

## *The transculturation of enlightenment*

The *Journal* of Tiyo Soga

Subsequent to a skirmish during the last of what came to be called the frontier wars in the Cape Colony early in 1878, a company of colonial troops was preparing a mass grave for seventeen of their Xhosa enemy when they came across a copy of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* on one of the bodies. The flyleaf bore the following inscription:

Lovedale Missionary Institution. First Prize in English Reading,  
Junior Division, First Year, awarded to Paul Nkupiso. [Signed]  
James Macdonald, Lovedale, Dec, 1875. (Shepherd 1940, 210)

Soon afterwards, the discovery was reported in the settler newspaper, the *Tarkastad Chronicle*, together with the sarcastic remark: 'it is unnecessary to make any comment on the subject. The book will be kept as a standing advertisement of missionary labour' (in Shepherd 1940, 210).

Always wary of settler opinion, and arguably the pre-eminent centre of missionary education on the African subcontinent, the Lovedale mission was immediately put on the defensive. The report was false, it said, because no Lovedale boy could possibly have died fighting the Colony. Paul Nkupiso was a loyal 'Fingo', the very people whom the British were trying to protect. The principal, James Stewart, boldly stated that 'sooner or later they would be able to produce Paul Nkupiso in bodily form as the best proof that the whole story was a fabrication – and one of a numerous class of the same order' (Shepherd 1940, 211). His bravado did pay off, for the mission newspaper, *The Christian Express*, later reported:

Paul Nkupiso is still in the flesh. About a month ago, he walked into Lovedale, having spent the interval since his last visit in work of various kinds, with the view of earning a little money . . . [to obtain] a teacher's certificate. He is here now . . . and can be seen any day by those who are incredulous. (Shepherd 1940, 211)

The incident passed into history but Stewart began compiling a register of his graduates in case it should prove necessary to protect the school's reputation again.

After the affair had blown over the question remaining in the air was this: if it were not Nkupiso, who *did* carry that copy of *The Pilgrim's Progress* into the Battle of Quanti, as the amaXhosa later called it? More pertinently, *why* did this young fighter do so? There are, of course, several possibilities. If he were not a product of Lovedale, as Stewart insisted, nor another mission, and if the book had fallen into his hands by chance, he would probably not have been literate. If so, did he hope that if the British could protect the rival Mfengu (whom the missionaries and settlers called Fingo) with guns, perhaps this other sign of British power – what the amaXhosa, mimicking the language of the pulpit, called 'the Word' – might protect him?<sup>1</sup> Tiyo Soga (whom I shall introduce more fully shortly) is said to have remarked:

The prevalent opinion [amongst the amaXhosa] . . . is, that missionaries are the emissaries of Government, to act upon the minds and feelings of the people, with an Instrument which they call 'the Word'; and those who become afflicted by the Word, and exchange Kafir customs for those of the white men, become subjects of the English Government. (Chalmers 1877, 327)

Soga is referring to a functional linkage between colonial words and colonial force, a linkage that was not entirely the product of the pre-modern imagination. It was made by both sides, as is famously illustrated in the War of the Axe, just a generation earlier, when colonial troops had melted down the printer's type of the

Lovedale Press to make bullets (Shepherd 1940, 400; De Kock 1996, 31). It is possible too, that the young fighter *had* been through Lovedale's doors (though he may not have been Nkupiso) and that Stewart was reluctant to identify him properly; perhaps that he came from another mission, such as Healdtown. After all, there would later be generations of young men, nationalists who from their position of knowledge of what the mission had to offer, *would* become the antagonists of the Colony. Whatever his circumstances, and whatever thoughts the young fighter may have had, the military power of the Colony was not placated, although the symbolic power of the book he carried was, indeed, turned for a moment against the missionaries, thanks to the *Tarkastad Chronicle*.

TIYO SOGA WAS the first ordained African minister in South Africa. He was also the first to be trained abroad (in Glasgow) and, in effect, was the country's first black missionary. His father, 'Old Soga', as he was known in mission circles, had been an adviser to the Ngqika chief, Sandile. Old Soga and Sandile died in the same war that saw the end of the young man who carried that copy of *The Pilgrim's Progress* into battle. According to Lovedale's records, when it became clear that the war was lost, Old Soga went to ground with a few weapons in a cave – where he was found and summarily executed (Shepherd 1940, 191). By the time the father was killed in this way, he had lived for six years with the grief of his son Tiyo's death. Tiyo was buried in an orchard of fruit trees near his mission house at Tutura, in Xhosaland proper, across the Kei River, where tuberculosis had taken him at the age of 42. The church where he had preached was burned down in the same conflict that killed the father. It is a story of bitter ironies and, seemingly, of failure.

One of Tiyo's greatest achievements near the end of his life, however, was to have produced *Uhambo lo Mhambi*, the Xhosa translation of the first part of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, published by the Lovedale Press. In different ways, both the unnamed Xhosa soldier and Tiyo Soga seem to have revered Bunyan's story. For the young

fighter the appeal might have been the materiality of the book as magical icon; for Soga it was, as the author had intended it, a devotional narrative worthy of the kind of heroic intellectual labour it took to translate it into what was still an unstable orthography. These responses are related in their attempt, as John and Jean Comaroff put it, to ‘recast . . . European forms in their own terms’ (1992, 235). This is our first instance of transculturation, arising from what the Comaroffs also call the country’s ‘long history of symbolic struggle’, a history in which the consciousness of coloniser and colonised – as well as those falling somewhere in between – is fashioned and refashioned through generations of interaction, from the most mundane to the most violent (1992, 235).

