

‘A source of future trouble’:

Sidoyi kaBaleni and the politics of Mzimkhulu

by Milner Snell

Sidoyi kaBaleni was the *inkosi* of a branch of the Nhangwini people from 1850 to 1882. In 1857, after attacking a neighbouring chiefdom, he fled Natal and settled at Mzimkhulu. Here, he and his followers lived under the authority of the Griqua and later Cape governments. Sidoyi is viewed in colonial records as a minor but potentially problematic chief. He is regarded as a man who was misled by malcontents among the Griqua, but eventually became a useful ally to the Cape government after being convinced to co-operate with local officials. This is a one-sided and superficial understanding of his life. In the 1850s and early 1860s Sidoyi relied heavily on his relationship with the Griqua to recover

from his losses in Natal and for support in his conflicts with a rival chiefdom. A decade later, however, both the leaders of the resistance to colonialism in East Griqualand and officials enforcing Cape rule realised it was beneficial to form an alliance with Sidoyi, and at times worked to win him over to their cause. The aim of this article is to relook at Sidoyi's interactions with the Natal, Griqua and Cape governments over 25 years, with a particular focus on his response to changing regional politics at Mzimkhulu. It highlights his relationship with Donald Strachan, the magistrate at Mzimkhulu, and Smith Pommer, a prominent leader of a rebellion against the colonial government.

'A proclamation of independence': Sidoyi and the Natal government

In his youth Sidoyi had accompanied his father, Baleni, and members of the chiefdom as they migrated south from the upper Thukela across the Mzimkhulu River. During the reign of Dingane, Sidoyi's branch of the Nhlangwini returned to the Thukela and in the early 1840s settled along the Mkhomazi River. When the British government annexed Natal, Sidoyi was a minor and a regent was serving as chief. He reached his majority in about 1850 and the Nhlangwini elders requested that the colonial government recognise him as their chief. The secretary for native affairs, Theophilus Shepstone, agreed but made it clear that Sidoyi would hold office under British authority. Sidoyi developed a reputation, as far as Shepstone was concerned, for overstepping his authority and having a reckless personality, an idea that was reinforced in the mind of the secretary when he became an *inyanga*.¹ Sidoyi alienated the government in March 1857 when he attacked his neighbours, and rivals for some generations, the Memela under Mshukangubo kaMdingi. Sidoyi's actions created a crisis for the colonial government in Pietermaritzburg. By launching an unauthorised attack in defiance of the white magistrate, Sidoyi had challenged the authority of the colonial state. Shepstone was in particular concerned about how the smaller and less powerful chiefdoms viewed Sidoyi's actions. The mutilation of Mshukangubo's body was also seen by Shepstone as 'a proclamation of independence'.² Shepstone, determined to assert his authority, mounted a large force against the Nhlangwini. In the ensuing chaos Sidoyi managed to escape the colonial net, eventually crossing

the border and settling at Mzimkhulu. Many of Sidoyi's adherents followed him and he 'continued in fact to be the ruler of the tribe'.³

Nomansland: a place without laws

Mzimkhulu in 1857 was part of what colonial observers called Nomansland.⁴ The term emerged because there was no single group that had been able to assert their authority over the entire area.⁵ Some Zulu speakers living in the adjoining territory of what is now KwaZulu-Natal referred in the mid-1800s to the area beyond the Mzimkhulu River as the *emaXameni* country, which translates to a place where people 'do not yet have any laws'.⁶ When Sidoyi settled at Mzimkhulu the area was inhabited by a number of chiefdoms. The two largest groups were another branch of the Nhlangwini, under Sidoyi's kinsman Fodo kaNombewu, and the Bhaca adherents of Mdushane kaSonyangwe. Like Sidoyi and his followers, both the Bhaca and Nhlangwini chiefdoms had fled to Mzimkhulu after devastating clashes with the colonial authorities in Natal.

