarhili, a young man who would probably have been in his early 20s because he was still ikrwala, and had only recently returned from the initiation school in 1834.¹⁴⁸ Sarhili's mother, Nomsa, a Mpondo princess, was the queen mother to support her son.

Coincidentally, at more or less the same time, amaTshatshu of the Thembu Royal House, from which Sutu came, Nkosi Bawana Sutu's brother, died in 1830, leaving a young Mapasa to face the challenges amaTshatshu also had to contend with. Furthermore, Nonesi, the Queen of abaThembu took over as regent for the heir to the throne for the young Mtirara in 1830. Nonesi established her Komkhulu at Imvani.¹⁴⁹ The observation regarding female regencies by Charles Brownlee, who had grown up among isiXhosa-speaking people as a son of a missionary and had worked as a civil servant for the colonial regime, is confirmed by the examples of female regencies quoted above. It would appear as though the queen mother rule was in the scheme of things rather than accidental. Secondly, these female regents were much appreciated as ushering in a new political phase with the woman bringing in her influence from her natal home. Thus, the beginning of each political epoch began with a symbolic birth and the whole polity would also enjoy being nurtured by a regent queen mother.

Thus, the political landscape in southeast Africa during the mid-1830s was both desperate and strong. It is intriguing that at such critical times the incumbents to lead the polities were regent mothers who stepped in to lead, support and guide their sons, some of whom were just boys and still had to go to initiation schools to attain their manhood, or were young men in their 20s with limited experience. These strong women did not just bring military prowess which is the dominant element that is generally considered by scholars and researchers when analysing the nineteenth century circumstances of southeast Africans, they also brought about unity because they commanded respect from the older generations of their deceased husbands' era,

145 Mqhayi, *Abantu Besizwe*, 337.

146 *Correspondence between His Excellency Sir George Grey KCB and Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State of the Colonies in the Affairs of the Cape Colony, Natal and Adjacent Territories 1855-57* (Cape Town: Saul Solomon & Co., 1857), 66.

147 Lulu, *The Deaths of Hintsa*.

148 Tisani, 'Continuity and Change', 1000.

149 Mager and Velelo, *The House of Tshatshu*, 33.

as well as the young ones, the generation of their sons. Their positions were looked upon with awe as they stood for the pronouncements made by elders already in the world of *izinyanya*/ancestors. To reach solutions of a military nature, these women looked for other options like co-existence, incorporation and even peace. But this was no plain sailing and called for great resilience and a toughness of character beyond measure. Of great importance, yet often overlooked, is the fact that these women were outsiders, they came from their natal homes and had been called upon to adjust to different circumstances in their marital families.

The period of an interregnum among amaXhosa is difficult to understand. This is particularly so if one is to approach it with a typical western political analysis. When Ngqika died, writers like Mostert and Stapleton immediately shifted their perspective to foreground Maqoma, a man, as the person who was to lead amaNgqika. Mostert refers to this period as the 'recasting of the power structure of the frontier Xhosa following the deaths of Ngqika Ndlambe and Mdushane'.¹⁵⁰ For his part, Meintjies claims the Regent, Maqoma, became the strongman and that it was to his place that Sandile went to stay.¹⁵¹ At that time it is difficult to discern the role of Sutu beyond that of a mother because it was virtually smothered under the high profile masculinity purported by these writers then and now. These writers were informed by the 'Big Man' syndrome. Yet it is possible that from the outset, as was seen with Yese/Novile earlier, that Sutu occupied the centre of political life within the Xhosa polity. This she would have undertaken to play her role as an outsider bringing in new and different perspectives, as well as the fact that she was protecting the interests of her young son within the Xhosa political framework. In an inclusive thought system that characterised the African worldview or world sense, there was room, indeed it was desirable, for an outsider to be part of a centre of power among several that existed.

Moreover, the political system among amaXhosa then did not just have one centre around inkosi or ukumkani. There were multiple centres of power. And the other key centre, were amaphakathi, themselves not a homogenous group. They are mainly of two generations, those who had served the previous ruler and the young amabutho who had gone to the circumcision school with the young ruler. In the political sphere, therefore, the regent queen mother had multiple identities which themselves enjoyed a measure of power. She most probably would have remained in her dead husband's camp as she had an awareness of what had transpired previously. An example of an old iphakathi who had served Ngqika and who was in Sutu's council was Soga. These were the men who most probably organised the military arm that served under the name of the Queen Mother Sutu. It also happened that there were desertions as well. An older iphakathi, like Ganya who had been Ngqika's phakathi and who had been in the service of Sutu, by some strange inexplicable twist, became Smith's 'councillor'.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Mostert, *Frontiers*, 612.