These patterns were first established in the Eastern Cape, but by 1910, following the Act of Union that brought together the Boer republics and the English colonies, South Africa’s symbolic struggle had produced a colonial state that was both ‘an institutional order of political regulation *and* a condition of being, a structure *and* a predicament’ (Comaroffs 1992, 236). Both the structure and the predicament were to harden after 1961, when the Union became a Republic under the National Party. That event, which signalled in its time the complete ascendancy of the Afrikaner, enabled a kind of amnesia to develop amongst the heirs of the British settlement in South Africa, a settlement that began in 1820. From 1961, indeed, English-speaking South Africans, together with their cousins in the former British Dominions, became more reluctant to acknowledge their historical responsibility for bringing about the oppression that arose from the process leading to the formation of the colonial state. This responsibility is emphasised in a strand of argument amongst historians of the Eastern Cape, which holds that it was in the years 1820–57, from the arrival of the first British settlers to the year of the disastrous, millenarian Cattle-Killing Movement, that the legal, administrative, and even epistemological basis for what Sol Plaatje in *Mbudi* (1984 [1930]) called ‘the settled system’, was first laid down.

By the mid-nineteenth century, a new order in the Cape Colony had come about that entailed a shift from a largely patriarchal mode

of authority vested in the person of the Dutch pastoralist, to a diffused, administrative, emerging statutory form of power that limited the authority of the chiefs, defined the conditions of movement and labour for Africans, and consolidated a regulatory language predicated on the otherness of the native (Crais 1992, 92–95).<sup>2</sup> The systemic quality of these developments implies that the search for the historical roots of apartheid must, to some degree, be conducted in the effects of the British settlement of 1820, rather than exclusively in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century histories of Dutch agrarianism and slavery. The ‘stabilising presence’ of the settlers was to make use of ‘civilised free labour’ rather than slavery, but the settlers’ prosperity came increasingly to depend on other, as effective, forms of coercion. Indeed, as Martin Legassick puts it, ‘the basis of “civilisation” – the aspiration of the Enlightenment – lay in the practice of “barbarism”’ (1993, 334; see Crais 1992, 95).

It was under these conditions that the English language assumed the position it still holds, that of being what J.M. Coetzee aptly calls ‘a deeply entrenched foreign language’ (1993, 7). With the end of apartheid, the expansion of the black middle class will bring with it a more complete indigenisation of English, another reason to contemplate the ironies of history. The entrenchment of English beyond its usage by the settlers themselves was initially the task of the missionaries, who undertook what Michael Chapman has called a ‘vast “literacy” project’ in both English and the indigenous languages. In the case of the latter, this involved creating what were less-than-perfect phonetic orthographies to record what the missionaries could grasp of the oral languages (Chapman 1993, 36).

In the fields of literacy and book production, the missionary enterprise was hugely consequential. As Leon de Kock has demonstrated in *Civilising Barbarians*, the ethos and representational forms of mission literacy defined the terms on which a black South African written literature was to emerge (1996, 64–104). The missions also governed access to African social empowerment, a process in which literacy and a literate education were important

ingredients. ‘Africans aspiring to social elevation in colonial society,’ says De Kock, ‘had little choice but to embrace Protestant values which were embedded in the exalted medium of English and promoted in missionary education’ (1996, 30). Sol Plaatje would bear this out: ‘The key of knowledge is the English Language. Without such a mastery of it as will give the scholar a taste for reading, the great English literature is a sealed book, and he remains one of the uneducated, living in the miserably small world of Boer ideals, or those of the untaught natives’ (in Willan 1984, 36).<sup>3</sup> As Plaatje’s tone suggests, a rather stiff and constricting Victorian ethos became the *sine qua non* of African self-expression among the educated intelligentsia until at least the 1940s. Inevitably, the entrenchment of English – the language, its ethos, and its literary genres – was marked by the same ambivalence that was evident in the legacy of the British settlement itself.

However, the constraints also represented grounds of opportunity. It is commonplace nowadays to observe that the ideals associated with nineteenth-century evangelical liberalism were corrupted by hypocrisy, and it is certainly true that for many settlers, administrators, and missionaries, the cross was indistinguishable from the flag. This argument was memorably made in 1952 by Dora Taylor, writing under the pseudonym of Nosipho Majeke, in *The Role of the Missionaries in Conquest* (1953).<sup>4</sup> However, we can now see that this point of view is too blunt an instrument: it obscures just how consequential missionary institutions and discourse have been in the history and development of African nationalism itself. Some of the questions that beg asking are therefore the following: how are the ideals associated with evangelical liberalism taken up and acted upon by those who fall under their influence? Indeed, what is the agency of black Christianity?

Tiyo Soga shared the mission ethos almost as deeply as any child of a white missionary family. When we unravel the events from what is, as we shall see, a rather tangled archival record, what we will discover is that, in Soga’s case, the adoption of mission

discourse in the English language would entail a transculturation into African terms of the aims and instruments of colonialism's civilising mission. It was in this context that Soga would lay claim to one of the key instruments of the European Enlightenment, what Immanuel Kant called 'the public use of reason', although, rather tellingly, Soga would have to enter the public domain through the use of a pseudonym.