By the mid-1840s the Nhlangwini under Fodo were the dominant chiefdom in the middle reaches of the Mkhomazi and Mzimkhulu rivers. Fodo, who developed a reputation as a compulsive fighter, provided 'genet skins, blue-monkey skins, and crane feathers' to the Zulu army.⁷ Dingane made Fodo responsible for persuading the people of southern Natal still in hiding to resettle and work the land in order to provide food for the Zulu army on their return from long-distance campaigns.⁸ Fodo fell foul of the Natal colonial authorities towards the end of 1846 when he launched an attack on a group of Bhaca who were fleeing into

the Colony to escape conflict with the Mpondo. Shepstone, determined to 'to show his authority over a chief well known for his independent history and aggressive qualities', issued warrants on 6 January 1847 demanding the return of stolen cattle and the arrest of those guilty of murder and robbery.⁹ Later in the month he led a contingent of African troops against Fodo. Although the campaign against the chief lasted six weeks, Fodo managed to evade capture. Shepstone represented Fodo's actions as deliberate aggression, although Jeff Guy argues that 'there is no evidence that Fodo attempted to resist'.¹⁰ Fodo offered cattle in an attempt to stop the conflict and although there were skirmishes among Fodo's homesteads, they were probably provoked by the presence of Shepstone's troops rather than planned resistance.¹¹ Fodo eventually did surrender and appeared before the lieutenant-governor in August 1847, asking not for the restoration of his position as chief, but to be allowed to 'live on the face of the earth'.¹² Although restored to the chieftainship, Fodo, probably in an attempt to maintain distance from Shepstone in Pietermaritzburg, moved to Mbekabantu at Highflats. He eventually moved further south and crossed the colonial boundary, settling in Nomansland at Gugwini, near the junction of the Ibisi and Mzimkhulu rivers.

Mdushane was the grandson of Madzikane who is considered the father of the Bhaca chiefdom. Madzikane, the chief of the Zelemu-Wushe who had been living in the region of the Mngeni River near Pietermaritzburg, gathered the remnants of numerous chiefdoms around him in the early 1800s and amalgamated them into a new cultural and political group that would become known as the Bhaca. The

Bhaca migrated to what is now Mount Frere in the 1820s and eventually under Madzikane's son Ncaphayi settled in the domain of the Mpondo paramount Faku in the 1830s. Ncaphayi, who was acting as regent for Mdushane, was killed in 1845 in a conflict with his former allies the Mpondo. After Ncaphayi's death, Mdushane led a group of his followers in 1846 back to the Colony of Natal where they would be out of reach of the Mpondo. The Bhaca under Mdushane emerged as the most powerful of the chiefdoms just south of the border with the Colony.¹³ As his followers lived on either side of the boundary of Natal, Mdushane had to deal with the colonial authorities in Pietermaritzburg. In 1854 Mdushane had signed a declaration with Shepstone recognising him as 'paramount and exclusive chief' who would rule the Bhaca under their own laws and independent of British jurisdiction.¹⁴ Relations soon soured between the Bhaca and the Colony. It was reported later in 1854 that Mdushane refused to pay hut tax, the Bhaca were stealing cattle from the vicinity of Pietermaritzburg, and 'that the practice has lately increased to a serious extent'.¹⁵ In December the Natal colonial government launched a campaign against the Bhaca who too fled and settled at Mzimkhulu. The evidence against the Bhaca was non-existent and the expedition against Mdushane amounted to nothing more than a cattle raid.¹⁶

Sidoyi, Pommer and the Griqua

Besides the Bhaca and Nhangwini, there were two other groups that settled in Nomansland in the 1850s and played a significant role in the politics of Mzimkhulu. In the mid-1850s a handful of white traders from the Colony of Natal settled at a drift near the present village of

Mzimkhulu. They served as middlemen between the chiefdoms and merchants in Natal, exchanging cattle, agricultural products and wood for manufactured goods. Donald Strachan, a young immigrant from Scotland, emerged as the leader of the trading settlement. By holding official positions in the Griqua and later colonial governments and forming alliances with local African leaders, including Sidoyi, Strachan played a significant role in local politics for almost half a century.

