

THE MISR REVIEW

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Introduction to this Issue

This issue appears more than a year after its scheduled publication. We have no alibis to offer, just an admission and a request that this be taken as an illustration of the continuing steep learning curve at MISR.

Key to research, we argued in *Our Mission* in 2016, is formulating the problem of research. Acknowledging that this would require a long journey, we dedicated *The MISR Review* to a double endeavour: one, to broadcast the intellectual work undertaken at MISR, particularly by advanced doctoral students, to the wider scholarly community; and two, to energize and promote debate in that community.

This issue introduces a mode of debate that we hope will take us a step further in the journey we began in 2012. The core of this issue are three articles by Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni: “Revisiting Nguni Formations: The Mfecane and Migrations in South-Eastern Africa”; “The Ndebele Kingdom of Mzilikazi Khumalo”; and “Decolonization/Decoloniality: Converging African/Latin American Thinking”. Given as a set of lectures at Makerere Institute of Social Research, they have been revised for publication. We have invited three different scholars to contribute a critical discussion, one on each lecture.

The issue also contains two stand-alone articles. Netsanet Gebremichael, at the time a doctoral student at MISR, explores travel writing as an empirical mode of knowing. Saleem Badat joins a critical discussion on decolonizing the curriculum in universities, a subject to which we hope to devote more space in future.

We invite readers so inclined to send short responses (maximum 1,000 words) to the above contributions.

Mahmood Mamdani | Lyn Ossome | Suren Pillay | Samson Bezabeh
March, 2020

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Revisiting Nguni Formations: The Mfecane and Migrations in South-Eastern Africa

Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni

Abstract

The history of Nguni-speaking people of south-eastern Africa is marked by epic migrations and moments of high levels of violence of which the Mfecane is a well-known signature. But like all histories of African people it is not free from colonial falsifications and distortions. This article revisits the nineteenth-century history of the Nguni-speaking people with a view to understanding how mobility, settlement and migration became constitutive of pre-colonial people's lives. The Mfecane as the discursive terrain within which Nguni mobilities and migrations of the nineteenth century emerged is subjected to critical analysis, including its rich historiography. What is underscored is that the Mfecane was a creature of colonial encounters, particularly mercantile capitalism, rather than of pre-colonial dynamics. Empirically, the article examines the migrations of Soshangane and his establishment of the Gaza kingdom at Delagoa Bay in Mozambique, and the migration of Zwangendaba and his people - an epic story of 20 years of migration, affecting five countries: Mozambique, Eswatini (Swaziland), Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zambia and Tanzania. The Zwangendaba migrations bring the Southern, Central and East African regions into the history of the Nguni-speaking people.

Introduction

How African is African history? The question haunts historians today. It is a loaded question that encapsulates a number of epistemic challenges faced by historians as they try to produce African history. The first challenge is that of the very idea of history and philosophy of history, cascading from the dawn of Euromodernity and Enlightenment thought.¹ The Eurocentric idea of history and philosophy of history is permeated by linear modernist thought that can be rendered as “ahistory”, “prehistory”, and “History” (with a capital “H”).² How free is African history from the Eurocentric idea of history and philosophy of history? The second challenge is that of chronology and periodisation whereby the colonial interlude as a key time holder (pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial) is at the very centre of African history.³ How can African history be freed from the colonial interlude? The third challenge in understanding even pre-colonial history is the use of modernist vocabulary and concepts.⁴ This problem arises from the very complex reality of how professional historians are produced, and particularly the vocabulary and concepts they learn during their training as historians in modern Westernized universities where modernist vocabulary and concepts are the language of intellectual and academic discourse.

All these questions arise within a context well identified by Derek R. Peterson and Giacomo Macola: “Africa’s historians seem always to be searching for an archive to call their own.”⁵ These

- 1 E.S. Atieno-Odhiambo, “From African Historiographies to an African Philosophy of History,” in *Africanizing Knowledge: African Studies Across the Discipline* ed. T. Falola and C. Jennings (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2002), pp. 13–64.
- 2 S. J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Epistemic Freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and Decolonization* (London and New York, Routledge, 2018).
- 3 K.K. Prah, “Has Rhodes Fallen? Decolonizing the Humanities in Africa and Constructing Intellectual Sovereignty,” in K.K. Prah, *The Challenge of Decolonizing Education: CASAS Book Series No. 128* (Rondebosch: Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society).
- 4 J. Depelchin, *Silences in African history: Between the Syndromes of Discovery and Abolition* (Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota Publishers, 2005).
- 5 D.R. Peterson and G. Macola, “Introduction: Homespun Historiography and the Academic Profession,” in *Recasting the Past: History Writing and Political Work in*

challenges are compounded by the quadruple helix that was clearly articulated by Michael-Rolph Trouillot: “Silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of sources); the moment of fact assembly (the making of archives); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance).”⁶

This first article in a series of three is sensitive to the above challenges and in a modest way tries to rethink the conventional history of Nguni-speaking people, the Mfecane and their migrations in south-eastern Africa in the nineteenth century, without necessarily claiming to have resolved the challenges laid out above. The lecture is organized into five sections. The first section provides a brief background to the pre-colonial African societies in general. The second section briefly introduces the ways of life of the Nguni-speaking people with an emphasis on mobility, settlement and migration. The third section introduces the Mfecane as the discursive terrain within which Nguni mobilities and migrations of the nineteenth century cascaded. The dynamics of the events in the Phongolo-Mzimkhulu region, covering what is today the province of KwaZulu-Natal, are analyzed, as it is not only the first epicentre of conflicts, wars and migrations but also the original home of those who migrated to Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zambia and Tanzania. This important section also provides a synopsis of the scholarly debates and historiography of the Mfecane and the impact of mercantile and industrial capitalism – with its imperial and colonial implications – on the conflicts, wars and migrations of the Nguni in the nineteenth century. The fourth section documents the first migrations and settlements from the coastal areas into the interior (the highveld/Caledon Valley and the Cape – two other epicentres of conflicts, wars and migrations – and the consequences. The fifth section examines

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Modern Africa ed. D. R. Peterson and G. Macola (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2009), pp. 1–30.

6 M-R Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995), p. 26.

the migrations of Soshangane and his establishment of the Gaza kingdom at Delagoa Bay in Mozambique, where were based the Portuguese who were actively involved in the slave trade. Delagoa Bay became an epicentre of conflicts, wars and migrations. The fifth section documents the migration of Zwangendaba and his people. His became an epic story of 20 years of migration, affecting five countries: Mozambique, Eswatini (Swaziland), Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zambia and Tanzania. The Ndebele of Mzilikazi are not discussed in this seminar paper because they are covered in a separate article on the Ndebele state.

Background

One can identify four key features of pre-colonial Africa which defined human life in general. The first was mobility (voluntary and gradual but frequent movements) and migration (forced fast-paced movements). The second key feature of pre-colonial Africa is fluidity and plurality of identities. The historian Paul S. Landau alluded to this feature when he posited that “the people of South Africa were historically well equipped to embrace and absorb strangers” and that “hybridity lay at the core of their subcontinental tradition”.⁷ He compared this feature of pre-colonial African life with that of nineteenth-century Europeans who “attempted to repudiate mixing, politically and otherwise, albeit with only partial success”.⁸ The third key feature is constitution/reconstitution of self, nation and belonging. At the base of this feature of pre-colonial African life was the compositional/communal humanist ideology of *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (seeing one’s humanness in other human beings) which enabled a politics of incorporation and full integration of people of diverse origins into the ranks of Nguni-speaking societies. People were a major asset and the more people who accepted and lived under the rule of a single kingdom the more power that king embodied, wielded and exuded. The most popular political proverb which speaks to conceptions of the

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 7 Paul S. Landau, *Popular Politics in the History of South Africa 1400-1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. xi.

8 Landau, *Popular Politics*, xi.

sources of power in Nguni societies has been “*inkosi yinkosi ngabantu*” (the king is a king because of the people).⁹ Perhaps the veteran historian of pre-colonial Africa, Jan Vansina, was referring to this feature of pre-colonial life when he argued that governance is the mother of all history.¹⁰ It was also Vansina who noted that in most pre-colonial societies, co-existed two ideologies “one that extolled and explained the success of big men and one that stressed the ideal of equality of all”.¹¹

The fourth key feature is the claiming of territory and settlement. This feature directly challenges what James Blaut termed the “colonizers” model of the world” (leitmotif of imperial/colonial historiography) in which pre-colonial Africa was considered to be an empty space which was either completely uninhabited (*terra nullius*) or settled by mobile, nomadic wanderers with no sense of political sovereignty, no claims to territory and no notions of rights to property.¹² But even though the Nguni-speaking people constantly moved around, they also valued their cattle, their grazing and agricultural lands and their political sovereignty. In addition to these features, pre-colonial Nguni societies, like other African societies of the time, maintained strong charters/myths of origin and notions of legendary founding fathers (not mothers, because of their patrilineal orientation).

However, the recent research of the South African historian Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu is recovering the “role of powerful and authoritative African women who participated in mainstream networks of power and politics in the area now referred to as the province of KwaZulu-Natal”.¹³ Ndlovu posited that the invisibility

9 Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *The Ndebele Nation: Hegemony, Memory and Historiography* (Amsterdam and Pretoria: Rozenberg Publishers and Unisa Press, 1999), pp. 69-79.

10 Jan Vansina, *How Societies Are Born: Governance in West Central Africa Before 1600* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2004), p. 2.

11 Jan Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforests: Towards a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa* (Oxford: James Currey, 1991), p. 253.

12 James M. Blaut, *The Colonizer's Model of the World: Geographical Diffusion and Eurocentric History* (New York and London: The Guildford Press, 1993).

13 Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu, “Women, Authority, and Power in Precolonial Southeast Africa: The Production and Destruction of Historical Knowledge on Queen

of powerful women in pre-colonial south-east Africa was due to the role of “male cultural brokers, intellectuals and ideologues who controlled the production of knowledge”.¹⁴ Through careful reading of oral traditions and vernacular literature, as well as re-reading the massive archive on pre-colonial history of southeast Africa, Ndlovu has been able to successfully uncover and position such powerful women as Queen Mother Ntombazi of the Ndwandwe, Queen Regent MaNtantisi of the Batlokwa, Queen Regent Mnka-bayi of the Zulu, Queen Regent Novimbi okaMsweli of the Zulu, Queen Nandi kaMbengi of the Zulu, and others.¹⁵ This research begins to challenge the notions of rigid patriarchal and patrilineal pre-colonial societies where legendary women are excluded from the pantheon of founding myths and charters.

At a broader and general level, one can underscore two epic forms of Nguni mobilities and migrations punctuated by many other constant small-scale movements and settlements across time and space. The first is their movement from the north to the south, part of what is depicted as the Bantu migrations.¹⁶ The second is the movement from the south to the north that is generally attributed to what is known as the Mfecane, which produced the Nguni dispersal of the nineteenth century,¹⁷ about which this article is concerned. The migrations of the amaNkwane of Matiwane, amaNgoni of Zwangendaba, the amaNgoni of Nxa and Ngwana, and the amaShangane of Soshangane created an Nguni diaspora. Present-day South Africa, particularly the Phongolo-Mzimukhulu region (covering present-day KwaZulu-Natal province) is identi-

Mother Ntombazi of the Ndwandwe,” in *A Companion to African History* ed. William H. Wonger, Charles Ambler and Nwando Achebe (London: Wiley Blackwell, 2019), p. 95.

14 Ndlovu, *Women, Authority*, 95.

15 Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu, “A Reassessment of Women's Power in the Zulu Kingdom,” in *Zulu Identities: Being Zulu, Past and Present* ed. B. Carton, J. Laband and J. Sithole (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press).

16 David Hammond-Tooke, “Southern Bantu Origins: Light from Kinship Terminology” *Southern African Humanities*, 16, 2004, pp. 71-78.

17 John Omer-Cooper, *The Zulu Aftermath: A Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Bantu Africa* (London: Longman, 1966)

fied as the original home of the Nguni speakers.¹⁸ Owing to migration, they are dispersed into present-day Eswatini (Swaziland), Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Malawi and Tanzania.

Their “great treks”, as Norman Etherington depicted them, are linked to the contested time of the Mfecane.¹⁹ In the conventional historiography of Southern Africa, the Mfecane was attributed to the rise of the Zulu kingdom under King Shaka, who is credited for political, social and military innovations and blamed for igniting unprecedented violence, conflicts, wars and migrations.²⁰ The Mfecane has been used to name the upheavals of the 1820s and 1830s which consisted of wars, conflicts, violence and migrations, as well as the formation of kingdoms and chiefdoms of the Ngwane, Ndwandwe, Mthethwa, Zulu and others.²¹ Early writers such as George M. Theal simply depicted the upheavals as “the wars of Shaka”.²²

The 1980s witnessed the emergence of revisionist historiography led by Julian R. Cobbing, challenging the “Zulu-centric” idea of King Shaka as the main cause of the wars, conflicts, violence and migrations that affected the whole of the eastern half of Southern Africa and beyond into Central and East Africa.²³ In short, revisionist historiography called attention to the role of mercantile and proto-industrial capitalism characterized by increasing demands for ivory, cattle, slaves and even land, as well as the roots of settler imperialism and colonialism represented by the Portuguese in Delagoa Bay in Mozambique (Portuguese East Africa), the Dutch and the British in the Cape Colony, the British in Port Natal (Natal Colony) and the white missionaries, Griqua and Boers in the highveld of South Africa.²⁴

The Nguni-speaking People

The archaeologist Thomas N. Huffman posited that “the Nguni-speakers form the largest division of the Eastern Bantu language in Southern Africa”.²⁵ In terms of origins, the Nguni-speak-

²⁴ Cobbing, *The Mfecane as Alibi*.