Some readers will find it easier to associate the Enlightenment with eighteenth-century Europe than the nineteenth-century Cape Colony, but we should remember that the so-called civilising mission was, among other things, the historical form in which the earlier Enlightenment would reach the colonies. That is to say, for people such as Soga, and for the succeeding two or three generations of black intellectuals, the principle of human perfectibility projected through the mission enterprise represented the grounds on which autonomy and social emancipation would be sought – the local equivalent of the Whiggish or bourgeois emergence of the eighteenth century. The kind of emancipation that could be envisaged under colonial conditions, however, would have to be salvaged from economic and political instrumentalism, imperialism, and racism, and pressed into the service of all humanity. To effect this salvaging operation was Soga's task, indeed his generational destiny and that of the two or three generations that succeeded him. It was to bring into being the transculturation of enlightenment.<sup>5</sup>

WHY SHOULD WE be so concerned with this particular turn in our cultural and political history? The answer is two-fold: firstly, this is the moment and these are the terms in which a black literary culture first develops in South Africa (a writing culture that draws on, though is distinct from, an oral tradition). Secondly (and here I will risk some speculative hindsight), the transculturated enlightenment resurfaces in the political culture of the transition in the early 1990s. Having been forced into the half-life of exile or incarceration, and

then having given way to the more politically instrumental rhetoric of revolutionary struggle, enlightenment discourse returns with the end of apartheid as the recovery of human rights. With the democratic transition, in other words, South Africa makes peace with the eighteenth century. It is this reinvented tradition that the novelist Dan Jacobson was noticing when he remarked, after a visit to the Mary Moffat Museum near Kimberley, that ‘occasionally, what seems truly amazing about the subcontinent is not the ferocity generated by the divisions manifest wherever you turn; it is the regard for order that many people of all races somehow still manage to preserve’ (1994, 3). Jacobson was speaking in the wake of the 1994 elections, and about attitudes that were to find their way into the Constitution:

there is a need to create a new order in which all South Africans will be entitled to a common South African citizenship in a sovereign and democratic constitutional state, in which there is equality between men and women and people of all races so that all citizens shall be able to enjoy and exercise their fundamental rights and freedoms. (‘Preamble’, 1–3)

This is surely the profoundest legacy of the transculturated enlightenment.<sup>6</sup> Apart from its philosophical centrality, there was also, at the time of the transition, a way in which it made its mark on the political style of the Mandela presidency: the much-remarked dignity, the Edwardian air, the charming of the wives of former opponents over a cup of tea, were all traces of an ethos that had been forgotten through the steely years of apartheid.

Tiyo Soga’s moment would be the appropriate place to begin to trace the historical origins of this ethos. In what follows, then, I will explore his example by looking into the archival record of his life, both as he lived it and as his biographers told it. What we need to understand is how he became such a paradox: how his first biographer, John Aitken Chalmers, could in 1877 appropriate him



to the colonial cause as ‘the Model Kafir’, and how the second biographer, Donovan Williams, writing a century later, could in *Umfundisi: A Biography of Tiyo Soga* construct him as the progenitor of Afrocentric nationalism (1978, 97). The point will be to understand how the man could play such apparently diametrically opposed roles at the same time.

UNLIKE HIS AGE-MATES, Tiyo Soga was never sent for initiation. His father, Old Soga, had heard Ntsikana, the first Christian Xhosa prophet, preach, and he and his Christian wife, Nosutu, sent Tiyo to Lovedale under the patronage of the first principal, William Govan Bennie. Thereafter, whenever war broke out between Xhosa and British – in 1846 and again in 1850 – Tiyo was taken into the missionary fold and twice travelled to Scotland with missionary families. He had most of his formal education in Glasgow. When he was ordained in the John Street United Presbyterian Church in December 1856, his mentor, the Revd Dr Anderson, with his Scottish hand on Soga’s head, produced a ‘tirade against the colonial policy of England’ and offered ‘supplications for the noble Kafir chieftain, Sandilli’ (Chalmers 1877, 89). With his Scottish wife, Janet Burnside, Soga sailed for Kaffraria as a missionary on the *Lady of the Lake* in April 1857. In that year, while David Livingstone was being mobbed by admirers in London’s streets and churches for his work in southern Africa (although by all accounts his success as a healer of souls, as opposed to an explorer, was not as successful as was generally accepted), Xhosaland was experiencing serious trouble: people were dying by the tens of thousands in the Cattle Killing. If Livingstone’s presence in London had fired Soga’s imagination at all in Scotland, the reality he was to encounter on his return would be disheartening.

