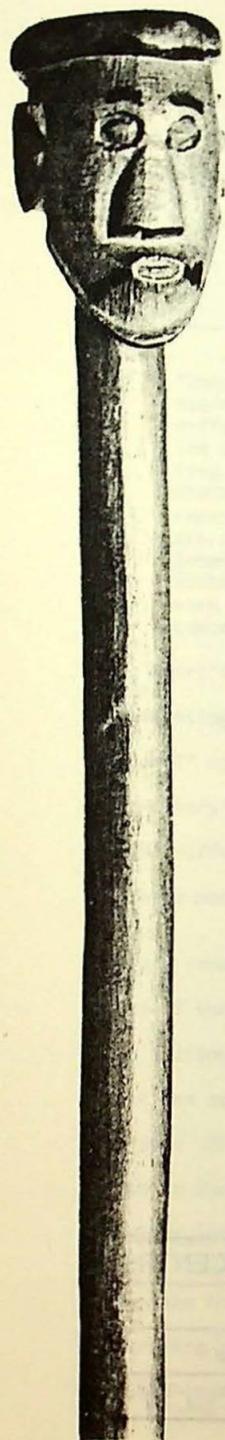


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RECONSTRUCTION OF HISTORY:
The case of Shaka

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"RECONSTRUCTIONS OF HISTORY : THE CASE OF SHAKA"

"Independently of its scientific vocation, history effectively exercises a double function, both therapeutic and militant. At different times the 'cause' of this mission has changed, but not its significance : in Franco's Spain, it was to glorify Christ the King ; during the Republics in France, the nation and the state; in the U.S.S.R. or in China it is no less missionary as regards the communist party; the talk of science and methodology are no more than fig-leaves covering the nakedness of ideology. Benedetto Croce wrote, at the beginning of the century, that history pin-points the problems of its own times more fully even than those of the era about which it is supposed to be concerned."

Marc Ferro's analysis of "The Use and Abuse of History" is both illuminating and provocative : it sheds light on the question "What is History?" and challenges the reader to reconsider the different functions of "History" and to evaluate "Reconstructions of History" in the light of the different forces at play at the time when those "Reconstructions" are/were made.

Ferro's remarks are pertinent to Shakan historiography as the life and times of the first Zulu king have been the subject of numerous accounts - both fictional and "historical".² The "therapeutic and militant" functions can be detected in both the historiography and the (historical) fiction. Shaka has been celebrated as the founder of the first nation-state in Southern Africa, as the man who welded the different clans together into a nation.

Given the contentious nature of South African historiography³, it is not surprising to see that different generations and ethnic groups have taken it upon themselves to constantly revise the interpretations of the stature

and significance of the first Zulu king, Shaka.

For the purposes of this paper, I shall consider the accounts of the oral material at our disposal; the novels written by the pioneering black Southern African novelists; the standard white accounts of the Shakan era; the early revisionist interpretations by black South African writers and the more militant reconstructions of later African writers.

Given that Shaka reigned (c. 1816 - 28) in a pre-literate era, it is not surprising that the oldest indigenous accounts of him are the praise-poems, or izibongo, composed in his honour. Although it is difficult to date these poems, enough is known about their role in the cultural context to be able to vouch for their veracity in terms of being an "official" account of the merits (or demerits) of the ruler in question.⁴

Perhaps the finest Shakan poem is the collation by James Stuart, which was translated into English by Daniel Malcolm and edited by Trevor Cope. The poem begins by saluting the man who transformed his empire at the expense of weaker and less disciplined clans:

Dlungwana son of Ndaba!
Ferocious one of the Mbelebele brigade,
Who raged among the large kraals,
So that until dawn the huts were being turned upside-down.
He who is famous as he sits, son of Menzi,
He who beats but is not beaten, unlike water,
Axe that surpasses other axes in sharpness;
Shaka, I fear to say he is Shaka,
Shaka he is chief of the Mashobas.
He of shrill whistle, the lion;
He who armed in the forest, who is like a madman,
The madman who is in full view of the men.
He who trudged wearily the plain going to Mfene,
The voracious one of Senzangakhona,
Spear that is red even on the handle...⁵

The praise-name, "Dlungwana", means "Ferocious one". Shaka's temperament is clearly established at the outset, and the superlatives that follow clearly reveal the praise-poet's approval of Shaka's achievements - for example: "Axe that surpasses other axes in sharpness..." That Shaka

is a successful warrior-king is underlined by the choice of imagery.