²⁵ Thomas N. Huffman, “The Archaeology of the Nguni Past,” *South African Humanities*, 16 December 2004, p. 79.

ing people are constitutive of the Early Iron Age people, traceable to East Africa.²⁶ Their history is characterized by mobility, settlement and migration as part of their life. Huffman posited that the Nguni-speaking people left East Africa “around AD 1000”. Between AD 1300 and 1500 they were settled in what is today South Africa.²⁷ Elizabeth A. Eldredge wrote that:

The first complex society emerged in the Trans-Vaal region of modern South Africa along the middle Limpopo River in 850 CE, and by 1400 CE prominent lines of descent of the ruling families of small chiefdoms had been established across south-eastern Africa that would give rise to thriving processes of socio-political consolidation both east and west of the Drakensberg Mountains by the early 1700s.²⁸

In terms of the waves, streams and groupings of the Nguni-speaking people arriving in what is today South Africa, Alfred T. Bryant, in his widely referenced book *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal*, identified four main interrelated communities. The first is Ntungwa-Nguni (amaNtungwa); the second is Tekela-Nguni; the third is Thonga-Nguni; the fourth is Embo-Nguni.²⁹ It is from these early Nguni formations that the later kingdoms of the Ngwane, Mthethwa, Ndwandwe and the various Xhosa chiefdoms emerged: for example, the Ngwane, Ndwandwe and Bhele-Zizi formed the Embo-Nguni cluster; the Mthethwa are an offshoot of the Thonga-Nguni group; and the Zulu and the Xhosa are linked to the Ntungwa-Nguni formation.³⁰ However, kinship ideology connected Nguni-speaking people and they all identified some common founding patriarchs such as Langa, Musi, Mandelala and others in their myths of origin.³¹

The East African connection is not only emerging from archaeologists, but anthropologists and historians also pointed to East Africa as the original home of the Nguni-speaking people, classifying them as part of the “East African cattle complex” civili-

³¹ Schoeman, *Settlement in South Africa*, 192-198.

zation.³² Cattle constituted a major means of wealth accumulation, to the extent that one can speak of a “pastoral ideology” which entailed institutionalisation of the practice of raiding for cattle.³³ Social orientation has been patrilineal, with cattle rearing and keeping as a male domain and agriculture as a female domain. Huffman posited that “the emphasis on pastoralism also extends to material culture” with beehive houses “the premier symbol of pastoralism throughout Africa”.³⁴ In terms of Nguni-speaking people’s socio-cultural-political constitution and leadership, Eldredge’s comprehensive description is worth quoting:

These sociopolitical and cultural units are appropriately conceived as *chiefdoms*, defined as the adherents to a political leader or “chief”, usually chosen because of his social role that was often inherited. In south-eastern Africa, the term *inkosi* has been understood to refer to the person in political authority who ordinarily was also the senior male of the ruling descent line in a socio-political unit or chiefdom. That the head of small socio-political units in Africa have commonly been the senior male of a ruling descent has also prompted historians to perceive of such units as “clans” with the understanding that the family and blood ties defining membership in a clan unit were often blurred with the acquisition of new adherents joining voluntarily in an accepted social process of incorporation.³⁵

Incorporation was not always voluntary. Militarily defeated communities either migrated or were incorporated in a subordinate status. At times, a defeated community remained separate and enjoying semi-independence as long as it paid tribute as acknowledgement of loyalty to the powerful kingdom or chiefdom. Thus, besides a life of migration and settlement the Nguni-speaking peo-

32 Monica Wilson and Leonard M. Thompson (eds), *The Oxford History of South Africa: Volume 1: South Africa to 1870* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).

33 Walter Goldschmidt, “Theory and Strategy in the Study of Cultural Adaptation,” *American Anthropologist*, 67, pp. 402-407.

34 Huffman, *The Archaeology of the Nguni Past*, 83.

35 Elizabeth A. Eldredge, *The Creation of the Zulu Kingdom 1815-1825: War, Shaka and the Consolidation of Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 4.

ple were characterized by frequent incorporation of other people into their ranks. This is why Eldredge posited that “these chiefdoms were neither insular or immobile ... welcomed newcomers to settle among them individually and collectively, and sometimes migrated collectively themselves, in part or in whole, and resettled at a more favourable site that offered better productive, trade, or political opportunities and conditions.”³⁶

For example, between AD1630 and 1670 the Northern and Southern Ndebele were already migrating out of northern KwaZulu-Natal area into the interior where they constituted themselves into what is today known as the Manala and Ndzudza Ndebele in the Mpumalanga province of South Africa.³⁷ Huffman has documented the migrations of these people, who claimed Musi as their legendary founder leader; they included the Po led by Mogale and the Kekana – both of whom underwent Sothorization (heavy influence of the Sotho/Tswana-speaking people).³⁸ The next migration was by groups who claimed Langa as their legendary founding leader. They included the Mphahlele and Ledwaba.

Building on this life of mobility, settlement and migration, Huffman depicted the migrations of the nineteenth century as the “third set of movements out of KwaZulu-Natal”. Huffman is of the idea that the Nguni migrations of the nineteenth century cannot be totally divorced from a continuing and long-standing tradition of mobility, settlement and migration characteristic of Nguni-speaking people. He dates this third set of movements to AD 1821 “when the Hlubi moved onto the highveld from KwaZulu-Natal and attacked the Tlokwa”.

But Huffman is not a Mfecane denialist. Rather, he sought to identify the factors that provoked the changes in the scale and magnitude of the mid-nineteenth century Nguni migrations, compared to the previous ones. In general, a number of factors caused and determined a life of settlements and migrations: environmental changes, droughts, succession disputes, search for pastoral

36 Eldredge, *Kingdoms and Chiefdoms*, 3.

37 Huffman, *The Archaeology of the Nguni Past*, 95.

38 Huffman, *The Archaeology of the Nguni Past*, 97-98.

land, political ambitions, conflicts and the impact of mercantile and industrial capitalist incursions. However, the magnitude and scale of the nineteenth-century migrations provoked historians and other scholars to explain the causes. This takes us to the Mfecane controversy.

Rethinking the Mfecane and Nguni Migrations of the Nineteenth Century

The conventional historiographical view in Southern African history is that the mid-nineteenth century witnessed cataclysmic changes in the areas between the Indian Ocean and the Drakensberg Mountains (roughly covering the present day KwaZulu-Natal province) with unprecedented consequences on existing political formations, institutional practices of politics, military engagements and general human relations. Wars, conflicts, violence, insecurity and migrations of unprecedented scale and magnitude characterized the period from the 1820s to the 1830s.

The Mfecane emerges as the name of these changed circumstances. The early historian Eric Walker is credited for coining the name Mfecane in 1928.³⁹ But the real meaning of the term Mfecane remains unclear beyond its use to name what became vaguely depicted as “times of trouble”. Even its Sotho-Tswana version, Difaqane, which is said to mean times of “crushing” is also not very clear in its meaning.⁴⁰ The identity of “crushers” remains Shaka-centric/Zulu-centric, which is not adequate for the magnitude of upheavals of the 1820s and 1830s which reverberated in such epicentres as the Phongolo-Mzimkhulu region, Caledon Valley, Delagoa Bay and other places far away from the Zulu kingdom. With reference to the separate epicentres of conflicts, Wright and Hamilton made this important point:

It is clear that the Phongolo-Thukela region was only one of several quite separate epicentres of political instability that were emerging in south-east Africa at this time, and

³⁹ Eric A. Walker, *A History of South Africa* (London: Longman, 1928).

⁴⁰ William F. Lye and Colin Murray, *Transformations on the Highveld: The Tswana and Southern Sotho* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1980).

that to ignore the others, as Mfecane theory invariably does, is to give a greatly distorted view of the forces that were shaping the region’s history.⁴¹

The recent work of the African historian Nomalanga Mkhize, based on a careful historical reading of African vernacular writings on the Mfecane, particularly R. T. Kawa’s *Imbali Lama Mfengu* published in 1929 and isiXhosa newspapers, uncovered that the concept of Mfecane was first used by William Gqoba in 1887 to “describe Matiwane’s forces: *ezi zizwe ... azinayo kanye kulwa ne Mfecane* (these nations could not fight off the Mfecane)”.⁴² Although Mkhize’s research and reading of vernacular publications indicates a direction towards an African origin for the term Mfecane, she does not help us in terms of its real meaning – one different from the conventional historical version dominated by white historians. Does it mean violent stranger, desolator and marauder? In the way Gqoba used the term, it seem to mean forces of invasion. But what is intriguing about Mkhize’s intervention is her notion of “anti-Mfecane school” which does not “tackle African perspectives or sources with any seriousness”.⁴³ The same is true even of the “pro-Mfecane school”. What they considered as African oral traditions are collections of early white literate observers, some of whom were involved in trade in slaves, cattle and other items, as well as the acquisition of Nguni lands. Thus, in her re-appraisal of the history of the “amaMfengu” from vernacular sources, Mkhize situated herself in-between the conventional version of the Mfecane and the revisionist version, concluding that “more work needs to be done to engage the implications of African Nationalist historiographies, such as Kawa’s *Imbali LamaMfengu*”.⁴⁴ What is

⁴¹ Wright and Hamilton, *Traditions and Transformations*, 69.

⁴² Nomalanga Mkhize, “In Search of Native Dissidence: R.T. Kawa’s Mfecane Historiography in *Imbali LamaMfengu* (1929),” *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies: Multi-, Inter-and Transdisciplinarity*, 13(2), p. 106. Mkhize draws from William Gqoba, “Imbali YeseMbo: The History of the Eastern Territory (1887),” in *Isizwe Esinembali: Xhosa Histories and Poetry (1873-1888)*, ed. J. Opland, W. Kuse and P. Maseko (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2015), pp. 300-345.

⁴³ Mkhize, *In Search of Native Dissidence*, 105.

⁴⁴ Mkhize, *In Search of Native Dissidence*, 109.

more rewarding from Mkhize's close reading of *Imbali LamaMfengu* is that she convincingly identifies the origins of amaMfengu to the Phongolo-Mkhuze region.

Perhaps, because of its continuing vagueness and partly because of historians' ceaseless search for a cause of the changes that produced the upheavals of the 1820s and 1830s, the Mfecane has generated a rich historiography. In it, there seem to be consensus that radical change indeed took place in the mid-nineteenth century which needs to be explained. The dissensus is on the factors that produced these changes. Who was responsible for these changes? What was responsible for these changes? What caused these changes? The earliest writers such as Bryant, Theal and Walker took an easy way out and identified the rise of King Shaka of the Zulu to power as the main cause of the cataclysmic transformations and changes. Here was born a conventional version of the Mfecane that stood unchallenged until the 1980s.⁴⁵

At the centre of the conventional version of the Mfecane are three arguments. The first is that the period from the 1820s to the 1830s was characterized by a chain reaction of wars, conflicts, violence and migrations which swept over much of the eastern half of Southern Africa. The second argument is that the main cause of the chain reaction was the rise of King Shaka of the Zulu who engaged in an aggressive and indeed explosive expansion of the Zulu kingdom. The third strand of argument is that from the wars, conflicts, violence and migrations of the nineteenth century emerged a new and vigorous process of state formation and nation building which shaped the history of the subcontinent beyond the nineteenth century.⁴⁶ Cobbing provided a concise summary of the main assumptions of the conventional version of the Mfecane:

After about 1790, a *self-generated internal* revolution occurred within northern "Nguni" societies to the south-

45 John Wright, "Beyond the 'Zulu Aftermath': Rescrambling Southern Africa's Mfecane Migrations." Unpublished Paper, School of Anthropology, Gender and Historical Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus, March 2006.