Of all his writing – translations, hymns, speeches, letters, notebooks, and newspaper columns – Soga’s historical significance emerges most clearly in his private journal, which he kept from 1857 to 1870, shortly before his death. The narrative begins with the embarkation, with the ship lying at anchor off Gravesend, when

Soga goes ashore to buy a remedy because he is expecting seasickness. That the journal opens this way is interesting: narration begins with the voyage ‘out’ to the Colony, even though Soga had, in fact, already made several voyages, both cultural and literal.<sup>7</sup> ‘Home’, in other words, is Glasgow – Soga is writing himself into the script of the outbound missionary. He anticipates the first Sunday on board because he has had the assurance that the John Street congregation will be praying for him and his party (Soga 1983, 12). As the journal progresses, notably after the arrival in the mission field, the writing becomes a record of divine revelation with God’s purposes being revealed in day-to-day hardships and accomplishments:

Glenthorn S. Africa – Octr 17th 1857. A new era in my ministerial and missionary history – This Lord’s day I admitted into the church by the rite of holy Baptism *ten* individuals – the fruits of an abundant harvest . . . in this part of the Lord’s Vineyard. (Soga 1983, 15)

The private journal was supposed to be the precursor to a more official journal and regular reports submitted to church headquarters in Edinburgh. This partly explains its teleological emphasis and the connection it makes between journal writing and Providence. The official journal has not survived (Williams 1978, xviii), but in any event the private journal is probably the more interesting document, since the providential aspect of the narrative and its official overtones are interrupted with anecdotes, confessions, candid social observations, and, most significantly for our purposes, polemic. Soga’s situation in the Colony was fraught with difficulty. At his mission station at Mgwali in the Stutterheim district, progress was slow, even though mission work was generally made easier by the Cattle Killing. Among other things, Soga had to contend periodically with what he saw as the demoralising resurgence of traditionalism, with white-painted initiates (*abakweta*), some of whom were sons of elders in his own church, appearing at the door of the mission

house in open mockery of the uncircumcised black missionary (Williams 1978, 84–85).

The year 1865 was a time of crisis. In March, the colonial government proposed to remove Soga's people, the Ngqika, from their home near the Amatole Mountains to a stretch of land across the Kei River that had been taken from the Gcaleka chief Sarhili. Soga drafted a strongly worded memorandum that set out why this was both unjust and unsafe (1983, 4). He was, however, driven into public statement by what amounted to an act of betrayal by his fellow missionary at Mgwali. Ironically and cruelly, this was the man who was to write Soga's biography – John Chalmers. Soga and Chalmers had virtually grown up together. It was Chalmers's father, William, who had secured Tiyó's place at Lovedale and urged him to further his studies in Glasgow. Eight years younger than Soga, John Chalmers followed him to Scotland for ministerial training and ordination and then joined him at Mgwali. Chalmers had none of Soga's patience and he held orthodox settler views of the Xhosa (Williams 1978, 94).<sup>8</sup> By November 1864, Chalmers was complaining in the *Missionary Record of the United Presbyterian Church* that 'sometimes I have felt almost brokenhearted at the small signs of spiritual life around me. Sabbath after Sabbath do I gather the heathen, and repeat to them the old story of redeeming love, and still the same obduracy, still the same deadness' (Chalmers 1864, 199). By February 1865, he was exasperated. He sent an article to the Lovedale newspaper, the *Indaba*, entitled 'What is the destiny of the Kaffir Race?', which was republished in the *King Williamstown Gazette and Kaffrarian Banner* (as 'Recreations of a missionary'). In an accompanying note to the editor Chalmers writes, 'if you have any objections to it you can let me know. I have written it *simply*, so that some of our Kaffirs who read the *Indaba* may have something to think over' (1865a).

Chalmers argued in his article that Africans were doomed to extinction, for three reasons: indolence, an antipathy to education, and an addiction to European vices, especially drink. These weaknesses were anything but trivial; they pointed to a fatal malady

of indifference to change: ‘there is nothing so deadening, nothing which keeps down a nation, nothing so unnatural as to keep things fixed when all the world is by the very law of its creation in eternal progress’ (1865b). Chalmers was, in some ways, what the nineteenth century would have called a progressive: he had imbibed the Victorian scientific spirit. In the same article he advocated industrial training – years before Lovedale and other institutions actually implemented it. If Soga was a transitional figure, so was Chalmers: as imperialism unfolded, he lived out the decline of liberal humanitarianism and the consolidation of racism; the transition, in a sense, from Rousseau to Darwin. But one statement in particular would have offended Soga: ‘when a Kaffir youth has got a smattering of knowledge . . . he wishes nothing more. His ambition then is to be a gentleman, a sort of peacock bedizened with ornaments of the gaudiest hue’ (1865b).

Chalmers had not counted on Soga seeing this article, nor on Soga’s seeing himself positioned in it. In the journal, Soga began a reply:

One of our missionaries – wiser than his predecessors, has pronounced in an article in the native periodical – . . . Indaba – on the doom of my Race – Without disputing his superior Sagacity and foresight, I should like to know for myself – Whether in this doom is included – the Kaffir races of – Tambookies – Maondo’s – Napondomisi – Mabomvana – Galekas – Zulu’s – MaSwazi – These races are all pure, Kaffir races – one in language – & manners – with but slight differences – If in this doom is included all these races – I venture to say the process of destruction will take a very long time to accomplish its work. (1983, 38–39)

This restraint is carried over to the text of his anonymously published reply in the *King Williamstown Gazette* of 11 May 1865. Soga gains a foothold in the discourse by appealing to an Englishman’s sense of ‘fair play’; he draws attention to the missionary efforts of

the previous 50 years, wondering why Chalmers, a missionary himself, belittles them; he asks whether anything can be measured on the scale of 'civilisation' in 50 years, and provides counterfactual evidence. 'Permit me, Sir,' he then proposes, 'before I close to make some general observations':