¹⁵¹ Meintjies, *Sandile*, 80.

¹⁵² H. Smith, *The Autobiography of Lieutenant General Sir Harry Harry Smith* (London: John Murray, 1903), 445.

The other important role the regent queen mothers had to play was that of providing a balancing act within the complexities that thrived in indigenous polities. This, in the case of Sutu and others, could be exercised through the number of identities they had throughout. A political system that would otherwise have seemed to have the potential to explode from competing centres held together in the face of severe threats that were more difficult than amaXhosa had ever imagined. Nonetheless, within the multiple centres the political fabric was taut. There were unwritten laws which were observed judiciously. Calderwood, a Methodist missionary who had worked among amaXhosa as a churchman and later as a civil servant under the colonial regime noted that, [AmaXhosa] have laws and courts of laws: 'they are great sticklers for law and courts of law and are universally lawyers'.¹⁵³

Thus, an analysis of the political framing of isiXhosa-speaking people is long overdue. It has to break away from the notion of a dominating centre of power as exercised in modern times in the western world through a ruling party system. Further, the western-centric political system is moulded around majoritarianism from which a ruling party arises and against which an opposition party or several are pitted. The central binary Eurocentric thinking that predominates is tethered around a ruling and opposing dimension. These unwritten African laws just referred to were held in place by a value system that celebrated elasticity and inclusivity as crucial tenets within the African cosmological outlook. In this political set-up described, elasticity made room for accommodating and including new individuals and even new groups within the ruling circle. The tenor is that of oppositionality in a complementing fashion between the groups as they enjoy flexibility of movement.

The basic tenets that guided southeast Africans pertaining uNdlunkulu/the Great Wife practice were strictly adhered to. Once a woman was pronounced or declared as one, no changes would be entertained by the polity. If she failed to produce an heir naturally, then a son would be taken from one of the junior houses and be 'born' into the Great House by the Great Wife.¹⁵⁴ The Great House was thus not a physical presence, but a metaphysical one. If the royal court had 'spoken' about who the Great Wife would be, then there was a finality in that decision which would not be easily tampered with.

Further, it would appear as though the choice of a future queen mother was decided by the belief that her isithunzi, amandla, siriti/vital force she had would be efunjathisiwe / bolstered by and from her own royal house.¹⁵⁵ There was a strong belief among amaXhosa that one coming from outside could come along with iimfihlelo, secrets for the benefit of the new home to which he was to be committed. In his book, *Ingqumbo Yeminyanya*, A.C. Jordan presents the belief and argument about the appropriateness of a princess for Ndlunkulu/the Great House through the

153 H. Calderwood, *Caffers and Caffer Missions with Preliminary Chapters on the Cape Colony as a Field for Emigration and Basis of Missionary Operations* (London: James Wisbetand Co., 1858), 35.

154 For example, Queen Nonesi of abaThembu had no issue and she was given a son, Mtikrakra, to bring up and prepare for leadership.

155 Alverti, *Account of the Tribal Life*, 84.

life and death struggle between amakhumsha/the school people and amaqaba/the traditionalists in the Mpondomise polity. The tradition regarding Umfazi Omkhulu/the Great Wife was that she was usually one who was married when uKumkani or iNkosi was at an advanced age and inevitably led to the prevalence of regent queen mothers. One thing, the power at the throne was hardly ever challenged by an heir who, more often than not, would have been merely 20 to 25 years younger. Thus, in each epoch of a reigning Kumkani or Nkosi, there would be a period when there was a woman heading the polity with the assistance of councillors.

The practice of exogamy among the Nguni-speaking groups of southeast Africa meant that wives were brought in as outsiders from other clans or royal lineages. For royal families that usually meant a princess would be from adjacent royal houses like amaMpondo, abaThembu, amaBhaca and others. Such marriages were mainly for political alliances. In essence, although ostensibly they were led by royal males, these marriages meant that these polities had to accommodate the leadership and influence of a female who came from another royal line or house. Such a practice can best be understood if analysed from the cosmological outlook of indigenous people which was elastic and inclusive.¹⁵⁶ Endogamy or such related practices was perceived as incestuous and injurious to the wellbeing of an individual as well as the people generally. Thus, the princess from another royal house would bring in knowledge, wisdom, and the new perspectives of an outsider to which the young ruler and the nation would be exposed.