In the mid-1850s people of mixed descent began moving into Nomanland. In 1851, after an uprising at the Kat River and a mutiny in the ranks of the Cape Mounted Rifles, a number of groups settled in the Transkei. Although they were small in number, they were mounted and well-armed and by forming alliances with Africans made their presence felt in Nomanland. The most prominent of these new arrivals was Smith Pommer, who, with his followers, had settled in about 1856 at a mission station called Pearsetown at the Ibisi. In the early 1860s large numbers of Griqua settled in parts of Nomanland under their leader Kaptyn Adam Kok III. The Griqua established their headquarters at what would become Kokstad and were recognised by the Cape government as the rulers of the area between the Mzimkhulu and Mzimvubu rivers. The chiefdoms of Mzimkhulu were thus subjects of the Griqua.

Soon after his arrival at Mzimkhulu, Sidoyi developed a close personal and political relationship with Pommer and later through him the Griqua. White officials viewed this connection as stemming from a mutual hatred of colonialism. Pommer, a colonial commissioner, concluded, 'met with a congenial spirit' in Sidoyi and 'a vow was made to stand

by each other and resist the English to the death'.¹⁷ There was no doubt that the treatment by the Cape and Natal colonial governments respectively of Pommer and Sidoyi cemented a connection between the two men. However, there were more immediate and pragmatic reasons for the relationship. The Nhangwini followers of Fodo and Sidoyi had suffered devastating losses in the previous decade. Many of Fodo's followers, including his favourite wife MaSosibo, refused to go with him to Mzimkhulu and stayed in Natal.¹⁸ Those who remained within the Colony also became divided, recognising the authority of numerous members of the family. This led to conflicts within the chiefdom, particularly between the followers of Fodo and those of his uncle Jongwana.¹⁹ Sidoyi and his followers had lost 90% of their cattle in Natal and were impoverished and weakened.²⁰

For Sidoyi and Fodo, Pommer's connections to the Griqua government were vital for their recovery, and they both became allies of the Griqua. The Griqua assisted them in internal challenges to their authority. They helped Fodo defeat a challenge from his brother Nondabula, who had settled with his adherents in the lower reaches of the Cabane River.²¹ More importantly, the Griqua assisted the Nhangwini in their longstanding conflict with the Bhaca. The losses in Natal, numerous divisions and internal conflicts left the Nhangwini weak and vulnerable to the Bhaca. Conflict between the two groups reached a peak in 1859 and early 1860. Sidoyi, allegedly encouraged by Pommer, challenged the Bhaca regent Thiba, which led to numerous skirmishes and two major battles in the months that followed in which Sidoyi's men were soundly beaten. The arrival of the Griqua in 1864

was important for Sidoyi's survival. A Griqua observer later commented to a colonial commission that Sidoyi hid at the junction of the Mzimkhulu and Ibisi rivers and 'could not come out until Adam Kok allowed him'.²²

This is not to say that the alliance was not also beneficial to the Griqua government. The Griqua did not move into a political vacuum and had to assert their authority over the Bhaca and Nhlanguwini at Mzimkhulu. The Griqua did not attempt to move the African chiefdoms from the areas in which they had settled prior to their arrival. They shrewdly designated them as 'locations' within which the routine running of affairs, including land tenure, remained with African chiefs.²³ Although there was pressure from land-hungry Griquas on African land, Adam Kok, aware of the need to placate the chiefs, contained the pressure.²⁴ By forming alliances with the Nhlanguwini and playing on divisions which developed within the Bhaca chiefdom in the 1860s and 1870s, the Griqua asserted their authority relatively easily over the Mzimkhulu region.