Africa was of God given to the race of Ham. I find the Negro from the days of the old Assyrians downwards, keeping his 'individuality' and his 'distinctiveness', amid the wreck of empires, and the revolution of ages. I find him keeping his place among the nations, and keeping his home and country. I find him opposed by nation after nation and driven from his home. I find him enslaved – exposed to the vices and the brandy of the white man. I find him in this condition for many a day – in the West Indian Islands, in Northern and Southern America, and in the South American colonies of Spain and Portugal. I find him exposed to all these disasters, and yet living – multiplying 'and never extinct'. Yea, I find him now as the prevalence of christian and philanthropic opinions on the rights of man obtains among civilised nations, returning unmanacled to the land of his forefathers, taking back with him the civilisation and the christianity of those nations. (See the Negro Republic of Liberia.) I find the Negro in the present struggle in America looking forward – though still with chains in his hands and with chains on his feet – yet looking forward to the dawn of a better day for himself and all his sable brethren in Africa. Until the Negro is doomed against all history and experience – until his God-given inheritance of Africa be taken finally from him, I shall never believe in the total extinction of his brethren along the southern limits of the land of Ham. The fact that the dark races of this vast continent, amid intestine wars and revolutions, and notwithstanding external spoliation, have remained 'unextinct', have retained their individuality, has baffled historians, and challenges the author of the doom of the Kaffir race in a satisfactory explanation. There has been observed among these races the operation of a singular law, by which events have readjusted

themselves when they threatened their destruction. I believe firmly that among the Negro races of South Africa events will follow the same law, and therefore neither the indolence of the Kaffirs, nor their aversion to change, nor the vices of civilisation, all of which barriers the gospel must overthrow, shall suffice to exterminate them as a people. (Soga 1865a)

Despite appearances, Soga's use of biblical metaphor was forward-looking, for nineteenth-century Protestantism produced a reevaluation of the curse of Ham – which the Vatican eventually came to accept – in order that 'the interior of Africa may participate in the solemn coming joy of the Church's triumph' (in Mudimbe 1988, 46).<sup>9</sup> Soga capitalises on this revision, using the curse of Ham to claim access to God's grace and to envision the full participation of Africans in human progress. He attaches a pseudonym to the essay, 'Defensor', from *defensor fidei*, defender of the faith, positioning himself anonymously as a spiritual guardian on the model provided most obviously by the monarch and head of the Church of England. His first rhetorical gesture, therefore, is to produce incorporation into a Christian sense of history. But this is not incorporation at any price: if Africans play a part in the divine purpose, they do so in their 'distinctiveness'. This emphasis is among the earliest examples of race-conscious and diasporic thinking in South African intellectual life, linking the trials of the ordinary Xhosa homesteader to a global and redemptive history emerging from the end of slavery. On the strength of this, Donovan Williams links Soga with the rise of pan-African thought in West Africa and credits him with being the first spokesperson of black- and 'Africa-consciousness' in South Africa (Williams 1978, 97). Soga repeats his affirmation of distinctiveness elsewhere, notably in a book of homilies that he gave to his sons on their departure for higher education in Scotland:

I want you, for your future comfort, to be very careful on this point. You will ever cherish the memory of your mother as that

of an upright, conscientious, thrifty, Christian Scotchwoman. You will ever be thankful for your connection by this tie to the white race. But if you wish to gain credit for yourselves – if you do not wish to feel the taunt of men, which you sometimes may be made to feel – take your place in the world as coloured, not as white men; as Kafirs, not as Englishmen. You will be more thought of for this by all good and wise people, than for the other. . . . I consider it the height of ingratitude and impiety, for any person to be discontented with the complexion which God has given him. (in Chalmers 1877, 430)

Let's return to 'Defensor's' argument against Chalmers's accusation of indifference to change; Soga observes the operation of a 'singular law' of adaptability in African cultures that has ensured and will continue to ensure the survival of the race. In this manner, in the language of natural science and ethnography, Soga repudiates the racism of Darwinian determinism. All told, Soga's argument is about incorporation into a global and teleological history, the retention of racial distinctiveness, and adaptability. These positions are Soga's currency. They have no precedent before him, which may explain his use of an iterated present tense which has the effect of confirming an irruption into history: 'I find the Negro . . . I find him keeping his place among the nations . . . I find him opposed by nation after nation . . . I find him enslaved. . . . Yea, I find him now . . . returning unmanacled to the land of his forefathers'.

I have mentioned the irony that Soga's legacy had to come to us via Chalmers, but not how cruel that irony could be. Chalmers expunged his clash with Soga from the biography. He certainly would have discovered who the author was of the magisterial reply to his outburst, for he had access to Soga's papers after his death, including the journal where it was first drafted. Chalmers's labour of love was therefore also a labour of expiation: 'From channels least expected,' he writes, 'and from men who were well able to strengthen his hands, there came during the last years of [Soga's] life the very bitterest wounds that can be inflicted on a pious earnest soul'

(Chalmers 1877, 487). Indeed, some of those wounds came from Chalmers himself. Soga acknowledges his pain – and a desire to make his response known to certain colleagues – in a letter he wrote to another missionary, J.F. Cumming, shortly after the controversy: ‘did you see an article in the last “Indaba” by Chalmers on the Destiny of the Kafir Race? – Will send you the Kingwilliamstown Gazette with a long article, in answer to that of Chalmers – by *Defensor* – alias your correspondent – great talk about them both – the first has caused a great deal of pain to some’ (1865b).