46 Wright, *Beyond the Zulu Aftermath*, 1.

west of Delagoa Bay, and this culminated in the Shakan military revolution at the turn of the 1820s. The consequent Zulu expansionism had a near-genocidal effect and precipitated a series of destructive migrations into the interior. People as far away as Lake Nyanza (Victoria) were scarred by the play-out of chain reactions initiated by Shaka. Instantly, "Zulu-ized" first migrants such as the Ndebele and Ngunwane "set in motion" peoples further inland. In combination they extensively depopulated the future white areas of the Transvaal, the Orange Free State and Natal, a process which accounts for "the general distribution of white and Bantu land ownership [in South Africa today] ... Shaka became an explanation for everything."⁴⁷

It is these arguments that found professional historical expression in John D. Omer-Cooper's celebrated book *The Zulu Aftermath: A Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Bantu Africa*.⁴⁸ However, what was distinctive about Omer-Cooper's intervention was that it emerged in the context of the rise of African nationalist historiography that sought to counter Eurocentric imperial/colonial historiography. Omer-Cooper was part of the Ibadan School of History when he wrote *The Zulu Aftermath*. The unique part of Omer-Cooper's intervention is that he strove to cast a positive light on the Mfecane and its consequences through naming it a "nineteenth-century revolution in Bantu Africa" and emphasizing the fact that African leaders such as Mzilikazi of the amaNdebele, Zwangendaba of the amaNgoni, Soshangane of amaShangane and other non-Nguni leaders such as Sebetwane of the Kololo, demonstrated African genius in state making and nation making – thus being important makers of African history.⁴⁹ The emerging African nationalist historiography

47 Cobbing, *The Mfecane as Alibi*, 487-488.

48 Omer-Cooper, *The Zulu Aftermath* which stood as an influential standard text on the Mfecane until it was challenged in the 1980s.

49 Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "The Dynamics of Democracy and Human Rights in the Ndebele State, 1818- 1934," Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Zimbabwe, October 2004. See also Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *The Ndebele Nation: Hegemony, Memory and Historiography* (Amsterdam and Pretoria: Rozenberg Publishers and Unisa Press, 1999).

was an emphasis in uncovering what was then termed the African factor in human history and today is known as agency.⁵⁰

What is beyond doubt is that indeed there were radical changes associated with the upheavals of the 1820s and 1830s, which included political centralization, consolidation and external expansion of chiefdoms and kingdoms. John Wright and Carolyn Hamilton posited that “these processes entailed deep-seated social and political changes that centred on the transformation of the functions performed by the bodies of young men known as *amabutho* (singular *ibutho*)”.⁵¹ This institution which, according to Wright and Hamilton, was previously constituted as circumcision school marking the transition from youth to adulthood, underwent radical transformation including militarization as its functions were redefined in the late eighteenth century and mid-nineteenth century. Besides increased use of *amabutho* for hunting for ivory, the youth became standing armies for conflicts and maintenance of “political subordination of subjected communities and to extract an increased quantity of tribute”.⁵² In short, *amabutho* became an important instrument of governing heterogeneous societies whose loyalty to one centre had to be monitored and controlled. What was also new was “a new kind of leader: men who owed their positions as much to their aggressiveness, powers of initiative, and ability to make quick decisions as they did to their diplomatic and organisational talents”. Wright and Hamilton also emphasize the changes in the social stratification of Nguni kingdoms:

The emphasis on common origins that had earlier served to unite subjected groups with the Mthethwa ruling house now gave way to an emphasis on the distinctions that existed between the core of the older groups and the newly subjected ones, with the latter being excluded from certain rights and privileges enjoyed by the core,

50 See Caroline Neale, *Writing “Independent” History: African Historiography*, (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 1985); see also Toyin Falola, *Nationalism and African Intellectuals* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2001).

51 Wright and Hamilton, *Traditions and Transformations*, 62.

52 Wright and Hamilton, *Traditions and Transformations*, 63.

and subjected to demands for tribute in cattle and labour. The emergence of this distinction can be seen as marking the beginnings of the formation of embryonic social classes within an embryonic state.⁵³

What caused these changes became the major subject of historical debates. In the 1980s, Julian Cobbing introduced a radical revisionist historiography of the Mfecane, not only calling for its “jettisoning” from Southern African historiography but also confronting head-on the key aspect of the “Zulu aftermath” thesis. According to Cobbing, the upheavals of the 1820s and 1830s were not caused by the rise of King Shaka and the expansion of the Zulu kingdom but by pressures from the Portuguese based at Delagoa Bay, the Dutch and the English based at the Cape Colony, the British based at Port Natal and by the Boers, Griqua and white missionaries who had entered the highveld and were involved in slave trade.⁵⁴ Cobbing argued that “the motor for change...was not a self-generated internal revolution with a short time scale, but rather European penetration, against which black societies threw up a series of complex reactive states, that matured over a much longer period of time, both before and after the irrelevantly truncated “mfecane” era (c. 1790-1830)”.⁵⁵ Cobbing made bold conclusions that linked the past and the present:

The “mfecane” is a characteristic product of South African liberal history used by the *apartheid* state to legitimate South Africa’s racially unequal land division. Some astonishingly selective use or actual invention of evidence produced the myth of an internally-induced process of black-on-black destruction centring on Shaka’s Zulu. A re-examination of the “battles” of Dithakong and Mbolompo suggests very different conclusions and enables us to decipher the motives of subsequent historiographical amnesias. After about 1810 the black peoples of southern Africa were caught between intensifying and converging

53 Wright and Hamilton, *Traditions and Transformations*, 64.

54 Cobbing, *The Mfecane as Alibi*.

55 Cobbing, *The Mfecane as Alibi*, 518.

imperialistic thrusts: one to supply the Cape Colony with labour; another, at Delagoa Bay, to supply slaves particularly to the Brazilian sugar plantations. The flight of the Ngwane from the Mzinyathini inland to the Caledon was, it is argued, a response to slaving. But they ran directly into the colonial raiding-grounds north of the Orange ... In short, African societies did not generate the regional violence on their own. Rather, caught within the European net, they were transformed over a lengthy period in reaction to the attentions of external plunderers. The core misrepresentations of “the mfecane” are thereby revealed; the term, and the concept, should be abandoned.⁵⁶

Cobbing’s Revisionist History and the Arc of Early European Encirclement

The historical findings and conclusions drawn by Cobbing have a number of implications for the broader history of Southern Africa. In the first place, by revealing the entangled nature of the historical development of the period from the 1790s to the 1830s with mercantilism and proto-industrial capitalism, Cobbing’s work provoked the question of the periodisation of history – particularly where we draw a line in terms of pre-colonial history and colonial encounters. Africa has of course never been isolated from the rest of the world. However, if one follows Cobbing’s analysis closely it indicates that the upheavals of the 1820s and 1830s do not belong to the usual pre-colonial African history characterized by trading with other parts of the world without a threat of being invaded and colonized. What emerged and unfolded from the 1790s, provoking the cataclysmic events of the 1820s and 1830s, was part of colonial encounters, which date as far back as the fifteenth century. Once that is accepted, the impact of mercantilism and proto-capitalism becomes clear.

To gain a deeper appreciation of how Southern Africa became embroiled in the age of mercantilism and proto-capitalism,

⁵⁶ Cobbing, *The Mfecane as Alibi*, 519.

we have to pay attention to the year 1488. It is a landmark in the unfolding of South African colonial modernity. This is the year Bartholomew Diaz circumnavigated the Cape. This is the beginning of the invention of South Africa in the colonial imaginary and its insertion into the modern world capitalist system, coterminous with the so-called “discovery” of the Americas by Christopher Columbus. Columbus, like Diaz, was searching for a sea route to the East (India). Diaz and Columbus knew each other and were at some point companions on a ship to the west coast of Africa in 1482 to establish a slave fort.⁵⁷

To highlight the entanglement of Southern Africa into the mercantile and proto-capitalism system it is important to clarify some of the key epochs. Four of them are discernable and important. The first runs from 1488 to 1652; the second from 1652 to 1795; the third from 1795 to 1820 and the fourth from 1820 to 1910. During the first epoch, on 10 October 1487, the Portuguese King Joao II commissioned Diaz to be in charge of an expedition to round the southern tip of Africa in search for a sea route to India and also to explore markets for trade. Diaz’s itinerary was expansive as he was also expected to find the lands ruled by Prester John, the king of Ethiopia.⁵⁸ What is also important to underscore is that during his expedition Diaz carried six African enslaved people – which indicated that transoceanic slavery was ongoing by that time.⁵⁹ Diaz sailed along the west coast of Africa, passing Angola, Walvis Bay, the Cape (which he did not see because of a storm), Mossel Bay and Kwaaihoek – but did not reach India. He “discovered” the Cape on his way back in May 1488.⁶⁰ Diaz’s circumnavigation of

⁵⁷ Malyn Newitt, ed., *The Portuguese in West Africa, 1415-1670: A Documentary History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁵⁸ Charles E. Nowell, “The Historical Prester John,” *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies*, xxviii (3), pp. 435-445. King Prester John of Ethiopia was an invention of European imagination.

⁵⁹ Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Kenneth Tafira, “The Invention of the Global South and the Politics of South-South Solidarity,” in *Routledge Handbook of South-South Relations* ed. Elena-Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Patricia Daley (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), pp. 127-140.

⁶⁰ Daniel Boorstin, *The Discoveries: A History of Man’s Search to Know His World and Himself* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983).

the Cape in 1488 was followed by Vasco da Gama's expedition of 1498. Vasco da Gama not only successfully reached India but also named the area around Durban as Natal.

Taken together, these two expeditions opened the way for Jan van Riebeeck's arrival at the Cape in 1652 with overt colonial intentions. A stage had been set by Diaz and da Gama. For example, Diaz had already traded some trinkets with the Khoi Khoi in 1488 at Mossel Bay and even clashed with them after he shot one of them with a crossbow.⁶¹ In 1497, da Gama also encountered the Khoi Khoi and also clashed with them. Thus, the period 1488 to 1652 lays the foundation for mercantilism and the enslaving industry in Southern Africa. The Dutch East India Company (Dutch acronym *voc*) was formed on 20 March 1602. It obtained a charter which authorized it to monopolize trade, conquer and colonize territory, and enslave non-European people.⁶² On the eastern side, the Delagoa Bay and Inhambane were fast developing into Portuguese slave-trading stations. Kwame Nimako and Glenn Willemssen correctly depicted the entire mercantilism the "age of banditry, abduction and captivity of vulnerable people".⁶³

The next epoch from 1652-1795 is characterized by the conquest and colonisation of the Cape by both the Dutch and the British. The foundations of a colony intensified with trickery, chicanery, genocide and the enslavement of indigenous people under the rule of a mercantilist Dutch East India Company. What emerged was a violent moving colonial frontier, conquering, dispossessing, enslaving and displacing indigenous people. The immediate victims were the San, Khoi Khoi and Xhosa. It was the banditry, violence and killing during this period that led Mohamed Adhikari to write *The Anatomy of a South Africa Genocide: The Extermination of the Cape San Peoples*.⁶⁴ Adhikari correctly posited that:

61 Kirti N. Chaudhuri, "The Portuguese Maritime Empire, Trade and Society in the Indian Ocean During the Sixteenth Century," *Portuguese Studies*, 8, 1992, pp. 57-70.

62 Kwame Nimako and Glenn Willemssen, *The Dutch Atlantic: Slavery Abolition and Emancipation* (London: Pluto Press, 2011), pp. 39-40.

63 Nimako and Willemssen, *The Dutch Atlantic*, 14.

64 Mohamed Adhikari, *The Anatomy of a South Africa Genocide: The Extermination of*

Historically, the destruction of the Cape San societies can be viewed as part of a series of overlapping, essentially concentric, global movements of violent subjugation that were often genocidal in nature... The annihilation of the Cape San formed a small part of this five-century-long process which started in the Canary Islands in the fourteenth century and included many instances of the complete extermination of indigenous peoples. Because European colonialism was such a hugely diverse and complex phase in human history, it is perhaps more helpful to view the destruction of the Cape San within the framework of a subset of settler colonial confrontations—those in which livestock farmers linked to the global capitalist market clashed with hunter-gatherers.⁶⁵

Why were these violent events that engulfed the Cape since the arrival of white settlers not termed the Mfecane – if indeed it means the "time of trouble", one wonders? In the third epoch from 1795 to 1820, the San, Khoi Khoi and Xhosa were physically confronting the Dutch and English colonial forces. By 1795, the British, in the course of Napoleonic wars, occupied a strategic wartime naval base. By 1806, the British had take over the Cape Colony. The arrival of additional white settlers in 1820 exacerbated the dispossession and displacements by increasing demands for land and labour. The Xhosa endured a hundred years of resisting conquest, colonisation, enslavement, dispossession, displacement and general reduction into subhuman beings from the 1790s to the 1850s.⁶⁶ Martin Legassick's *The Struggle for the Eastern Cape 1800-1854: Subjugation and the Roots of South African Democracy* documents the struggles of the Xhosa and other indigenous people against the incursions of the British colonialists as they built and consolidated

the Cape San Peoples (Cape Town: UCT Press, 2010).