Sidoyi and Natal officials

Despite fleeing from Natal, Sidoyi was still of concern to officials in Pietermaritzburg. Magistrates on Natal's southern border, besides alleging that men living under Sidoyi were responsible for stealing horses and cattle from frontier farmers, believed from the late 1850s that he was gathering people around him who were discontented with white rule and would become over time a threat to the stability and safety of the Colony. Caesar Hawkins, magistrate of the upper Mkomazi and stationed at Richmond in Natal, wrote in July 1858 that Sidoyi's

tribe are gradually withdrawing from this Colony and joining their late

Chief. Seven kraals have already left and the greater part of the tribe will most probably follow eventually. I would beg to call the attention of His Excellency to this combination of two Chiefs who have both been punished by the Government and who being settled upon our immediate frontier would be ready to take advantage of any opportunity of avenging themselves and recovering their lost cattle. Although the numbers are at present too few to be formidable yet may become so by gathering around them the disaffected and turbulent from the surrounding tribes as well as those who have been driven from British Kaffraria and who are gradually filling up the country beyond our south western frontier.²⁵

White officials attempted to stop Sidoyi's followers who had remained in the Colony after his flight from the Natal government from joining him at Mzimkhulu. In February 1870 Hawkins, with the permission of the lieutenant-governor, wrote to the secretary of the Griqua government proposing that an arrangement be entered into by which all Africans who crossed without permission from Natal to Griqualand be compelled to return to the Colony with their cattle. The Natal government, in turn, would apply the same policy to Africans leaving Griqualand. The proposal was in response to Hawkins having received a report that 'about forty kraals of the Enhlangweni tribe' had crossed the border for the purpose of joining Sidoyi. The concerned magistrate wrote:

Unless measures are immediately taken to put a stop to this exodus the whole of the Enhlangweni tribe I am given to understand propose leaving Natal and forming a strong nation under Usidoi or some other chief of this

tribe. I need not point out to you that the formation and concentration of so strong a tribe will sure to be a source of future trouble to Captain Kok and eventually involve the Natal Government in complications on account of their proximity to the border.²⁶

Two years later Hawkins again expressed his concern, writing to the secretary for native affairs that 'another section of the Enhlangwini tribe have left the Colony for the purpose of rejoining their former Chief Usidoi in Griqualand; in a few years the whole of Usidoi's people with the exception of a few kraals will have quitted the Colony'.²⁷

The fine at Harding: the annexation of East Griqualand

Until the early 1870s the chiefdoms between the Mthatha and Mzimkhulu rivers had by and large been spared from direct colonial interference. This was, however, to change in the early 1870s when the Cape Colony gained 'responsible government' from direct British rule and began to extend its influence beyond the Kei River. Although the proclaimed motivating influence among Cape officials for extending colonial rule was border security, it took place at a time of aggressive colonial expansion throughout southern Africa, carried out by both the imperial government and settler administrations in response to an economic transformation of the subcontinent brought on by the discovery of diamonds. In early July 1873 the Cape administration appointed Joseph Orpen resident of Nomansland. He in effect was the representative of the Cape government with the people beyond the Mthatha River and it was his responsibility to extend Cape rule over the area.

With the appointment of Orpen, Sidoyi realised that the Cape administration was asserting its influence in the area, which made his position and that of his adherents more precarious than before. An uprising in the Colony of Natal at the end of 1873 among the Hlubi highlighted the changing dynamics. From about 1849 the followers of Langalibalele kaMtimkulu had lived on the foothills of the Drakensberg beneath the peaks of Champagne Castle and Cathkin Peak. The Hlubi had been settled in the area to serve as a buffer between the San, who still lived in the Drakensberg, and the Colony. In 1873 Langalibalele ignored repeated orders by the magistrate to register firearms owned by his people. Shepstone sent a force to arrest Langalibalele. He fled across the Drakensberg into Basutoland and sought refuge with Chief Molapo who handed Langalibalele over to a detachment of the Frontier Armed and Mounted Police (FAMP).