Chalmers’s apparent sympathy after the fact did not prevent him from committing further acts of betrayal as the biographer, by attributing words to Soga that he never actually uttered. His tendency to take liberties with Soga’s writing is neatly illustrated in an episode in which Soga recounts the dying moments of a woman called Notasi, the wife of Dukwana, Ntsikana’s son and a church elder:

she said, with an audible loud whisper, which produced the stillness of death among all present – ‘Tell me who that person is that is speaking –?’ – ‘The Teacher’ – was replied – ‘Who – Tiyo?’ – she enquired again – ‘Come and let me bid you farewell . . . my dear Teacher – I was waiting for you hitherto’ – She never uttered another word after this – & in half an hour or so she calmly and peacefully fell a sleep in Jesus. (Soga 1983, 21)

Chalmers transcribes this as follows:

‘Tell me who that person is that is speaking,’ ‘The teacher,’ was the reply. ‘Who? Tiyo?’ she enquired again; ‘come and let me salute you, my teacher; I was hitherto waiting for you.’ She never uttered a syllable more on earth. *I pressed her cold hand in mine.* In half an hour after she calmly and peacefully fell asleep. (Chalmers 1877, 176; emphasis added)

Other interpolations are less amusing than this, though equally melodramatic. When Soga was at Tutura in 1870, some of the



tensions from the days of the Cattle Killing resurfaced with a new outbreak of lungsickness among Sarhili's herd. A counsellor named Maki, who was a Christian and close to Soga, was accused of bewitching the cattle and came to seek Soga's advice because it seemed his life was in danger:

I found him in great dejection of spirits, & meditating a serious removal from this country. The meshes of Galeka jealousy of his reputation & commanding powers, are compassing his Ruin, and as he does not belong to the old killing party – that say the customs of our Fathers are good enough for us – but to the liberal party that hails light – improvement, good & orderly Govt from the whiteman, all, from the chief downwards, seek his Ruin! (Soga 1983, 42)

Soga's interpretation of Maki's predicament relates the problem back to the Cattle Killing, in which a 'killing party' – which slaughtered cattle and burnt crops in expectation of the destruction of white rule – was opposed by a 'liberal party', which did not. While Soga's dislike of sorcery is implicit, as is his acceptance of white rule, Chalmers ignores Soga's contextualisation, turning the entry into an occasion to attack Xhosa custom and giving a quite different meaning to the phrase 'killing party'. The animus against the Xhosa is a severe misrepresentation of Soga's sympathies:

This land of the Galekas is being ruined by the baneful influence of the witch doctors. Human beings, yearly, and in no small numbers, are secretly put to death. . . . there is no security for the most precious life amongst this people. They are all sheep for the slaughter. The butcher of a witch doctor has only to point out his victim, where and when he likes. (Chalmers 1877, 396)

Most puzzling of all, however, are Chalmers's lengthy transcriptions (nine pages in all; 1877, 271–79) of confessional passages purporting to come from the journal, which present Soga in a state of alarming

spiritual turmoil. While there are moments in the journal when Soga acknowledges doubt, notably about his vocation – interestingly, such passages are written in Xhosa (Soga 1983, 22, 35) – they certainly do not occur on the scale presented by Chalmers. In addition, the contrast between Soga’s spontaneity and Chalmers’s didactic transcription and editing is striking:

[Soga:] Into elusizi bubume beyam intliziyo. Idinga no ntywila ngokuntycoila ehomini-kndakwenzayo ngokuzinikela ebufundisini ndingazifumanelanga inkululeko ngokwenganiso. [Trans. I am concerned about the spiritual condition of my heart. I wish that you would embrace the new life – I fear that I decided to be a preacher while I was yet aware of not being fully converted.] (1983, 35)

[Chalmers:] Sunday, 11th November. – Since my last entry I have passed through various frames; but I am sure the prominent blemishes of my character have been indifference, indolence, unbelief, and faithlessness. What is it that will save me? Father, let me experience the enormity of my guilt, and the greatness of Thy mercy. The Gospel has all that time been preached by me in hypocrisy. I cannot take credit to myself for anything; yet I live. Lord, Thou has saved many thousands from hypocrisy and indifference. To whom shall I go? Thou alone canst save me! (1877, 277)

The words attributed to Soga are not in the journal, as Chalmers claims. They are either invented or transcribed from letters that have been lost (Williams 1983, 11). This raises the question of the purposes of the biography: why does Chalmers construct such formidable evidence of a soul in anguish? The answer that suggests itself is that Chalmers wants to show that the Protestant spirit could be found alive and well in an African, and the more hand-wringing there seemed to be, the better for his tendentious narrative. Soga’s crises of faith could be read into a pattern of heroic, self-chastening individualism that would provide ample justification for the missionary enterprise. He was an example of all that could be

achieved if the civilising mission were to be allowed to restructure the African's symbolic universe. Add to this Chalmers's Calvinism: Soga's intimations of doubt could be assumed merely to confirm the workings of a higher Providence – a Providence for which Chalmers is, of course, the privileged interpreter. Chalmers always doubted the success of the missionary endeavour, but the life of Soga held the promise of its ultimate fulfilment. The biography is subtitled *A Page of South African Mission Work*: the 'page' is Soga's own contribution to that work, but Soga himself is also a page in that work, the work's subject, rather than its agent, the work itself being larger and more encompassing than the life being described.