65 Adhikari, *The Anatomy*, 18.

66 H. Giliomee, "The Eastern Frontier, 1770-1812" in *The Shaping of South African Society* ed. Richard Elphick and H. Giliomee (Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman, 1989).

the Cape Colony while subjugating the Xhosa.⁶⁷

The important point which is often missed by historians is that those African leaders such as Shaka of the amaZulu and Mzilikazi of the amaNdebele – and many others who were blamed for the Mfecane in the conversional historiography – were born during the second epoch, 1652–1795. They were born during the age of mercantilism which Nimako and Willemsen have depicted as the “age of banditry” in general.⁶⁸ It is therefore not surprising that it was during this period that the area around Phongolo-Mzimkhulu and other epicentres such as the Caledon Valley, the Cape and Delagoa Bay became sites of wars, violence, conflicts and migrations. If we take this into account, the Mfecane cannot be a pre-colonial event. It emerges at the centre of mercantile and colonial encounters.

What is also emerging is that it was during the third epoch (1795 to 1820) and fourth epoch (1820 to 1910) that the events in the Cape were spilling over to the Phongolo-Mzimkhulu region and those of Phongolo-Mzimkhulu were also spilling into the Cape, Mozambique Bay, Caledon Valley and other places. By 1824 the British had established a permanent white settlement at Port Natal.⁶⁹ Another colonial pressure point emerged, with implications for those African kingdoms which were still independent. An arc of encirclement of the remaining independent African polities was developing from the Cape Colony to Port Natal. At first, the Port Natal white settlers began to welcome and give shelter to what they considered to be “African refugees” from the Zulu kingdom but by the 1830s military skirmishes had broken out between the Zulu forces and white settler forces over land, cattle and even authority. The arrival of armed Boers under the leadership of Piet Retief and Gerrit Maritz in 1837 at Port Natal endangered the security of the Zulu kingdom. The Battle of Blood River (eNcome) of 1838 was the

67 Martin Legassick, *The Struggle for the Eastern Cape 1800–1854: Subjugation and the Roots of South African Democracy* (Johannesburg: KMM Review Publishing, 2010).

68 Nimako and Willemsen, *The Dutch Atlantic*, 14–17.

69 Charles Ballard, “Traders, Trekkers and Colonists,” in *Natal and Zululand* ed. Duminy and Guest, pp. 116–145.

climax of this formation.⁷⁰ When Cobbing wrote of the “European net” within which African societies were caught he was referring to the developing arc of European encirclement. This consisted of the moving frontier from the Cape with its demands for slaves, cattle, land and political power. The Dutch, the British and the Griqua were the foot-soldiers of this moving frontier of violence. The second axis cascaded from Delagoa Bay where were stationed the Portuguese who were active in the lucrative slave trade, supplying the Brazilian sugar plantations. The third axis of the arc of encirclement was Port Natal, which was inhabited first by the British in the 1820s and later by the Boers in the 1830s, thirsty for such items of trade as ivory, cattle, slaves and land. The fourth axis emerged at the centre of the highveld – the Caledon Valley, where the Boers, Griqua, Korana and other offshoots of the Cape moving frontier not only confronted such “migrant kingdoms” as Matiwane’s Ngwane, MaNtatisi’s Tlokwa and Mzilikazi’s Ndebele, but were also engaged in banditry in the form of cattle raiding and slave trade.

Cobbing implicated even those who pretended to be Christian missionaries in cattle raids and enslavement activities. If this analysis is taken seriously, the notion of Shaka of the Zulu as the cause of the migrations of the Ndebele of Mzilikazi across the Limpopo River does not make sense. Shaka was assassinated in 1828, and Mzilikazi crossed the Limpopo River in 1838. It becomes clear that the migration across the Limpopo had to do with other factors, such as the migrations of the Boers from the Cape Colony. What conventional historiography always underplayed were the forces coming from the Cape. These arcs of encirclement help to explain why some African leaders and their people had to journey far into the north.

70 A.F. Hattersley, *The British Settlement in Natal: A Study of Imperial Migration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950).

The Internal Migrations from KwaZulu to the Interior

The earliest migrants were the vulnerable smaller polities that were the easier targets of the expanding bigger political formations such as the Mabhudu, Ngwane, Ndwandwe, Mthethwa and the emerging Zulu kingdom dominating the Phongolo-Mzimkhulu region. The migrations began in the 1810s and intensified in the 1820s. Only three options became available to the smaller political formations. The first was to expand and reconstitute into bigger and more powerful defensive structures able to repel invaders. The second option was to capitulate and be absorbed by the expanding bigger political groupings. The third option was to abandon territory and migrate.

The troubles came from two directions: the unfolding arc of European encirclement and the expansionist activities of the four emerging great powers (the Ngwane under Matiwane, the Ndwandwe under Zwide, the Mthethwa under Dingiswayo, and the Zulu under Shaka) located in the Phongolo-Mzimkhulu region. Cobbing's analysis helps us to make linkages between the behaviour of the four great powers and the pressures they felt and endured. The outbreak of *Madlathule* drought only exacerbated the insecurities, conflicts and wars that were underway. While the four great powers engaged each other militarily for hegemony, the smaller formations of the Bhele, Zizi, Bhaca, Mchunu, Hlubi, Thembu and others became easy targets.⁷¹ They were the first to be either swallowed up (incorporated) or to be pushed to migrate.

In *Imbali LamaMfengu*, the Bhele, Zizi, Bhaca, Hlubi and others were clans constitutive of the Mbo nation.⁷² Mkhize's reading of *Imbali LamaMfengu* identified the early migrants as from the Mbo kingdom.⁷³ It was these early migrations that gave birth to what became known as "Fingo" in colonial parlance and amaMfengu in indigenous languages. The term "amaMfengu" is said to mean "refugees/destitutes" produced by the conflicts that engulfed the

71 Wright and Hamilton, *Traditions and Transformations*, 71.

72 Mkhize, *In Search of Native Dissidence*, p. 99.

73 *Ibid.*

region.⁷⁴ The relatively stronger but still smaller formations such as the Qwabe and the Ndebele were to be affected later. Zwide of the Ndwandwe, rather than Shaka of the Zulu, was rapidly and aggressively expanding southward across Mkhuzwe toward Black Mfolozi rivers.⁷⁵ However, in Mkhize's meticulous reading of *Imbali LamaMfengu*, it emerges that the early migrations came out of a conflict between the Ngwane of Matiwane and the Hlubi of Mthimkhulu.⁷⁶ What is also emerging clearly from Mkhize's research is that the "amaMfengu" did not arrive in the Cape as a singular cohesive group; rather, some came as leaderless small groups and others as larger groups under Mbo royal leaders.

More importantly, Mkhize's research and reading of *Imbali LamaMfengu* directly challenge some of the revisionist anti-Mfecane articulations of the history of the amaMfengu. The first point relates to how the amaMfengu were treated under King Hintsa of the Xhosa in the Cape. What Mkhize derived from *Imbali LamaMfengu* indicated that the amaMfengu were cordially welcomed and treated as kin by the Xhosa, and the Mbo royals were recognized and given land to continue ruling over their followers.⁷⁷ This intervention challenges the conventional idea of the amaMfengu being treated as slaves under Xhosa kingdoms. The second point emerging from Mkhize's research indicates that the amaMfengu were not a mere colonial invention to cover up for labour raids by the British. Mkhize's analysis confirmed that there were "refugees" from the Phongolo-Mzimkhulu region who migrated to the Cape. The third point relates to why the amaMfengu broke away from the Xhosa in 1835 and joined the British. The "anti-Mfecane school" version, as Mkhize prefers to call the revisionist version, is

74 Allan Webster, "Unmasking the Fingo: The War of 1835 Revisited," in *The Mfecane Aftermath: Reconstructive Debates in Southern African History*, ed. Carolyn Hamilton (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 1995).

75 John Wright, "Political Transformations in the Thukela-Mzimkhulu Region in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries," in *The Mfecane Aftermath: Reconstructive Debates in Southern African History*, ed. Carolyn Hamilton, (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 1995), pp. 163-181.

76 Mkhize, *In Search of Native Dissidence*, 99.

77 Mkhize, *In Search of Native Dissidence*, 102.

that those who became known as the amaMfengu who left Gcal-eka terror in 1835 were not refugees from the Mfecane but were Xhosa people who had been captured in a labour raid by the British.⁷⁸ Mkhize directly challenged this thesis and, drawing from *Imbali LamaMfengu*, concluded that the amaMfengu broke from the Xhosa in 1835 because they were promised land by the British and they thought that with this gift of land they would re-establish themselves as independent polities once more.⁷⁹

The next important early migration was by the Ngwane of Matiwane, among the four great powers of the Phongolo-Mzimkhulu region to succumb to the pressure of conflicts, who migrated into the Caledon Valley.⁸⁰ In the conventional version, they are blamed for initiating a chain reaction of conflicts pushing the Tlokwa of MaNtansi and her son Sekonyela – and setting in motion violent “Mantantee hordes”.⁸¹ What is missing in the chain reaction thesis is the “white factor”, which Cobbing’s analysis brings forcefully into the debates. The Ngwane migrations went into the Caledon Valley, where raiding for slaves and cattle as well as struggles over territory were already rife.⁸² This is why Cobbing speculated that “the word Mantantee was probably coined as a euphemism for forced labourers taken from the Tswana and Sotho north of the Orange and driven south into the Cape”.⁸³ Using the case studies of the two battles of Dithakong (1823) and Mbolompo (1828), Cobbing empirically proved that the conflicts, wars and violence involved the Boers, British, white missionaries, Kora, and the Griqua who were seeking slaves and cattle to supply the market in the Cape Colony. What emerges poignantly is that Matiwane and his Ngwane’s mi-

78 Allan C. Webster, “Land Expropriation and Labour Extraction Under Cape Colonial Rule: The War of 1835 and the ‘Emancipation; of the Fingo.’” Unpublished MA thesis, Rhodes University, 1991, p. 132.

79 Mkhize, *In Search of Native Dissidence*, 104.

80 Cobbing, *The Mfecane as Alibi*, 490.

81 William F. Lye, “The Difaqane: The Mfecane in the Southern Sotho Area, 1822–24” *Journal of African History*, viii, 1967, pp. 107–131.

82 Patrick Harries, “Labour Migration from Mozambique to South Africa, with Special Reference to the Delagoa Bay Hinterland, c.1862–1897.” Unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1983.

83 Cobbing, *The Mfecane as Alibi*, 493.

gration out of the Caledon Valley had nothing to do with Shaka and the Zulu but everything to do with forces from the Cape.

Migrant Kingdoms: Soshangane and the Gaza Kingdom

After the collapse of the Mthethwa kingdom of Dingiswayo in 1816 its people were absorbed by the emerging and fast expanding Zulu kingdom.⁸⁴ Zwide’s Ndwandwe had been responsible for the demise of the Mthethwa kingdom. Between 1817 and 1818, the powerful Ndwandwe kingdom found itself face-to-face with the emergent Zulu kingdom under Shaka. It was at the Battle of Mhlathuze River in 1818 that the Zulu forces defeated the mighty Ndwandwe kingdom of Zwide for the first time. According to Wright and Hamilton, “Overnight, the Zulu had become the predominant power in the Phongolo-Thukela region.”⁸⁵ The praise names of Shaka commend him and praise him for defeating Zwide more than any other power.⁸⁶ They confirm that Zwide was the most feared leader in the Phongolo-Mzimkhulu region at the time.

The Ndwandwe kingdom fragmented into smaller clusters under different military generals. Zwide and his loyal supporters migrated a short distance to the north-west over the Phongolo River. His generals such as Zwangendaba Hlatshwayo Jele, Soshangane Zikode Nxumalo, Nxaba Msane and Ngwana Maseko migrated into Mozambique.⁸⁷ Gerhard Liesegang writes:

The area adjacent to the Portuguese possessions of Lorenzo Marques, Inhambane, Sofala, and Rios de Sena was affected after July 1821 by wars and migrations which had started in South Africa few years before. At least four groups moved into the area under consideration; one of them, the Gaza under Soshangane, continued to remain in possession of a part of it after 1839, when the other

84 This was made possible partly by the fact that Shaka had grown up among the Mthethwa and was close to Dingiswayo.

85 Wright and Hamilton, *Traditions and Transformations*, 67.

86 Sibusiso Nyembezi, *Izibongo Zamakhosi* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1972).

87 Gerhard Liesegang, “Nguni Migrations Between Delagoa Bay and the Zambezi, 1821–1839.” *African Historical Studies*, 111(2), 1970, pp. 317–337.

three had left, dominating the area where, before 1820, more than fifty independent political units had existed.⁸⁸

Mzilikazi of the Khumalo, who was also related to Zwide (his maternal uncle), reacted to the defeat of the Ndwandwe by the Zulu by first shifting loyalty to Shaka briefly and later migrating into the highveld – until he became entangled in the Caledon Valley conflicts and wars of the 1820s–1830s.⁸⁹

The early history of Soshangane and his Gaza kingdom is inextricably entangled with that of Zwangendaba's Ngoni, Nxaba Msane's Ngoni and Ngwana Maseko's Ngoni. It would seem that after the defeat of Zwide in 1818 (or even before it, for some of them), these generals migrated separately into Mozambique. However, there is another revisionist view that internal tensions among ruling royal houses of the Ndwandwe were the main cause for Soshangane, Zwangendaba, Nxaba and Ngwana to migrate away from the main house under Zwide. There is also a strong idea that the choice of Delagoa Bay was for its lucrative and flourishing trade in ivory, cattle, slaves and other items.⁹⁰ T. J. Thompson suggested that:

Thus in the years 1815 to 1818, before any clash between Zwide and Shaka at all, Zwide's indunas, including Zwangendaba, and possibly Soshangane and Nxaba, were building up a heterogonous following drawn from many clans to the north, south and west of them.⁹¹

What brought them together was that they were all offshoots of the Ndwandwe kingdom. It would seem that these generals briefly lived together, not as one kingdom but neighbours, at Delagoa Bay before they turned on each other. The Ngoni of Ngwana Maseko and Nxaba Msane seemed to have initially migrated together before splitting into separate political entities. Zwangendaba Jele and Soshangane Nxumalo also seemed to have initially

⁸⁸ Liesegang, *Nguni Migrations*, 317.