Predictably, the declaration of Sutu as Ndlunkulu/Great Wife was not without controversy. Mostert narrates that even before his death Nkosi Ngqika had shown some reluctance to marry a young Great Wife because he contended that he already had sons.¹⁵⁷ In this instance, the limited powers of inkosi can be seen. On the issue of Ngqika's wife, amaphakathi seem to have had other views. They brought in Sutu, as Ndlunkulu/Great Wife¹⁵⁸ for Ngqika. The real threat to Sutu was when a senior Thembu princess, daughter of Ndaba and sister to Ngubengcuka, was brought to the Ngqika polity as a possible Ndlunkulu/Great House. This matter was referred to Kumkani. It was Hintsá, the reigning Xhosa monarch at the time, who confirmed Sutu as Ndlunkulu/Great Wife of the House of Ngqika.¹⁵⁹

Further challenges from co-wives with their own power bases at the court would have been a serious threat to the young and inexperienced bride and Great Wife-tobe. Equally, older sons of the reigning Kumkani would not have been amenable allies to the one who was lined up to give birth to the heir. Sons and daughters of ukumkani or inkosi overtly and covertly were also involved in political intrigue and rivalry. It is hardly surprising, therefore, to note a report of tension and possible strife between the

156 Tisani, 'Of Definitions and Naming', 24–25.

157 Mostert, *Frontiers*, 566.

158 An important factor about UNdlunkulu / the Great Wife was the broader spectrum of people who produced cattle for her *lobolo*, with *amaphakathi* in the lead.

159 Mqhayi, *Abantu Besizwe*, 417.

leading Ngqika princes, Maqoma, and Tyhali as related in an article entitled, 'Caffer Feud' on 22 August 1833 in the Grahamstown Journal.

There were two other issues that would have been a thorn in Sutu's socio-political life among amaRharhabe. The first was the claim that Sandile was illegitimate. Mostert puts the rumour as vaguely as befits such a lie. He says, 'Sandile was never regarded by some Xhosa ... as the natural son of Ngqika'.¹⁶⁰ He further attaches his argument to the fact that Ngqika had not wanted Sutu to be Ndlunkulu/Umfazi Omkhulu. Such a claim about illegitimacy of a child is usually aimed at besmirching the mother as well as attacking the dignity and integrity of a child. The fact that Sandile was lame was another possible reason that could have turned his people away from him. In 1803, Alberti noted that deformed 'Kaffirs' were rare. One whom he had seen with a deformity had been a butt of children's teasing.¹⁶¹ It speaks of Sutu's inner strength that she was not just able to overlook and survive the accusation of adultery, but to bring up a son who overcame his disability. Until the end of his life, Sandile was respected as the supreme inkosi among amaRharhabe and he was a beloved leader.¹⁶²

But any rumours and challenges pale into insignificance when consideration is given to an eruption that occurred at the death of Tyhali in 1842. An explosion occurred at Komkhulu/the Great Place when igqira/a divining doctor is said to have accused Sutu of bewitching Thyali. In the case of widow Sutu, Tyhali's death exposed the precarious position Ndlunkulu/Great Wife held. Thus, Tyhali's death on 1 May 1842, after a short illness, was a serious crisis which Sutu and Sandile faced soon after the ascent to power of Sandile. Meintjies claims that Maqoma and Mhala of amaNdlambe called in igqira named Umdlankomo, to find out the cause of death.¹⁶³ It would appear the practice of ukunuka/to 'smell out' was an effective and feared tool often used against socio-political opponents in most African communities.¹⁶⁴ Royal wives were not exempt. Rose, a traveller, notes that Kama's mother had at one time been accused of witchcraft. So, in 1842 Sutu wanukwa/was smelt out, as being the witch that had caused Tyhali's death. This meant that Sutu's life was in real danger. What complicates matters about that incident is that igqira that was consulted was a 'Fingo'. The so called Fingoes were a group that had formed shortly before out-of-the-muddy waters of the encounter between the isiXhosa-speaking people and the European intruders. Being a creation of the missionaries, particularly Ayliff, they were often portrayed in the writings of the time as the sworn enemies of amaXhosa.

Circumstances about the incident of Sutu's life being threatened become rather unclear when one considers the various vague accounts that appear in the sources

160 Mostert, *Frontiers*, 566.

161 Alberti, *Account of the Tribal Life*, 21-22.

162 Maclean, who was the commissioner to amaNdlambe when George Grey was governor at the Cape, would constantly advise Grey against disregarding the high respect and supremacy accorded to Sandile by amaNgqika. See Maclean to Grey, 4 August 1855, *Correspondence between His Excellency Sir G. Grey*, 93.