Notwithstanding the hyperbolic nature of these praises, one should not underestimate their significance, as they are often referred to as the chronicles of the clan. A number of James Stuart's informants cite them when recounting aspects of their oral history.⁶ Shaka is praised for his military success, and a recurrent image that runs through the poems is that of a destroyer - provider, as can be seen in the final salute:

Ngibi naNgwadi!
Little leopard that goes about preventing other
little leopards at the fords.
Finisher off! Black Finisher off!⁷

The pioneering Southern African writers also utilized praise-poems in their works. Magera Fuze, who wrote the first Zulu "history", entitled (in translation): The Black People and Whence They Came : A Zulu View, highlights the fact that praises relate to actual historical events:

But as for Shaka, he could not put down his shield but continued to attack other clans, wishing to subject them to his rule. It was thus that there arose Shaka's praise : "Isidlukula - dlwedlwe (long-armed-robber-who-robs-with-violence) who⁸ destroys with his shield ever ready on his knees.

The Black People is an historical survey of the pre-colonial period, charting the major events that occurred during the lives of the Zulu kings. The author's association with Zulu kings spanned four reigns, from 1879 to the 1820s, so his information is quite substantial.

Shaka figures prominently, in his book, and the author's attitude towards him is ambivalent. Writing from within the Zulu fold, Fuze celebrates Shaka's golden era:

At that time Shaka was the ruler of the whole of South Africa, there being no chief who dared to touch him. And there in Thekwini (Port Natal) he had white subjects who came from Cape Town, who were with Fynn and Ogle and the others. His power of sovereignty was full to

the brim of the basket and he ruled in a manner never known by his (ancestors).... It was the first time that there had been a government to unite the whole country of South Africa under a single ruler like Shaka. And it is for this reason that all people were said to be Zulus.

The metaphor: "His power of sovereignty was full to the brim of the basket" denotes the author's pride in the extent of Shaka's empire. A recurrent theme, or complaint, rather, that runs through The Black People is that black South Africans are deeply divided and will achieve nothing unless they unite - this is made particularly clear in the Exhortation.¹⁰ An instance of history pin-pointing the problems of its own times more clearly than the era it purports to describe. But, as a Christian convert, Fuze has difficulty in coming to terms with Shaka's brutality, and he therefore presents him as the scourge of God whose hubris precipitates his downfall:

Shaka, who moulded the sovereignty of the Zulu nation, ruled for only ten years (1818-1828). For when he defied the Owner of all peoples for whom he ruled his people, his rule was terminated and God roused his brothers to kill him, advised by their father's sister, Mkabayi, who said that Shaka had terminated his father's people, killing them for nothing and for no reason.¹¹ And so Shaka died at the end of those ten years.

The tension between the admiration of Shaka's military prowess and the distaste for his disregard for the sanctity of human life runs through most of the books written by the early black Southern African writers.

Magema Fuze's friend, Reverend John Langalibalele Dube (who received a special commendation in the Prologue to The Black People, for establishing the black newspaper, Ilanga Lase Natal) also wrote a book on Shaka, Insila kaTshaka¹².

The tension between attraction and repulsion also runs through Dube's text. The protagonist, Jeqe, oscillates between admiration and repugnance:

Even though our King loves to see the red blood flow,
I am overcome with admiration for his peerless courage
on the battlefield.¹³

If we look to the authorial voice, then Dube's own criticism is clear:

Jeje had been frequently sent out to kill both
men and women, for it was the king's desire to
purge his heart of all pity and to make him like
himself - merciless and indifferent to human suffering.¹⁴

For a sustained critique of Shaka's reign one must turn to Mofolo's
classic, Chaka.¹⁵ Like Dube and Fuze, Mofolo was a Christian, but
unlike the two Zulu authors, Mofolo was a Basotho, whose perspective on
the so-called Chakan wars (or Mfecane or difaqane) was highly critical.

Mofolo's is the superior text, in literary terms. In it, the author
evaluates the Chakan era critically, paying particular attention to the
devastation wrought by Chaka:

Ahead of Chaka's armies the land was beautiful,
and was adorned with villages and ploughed fields
and numerous herds of cattle; but upon their
tracks were charred wastes without villages, without
ploughed fields, without cattle, without anything,¹⁶
whatsoever except occasionally some wild animals.