⁸⁹ R. Kent Rasmussen, *Migrant Kingdom: Mzilikazi's Ndebele in South Africa* (London: Rex Collings, 1978).

⁹⁰ Wright, *Beyond the Zulu Aftermath*, 12.

⁹¹ J.T. Thompson, "The Origins, Migration and Settlement of the Northern Ngoni." *The Society of Malawi Journal*, 34(1), p. 10.

lived together near Lourenco Marques and the Limpopo Valley before they also turned on each other.⁹² Their conflicts initiated a new set of migrations into Swaziland, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zambia and Tanzania.

Soshangane Nxumalo was a high ranking royal official and military leader under Zwide of the Ndwandwe. He led the Gaza section of the Ndwandwe who were stationed in the Mkhuzi area, around the eNtshaneni Mountain, prior to 1818. The Gaza had always shared a border with the Thonga (Tsonga) across the Mkhuzi River. It is into the Tsonga country that Soshangane migrated after 1818, arriving in Mozambique in 1821. It would seem that the Ngoni of Zwangendaba had moved into Mozambique ahead of Soshangane and his people.⁹³

The intensification of building the Gaza kingdom covers the period 1838 to 1845. The nation building took the form of conquest and bringing the whole region between the Nkomati and Zambezi Rivers under Soshangane's control. The Gaza kingdom dominated mainly the Tsonga-speaking people while repelling the constant threats from the Portuguese who had stationed themselves at Delagoa Bay since the fifteenth century. The second form of threat came from the Zulu who, in 1828, attacked the Gaza but were defeated. The next challenge came from smaller communities such as those of Maluleke and others who consistently resisted Gaza power. Wright argued that what must be taken into account is that "the Gaza state did not grow in a political vacuum."⁹⁴

The Gaza kingdom was surrounded by threatening neighbours. To the west, was Zwide's reconstituting kingdom which eventually fell in 1826. To the east were the Zulu and Portuguese at Delagoa Bay and the Portuguese at Inhambane. To the south-west was the Ndebele kingdom of Mzilikazi, which was emerging as a powerful and threatening force. Also to the south-west were the Swazi and Pedi kingdoms, which could not be ignored.⁹⁵ To his ad-

⁹² Liesegang, *Nguni Migrations*, 320.

⁹³ Liesegang, *Nguni Migrations*.

⁹⁴ Wright, *Beyond the Zulu Aftermath*, 12.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

vantage was the fact that Zwide's kingdom collapsed completely in the 1830s and its remaining fragments joined the Gaza kingdom.

The Gaza kingdom covered part of Mozambique, South Africa and the eastern part of Zimbabwe. Soshangane died in 1858 but his Gaza kingdom continued until colonisation by the British in 1895.

Migrant Kingdoms: The Ngoni of Zwangendaba

Zwangendaba Hlatshwayo Jele was one of the leading figures in the Ndwandwe kingdom of Zwide. It is not clear when he migrated to Mozambique. By 1821, when Soshangane entered Mozambique, Zwangendaba was already living north of Lourenco Marques. Among the migrant kingdoms, Zwangendaba's journeys are the most intriguing as they cut across five countries: Mozambique, Swaziland and Zimbabwe in Southern Africa, Malawi and Zambia in Central Africa and Tanzania in East Africa. Thompson had this to say about the legacy of Zwangendaba:

It is ironic to consider that one of the proofs rightly cited for Zwangendaba's claim to greatness is that he successfully held together his followers in a migration of two thousand miles stretching over nearly 30 years; and yet the length of the migration, in both time and distance is one indication of the comparative military weakness of the group he led, for it was defeat, as much as intent which pushed them further and further north – at least until after they had crossed the Zambezi.⁹⁶

What is also intriguing is that the overall history of the Ngoni becomes a tale of three African regions: Southern Africa, Central Africa and Eastern Africa – each region with its dynamics and contexts that the Ngoni had to explore, navigate and negotiate to survive until his death in 1848. If we flash back to the original base of Zwangendaba in the Phongolo-Mzimkhulu region, it emerges that in the period 1815 to 1818, prior to the defeat of the Ndwandwe by the Zulu, he was already building a heterogeneous

⁹⁶ Thompson, *Origins, Migration and Settlement*, 13.

following consisting of the Ndwandwe, Qwabe, Ntungwa, Swazi and other elements.⁹⁷ This confirms the argument that the centre of the Ndwandwe kingdom was no longer holding long before its defeat by the Zulu. It would seem that the defeat of Zwide by Shaka in 1818 became simply an aggravating immediate cause for the fragmentation of the Ndwandwe kingdom and the migration of its fragments. In Mozambique, Zwangendaba stationed himself in an area between the Nkomati and Limpopo Rivers. By the time of the final defeat of Zwide by Shaka in 1826, Zwangendaba, like Soshangane, gained new followers from the Ndwandwe. According to Thompson, Soshangane, Nxaba, Ngwana and Zwangendaba has a brief but “uneasy-coexistence in the area around Delagoa Bay” and the outbreak of “armed conflicts were a matter of time”. These conflicts among Ngoni fragments provoked further migrations. For a recent more detailed but not definitive history of Zwangendaba and the Ngoni, the work of the late Zambian historian Yizenge A. Chondoka entitled *The Zwangendaba Mpezeni Ngoni: History and Migrations, Settlements and Culture* is handy.⁹⁸ Chondoka tried to cover the historiography, origins, migrations, settlements, culture, splits and dispersal after the death of Zwangendaba and colonial encounters right up to colonization of the Ngoni by the British, as well as how the Ngoni of Zambia in particular have revived their culture, specifically the annual *Inxwala* ceremony.

The long migration of the Ngoni first takes them to Mozambique. Because of conflicts among the fragments of the Ndwandwe kingdom (Soshangane, Nxaba, Ngwana and Zwangendaba), they migrated to Swaziland where they stayed for two years. In Swaziland, Zwangendaba was accompanied by his sister Nyamazana, who led one of the armed forces. According to Chondoka, two important events happened there. The first was that the Ngoni began to hold the first *Inxwala* ceremony which subsequently became a key politico-religious-cultural event throughout their existence as a community, until the time of colonisation. The second was that

⁹⁷ Thompson, *Origins, Migration and Settlement*, 10.

⁹⁸ Yizenge A. Chondoka, *The Zwangendaba Mpezeni Ngoni: History and Migrations, Settlements and Culture* (Lusaka: Academic Press, 2015).

Zwangendaba, annoyed by the first wife who was the centre of the “first house” from where the successor was to emerge, degraded the first house to the status of the “second” and upgraded the “second house” to the status of the “first”.⁹⁹ As Chondoka put it:

Zwangendaba’s brief stay in Swaziland is very significant in the history of the Zwangendaba Ngoni. This is because of one major event that took place in that country amongst the Zwangendaba Ngoni that affected their future inheritance to political power with regards to changes in the ranks of the houses of political inheritance that took place in Swaziland. What happened in Swaziland had severe long-term negative consequences on the political leadership of the Zwangendaba Ngoni after Zwangendaba’s death in 1848.¹⁰⁰

This decision of Zwangendaba’s came to haunt his nation after his death, and caused serious succession conflicts that split the nation after 1848. The switching of statuses of houses became a crack in the political edifice of the Ngoni polity. When they left Swaziland in 1827, they carried with them this political crack. At this time, Zwangendaba’s nation had further incorporated Thonga (Tsonga) and Swazi people. By 1828, the Zwangendaba group was in Zimbabwe, where they inflicted some defeats on the Rozvi kingdom. It was in Zimbabwe that Zwangendaba once again met Nxaba Msane and Ngwana Maseko and their Ngoni followers whom he had left in Mozambique. Wars ensued which forced Zwangendaba to cross the Zambezi River in 1835 into Malawi.¹⁰¹ While in Zimbabwe, the Ngoni of Zwangendaba experienced their first split as Nyamazana—a sister of the king and a general—remained in Zimbabwe

99 Chondoka posits that the cause was that the first wife (the first house) named Lompetu (senior/head wife) became negligent and did not cover the clay pot in which she carried the beer and this did not please the king and his senior political colleagues at a beer-drinking gathering (pp. 23–24). Another version is that the first wife was trying to bewitch the king, as he found hair in the beer. The third version is that the first wife was accused of promiscuity.

100 Chondoka, *The Zwangendaba Mpezeni Ngoni*, 21.

101 Elzear Ebner, *The History of the Wagoni and their Origin in South African Bantu Tribes* (Peramiho: Benedictine Publications, 1987).

and continued to inflict defeat on the Rozvi to the extent of killing the last Rozvi ruler.¹⁰² The Ngoni of Ngwana Maseko followed Zwangendaba’s group into Malawi, and after years of migrations and raiding even into Tanzania; they eventually settled west of Lake Malawi at Dowa in southern Malawi,¹⁰³ in Petauke, a territory under Chief Mkocho of the Nsenga people in the headwaters of Nyimba River. It was at Petauke that Ntutho (Mpezeni) was born in 1835. The Ngoni stayed in Petauke for four years. They were now composed of some Shona people taken from Zimbabwe and Nsenga people conquered and absorbed into the ranks of the Ngoni society.¹⁰⁴ By 1840, the Ngoni of Zwangendaba had left Petauke and by 1841 they were settled at Mawiri at Mzimba in northern Malawi. It was at Mawiri that Mbelwa was born—another claimant to the throne. By this time, those who were old when the Ngoni had left South Africa began to die in old age and were buried in Mawiri (Mbelwa’s name is said to be derived from the act of burying the dead (*ukumbela*)).¹⁰⁵ Based at Mawiri, the Ngoni of Zwangendaba would raid for cattle and people as far as Tanzania. In one of the raids into Tanzania, the Ngoni brought the beautiful long-horned red cattle and Zwangendaba fell in love with them to the extent that he instructed his nation to move further so as to be nearer to where these red cattle were kept.

The Ngoni left Mawiri in 1845 and migrated to Nachipeta in 1846, where they launched raids into Tanzania to get the red cattle. They did not stay long in Nachipeta, but moved on with the aim of reaching Mapupo (dream place) with plenty of red cattle. But along the way an omen happened as Zwangendaba, who was very old, fell from the ox he was riding. Because of this incident, the Ngoni decided to settle in Malindi, still near Nachipeta. In 1848, Zwangendaba died. His death sparked succession battles as the

102 Nyamazana, sometimes called Nyembezana, was eventually found by the Ndebele of Mzilikazi in Zimbabwe; she married Mzilikazi and became one of the queens of the Ndebele state.

103 Chondoka, *The Zwangendaba Mpezeni Ngoni*, 27.

104 Yesaka Mlonyeni Chimbambo, *My Ngoni of Nyasaland* (London: United Society for Christian Literature, nd).

105 Chondoka, *The Zwangendaba Mpezeni Ngoni*, 40–41.

“Swaziland factor”, as Chondoka called it, returned to haunt the Ngoni politics of succession.¹⁰⁶

The Splits and Further Migrations of the Ngoni

Many Ngoni members of society were not privy to the “Swaziland factor” and expected Ntutho/Mpezeni to succeed his father. It was only a few senior *izinduna* (chiefs) who were privy to the “Swaziland factor” of changing the statuses of the two houses, which act caused problems as ordinary people could not understand why the senior *izinduna* (chiefs) wanted to install Mbelwa from the “second house” when Ntutho/Mpezeni from the “first house” was there. Because Zwangendaba had many sons (Ntutho/Mpezeni, Mbelwa, Mthwalo, Mabilawo, Mperembe, Ndabazakhe, Mharule, Mpama, Chiputula, Njerenjere and Mhlatshana), succession politics became even more complicated and conflictual, to the extent that the Ngoni split into five factions/fragments.¹⁰⁷

The Ntutho/Mpezeni group migrated to the east and settled in Mwenzo before proceeding to Bembaland. Although Chondoka thinks that this “was the beginning of *Secondary Migrations* of the Zwangendaba Ngoni. The *Primary Migrations* from South Africa ended at Nachipeta where Zwangendaba died”, it seems that the life of the Ngoni continued to be that of mobility, settlement and migration – and splits were not uncommon. Mbelwa led the second faction to Iwanda in Fipaland. The third splinter group was the Gwangara led by Mgemezulu, which migrated to eastern Malawi where it fought with Ngwana Maseko’s Ngoni. The Gwangara-Ngoni finally settled in Songea in southern Tanzania near the border with Malawi. The fourth group was led by Chiwere Ndhlovu (a non-Ngoni/a Nsenga) who settled in Dowa among the Tumbuka. A fifth group led by Watuta migrated into central Tanzania. The Mpezeni-Ngoni group’s final settlement became Chipata in Lusaka, Zambia. The life of the Ngoni in Tanzania requires research as it links the events of the Southern African region with

106 Chondoka, *The Zwangendaba Mpezeni Ngoni*, 53.

107 Chondoka, *The Zwangendaba Mpezeni Ngoni*, p. 55.

those of East Africa.