On 16 November Orpen received a letter written eight days earlier by Shepstone, requesting that he intercept Langalibalele who was believed to be making his way to East Griqualand to seek refuge with his kinsman Ludidi.²⁸ Orpen initially wrote that he did 'not believe it probable that this was a movement to join Ludidi'.²⁹ He saw 'the movement as a simple removal of cattle of the tribe to a different unoccupied country in its rear'. Orpen pointed out that relations between Langalibalele and the Hlubi chiefs Ludidi and Zibi were strained.³⁰ Nevertheless, Orpen set out for the Griqua Laager on the slopes of Mount Currie to request support from Adam Kok. The Kaptyn had already received word about Langalibalele's flight from the Natal government and had sent small patrols towards Matatiele

and was in the process of calling up additional men whom Orpen made clear would 'act under his authority'.³¹ On 27 November news was received that Langelibalele was not making his way for East Griqualand but was in the Maloti Mountains. In early December, however, Orpen received a message that a detachment of the FAMP was in the vicinity with the intention of crossing Qacha's Nek and pursuing Langelibalele in the Malotis. Orpen with local levies joined forces with the FAMP in pursuit of Langelibalele, although they never crossed paths with the chief who was captured just as the campaign began.

Orpen's dealings with Kok, over whom he had no authority, were a clear sign that the Cape government no longer respected the sovereignty of the Griqua. This was not lost on either the Natal government or the chiefs who lived as subjects of the Griqua Raad. The Natal administration was always critical of the Griqua and unhappy about their presence on their southern border, but had generally respected their sovereignty and boundaries because they had been settled in the area with the consent of the Cape administration. With Orpen's appointment and the events surrounding the pursuit of Langelibalele, Shepstone was aware that he could rely on the support of the Cape authorities, despite past rivalries over the region, and that the days of Griqua independence would soon be brought to an end. In his letter to Orpen informing him of the uprising Shepstone wrote:

Under these circumstances His Excellency directs me to request that you will take such steps as may appear to you feasible to intercept the fugitives and their cattle, in order that they may be punished for their treacherous and rebellious conduct; and that it may be

quite clear to the natives that should any of them rebel against the Government of one portion of Her Majesty's dominions in South Africa they rebel equally against all.³²

In their dealings with the Griqua Raad, Natal's attitude had also changed. Orpen noted:

It is to be remarked that Government authority to call up Kok as a subject in case of war had been exerted for the first time a few weeks before the outbreak, when he was ordered to warn his people to prepare for war with the Pondos. The Natal Government was informed of this, and in the rebellion immediately requested Kok's co-operation, instead of, as on former occasions, treating him as an independent foreigner and his country as an Alsatia for outlaws.³³

Although Sidoyi agreed to go along with Kok's decisions regarding Langelibalele, in January 1874 he travelled to the magistracy near Mount Fletcher to seek an interview with the resident to offer his assistance.³⁴ Orpen recorded the meeting as follows:

The outlaw Sidoni came forward and desired to be forgiven his offences, and I said that having shown his loyalty, and come forward in arms to save the Queen, he was forgiven so far as this territory was concerned, and I would plead for him to the Natal Government, and I am now about arranging his submission to Natal preparatory to pardon.³⁵

In May, Donald Strachan accompanied Sidoyi to the magistrate at Harding where he paid a fine of £50, for which Strachan stood surety, so that his outlawry could be rescinded.³⁶ He was disqualified from holding the rank of chief in Natal, but it did remove the threat of arrest if he crossed the border

given the possibility after annexation of being forced to return to Natal by the Cape administration. Sidoyi's fine to the Harding magistrate is an incident that is generally glossed over, but it is significant and revealing about the motives of both Sidoyi and Strachan. Both men realised Griqua independence was coming to an end and that they needed to start cultivating relations with colonial officials in Natal and the Cape. Strachan was still a Griqua magistrate in May 1873 and standing surety for Sidoyi did not benefit the Raad. It did, however, allow him to start developing contacts with Natal officials who up to this stage had been suspicious of his position amongst the Griqua.