The cumulative effect of the above condemnation of Chaka's pillaging is
very striking.

I have, elsewhere, pointed out that Chaka is the anti-hero in this text
and that the real hero is the more progressive overlord, Dingiswayo, who,
in many respects, was Chaka's foster-father, during Chaka's years in
exile.¹⁷

As a founder-member of the "Basutoland Progressive Association" (Lekhotla
la Tsoelo-pele), Mofolo's sympathies lay with the overlord who promoted
good husbandry, arts and crafts, as opposed to the man whose single
interest was warfare.

Mofolo's psychological insight can be seen in the manner in which he

initially sympathises with the persecuted boy, Chaka, but gradually distances himself from the warrior-king as Chaka becomes obsessed with slaughter. Chaka's death is presented as a positive event, as seen in the mockery that pervades the conclusion:

So it came about, the end of Chaka, son of Senzangakhona. Even to this day the Zulus, when they think how they were once a strong nation in the days of Chaka, and how other nations dreaded them so much that they could hardly swallow their food, and when they remember their kingdom which has fallen, tears well up in their eyes, and they say, "They ferment, they curdle! Even great pools dry away."

Mofolo's hidden "purpose" in writing Chaka can be explained in the manner a parable: "What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?"

Through his deft blending of fact, fiction and faction, Mofolo proves that poetic truth and historical truth are not necessarily mutually exclusive, that fictional discourse and historical discourse are both concerned with interpretation, with explaining what happened, with making meaningful judgements on people's actions and events.

Mofolo criticizes Chaka's ruthless, dictatorial regime and favours a conciliar mode of government.¹⁹ As a Mosotho, whose legendary king, Moshoeshe, sheltered refugees from the Chakan wars, it is perfectly understandable why Mofolo's account is not as partisan as that of Fuze.

Fuze, Dube and Mofolo relied heavily on oral testimony for their accounts. Given the fact that African Oral History and Orature have only recently become academically respectable, the "historical" aspects in these works has generally been under-played or fiercely contested - for example, Reverend S.M. Malale's letter in the newspaper, Leselinyana la Lesotho, in July 1928²⁰, in which he took issue over the accuracy of Mofolo's account of the establishment of the Shangana nation. It is worth quoting Mofolo's

response:

I believe that errors of that kind are very many in the book Chaka; but I am not very concerned about them because I am not writing history, I am writing a tale, or I should rather say I am writing what actually happened, but to which a great deal has been added, and from which a great deal has been removed, so that much has been left out, and much has been written that did not actually happen, with the aim solely of fulfilling my purpose in writing this book.²¹

Mofolo's equivocation, sums up some of the ambiguities of "historical fiction". Some of the points he makes are also applicable to the standard source of early Zulu historiography, Father Bryant's Olden Times in Zululand and Natal.²²

Bryant's painstaking reconstruction of Zulu history, like that of Fuze, is heavily reliant on oral testimony, on weaving together various "traditions", each with its own ideological loading, resulting in a massive pastiche. Since Bryant does not often cite his sources, the oral nature of his information is often overlooked, bearing in mind the widespread veneration of the written, rather than the spoken word.

Moreover, the earliest written accounts of Shaka's reign, penned by the white settlers who lived, intermittently, in Shakan Zululand, namely Henry Francis Fynn and Nathaniel Isaacs, are highly suspect, in the light of Isaacs letter to Fynn, dated 10th December, 1832:

...show their chiefs, both Shaka and Dingarn's (sic) treachery and intrigue...Make them out as bloodthirsty as you can and endeavour to give an estimation of the number of people that they have murdered during their reign, and describe the frivolous crimes people lose their lives for. Introduce as many anecdotes relative to Shaka as you can; it all tends to swell up the work and make it interesting.²³

Fact, fiction and faction are irrevocably intertwined in the early written accounts of the Shakan era, as Dr. William Worger has enunciated in his authoritative study: "Clothing Dry Bones : The Myth of Shaka"²⁴. Worger concludes that:

...it should be stressed that Shaka must always remain an enigmatic figure. The quantity, and more especially, the quality, of the evidence available will not allow otherwise.... Historians should engage in shaping an adequate historical reality, not in myth making.²⁵

Bryant, like Fynn and Issacs, figures prominently in establishing the myth of Shaka as a degenerate:

But in accomplishing his 'glorious' work, he ruined himself - if, indeed, he was not ruined already; in gaining the world, he lost his own soul. For the brutal methods and vicious deeds necessarily and continuously practised in pursuance of his plan naturally involved an abnormal development of the baser qualities and a gradual deadening and final extinction of those more noble. Whatever he may have been in childhood and youth-and we have an idea that with him the child was but father to the man-certainly in adult life, every virtue seemed lacking and every vice was rampant. He was man reverted, not to savage, but to brutish stage, in which all altruistic sentiments are absent, and the animal instincts reign supreme.²⁶

Bryant's Christian outlook, together with elements of Social Darwinism combine to produce a devastating condemnation of Shaka. Bryant's assessment has much in common with that of Mofolo and Dube²⁷, but has been challenged by the more militant views of Wole Soyinka and Mazisi Kunene.²⁸

The publication of ethnographic studies like Bryant's Olden Times and R.A.C. Samuelson's Long, Long Ago²⁹ in 1929 stimulated educated Africans to reconsider their history and write their own versions. Rolfes Dhlomo's historical novel UShaka³⁰ has much in common with Bryant's account. But, as the political situation within South Africa worsened, educated Africans' began harking back to the political attainments Shaka symbolized.

Benedict Wallet Vilakazi, in his poems "UShaka KaSenzangakhona" ("Shaka, son of Senzangakhona") and "Phezu Kwethuna likaShaka" ("The Grave of Shaka") reconsidered the ambiguous legacy of the founder of the Zulu nation.³¹

Shaka is celebrated as a Zulu hero, in "Shaka, son of Senzangakhona".

Vilakazi mentions Shaka's bloodlust repeatedly and defiantly:

Ah, let us come together Zulus
And dance, unfettered, in his honour! -
For we shall never fail him or allow him
To be defamed by any foreign breeds.
So let us dance or use our eager pens
In praise of all the victories
Of him they spoke of as "The Hoe" -
Of Shaka, the mightiest Hoe of all!
Let us tell how tribes once reeled and fell,³²
Their blood congealed with shock and terror,

It is tempting to conclude that Bryant is included in the general condemnation of "foreign breeds." The poem is, clearly, addressed to fellow Zulus and history here is serving both a "therapeutic" and a "militant" function, as outlined by Marc Ferro.

The conclusion of the poem underlines Vilakazi's apologist stance:

...Your name, reviled throughout the earth,
Will live while men can speak and write
And strive to solve your mystery! -
Yet who, mighty Shaka, shall fathom your heart?³³

"The Grave of Shaka" develops some of the themes raised in "Shaka, Son of Senzangakhona". The occasion giving rise to the poem was the erection of a monument in honour of Shaka at Stanger, in Natal, which lies on the site of Shaka's palace, at Dukuza. Vilakazi denounces the "white oppressors" who have turned South Africa into a "white man's wilderness"³⁴. He laments the marginalisation of blacks in the political affairs of the country:

But are we able, here and now,
To take in public affairs our rightful part?
O, would that our present were worthy of your part!³⁵

The Shakan era thus represents for Vilakazi's generation, a golden age wherein blacks were in control of their destiny. A similar strident tone runs through Herbert Dhlomo's Valley of a Thousand Kills, which begins by invoking "Hymned Shaka, god of war-writ fame...."³⁶

Perhaps the most striking revision of Shaka's reputation comes in Mveli Skota's biography of Tshaka:

...He had absolute discipline in the land. He was King, judge and administrator, also a philosopher, a poet and a musician....

Tshaka was a very busy man, being his own Field-Marshal, Minister of War, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Prime Minister, Administrator, Political Agent and King. He was also engaged in research work. This is indeed a big task for any man, even under the most favourable circumstances. That Tshaka, like William the Conqueror, was a great man nobody can doubt, and to state that he was a cruel King is to pay the man who broke virgin ground and founded a nation the poorest compliment. Had there been no Tshaka there might never have been a proud Zulu nation.³⁷

It is pertinent to note that Mveli Skota wrote the above eulogy as General Secretary of the African National Congress. Considering his political role, a glowing tribute to Tshaka was crucial in terms of championing Black South Africans' competence in government.