Conclusions

If the conceptual challenges of the idea of history, philosophy of history, the problematic use of modernist vocabulary and concepts as well as those of chronology and periodisation, it is because this lecture deals with a small part of African history which is still struggling to attain intellectual and epistemic sovereignty. At another level, the author of this lecture is a modern professional historian produced by problematic modern Westernized universities where modernist vocabulary and concepts were imposed on him. However, he has began the painstaking journey of learning to unlearn in order to relearn (a complex decolonial historical journey).

In empirical terms, at the beginning of this lecture, the East African origin of the Ngoni-speaking people was introduced and briefly discussed. The migrations and dispersal of the Ngoni of Zwangendaba takes us back to Tanzania in East Africa, where two fragments of the Ngoni settled in Songea and Kahama in Tabora province. Tanzania takes the Ngoni into another terrain with its own dynamics including Arab-Swahili slave raiders. The emergency of the “Rugaruga” are at times linked to the raiding influence of the Ngoni and their military tradition. Patrick M. Redmond noted the enduring legacy of the Ngoni cultural identity in south-eastern Tanzania.¹⁰⁸ What is emerging clearly from all the examples of “migrant kingdoms” is that mobility, settlement and migration were part of life in pre-colonial south-east Africa and even other parts of Africa. There were no rigid boundaries that made mobility and migration impossible. In cases of conflicts, wars and violence, the defeated had options to migrate or be integrated into the ranks of the victorious societies. Mobility and migration made genocides impossible. Whenever a threat of violence was to occur, the option of migrating was always available. At another level, the migration of the Ngoni-speaking people, in the process conquer-

108 Patrick M. Redmond, “Some Results of Military Contacts Between the Ngoni and their Neighbours in Nineteenth Century South East Africa.” *Transafrican Journal of African History*, 5(1), 1976.

ing and incorporating other people into their ranks, demonstrates the flexibility of pre-colonial kingdoms and their identities. The mobilities, settlements and migrations linked the three regions of Southern Africa, Central Africa and Eastern Africa. Finally, what also emerged poignantly is that the causes of migrations of the Nguni in the nineteenth century and the consequent conflicts, wars and violence cannot be dissociated from the entanglements of pre-colonial African formations with rising mercantilism and proto-capitalism's imperialistic and colonial realities dating as far back as the fifteenth century.

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DISCUSSION:

Mfecane and Migration: A Critique of the Nguni Diaspora

Haydée Bangerezako

Abstract

Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni's history is summarized in "The Nguni Diaspora" through events and movements. Migrant kingdoms, presumably a result of the Mfecane, come to an end with the creation of colonial borders, and an Nguni-speaking diaspora is born. Ndlovu-Gatsheni offers a debate over the sources used in the writing of history through a literature review of secondary sources, and challenges us about pre-colonial and colonial chronology. The current article questions Ndlovu-Gatsheni's account on the basis of his focusing on leaders and neglecting the details of ordinary lives and of how the migratory groups were organized. This, as the current article points out, is the result of his relying on texts written by missionaries and colonial administrators rather than the testimonies of the people themselves. The current critique also questions the role of the Mfecane in causing the migrations.

In "The Nguni Diaspora", Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni produces a historical narrative that presents the pre-colonial social and political philosophy of the Nguni people in nineteenth-century Southern Africa through settlement, migration and mobility. The author questions whether it was the rise of the Zulu kingdom that caused conflicts between neighbouring kingdoms leading to migration (referred to as the Mfecane), or whether the cause was settler colonialism and a capitalist economy. Ndlovu-Gatsheni's approach is to present both sides of the debate and to concur with both.

The paper then traces the movements of leaders (as historical actors) and their followers, who leave the Phongolo-Mzimkhulu region – described as an epicentre of violence – for Delagoa Bay before moving northwards as far as East Africa. This commentary highlights the notion of decolonising history, first by paying close attention to the sources used to study the past. Ndlovu-Gatsheni is interested in finding the roots of the origin of the term "Mfecane", using sources previously ignored in the writing of South African history. The paper tells us little about social, economic or political organisation and systems: the history is about war and migration.

On Sources: The Search for the Origins of the Mfecane

Yusuf Bala Usman writes that to reconstruct history requires the assessment and interpretation of the information from primary and other sources. This is essential for an understanding of the historical process. Sources should not only be assessed for their reliability and accuracy but also for their conceptual framework and world outlook.¹ In writing African history, the writings of missionaries, explorers and colonial administrators have been privileged over oral and written sources by Africans. Their frame of reference has remained unquestioned while oral sources continue to be overlooked. In *Oral Tradition as History*, Jan Vansina wrote that, following a stringent evaluation, oral traditions can be valid historical sources.² This approach to oral sources has been criticized as based on a Western episteme.³ Usman argued that written sources should be as strictly evaluated as oral sources as they can carry the categories and assumptions of imperialism.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, using secondary sources, joins this debate by bringing new arguments to the historical period of the nineteenth century that take into account "native" voices and texts in the Mfecane debate. His search for the origin of the word Mfecane limits his interaction with insights brought by historians reflecting on early African writing. His intervention weighs in in a debate between anti-Mfecane and pro-Mfecane historians, to show that neither take African perspectives into consideration. Both

pro- and anti-Mfecane historians have been slated as engaged in a whites-only debate⁴ that has largely overlooked sources such as African oral testimonies⁵ and ignored African writers while privileging colonial sources produced by missionaries, traders and European administrators.

At the heart of the Mfecane controversy is the following question: What is the cause of violence and migration in the Phongolo-Mzimkhulu region? Ndlovu-Gatsheni presents the military rise of the Zulu kingdom as the cause, but what should also be considered as part of the turmoil are the Griquas' search for slaves, the Boers' search for land, the roles of the British and the Portuguese. John D. Omer-Cooper saw the Mfecane as illustrating state formation and nation making in Southern Africa and involving several leaders such as Mzilikazi of the amaNdebele, Zwangendaba of the amaNgoni, Soshangane of the amaShangane and other non-Nguni leaders such as Sebetwane of the Makololo. This is contrasted with the argument of Julian Cobbing, who objects to the term Mfecane and refers to it as an alibi by European forces – and, later, apartheid apologists – to hide their later exploitation and land grab. The violence and migration is not due to the Zulu kingdom, but rather to external pressures from the slave trade in Delagoa Bay, and Cape labour demands. For Cobbing, this is a Zulucentric and Afrocentricist argument which lacks empirical evidence, and does not rely upon any research into early Zulu history or neighbouring African societies before 1830.⁶ The Zulu kingdom, according to Cobbing, was never the “primary stimulus of forced migration”; it was, rather, the European expansionist activities of the Boers, the British, the Portuguese and the Griqua that produced reactive states. Cobbing rejects the approach that represents Shaka Zulu as a “savage despot” who provoked “black-on-black destruction” with Europeans as the only ones who could restore peace.⁷ He denies Africans any autonomous roles as actors, overlooking the historical consciousness of those Africans who were in contact with Europeans.⁸ Carolyn Hamilton opposes Cobbing for separating white

8 Wright, *Beyond the Concept*, 113.

and black histories and replacing Shaka as the cause of violence with the slave trade, thus enlarging European activities and overlooking Africans.⁹ What is striking is that Ndlovu-Gatsheni ties together the Zulu and European expansions to explain the flight of smaller polities and migrant kingdoms. Ndlovu-Gatsheni shows the connection between the two sides of the debate. African actors and European actors both produce the Mfecane: the pressure of European encirclement and the four emerging great powers – the Nguni, the Zulu, the Mthetwa and the Ndwane – at war with each other in the Phongolo-Mzimkhulu region.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni is interested in the origin of the word Mfecane as he reviews Nomhlanga Mkhize's article “In Search of Native Dissidence: R.T. Kawa's Mfecane Historiography in *Imbali LamaMfengu* (1929)”. He acknowledges the insights brought by Mkhize – that both the anti-Mfecane and pro-Mfecane schools overlooked African writers. Mfecane historians have failed to include African perspectives and sources, and if the challenge is the language barrier, that should also be acknowledged.¹⁰ Oral histories by African writers were viewed as tainted by missionary narratives, and church narratives were preferred by historians.¹¹ Mkhize's review of Kawa is most interesting. She writes that many early African writers were informants to missionaries, whose writings were used by historians. The 1929 Xhosa text by the missionary-educated Richard Taiton Kawa *Ibali lamaMfengu*, the history of the amaMfengu, illustrates one of the accounts written by African writers as a critique of colonial writing and historiography. Because Kawa, an informant to missionary writer Joseph White-side, wrote in isiXhosa, his work was ignored by the South African academic historiography. One of Kawa's interests was to rectify the colonial historiography by privileging oral history forms that included clan genealogy, *iziduko* or clan histories and praises, and historical accounts called *imbali* in isiXhosa. While historians like Alan Webster and John Wright argue that the amaMfengu were

9 Hamilton, *The Character and Objects*, 39.

10 Mkhize, *In Search of Native Dissidence*, 105.

11 Mkhize, *In Search of Native Dissidence*, 105.

locals and not refugees from the Phongolo-Mzimkhulu region, Kawa shows that they moved to the Eastern Cape fleeing not King Shaka but the Mthimkhulu-Matiwane clash in the same region. The amaMfengu, part of the Mbo kingdom, fled because of conflict in the Phongolo-Mzimkhulu region to live under King Hintsa of the Gcaleka kingdom in the Eastern Cape. The insight in this instance, is that Kawa was able to locate where the amaMfengu came from, and that they were not fleeing the violence perpetrated by Shaka and the Zulu kingdom but the conflict between the Mthimkhulu and Matiwane kingdoms.¹²

While Ndlovu-Gatsheni shows us what insights African early writers can bring to the debate, this is not as important for him as finding the root meaning of Mfecane; he notes for instance that the account of William Gqoba writing in an isiXhosa newspaper in 1887 about nations struggling to fight off the Mfecane does not bring a different meaning to the word that that of the white historians.¹³ Ndlovu-Gatsheni is interested in the origin of Mfecane, yet a concept can come to have a different genealogy, one not necessarily connected to its original meaning.¹⁴ His concern is why Mfecane, as “a time of trouble” is only used to refer to violent events in the Phongolo-Mzimkhulu region and not the arrival of white settlers. For Ndlovu-Gatsheni, colonial encounters are integral to an understanding of what is happening in the kingdoms, they are interconnected. He raises a debate about periodisation: how pre-colonial was pre-colonial Africa when imperial and colonial forces were present? This is important as it brings attention to the violent period of colonial conquest which is usually ignored when the pre-colonial and the colonial are mentioned.

12 Mkhize, *In Search of Native Dissidence*, 98–99.

13 Mkhize, *In Search of Native Dissidence*, 106.

14 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson; trans. Carol Diethe (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

Political Formations

The author identifies four modes of social and political organization in the pre-colonial: the first is mobility (“voluntary and gradual but frequent movements”) and migration (“forced fast-paced movements”). Second is the “fluidity and plurality of identities”, similar to assimilation in other African kingdoms but, in the colonial period, becoming the division of the population according to tribe. The third is about self-constitution, nation and belonging; how the self is constituted through others (*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*) at the root of a communal humanist ideology.

As in kingdoms in East Africa, wealth in people was central to state formation, but how practices emerged, is not discussed by Ndlovu-Gatsheni. Rather, he represents a static timeless society with the same philosophy in the entire region, without much differentiation. Thus the environment, and social, economic and political practices are not discussed, but a few new institutions such as the *inxwala* and *amabutho* are mentioned. The Mfecane then becomes the main form of historical movement and change. What the article shows is that war and conflict among kingdoms, and the mercantile expansion and colonial presence in the region, were among the causes of change in society – the solution being migration (although what type of settlement, mobility or migration is not explained).