In late January Orpen wrote a detailed memorandum to Charles Brownlee regarding the Langalibalele campaign. He was now convinced that Langalibalele did actually want to seek refuge in East Griqualand. He did not have much evidence to support this change in opinion beyond the statement that 'it was the universal conviction of the Natal natives and Government that he intended to make his way here'.³⁷ However, Orpen convinced Brownlee that the independence of the Griqua state was a threat because they were unable to control the chieftaincies that lived under their authority. In October 1874 Sir Henry Barkly visited Kokstad and informed Kok and the Raad that the Cape would be taking over the area. Barkly travelled to Kokstad from Natal and Sidoyi was sensible enough to meet the governor on the Zuurberg heights with a large number of his followers to escort him to the capital.

Building discontent: Sidoyi's involvement in the Griqua rebellion

In the years following annexation, Strachan, now a Cape magistrate, was responsible for ensuring that the chiefdoms of Mzimkhulu, including the Nhlanguwini, co-operated with the new administration. In opposition to him was Pommer who was competing with a number of men among the Griqua to lead the resistance against the colonial government. From 1874 onwards there was a noticeable change in interactions between Sidoyi and Strachan and Sidoyi and Pommer. Strachan and Pommer both understood that it would be beneficial to have Sidoyi's support to help them assert their political dominance at Mzimkhulu.

Strachan understood that the enforcement of colonial rule was a dynamic process, depending on punishment and reward; but at times compromise and co-operation. He was not averse to using force against chiefs who defied colonial authority to remove them from their positions and replace them with men who would be more co-operative. He was equally careful to reward those who co-operated with land and positions in the administration. Strachan, despite his own personal misgivings, attempted to draw Sidoyi into the new administration. He used his influence to ensure that Sidoyi was granted a farm by the 1874 commission and that he was confirmed as a headman in 1876.³⁸

Despite optimistic predictions that the Griqua were content under British rule, loss of their independence and subsequently land, and the behaviour of local officials, contributed to a growing resentment in the territory. In 1875 Adam Kok was killed in a cart accident and new leaders began to compete for authority among the Griqua. They fell

into three categories: older and more conservative men who had played a role in the former government; younger members of the Kok dynasty; and outsiders who had gained support within the polity.³⁹ Pommer and Adam (Muis) Kok were the two most influential leaders at that time. Pommer's popularity was largely a result of his influence with the Nhlangwini.⁴⁰

In February 1876 rumours began to circulate that Pommer and Sidoyi were plotting against the colonial government.⁴¹ Strachan warned the magistrate at Kokstad and requested a company of the FAMP be sent to East Griqualand. In response to concerns over the actions of Pommer and Sidoyi, Captain Matthew Blyth was appointed first chief magistrate of East Griqualand. In his initial report Blyth commented that 'Sidoyi, the Chief of the Hlangwini tribe, is a restless and not very loyal man, and is carefully watched'.⁴²

The ill-feeling continued to grow until the early months of 1878. The discontent was brought to a head on 20 February when Lodowyk Kok had a disagreement with a local trader in his shop in Kokstad. Muis and Tommy Kok appeared on the scene to assist their brother. The police were sent for and the brothers were arrested and put in jail for the night. Muis was released on bail the following day and ordered to appear in court on 25 February. Lodowyk and Tommy were retained to stand trial. Both men received six months in jail, not for the incident in Kokstad but for treasonable talk a few months earlier at a meeting in Matatiele. After Muis had been released on bail, he left East Griqualand for Pondoland with some of his followers. On 30 March Smith Pommer wrote to Blyth informing him that he was going to Pondoland to fetch Muis to clear his reputation. Pom-

mer had been at the meeting at Matatiele and his name had been coupled with the statements made.⁴³ He asked Blyth to call a meeting of all people 'that have made accusations against me'.⁴⁴