Shaka's importance to the nationalist cause is also highlighted by Chief Albert Luthuli's reference to him in the opening chapter of his autobiography (which was published some thirty odd years after Skota's biography appeared):

Shaka has been much maligned by white South African historians. His outlook was that of his day, and when that is taken into account, and when all that can be said to his discredit has been said, this king of legendary physique emerges as a brilliant general, and a ruler of great courage, intelligence and ability.³⁸

Luthuli sees the roots of Shaka's downfall in terms of his corruption, in his centralisation of power and his refusal to see power in terms of service of the people:

Shaka's rule grew harsher. Finally, he estranged himself from his people by setting up as an unqualified dictator. For a time his subjects submitted to arbitrary rule as loyally as they could.³⁹ In the end, however, Shaka went the way of most tyrants.

A committed Christian, Luthuli's conclusion, like that of Mofolo and Dube

before him, was : "As you sow, so shall you reap!"

Seventeen years after Luthuli's verdict was first published, another leading figure in the ANC published his version of the Shakan legend, namely, Mazisi Kunene's Emperor Shaka the Great : A Zulu Epic. Unlike Luthuli, Mofolo and Dube, who saw in the Shakan story a parable on how absolutely power can corrupt; Kunene is anxious to present the reader with a model ruler:

He lay there, the warrior, the son of Ndaba,
the wisest of men.
Emperor Shaka the Great, Ruler of Many Rulers,
King of Kings!

Kunene believes that "...artists embellish their part to inspire their children"⁴¹ and addresses himself to the task of explaining Shaka's rise to fame:

How did it happen? In order to reach a suitable answer it is necessary to cut through the thick forest of propaganda and misrepresentation that have been submitted by colonial reports and historians. The following epic poem is an attempt to present an honest view of the achievements of Shaka.⁴²

Whilst debunking other Shakan myths, Kunene is busy creating his own, although he repeatedly lays claim to historical veracity:

Throughout the epic I have attempted to give as accurate a historical account as possible. On rare occasions where I felt rearrangement would make the central story more dramatic, without distorting the history, I have changed the sequence of events.⁴³

A detailed knowledge of Shakan literature reveals that Kunene systematically undermines the standard "historical" texts dealing with Shaka's rise to power.

Kunene's Shaka owes much to Ernst Ritter's Shaka Zulu, which portrays Shaka as a man of Napoleonic stature.⁴⁴ Kunene downplays Shaka's quest for the elixir of life by suggesting that Shaka desired it to save his

ailing mother, rather than to persevere his own life. The poet is embarrassed by Shaka's friendship with the early white settlers and suggests that the king was planning to confront them after defeating Soshangane. Kunene's revisionist tendencies can also be seen in the claim that Shaka was invited to take the throne after Senzangakhona's death, despite the numerous references to his half-brother's assassination, in various oral testimonies and praise-poems. Contrary to all other accounts I have seen, Kunene insists that Shaka was legitimate.⁴⁵ Although Kunene claims to be recording what his grandparents told him, it is clear that he has read numerous accounts of the Shakan saga.

The central weakness of Kunene's poem is its "over-kill". Shaka is presented as too "great" a figure - he is far more intelligent than other people; he can do no wrong; he is the favourite of the ancestors; he is above reproach and is often patronising. Had Kunene painted a more culpable man, his hero would have been more attractive.⁴⁶ Moreover, Kunene attempts to portray a feudal king as a socialist reformer!⁴⁷

A parallel mobilisation of the Shakan theme by nationalists can be found in Francophone literature. Léopold Sédar Senghor's seminal "dramatic poem", "Chaka", was written in 1956, at a time when Senghor was establishing his political base in Senegal. Senghor's poem sheds more light on the tensions experienced by the poet-politician at this time, than on the historical Chaka.⁴⁸ Senghor's Chaka is presented as a Négritude hero - the Négritude Movement's concern with the rediscovery of African history makes Chaka a logical choice for mythopoetic celebration. Chaka defends himself against the "White Voice" accusations of gross brutality:

WHITE VOICE

So you admit it Chaka! Will you admit to the millions of men
you had killed
Whole regiments of pregnant women and children still at the
breast?
You, provider-in-chief for vultures and hyenas,

poet of the Valley of Death.
We looked to find a warrior. All we found was a butcher.
The ravines are torrents of blood. The fountain runs
blood.
Wild dogs howl death in the plains where the eagle
of Death hovers
O Chaka Zulu, worse than plague than rolling fire of
the bush.

in terms of political necessity. In the face of the encroachment of the
white settlers, Chaka states:

...I became a mind an untrembling arm, neither a
warrior nor a butcher
As you said, a politician - the poet I killed - a
man of action alone
A man alone, dead already before the others,
those you pity
Who will understand my passion?⁵⁰