Ndlovu-Gatsheni writes that three options were faced by smaller polities in the 1810s and 1820s, before the rise of the Zulu kingdom: to grow and join with other small polities; to be absorbed by bigger polities; or to abandon territory and migrate. Such a decision had to be made because of European encirclement and the emergence of the great powers in the Phongolo-Mzimkhulu region, leading to their migration from the coast to the interior. An example is the break-up of Zwide’s Ndwande kingdom due to internal tensions (which we are not told about) that led to defeat by Shaka in 1818. Following their defeat by the Zulu, Zwangendaba Hlatshwayo Jele, Soshangane Zikode Nxumalo, Nxaba Msane and Ngwane Maseko moved with their clans and followers to Delagoa Bay.

We learn little about the relationships within and between the forming polities, how power is contested, how rivalries are resolved – or not resolved – other than through migration. Historical agents are individual persons, yet little is said about the institutions of each kingdom. The formation of kingdoms, and the internal tensions within kingdoms, are not explained.

War is the motor of society, which transforms society and leads to migration – a forced exit. The one political institution that is described is the institution of *amabutho* that gives Shaka Zulu the upper hand and creates a hierarchical structure. This institution gave more power to the leader against clans and lineages. The *amabutho* were used to fight and subordinate conquered communities, and obtain tribute from them. Differentiation was made between the populace of common origins and newly subjected communities, which did not have access to privileges but had to pay tribute.

The other political institution that forms part of Ndlovu-Gatsheni's argument for the diaspora is the institution of the first fruit ceremony in Zambia, the annual *inxwala* ceremony, revived by Zwangendaba. This ceremony would arguably not have been new, as it was widespread in the region and performed in many kingdoms in East Africa, and in Southern Africa. *Umuganuro*, as it is referred to, is widespread in today's eastern DRC, Rwanda and Burundi, and Buha in Tanzania, as the annual grain or first fruits festival for the renewal of kingship, connecting the sorghum and millet cereal and showing the union between mediumship and royalty, and the population and kingship.¹⁵ It marked the continuation of fecundity and fertility, a renegotiation of social relations and hierarchy at the conclusion of one agricultural year, involving kings, ritualists, chiefs and commoners. One could argue that such a political institution offers solutions to the problems in society.¹⁶

15 Georges Smets Papers Dossier F, 1935; Ndayishinguje, "Le rôle des Bashingantahe," p.31.

16 Abdullahi Smith, "Some Considerations Relating to the Formation of States in Hausaland," in *A Little New Light: Selected Historical Writings of Abdullahi Smith*. (Zaria: Abdullahi Smith Centre for Historical Research, 1987).

Interestingly, the journey north from southern Africa is described as a diaspora where customs and rites such as the *inxwala* are preserved, whereas in East Africa such an institution existed already. Less is said about the local customs and rites in those regions that were embraced by the newcomers.

The limitations of the Mfecane and migration discourses is that they hide the changes and developments in a state. What happens before or after the conflict is not clear and the polities are presented as always at war, hence the constant movement of the population. What specifically happens during the war or the migration and how it changes the political, social and economic organisation of polities is left out. There are few inner connections or inter-relationships between events to constitute a historical process.¹⁷ More challenging is that less is known about the decision(s) to go to war, to move, or to settle. Premesh Lalu argues that in the killing of Hintsá, king of the amaXhosa, colonial sources describe everything around the event except the event itself.¹⁸ Similarly, in Ndlovu-Gatsheni's article we move from sequence to sequence, attempting to cover everything but the event itself, which is neither described, nor explained. War and migration are repeatedly mentioned, but without details.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni draws major outlines of social and political organisation in the pre-colonial, but we do not know how such dynamics actually play out in the polities described. He refers to Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu, who highlight the powerful and authoritative roles of African women which were hidden by "male cultural brokers, intellectuals, and ideologues who controlled the production of knowledge". Interestingly it is the native leaders who hide women's powerful role and accuse the missionaries, traders or other Europeans of doing so, or allege a collaboration between Europeans and Africans to sideline women. Ndlovu-Gatsheni is

17 Yusuf Bala Usman describes the need for historical reconstruction to show the connection between events in "The Assessment of Primary Sources: Heinrich Barth in Katsina."

18 Premesh Lalu, *The Deaths of Hintsá: Postapartheid South Africa and the Shape of Recurring Pasts*, (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2009).

interested in the history of great men and women. Through oral traditions and vernacular literature notes, he notes women playing powerful roles – such as Nyamazana, sister of Zwangendaba, who leads one of the troops in Swaziland and who defeats the Rozvi and their ruler in Zimbabwe. When women are discussed in pre-colonial political history they are powerful women such as queens. Yet, this does not destabilize masculine forms of authority. It is important to understand the particularities of those societies in terms of gender relations; was there a flexible gender system in the pre-colonial where biological gender did not connect to ideological gender?¹⁹ Or was there a rigid male and female dichotomy?

Ndlovu-Gatsheni connects the violence involving mercantilism and the slave industry to the genocidal violence in the Cape against the San, Khoi and Xhosa, led by the Dutch and the British, including the Dutch East India Company whose goal was to “monopolize trade, conquer and colonize territory, and enslave non-European people”.²⁰ Genocide becomes a possibility with the colonising of territories, writes Ndlovu-Gatsheni; without national borders (as came with the modern colonial state) genocide was impossible in the pre-colonial due to the possibility of escaping the violence and because people were considered an asset. This argument of Ndlovu-Gatsheni’s is problematic because it reduces African history to mobility and because it is misplaced to use a term (genocide) for events occurring in the twentieth century and within nation states and to then project onto the pre-colonial among kingdoms and other polities. The term genocide is displaced in this argument and does not fit in the pre-colonial, because it is a product of the modern state.

19 Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (London, Zed Books, 1987); Oyeronke Oyewùmi, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

20 Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *The Nguni Diaspora*, 12.

What Constitutes a Diaspora?

Diaspora is introduced as a homeland and centre, in contrast to Ndlovu-Gatsheni’s pre-colonial life of mobility, settlement and migration. The odyssey of the Zwangendaba group and descendants, moving from southern to eastern Africa, is explained through the settlement, mobility and migration trope. If one follows the author’s argument, a diaspora cannot exist, owing to the mobility and fluidity of identities.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni’s main argument is about a Nguni diaspora that emerges from a group’s flight from conflicts in the KwaZulu-Natal region, one which could be described as a conquest diaspora. As Zwangendaba’s groups move northwards they absorb the population met along the way. If identities in pre-colonial Africa are flexible, fluid and plural, why allude to “refugees” (here, Ndlovu-Gatsheni refers to the work of Mkhize), migrants and a new diaspora? In the argument of a plural community the concept of a diaspora is a misnomer. What do we gain by considering a linguistic group such as the Ngoni a diaspora? What is this diaspora’s consciousness?²¹ What does the word “diaspora” help us to understand about the continuing link between Southern and Central Africa? If this is about the similarity of practices, “diaspora” is not needed.

The context Ndlovu-Gatsheni presents, the threat of slave trade, forced labour or defeat by another kingdom, is a population fleeing persecution. At the same time, he shows a population with agency, able to negotiate – for example the amaMfengu who allied themselves first with the Xhosa and then the British. The victim narrative does not quite fit the groups in the Phongolo-Mzimkhulu region.

By neither informing us about the internal political institutions or about interactions with the new population where they settled, Ndlovu-Gatsheni reproduces a representation of the African state as “an ever-dynamic leadership and a never-changing community”.²² This is connected to a racial and colonial history

21 Gilroy, Paul. “Diaspora,” *Paragraph*, Vol. 17, No. 3, 1994. pp. 207–212.

22 Mahmood Mamdani. *Saviors and Survivors* (New York: Crown Publishing, 2010),

that describes state formation by the Hamitic hypothesis whereby migrations, invasions and conquests were led by a settler race, in contrast with a population that remains static, traditional and tribal: the native race. The Hamitic theorists accepts only “one type of immigration and one effect”.²³ Organized African societies were the product of migrant races or “héros civilisateur”,²⁴ as explorers, missionaries and colonial administrators would argue, because African societies were depicted as barbaric. Ndlovu-Gatsheni produces a historical narrative that does not include the race aspect but presents the Nguni leaders as a conquering group, in the rest of Southern and East Africa, who are innovators, even performing the *inxwala* ceremony as they defeat and incorporate the population, parallel to the imagined settler migrant races.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni tells us that the Ngoni would move from Zimbabwe to Tanzania to raid cattle. The text focusses on Zwangendaba who died in 1848 after successfully crossing from Southern to East Africa, with defeat as the reason for the move: 20 years of Zwangendaba forces moving to East Africa resulting in an Nguni diaspora which incorporates other populations such as the Tsonga and Swazi people under the Ndwandwe kingdom, and is described as “one of the most spectacular odysseys in contemporary African history”.²⁵ The people constituting the Ngoni population are mostly made up of the locals absorbed by the Zwangendaba groups. Ndlovu-Gatsheni does not provide us, though, with evidence for any longing for a homeland, memories, myths, or a continuing relationship to the homeland. What is the relationship with the homeland? Is it only a linguistic one? The author might have referred to Lupenga Mphande’s “Ngoni Praise poetry and the Nguni Diaspora” where the longing for home is expressed through *izibongo*, praise poetry by Zwangendaba’s Ngoni people

p. 133.

23 Smith, *Some Considerations*, 70.

24 Smith, *Some Considerations*.

25 Lupenga Mphande, “Ngoni praise poetry and the Nguni diaspora,” *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 24, No. 4, Special Issue in Memory of Josaphat Bekunuru Kubayanda (Winter, 1993), pp. 99–122, 105

in northern Malawi. The *izibongo* captured by the anthropologist Margaret Read during the Second World War praises the past glories of the Ngoni, and expresses a longing for the “Swazi home”, and their dreams of glory after crossing the Zambezi. The praise poetry describes the brutality of war and exhaustion after a journey. Mphande highlights that the struggle at the root of migration was land, cattle and political control, and that as they travelled the Ngoni acquired cattle and territories. Their material comfort was based on plundering their neighbours.²⁶ Mphande furthermore describes how the majority of Ngoni followers, as they grew in numbers, became non-Ngoni. Would they then still be referred to as an Nguni diaspora? This paper suggests otherwise. Does a diaspora continue to live forever? When does it die? According to Ali Mazrui, either when the exile population dies or when they identify with their hosts or their conquerors, or lose nostalgia for home.²⁷

Ndlovu-Gatsheni concurs that more research is needed to learn about the life of the Ngoni in East Africa.²⁸ He raises the diaspora at the end of the pre-colonial philosophy and colonial presence and changes, with the emergence of colonial borders and freezing of identities. Otherwise, if we are to believe Ndlovu-Gatsheni’s argument, there cannot be a diasporic community in the pre-colonial.

Conclusion

Ndlovu-Gatsheni could have mobilized the categories of land use or political systems, for example, or closely studied specific wars to describe the early nineteenth century. Another approach is to move away from “essentialist identity politics” which have been central to historical studies, but to study instead institutions, practices, forms of governmentality, histories of concepts and systems

26 Mphande, *Ngoni Praise Poetry*, 117, 119.

27 Ali Mazrui in Mphande, *Ngoni Praise Poetry*, 102.

28 Interestingly, John Iliffe in *Tanganyika under German rule*, argues that the Hehe state in today’s southern Tanzania was formed as a result of the military revolution brought forth in the area by the Ngoni people in the 1940s, who brought their regimental system which refers to *amabutho* and the stabbing spear.

of knowledge.²⁹ The concepts of mobility-migration-settlement, as used in the article, hide what occurred because they are used in a general manner, without specifics. Such concepts do not unpack or explain how internal and external challenges are faced or what internal solutions were offered by kingdoms besides mobility or migrations. What political systems developed out of the particular historical experience of the clashes and European encirclement? What forms of spiritual and healing practices were used within the polities?

Ndlovu-Gatsheni argues about a decolonial turn, stopping “epistemicide”. One such approach is to decolonize African history and to study all sources extensively, not privileging colonial sources. Mkhize, for example, critically assesses the privilege of European sources such as the work of missionaries and explorers, whereas there was no interest in the publications of Africans who wrote about their own societies and also played the role of “native informant” to the Europeans. Their texts were not translated into English either. Ndlovu-Gatsheni presents all the debates, but does not move beyond their assumptions and a history focussed on movement to allow us to understand the historical process of the region. An interest in institutions, practices, forms of governmentality, histories of concepts, systems of knowledge, instead of the identity politics³⁰ of the Nguni and their “eternal” political philosophy would have best suited the author.

Decolonization of history should seek to move beyond colonial and postcolonial historiography and rethink the pre-colonial by finding out which pre-colonial and colonial narratives were silenced.³¹ The pre-colonial is an important period that requires close attention to sources, finding unconventional sources that have been overlooked, such as vernacular texts and oral literature. History should be decolonized by getting the historical question right, questioning the relationship between history and historiography, and

²⁹ Lalu, *The Deaths of Hintsa*, p. 39

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Haydee Bangerezako, *Indirect Writing and the production of History in Burundi: Official History and Woman as Mwami*, PhD dissertation 2017.

asking how power operates in the production of certain narratives while silencing others.³² Decolonising history allows us to study what narratives were produced and are reproduced today. In Ndlovu-Gatsheni’s article the question that the author sets out to answer is what the debates are about the causes and the directions of the Nguni migration. We learn less about political changes within kingdoms, less about the internal dynamics and external dynamics of the polities and how they were altered. What new political formations emerged following the movement northwards? What were the interactions between the Ngoni and the local population?