Colonial officials were adamant that Muis and Pommer were attempting to establish an alliance with the Pondo and Nhlangwini against the government.⁴⁵ A later colonial commission concluded 'Pommer and Muis no doubt fostered a belief that they would be joined by surrounding tribes, and might frighten Europeans out of this country, or force a parley from Captain Blyth, in either case increasing their prestige'.⁴⁶ Relations between the Mpondo and Cape government had deteriorated by the mid-1870s. The Mpondo watched with concern as the chiefdoms surrounding them were annexed by the Cape administration and, as Christopher Saunders points out, 'came to fear their survival as an independent people'.⁴⁷ The paramount Mqikela was considered a weak leader and by the late 1870s his nephew and powerful councillor Mhlangaso was considered by many to be 'the real ruler of the country'.⁴⁸ Mhlangaso and his brother, Josiah, had emerged as the most vocal critics of attempts by the colonial government to interfere in Pondoland. It was to the territory of Mhlangaso that Muis Kok fled in February after being released from jail in Kokstad. In late March, Pommer and two of Sidoyi's cousins joined Muis at Mhlangaso's homestead where discussions took place.⁴⁹

Sidoyi's involvement in events from late February to mid-April are difficult to unpack with any certainty. In mid-March Sidoyi unexpectedly reported to the magistrate's office in Mzimkhulu and handed over his arms as a pledge of loyalty to the government.⁵⁰ Blyth

returned them to Sidoyi as government arms to be used when instructed to do so. However, at the end of March he did not report to Mzimkhulu when Strachan summoned him to explain why his cousins had gone with Pommer to Pondoland. On 10 April, Sidoyi finally rode to Mzimkhulu to report to Strachan who instructed him to return to his homestead and await orders. On the same day Muis crossed the border from Pondoland at Brook's Nek to join forces with Smith Pommer who had ridden up from the Ibisi with his followers. Muis and Pommer began to make their way in a circular movement to the old Griqua Laager site on the slopes of Mount Currie and on 12 April the rebels occupied what remained of the settlement. They were joined by Josiah Jenkins and 94 men from Pondoland.

Sidoyi received a message from Strachan telling him to meet him on top of the Zuurberg range. Sidoyi did not appear at the designated time or place and later insisted that it had been a misunderstanding and that is why he had missed Strachan.⁵¹ On the following day Sidoyi and a group of men rode to Kokstad. They arrived just as the colonial troops were forming up to move towards the laager. They did not join the men in the laager but handed themselves over to Blyth. Strachan 'took them in hand' and led them to a safe place where he disarmed them and placed them under guard.⁵² When Josiah Jenkins and his men realised that the Nhangwini under Sidoyi were not going to join their former allies against the colonial government, they left the laager and returned to Pondoland. The Griqua in the laager were dislodged after a short skirmish and the uprising suppressed.

'There is always a great deal of "smoke" about Sidoi': the 1878 commission

A commission was established in December 1878 to investigate the Griqua Rebellion. Sidoyi appeared before the commission on 22 January 1879. His testimony was clearly carefully thought out and he insisted that he was loyal. In a shrewd, and at times slightly incredulous, statement he portrayed himself as being acquainted with, at times wary of, Pommer over whom he attempted to exercise a calming influence.⁵³ He testified that he was 'alarmed' to hear that Pommer had taken two of his men to Pondoland.⁵⁴ He recalled telling Pommer when tensions were rising: 'I will have nothing to do with it whatever, if the country gets into hot water I am out of it'.⁵⁵ The commissioners did not believe his testimony and concluded that Sidoyi had agreed to join the uprising and provide military support for the attack that took place at the old laager. They wrote further that:

He acknowledges himself that rumours of the period were unfavourable to his loyalty. And well he may, for ever since his flight from Natal, he has been a suspected individual. There is always a great deal of 'smoke' about Sidoi... There is not a more fervent loyalty than that of Sidoi if gauged in words. If there were no such thing as deeds his character could not be improved; and his deportment at the time of the disturbance must be regarded from the two-fold aspect of words and deeds.⁵⁶

The Transkei rebellion

A few months after the Griqua rebellion, Cape officials faced a far more serious challenge to their rule. Angered by a disarmament policy and the changes

being forced on their chiefdoms, the Basotho took up arms against the colonial government in September 1880. The uprising spread to the Mpondomise chiefdoms and some groups among the Thembu, and became known as the Transkei rebellion. The left wing of the Cape Mounted Rifles, which was responsible for the defence of East Griqualand, had been called up to the Basutoland border in early September. East Griqualand was thus without professionally trained troops and military commanders to co-ordinate and lead a campaign against the Basotho. Brownlee, the chief magistrate, turned to Strachan to raise a force from the loyal chiefdoms to fight against the Basotho. The exact number of men in the field waxed and waned, but at the height of the conflict there were approximately 5 560 black and 475 white troops involved.⁵⁷ The vast majority, approximately 3 000, of the levies were drawn from a corps that Strachan himself had raised twelve years earlier in 1868 from among the chiefdoms of Mzimkhulu and became known as the Abalondolozzi (Protectors). The majority of the Abalondolozzi were followers of the Bhaca and Nthlangwini chiefs Msingaphantsi and Sidoyi, both of whom were appointed officers in the corps.

The *Natal Witness* incorrectly reported that Sidoyi had joined the rebellion and expressed concern that because the chief had supporters on both sides of the border, the Colony of Natal would be pulled into 'the Cape's misfortunes'.⁵⁸ However, on 18 October Sidoyi arrived at Strachan's camp beyond the Mzimvubu, putting paid to the rumours that he had joined the uprising. In the months that followed Sidoyi and his men fought a difficult campaign in the Drakensberg. White commanders commented that

they would 'rather lead three hundred Nthlangwini in a fight than an equal number of Europeans'.⁵⁹ The conflict petered out in early 1881 and the Nthlangwini returned to their homesteads.

Sidoyi died in 1882. In his 30 years as *inkosi* of the Nthlangwini he had gone from being in conflict with the Natal government in the 1850s to co-operating with the Cape administration in the 1870s. Regional politics at Mzimkhulu go a long way to explain this change. The Nthlangwini chiefdom had been devastated by its conflicts with Natal authorities in 1857. It was only by forming an alliance with the Griqua after their arrival in 1863 that the chiefdom was able to adequately resist the more numerous Bhaca and regain some of its former prosperity. By the early 1870s Sidoyi realised that the Cape administration intended annexing East Griqualand and began cultivating relations with colonial officials, although he was hesitant initially to give them unqualified support and proceeded with caution. After 1874 Strachan and Pommer realised the benefits of having Sidoyi and his adherents co-operating with them and worked to win him over. By 1880 when the Transkei rebellion broke out Sidoyi co-operated with colonial officials in what was a mutually beneficial arrangement. Colonial officials needed the manpower provided by Sidoyi's supporters to go against the Basotho. Sidoyi, after the events in Natal, knew the devastation conflict with a colonial government could cause a chiefdom. More recently he had seen the impact of a failed uprising on the Griqua community. He was also aware of the benefits of rewards of cattle and land to those who co-operated with the colonial government. Like many other indigenous leaders, Sidoyi's decisions

were influenced by his interactions with local colonial officials and the need to protect both his position and the interests of his adherents.

NOTES

- 1 Pietermaritzburg Archives (PAR), Legislative Council of Natal, Document no. 30, 1857.
- 2 Jeff Guy, *Theophilus Shepstone and the Forging of Natal: African Autonomy and Settler Colonialism in the Making of Traditional Authority* (Pietermaritzburg, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013), p. 254.
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