By presenting Chaka as the man who foresaw the establishment of apartheid,
Senghor vests Chaka with prophetic insight, and attempts to portray him
as a Black Christ - "Who will understand my passion?", "My Calvary".⁵¹

The Messianic parallel did, clearly appeal to Senghor, who after many
years as teacher in France, contemplated a political career back in his
native land. In casting around for a suitable prototype of a founder
of a nation state, the Chakan saga served as a powerful symbol. Senghor
had read René Ellenberger's translation of Chaka, and projected onto
Chaka his own qualms about leaving a secure, essentially personal
domain for the larger public arena, as he stated in his letter to Donald
Burness:

C'est la lecture du livre de Mofolo qui m'a
inspiré ce poème; mais il n'y a pas eu d'influence
littéraire à proprement dire. C'est ma situation
que j'ai exprimée sous la figure de Chaka,
qui devient, pour moi, le poète homme politique
dehinc entre les devoirs de sa fonction de poète
et ceux de sa fonction politique.⁵²

Seydou Badian also sees Chaka as a symbol of African political
achievement in his play, La Mort de Chaka.⁵³ As Professor Dorothy Blair

points out, the play was written when Mali separated from federation with Senegal to form a new socialist republic.⁵⁴ Badian became Minister of Rural Economy and Planning in 1960, so it is not surprising that the play is full of polemical speeches on the virtues of national unity and promotes the cult of the leader.

Badian is clearly anxious to rehabilitate Chaka's reputation from that of a blood-thirsty butcher, à la Mofolo, to that of an accomplished strategist. Clive Wake points out, in his introduction to the play, that Badian wrote The Death of Chaka whilst the controversy over Kwame Nkrumah's style of government was rife. The play degenerates into a propagandistic piece stressing the virtues of obedience on the part of the masses.

Apart from the Francophone leaders' contribution to the Shakan saga, there is also a Zambian play, by Fwanyanga Mulikita, entitled Shaka Zulu⁵⁵. As the title shows, Mulikita is largely indebted to E.A. Ritter's account of Shaka. Mulikita, who served as the Minister of Power, Transport and Works in Zambia, does not attempt to whitewash Shaka's sanguinary image. Shaka emerges as an intelligent man who is more attractive than Badian's wooden hero. The major weakness of this play is its episodic nature - it is essentially a series of incidents that occurred during Shaka's life, which are strung together with little attention paid to organic wholeness. It does, nevertheless, exemplify how Shaka has been appropriated as a Pan African hero. The fact that two ministers and a President were moved to write plays and a poem on the significance of Shaka illustrates the Zulu king's importance on the African political stage.

Wole Soyinka's epic poem, Ogun Abibiman, reflects the apotheosis of Shaka. The poem is dedicated to the fallen of Soweto, and appeals for the rebirth of the Shakan spirit, which is presented as the most potent weapon against the evils of apartheid.

The first part of the poem, the "Induction", pours scorn on Pretoria's policy of dialogue; in the second section, "Retrospect for Marchers : Shaka!", Soyinka presents Shaka as a South African Ogun, the God of War and Creativity. Shaka is presented as the forerunner of Southern African nation builders:

Is all understood? The lesson gained?
Has history purified our goals beyond
Mzilikazi, beyond Soshangani, beyond
Lobengula or, beyond the forebear of them all -
Patriots and traitors - Shaka, womb of the amaZulu
- Shaka! Shaka!
Bayete Baba! Bayete!⁵⁶

By fusing Shaka with the Yoruba God of Destruction and Regeneration, Ogun, Soyinka is utilising history as a means of reconstructing the future. The third section, entitled "Sigidi!", after Shaka's war-cry, envisages a new "mfekane" ("a crushing, total war") against the Pretoria regime, which will usher in a new world founded on justice:

... -Vengeance
Is not the god we celebrate, nor hate,
Nor blindness to the loss that follows
In His wake.
Nor ignorance of history's bitter reckoning
On innocent alike. Our songs acclaim
Cessation of a long despair, extol the ends⁵⁷
Of sacrifice born in our will, not weakness.

The Zulu golden age is, once again, mobilised in order to challenge an imperfect and unacceptable present.