163 Meintjies, *Sandile*, 120.

164 Even royalty was not immune from this practice. The traveller Rose noted that Khama's mother had been accused of witchcraft during the 1820s. See Rose, *Four Years in Southern Africa*, 129.

at that time. On 10 August 1842, Stretch¹⁶⁵ wrote a letter, probably to Reverend J.F. Cumming, commenting that ‘Tyali’s death and Sutu affair have certainly caused much disorder’.¹⁶⁶ In Stretch’s journal an observation is made that Stretch’s ‘intervention had saved Sutu from being burnt to death’.¹⁶⁷ On the other hand, Reverend Laing who was a minister at Burnshill gives no direct account of the incident. Instead, he recorded in his journal that there were a ‘number of people at church seeking rain, among them Sandile, Sutu and others of the Great Place’.¹⁶⁸

No physical harm befell Sutu whatever had transpired. It is difficult to see the full picture of events around this painful chapter in Sutu’s life. To explain her ‘escape’ suggests that she had sympathisers who did not want to see her demise. There are other examples where the outcome was far more serious. In the case of amaphakathi/councillors who were accused of bewitching nkosi Maphasa of amaTshatshu in 1852, their fate was sealed and they met a gruesome death as Mager and Velelo recount. But perhaps amaphakathi/councillors, and a regent mother, did not share the same status. Nonetheless, the political rift in the Ngqika House was wide open.

Could it be that there was a wing within the Ngqika House that, in saving Sutu, stalled Maqoma’s ambitions? With Tyhali dead, he could conceivably have aimed at taking over the reins with Sandile being just a mere *krwala*/newly graduated into manhood? Such suspicions had some basis because Maqoma had proved his military prowess – together with Tyhali – in the war of 1818 and 1835. Even though Maqoma’s biographer, Stapleton, also suggests that Maqoma might have had such ambitions,¹⁶⁹ the political system among amaXhosa did not allow the son from Kunene/Right Hand House to usurp political power. On the other hand, the attack on Sutu revealed to all the bravery and strong will in Sandile who stood up to Maqoma in defence of his mother. The Sutu-Sandile mother-son alliance was confirmed once and for all and was not to be broken despite the trials and travails that followed the two in the next 35 years.

However, the incident introduced a new dimension in Ngqika politics. The missionaries had entered the Ngqika House. If Sutu had been saved by the missionaries from an attack by her own people then that was a decisive moment for her. If she had, earlier, merely tolerated missionaries as a nuisance in her life and her people, she could no longer entertain such a stance. She was beholden to them. At the same time death seemed to stalk Ngqika’s sons. Almost a year after the incident discussed above, Tente, one of Ngqika’s sons at about 27 years of age, also died. Unlike Tyhali, he had been very close to the missionaries at Burnshill Mission Station.

165 Charles Lennox Stretch was a resident agent among amaNgqika from 1835 to 1847. This provided him with first-hand accounts of some of the events he recorded.

166 Long, *An Index to Authors*, 257.

167 C.L. Stretch, *The Journal of Charles Lennox Stretch* (Cape Town: Maskew Miller, 1988), 142.

168 Laing, ‘Journal of Reverend James Laing’, volume 2.

169 Stapleton, *Maqoma*, 142.

Sutu's socio-political life among her people would, at face value, appear to have been largely in relation to men, particularly in the military sphere. It is important to note that Sutu led a social life enjoyed both by women and men. There is no clarity about her possessions and economic standing. She would have had access to land for cultivation. Whether or not there were servants who worked her land, there is no clarity. Records during her lifetime mentioned the cultivation of maize, sorghum, pumpkins, beans and other crops. The importance of food security weighed on her throughout her lifetime as she tried to avoid disturbing the cultivation annual cycle even during the many military encounters with Europeans. The colonial economy slowly penetrated the Rharhabe world right under her feet. The famous fair at Fort Willshire seems to have attracted both royalty and common people. By 1822 Philipps, an 1820 settler wrote a letter detailing that Africans 'every full moon ... come to barter with officers'.¹⁷⁰ Inkosi regarded the fair as a place where they could collect their tribute for the sale of ivory and other precious goods. Queen Mother Sutu, as was the case with her people, was not into accumulation and profit making. For a period, the European goods seem to have been items for re-distribution and power mongering.

170 Keppel-Jones, ed., *Philipps*, 130.



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