At the time the biography was published, Chalmers expressed some uncompromising views about frontier policy. The Colony was shamefully negligent in failing to achieve complete subjugation in the war of 1877–78: 'here was an opportunity granted to us to explain clearly to [the Ngqika] the system of our rule, and to tell them that for their own peace and prosperity it was needful to conform to our laws, and to abandon their national practices and be industrious and obedient' (Chalmers 1878, 11). He also returned to his old theme, the future of the African, arguing that now that the chiefs were vanquished, 'this part of Ethiopia will stretch out her hands unto God' (Chalmers 1879, 7). Chalmers would surely not have regarded his version of Soga's life as being in conflict with these views.

CHALMERS ERASED HIS encounter with 'Defensor' from the biography and, as we have seen, ruthlessly re-inscribed Soga's life and words into Chalmers's own narrative. Perhaps this is what Homi Bhabha would call the untranslatable element, when cultural translation meets a certain resistance (1994, 215–16). If so, can we take it that the anomaly is resolved, clarified, and restored to articulacy now, through the rediscovery of Soga himself, and through the words we know he penned in his private diary? To some extent, this must be true, but the effects of that original moment of untranslatability

linger on, even becoming part of the further transculturated discourse of Soga's heirs.

For instance, the 'Tiyo Soga' who appears as a character in H.I.E. Dhlomo's play of 1936 about the Cattle Killing, *The Girl Who Killed to Save*, does not speak at all (Dhlomo's play will be discussed more fully in Chapter 2, but I will make a few remarks here). He is introduced in the final scene as 'the new African missionary from Scotland' who 'has come to work among you, his kinsmen' (Dhlomo 1985, 28). This silent and enigmatic presence turns Soga into a larger-than-life figure, a legend rather than an historical being. Indeed, Dhlomo's Soga is simply a living embodiment of the cultural shift Dhlomo himself seeks to recognise: in the terms of the play he represents a transition from superstition and ignorance to Christianity and light (Dhlomo 1985, 29). This may be difficult to comprehend today, but Dhlomo, as a prominent cultural nationalist of the 1930s, interpreted the Cattle Killing as an episode in the unfolding of a historical destiny in which Africans would embrace modernity while preserving their distinctive memory. Dhlomo sees Soga as a pathfinder in this destiny. Dhlomo's interpretation of the Cattle Killing probably came from Chalmers's biography, which was the sole repository of Soga's legacy for subsequent intellectuals and which quotes Soga as saying soon after his arrival in Kaffraria in 1857, 'it is by terrible things that God sometimes accomplishes His purposes. In the present calamities I think I see the future salvation of my countrymen, both in a physical and in a moral point of view' (Chalmers 1877, 140). Of course, if Dhlomo did read Chalmers, he also relocated Soga in a teleology of liberation that Chalmers sought actively to undermine.

Soga was indeed a 'man of two worlds', but he was also a transitional figure *within* Xhosa history, marking a choice that subsequent generations would have to remake for themselves. The choice Soga did not make, indeed could not have made, is represented in the person who was possibly his most powerful contemporary in the sphere of culture: Mhlakaza, the orchestrator-in-chief, it would seem, of the Cattle Killing. Mhlakaza began his career in the same way

that Soga did, in the patronage of a missionary family. The historian J.B. Peires, in his account of the Cattle Killing, describes Mhlakaza as the first African to be baptised in the Anglican Church, after he became a retainer to Archdeacon N.J. Merriman of Grahamstown, in settler circles going by the name of Wilhelm Goliath. Merriman walked the Eastern Cape with Goliath at his side; they taught one another their languages, read scripture together around campfires and, occasionally, Goliath would preach (Peires 1989, 309–10; also Merriman 1957, 65, 123). Goliath built a house in Merriman's garden but declined becoming a houseboy – he wanted to be a 'Gospel Man' (Peires 1989, 309). He had his day: on the insistence of Mrs Merriman, he left the Merrimans' service to become a teacher, only to resurface as Mhlakaza – uncle, protector, and priest to the prophetess Nongqawuse (Merriman 1957, 127). It was Mhlakaza who interpreted and disseminated Nongqawuse's prophecies to the chiefs, and renewed them when they aroused scepticism, thus helping to precipitate the greatest disaster of nineteenth-century Xhosa history.

If Soga and Mhlakaza represent a critical choice within Xhosa culture and society in the mid-1850s, that choice is not strictly between tradition and modernity. For, like Soga, Mhlakaza was at one time positioned *within* the world of the mission. Indeed, as far as the whole movement was concerned, Peires shows that far from being a 'pagan reaction', as earlier historians called it, the Cattle Killing was in fact a wholly syncretic project, influenced by the Xhosa reception and revision of Christianity (Peires 1989, 122–38). The choice was not whether to choose tradition or modernity in a straightforward way, but whether to turn one's back on the Enlightenment and modernity, thus repudiating these things – having experienced them closely enough to know their ambivalence – or to embrace them in qualified terms. Mhlakaza and Soga together show how volatile is the condition of what Ashis Nandy calls intimate enmity that we associate with settler-colonialism. Unlike Mhlakaza, however, Soga embraced the civilising mission but sought to establish a new point of departure within it, one that placed an

African consciousness and identity within the larger framework of modern history.