In conclusion, then it can be seen that Shaka is an enigmatic figure who has attracted various writers for various, and often conflicting, reasons. Each text presents a certain perspective on the Shakan saga - some, like those of Thomas Mofolo, John Dube, Magera Fuze and A.T. Bryant - lean heavily on Christian tenets in an attempt to evaluate Shaka's significance. They also often rely on oral testimony and praise-poetry in their assessment of Shaka's historical significance. The ethnic origin of the writer often colours his portrayal of Shaka, too.

For Southern African writers, historical fiction provides an opportunity to reconstruct the history of the Shakan era with a view to understanding the dynamics of the Shakan regime and to assess its impact on the Southern African "political map".

Following Ferro's definition, one could state that the earlier Southern African texts serve a more therapeutic than militant function. With the increasing entrenchment of white settler power and the concomitant denigration of African history, a more militant mobilisation of African heroes, namely Shaka, takes place, as seen in the analysis of Benedict Vilakazi's and Herbert Dhlomo's poems.

The advent of independence in Francophone Africa, combined with easy access to Victor Ellenberger's translation of Mofolo's classic, Chaka, provides the African politicians with a powerful symbol of successful nation-building. This is most clearly seen in Léopold Sédar Senghor's dramatic poem, "Chaka", and Seydou Badian's The Death of Chaka. By choosing a well-known, but geographically remote African leader, Senghor and Badian are less concerned about historical verisimilitude than Southern African writers, and concentrate on establishing certain tenets for an essentially West African audience. They consequently highlight Shaka's role as a pioneering nation-builder and attempt to exonerate him of his crimes against humanity.

The tension between admiration of Shaka's military prowess and distaste for his ruthlessness which pervades most Southern African accounts of Shaka's reign, is thus absent in the Francophone leaders' accounts. Mazisi Kunene attempts to subvert standard white Shakan historiography, with limited success. Kunene's account fails to convince the discerning reader that Shaka was not a culpable leader. Wole Soyinka synthesizes Shaka's sanguinary reputation with his more positive role as a pioneering leader by representing Shaka as an Ogun-like figure. The Nigerian God of War and Creativity, who is also the Restorer of Rights, serves as an appropriate motif for Shaka's enigmatic legacy.

FOOTNOTES : "RECONSTRUCTIONS OF HISTORY : THE CASE OF SHAKA"

1. M.Ferro, The Use and Abuse of History, or How the Past is Taught
London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984, p.viii.
2. For a thorough analysis of the different trends in Shakan Literature, see M.Z. Malaba, "Shaka as a Literary Theme", D.Phil. thesis, Centre for Southern African Studies, University of York, 1986.
3. See, for example : H.M. Wright, The burden of the present, liberal - radical controversy over Southern African history, Cape Town, David Philip, with London, Rex Collings, 1978; J Cobbing, "The Case Against the Mfecane", Witwatersrand African Studies Institute Seminar Paper, 4 March, 1984; and A. Luthuli, Let My People Go, London, Fontana, 1982, p.17.
For an extended discussion, see A.T. Bryant, The Zulu People, Pietermaritzburg, 1949, p.486; E Gunner, Ukubonga ne Zibongo : Zulu Praising and Praises; School of Oriental and African Studies D.Phil., University of London, 1984; E Gunner, "Forgotten Men : Zulu Bards and Praising at the times of the Zulu Kings", African Languages/Languages Africaines, 2, 1976, pp.71-89; C.L.S. Nyembezi, "The Historical Background to the Izipongo of the Zulu Military Age", African Studies, 1948, Vol.II Pt.I, pp.110-125; Pt.II pp.157-174; M.Z. Malaba, "Shaka as a Literary Theme", Part I, op cit..
5. A.T. Cope, ed., Izipongo : Zulu Praise Poems, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1968, p.88.
6. C. de B. Webb and J.B. Wright, eds., The James Stuart Archive of Recorded Oral Evidence Relating to the History of The Zulu and Neighbouring People, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, Durban, Killie Campbell Africana Library, Vol.I, 1976; Vol.II, 1979; Vol.III, 1982.
7. Cope, op cit., p.116.
8. M.M. Fuze, The Black People and Whence They Come : A Zulu View, transl. H.C. Lugg; ed. A.T. Cope, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press and Durban, Killie Campbell Africana Library, 1979, p.50.
9. Ibid., p.66.
10. Ibid., pp. viii-ix. Like most pioneering black South African writers, Fuze had great difficulty in getting his book published. A draft of it was probably in existence between 1899 and 1913, but it was eventually only published in 1922, after a generous grant from Harriette Colenso.
11. Ibid., p.97.
12. J.L. Dube, (Insila kaTshaka) Jeje, the Body Servant of King Tshaka, transl. J. Boxwell, The Lovedale Press, 1951. Given the variety of spellings of "Shaka" I shall use that adopted by a given author, when analysing his text.
13. Ibid., p.19.

14. Ibid., p.26.
15. T. Mofolo, Chaka, transl. D.P. Kunene, London, Heinemann, 1981.
16. Ibid., p.136.
17. See M.Z. Malaba, "The Legacy of Chaka", English in Africa, Vol.13, No. 1, May 1986, pp. 66-67.
18. Mofolo, Chaka, op cit, p.168.
19. For a detailed analysis of this issue, see M.Z. Malaba, "Patterns of Power : A Study of Thomas Mofolo's Chaka and Sol Plaatje's Mhudi", Proceedings of the Tenth Southern African Universities Social Sciences Conference, Roma, Lesotho, 1987, forthcoming.
20. Mofolo, Chaka, op cit., p.xiv.
21. Ibid., p.xv.
22. A.T. Bryant, Olden Times in Zululand and Natal, London, Longman, 1929.
23. Cited in Africana Notes and News, 18, 1968-69, p.67.
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25. Ibid., p.156.
26. Bryant, Olden Times, op cit., p.648.
27. For a more detailed and insightful analysis of the influence of Christianity on early Southern African Literature, see A.S. Gérard, Four African Literatures : Xhosa, Sotho, Zulu, Amharic, Berkley, University of California Press, 1971.
28. W. Soyinka, Ogun Abibiman, Johannesburg, Ravan, London, Rex Collings, 1980; M. Kunene, Emperor Shaka the Great : A Zulu Epic, London, Heinemann, 1979.
29. R.A.C. Samuelson, Long, Long Ago, Durban, T.W. Griggs and Co., 1974.
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33. Ibid., p.42.
34. Ibid., pp.49,52.
35. Ibid., p.50.
36. H.I.E. Dhlomo, Valley of a Thousand Hills, Durban, Knox, 1941, p.2.

37. T.D.M. Skota, The African Yearly Register, Being an Illustrated National Biographical Dictionary (Who's Who) of Black Folks in Africa, Johannesburg, R.L. Esson and Co., 1932(?), pp.101,103.
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40. M. Kunene, Emperor Shaka, op.cit., p.425.
41. Ibid., p.116.
42. Ibid., p.xiii.
43. Ibid., p. xxvii.
44. E.A. Ritter, Shaka Zulu, Middlesex, Penguin, 1978, Ritter's "popular history" was first published in 1955, and has been widely taken as an accurate historical account. It is also heavily reliant on oral testimony and the early written accounts of Shaka's reign.
45. M. Kunene, Emperor Shaka, op.cit., p.xvi.
46. For a more detailed critique of the epic poem, see M.Z. Malaba, "Shaka as a Literary Theme", op. cit., pp.409-416; M.Z. Malaba, "Super-Shaka : Mazisi Kunene's Emperor Shaka the Great, A Critical Evaluation", forthcoming, Research in African Literatures, 1988.
47. M. Kunene, Emperor Shaka, op.cit., pp.xxiii-iv.
48. Senghor's "Chaka" was first published in the volume Ethiopiennes, and can be found, in translation, in J. Reed and C. Wake, eds. Léopold Sédar Senghor : Selected Poems, London, OUP, 1964, pp.67-77. For a detailed analysis of the poem, see M.Z. Malaba, "Shaka as a Literary Theme", op. cit., pp. 264-273; D Burness ed., Shaka, King of the Zulus in African Literature, Washington, Three Continents Press, 1976, pp. 25-42; and C. Wake, "The Personal and the Public : African Poetry in French", Review of National Literatures, 1971, Vol.2, pp.104-23.
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51. Ibid., p.71.
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53. Seydou Badian, La Mort de Chaka, pièce en cinq tableaux, Paris, Présence Africaine, 1961. English translation : The Death of Chaka : A Play in five tableaux, with introduction by C. Wake, Nairobi, OUP, 1968. See, also, D.S. Blair, African Literature in French, Cambridge, CUP, 1976, pp.95-102, for a summary of "The Shaka theme" in Francophone Literature and M.Z. Malaba, "Shaka as a Literary Theme", op. cit., Ch.4.
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