Was Soga successful? How do we measure this? Towards the end of his life he agreed to minister to Sarhili's people, the Gcaleka, in the heart of Xhosaland. Sarhili was paramount chief of all the amaXhosa. Soga spent only three years at Tutura before his death. The move from Mgwali to Tutura across the Kei River, near the present-day town of Butterworth, was a deeply symbolic one, for it drew Soga closer to traditional society, as if he were trying to heal one of the contradictions of his life. He could not, however, sustain himself for long. Understandably, the obituaries all speak of his isolation from both Xhosa and settler society and the burden this was to him. Apart from his tuberculosis, anxiety no doubt also took its toll. Although nothing remains of Soga's church, his grave is still there, and it is a scene of pathos: grasses and pine trees have grown up through the orchard. One of these trees, seemingly felled by lightning, has crumbled the stone wall surrounding the grave, and the heavy Victorian ironwork on which his name is now illegible has been augmented by a makeshift headstone that has also succumbed to the weather. It is as if Africa were trying to reclaim the son it lost to Empire.

On a larger historical canvas, Soga's life raises the question asked by Partha Chatterjee, of whether nationalism can ever break the historical link between the civilising mission and racism, between reason and callous instrumentalism, between the Enlightenment and oppression (1986, 169). Perhaps this link is never broken once and for all and, given the power of capitalism in its global dimensions, perhaps each generation of postcolonial subjects is obliged to attempt it. Following the transition to democracy in 1994, South Africans are living in a time and place where another attempt to do this is being made. I suggested earlier that one of the reasons Soga's example ought to hold our attention today is that what he represents is relevant, historically and philosophically, to the situation which contemporary South Africans are having to negotiate. Indeed, in *The Heart of Redness* (2000), Zakes Mda makes this connection,

seeing the conflict over the interpretation of modernity in the mid-nineteenth century as having strong parallels with the choices that current South Africans are facing. In Chapter 6 I will read Mda's account of this situation, but suffice it to say at this stage that Mda's solution is to suggest the importance of an Africanised modernity. It is not too fanciful to see Mda's leading protagonist, Camagu, as a contemporary version of Tiyo Soga, standing at a similar crossroads.

Finally, Jacques Derrida's discussion of the critical choices facing Nelson Mandela is instructive in the light of Soga's example. In an essay written in 1987, shortly after Mandela's refusal of conditional release from prison in exchange for a renunciation of violence, Derrida examines the implications of Mandela's declared admiration in *The Struggle Is My Life* for the tradition of political liberalism – an unholy tradition, in the context of postcolonial liberation struggles – represented by the Magna Carta, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, parliamentary democracy, the doctrine of the separation of powers, and the independence of the judiciary. 'But if he admires this tradition,' Derrida asks,

does it mean that he is its inheritor, its simple inheritor? Yes and no, depending on what is meant here by inheritance. You can recognise an authentic inheritor in the one who conserves and reproduces, but also in the one who respects the logic of the legacy enough to turn it upon occasion against those who claim to be its guardians, enough to reveal, despite and against the usurpers, what has never yet been seen in the inheritance: enough to give birth, by the unheard-of act of reflection, to what had never seen the light of day. (1987, 17)

By 'reflection' Derrida means reflecting the traditions of the European Enlightenment back to those who claim to own them, and repossessing them in a new context. When Mandela speaks to his judges at his trial, he makes them represent a 'virtually universal' instance; he 'speak[s] to them . . . while speaking over their heads'

(Derrida 1987, 36). The judges' claim to represent an abstract principle of law is used to produce a new species of authority, one in which the hollowness of their claim stands revealed.

What Mandela does with the principle of law, Soga did nearly a century and a half earlier, but with biblical metaphor. In Soga's hands, even the unpromising theory of the curse of Ham is used to imagine the full participation of Africans in modern history. Soga resisted the nineteenth century's decline into instrumentalism and racism, and although the task might have been too great for him in the end, we are able now to read his life as helping to instantiate a tradition of nationalism in which the European version of reason is made to confront racial difference, its irrational *doppelgänger*.

If Soga represents a tradition, however, there is no easy continuity between past and present. Soga's legacy was buried in Chalmers's biography before his second biographer, Donovan Williams, revisited it. There is no ready-made continuity between Soga and intellectuals such as Dhlomo or leaders such as Mandela who follow him. That tradition has had to reconstruct itself through intellectual work. Alternatively, each time the crisis of how to engage with the current version of modernity presents itself, the underlying roots of the response most likely to ensure survival have to be recovered.

As John Bunyan's character Ignorance discovers at the threshold of the Celestial City, there is a path leading directly to Hell (1974 [1678]). In the language of this chapter, the cords that hold universality and difference, modernity and identity, in creative tension are always in danger of being broken. In the event that they are severed, we spin off either into the pseudo-universalism of pure rationality, a world of colour-blindness that has proved itself to be oppressive, or into the pseudo-gratifications of the parochial, a temptation that may offer a homely comfort zone but that would leave us outside of history altogether.