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The Ndebele Kingdom of Mzilikazi Khumalo

Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni

Abstract

This article provides a broad overview of the history of the Ndebele of Mzilikazi KaMashobana Khumalo who originated in South Africa and eventually settled in Zimbabwe. Six complex and overlapping phases are discussed covering origin and emergence, migration and nation building, settlement and maturation, resistance against colonial encroachments and colonial conquest, colonialism and Ndebele subjecthood, postcolonial dispensation of persecution (ethnic cleansing) and the current politics of marginalization and attempts to revive the kingship. Throughout, the analysis of complex Ndebele history, issues of power articulation, deployment of violence, consent building, social ordering, national identity formation, state formation, nation building, religious beliefs, cultural/colonial encounters and survival politics are examined and highlighted, to avoid simplistic empiricism.

Introduction

The challenges of using modernist conceptual vocabulary and concepts trans-historically to make political sense of pre-colonial African formations such as the Ndebele of Mzilikazi Khumalo continues to haunt us as modern historians. Vernacularization does not help much. Re-writing the history of leaders such as Mzilikazi Khumalo and their people – who have been subjected to the colonial "othering" narratives of bloodthirsty savages and primitive people – inevitably invites us as African historians to engage in re-humanisation history writing. The danger which looms large in

the re-writing and re-humanising process is to end up re-producing them as modern people. This danger is compounded by the modernist framings and the deployment of such modern concepts as nations, nation building, citizenship, peasants and slaves – which carry the entire baggage of Euromodernity. Unwittingly, most of what appears as the history of pre-colonial formations is a masked history of the present, refracted and flashed backwards into the past. To resort to modern African nationalist vocabulary and concepts as the historian John Omer-Cooper did in 1966 in his work *The Zulu Aftermath: A Nineteenth Century Revolution in Bantu Africa* does not help African historians to escape the modernist cul-de-sac. Perhaps we must as historians simply accept that all histories are histories of the present and accept the consequences. Should we not perhaps accept the idea of transmodernity and possibilities of “African modernities” of the nineteenth century?

The current article takes into account this modernist baggage in the writing of African history but does not claim to have successfully transcended it. Historically speaking, the Ndebele of Mzilikazi KaMashobana Khumalo are a people of two modern spaces – South Africa and Zimbabwe – if one takes into account their past and present. Owing to the circumstances of the nineteenth century, the Ndebele-speaking people’s history now straddles what is called South Africa and Zimbabwe simultaneously. For analytical purposes, and for easy understanding of Ndebele history, it is vital to present it according to its distinct but overlapping chronological unfolding, from the nineteenth century to the present. Seven phases are discernible. The first phase is the origin and emergence of the Khumalo political formation up to the Mfecane. The second phase is that of migrations and nation building (1824–1837) south of the Limpopo River (in South Africa). The third is migration to Zimbabwe (1838–1842). The fourth phase is that of settlement and the maturation of the Ndebele state (1842–1893) in the south-western part of the Zimbabwean plateau (present day Matabeleland provinces and part of the present day Midlands province). The fifth phase is that of resistance against

colonial encroachments and colonial conquest (1893–1898). The sixth phase is that of colonialism and Ndebele subjecthood (1898–1980). The seventh phase is that of postcolonial dispensation (1980 to the present), characterized by the ethnic cleansing of the 1980s as well as the politics of marginalization and attempts to revive the kingship and low-key and nascent secession politics. This article is concerned mainly with phases one to five.

Let us begin with clarification of naming. The term “Ndebele” refers to two Nguni groups in Southern African history: to the followers of and a nation built by Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo. The nucleus of the Ndebele of Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo, namely the Khumalo clan, originated in present-day KwaZulu-Natal. The group snowballed into a heterogeneous nation through the conquest, incorporation and assimilation of both Nguni and non-Nguni groups during its migration and eventual settlements in the interior of South Africa (1823–1837) before crossing the Limpopo River and settling on the south-western part of what is today called Matabeleland in Zimbabwe. The term also refers to another Nguni group that migrated to what is today known as the province of Mpumalanga in South Africa earlier than the Ndebele of Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo, and led by Ndzudza and Manala (the Ndebele of Ndzudza and Manala).¹

While the Ndebele of Ndzudza and Manala claimed that they inherited the name from one of their founding fathers (Mntungwa KaNdebele), the Ndebele of Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo claimed to have derived the name from the Sotho-Tswana-speak-

1 The Ndebele of Mpumalanga Province of South Africa are also known as two groups – “Southern” and “Northern” Ndebele. For more details see the following works: P. Delius, “The Ndzudza Ndebele: Indenture and the Making of Ethnic Identity, 1883–191,” in *Holding Their Ground: Class, Locality and Culture in 19th and 20th Century South Africa* ed. P. Bonner, I. Hofmeyer and T. Lodge. (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 1989), 228–349; D. James, “A Question of Ethnicity: Ndzudza Ndebele of Lebowa Village.” *Journal of South African Studies*, 16, 1, 1990, 48–66; S. P. Lekgoathi, “Chiefs, Migrants and Northern Ndebele Ethnicity in the Context of Surrounding Homeland Politics.” *African Studies*, 62, 1, 2003, 53–77; and S. Ndlovu, “Ethnic Identity in Post-Apartheid South Africa: A Case Study of Southern Ndebele Identity on the KwaMhlanga Region in Mpumalanga Province.” (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 2007).

ing people who described the violent strangers who invaded their interior territories from the coast variously as “Ngoni” or “Matebele”.² “Ndebele” then becomes an “Ngunisation” of the term “Matebele”. Beyond the common name, there are four factors that linked the histories of the Ndebele of Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo and those of Ndzudza and Manala. The first is that both were of Nguni origin; the second is that they encountered each other and fought each other during a period that is known as the Mfecane in Southern African history.³ The third is that some of Ndzudza and Manala’s Ndebele were incorporated into Mzilikazi KaMatshobane’s Ndebele and they migrated with him across the Limpopo River to form part of the new settled Ndebele kingdom in present-day Zimbabwe. The fourth linkage was the common language known as isiNdebele, which is an Nguni dialect. While the language of Ndzudza and Manala’s Ndebele became largely influenced by Sotho-Tswana, that of the Ndebele of Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo was influenced by a combination of Sotho-Tswana as well as the Rozvi-Kalanga languages of the people they conquered and incorporated, both north and south of the Limpopo River. But both groups succeeded to a large extent in retaining their original Nguni language, and even imposed it

2 It would seem the term “Ngoni” was an attempt to say “Nguni”. “Matabele” is said to be a reference to *tebele*, the shield that the Nguni migrants carried as part of their war arsenal. For discussion on the terms used to describe the Nguni groups that migrated from the coast into the interior see W F. Lye, “The Ndebele Kingdom South of the Limpopo River,” *Journal of African History*, x, i, 1969, 87–104; R.K. Rasmussen, *Migrant Kingdom: Mzilikazi’s Ndebele in South Africa* (London: Rex Collings, 1978); and N. Etherington, *The Great Treks: The Transformation of Southern Africa 1815–1854* (London: Longman, 2001).

3 The term “Mfecane” is a controversial term whose linguistic origin is not clear; it was used to describe a time of intensified conflict and violence that began in the coastal areas occupied by Nguni-speaking political formations and spread into the interior where it was rendered as *difaqane*/*lifaqane* among the Sotho-Tswana speaking people. E.A. Walker, *History of South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1928) is said to be the first historian to use the term “Mfecane”. For a detailed discussion of the key debates on the *mfecane* including its rejection see J. Cobbing, “The Mfecane as Alibi: Thoughts on Dithakong and Mbolopo,” *Journal of African History*, 29, 1988, 487–519; see also *The Mfecane Aftermath: Reconstructive Debates in Southern Africa* ed. C. Hamilton (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 1995).

on those they conquered, those who voluntarily joined them, and those who were incorporated and assimilated.

This article is focused on the formation, migration, settlements and memory of the Ndebele of Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo in particular. Like other fragments of the nineteenth-century Nguni diaspora, the descendants of Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo and those he incorporated into the Ndebele nation are today exhibiting a complex state of being “rootless” and “restless”. This state of being produces complex forms of consciousness and political behaviour, including a combination of complaints of being unwanted and being marginalized within Zimbabwe, seeking to secede and restore the Ndebele kingdom, constant harking back culturally to South Africa as their original home, and holding annual Mzilikazi Day celebrations. There are even efforts in Matebeleland to revive the Khumalo monarchy within a Zimbabwean republican state, which has no clear constitutional provision for this. Collins Bulelani Lobengula Khumalo, a South African citizen who even served in the South African Defence Force (SADF) but is genealogically part of the family of King Lobengula KaMzilikazi Khumalo, the last pre-colonial Ndebele leader who was deposed violently from power by colonial forces, has been identified as the legitimate heir to the Ndebele monarchy.⁴ All this is part of how history and memory among “diasporized” groups combine to throw up particular forms of politics of memory and restoration.

4 How the descendants of King Lobengula Mzilikazi Khumalo ended up in South Africa was part of a colonial conspiracy to destroy the Khumalo royal house. The conspiracy was developed by the arch imperialist Cecil John Rhodes and entailed extracting all the legitimate potential successors to King Lobengula Mzilikazi Khumalo from the centre of the Ndebele society and exiling them to South Africa. Thus, all the direct descendants of King Lobengula Mzilikazi Khumalo became the direct targets of this conspiracy. Collins Bulelani Lobengula Khumalo is a direct descendant of those children of King Lobengula Mzilikazi Khumalo who were exiled to South Africa soon after the defeat of the Ndebele in the Anglo-Ndebele War of 1893 and the Ndebele Uprising/ Umvukela of 1896.

The Origins and Emergence of the Ndebele of Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo

The original nucleus of the Ndebele of Mzilikazi is a Khumalo lineage or clan that was located between the sources of Mkhuze River and Ngome Forests in Northern Natal. Three leaders of the Khumalo clans, Magugu, Matshobana and Ndoda, are identified in existing historical records. Collectively, these Khumalo leaders belonged to the amaNtungwa Ka Mbulazi – the founder ancestor.⁵ Norman Etherington highlighted how, geopolitically, these small Khumalo clans' chieftaincies were "sandwiched between the Ndwandwe and Zulu spheres of influence at the time Shaka came to power".⁶ William F. Lye articulated the location, origins and rise to power of Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo this way:

Mzilikazi belonged to the Northern Khumalo, a small chiefdom of the Northern Nguni. His branch originated in the segmentation of the Khumalo in the generation of his father, Mashobana. Mashobana lived near other Khumalo chiefdoms, between EsiKwebezi, a tributary of the Black Mfolozi, and the Mkhuze. This was when Zwide and Dingiswayo were contending for mastery. A neighbouring Khumalo chief, Donda, a vassal of Dingiswayo, aided Shaka to escape a trap by Zwide, when Zwide attacked and killed Dingiswayo in 1818. Therefore, Zwide killed Donda, and also killed Mashobana, his son-in-law. Zwide then placed Mzilikazi, his grandson, over the Khumalo, subject to himself.⁷

What perhaps needs to be understood beyond the events of 1818 is how the Northern Nguni political formations were organized in

5 A.M. Nkala, *AbeThwakazi* (Johannesburg: Arnold Mayibongwe Nkala, 2017) built this work on oral traditions and discovered that there were many leaders who were called "Mntungwa": Mntungwa KaNdlovu who is linked with the Maseko people; Mntungwa (Mrungwa) KaNdebele who is the ancestor of Mabhena, Mahlangu, and Sikhosana people of Mpumalanga and Mntungwa KaMbulazi who is the progenitor of the Mabaso and Khumalo people.

6 Etherington, *The Great Treks*, 159.

7 Lye, *The Ndebele Kingdom*, 87; see also A. T. Bryant, *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal* (London, 1929), pp. 167–173; and "Mziki" A.A. Campbell, "Mlimo: The Rise and Fall of the Matabele" (Pietermaritzburg, 1926), p. 72.

general prior to the rise of Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo to power and prior to the Mfecane. Such an analysis enables a deeper appreciation of the origins of the Ndebele of Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo. J. B. Peires provided a snapshot analysis of Nguni histories prior to the rise to power of King Shaka KaSenzangakhona and the outbreak of the Mfecane. He underscored that prior to the Mfecane, most of the Northern Nguni political formations were not yet organized into powerful centralized kingdoms under one dominant and powerful *inkosi* (king). He highlighted how kinship ideology, clan intimacies and blood solidarities kept people together under various clan/lineage heads and chiefs.⁸

The history of the Khumalo clans that formed the nucleus of the Ndebele political formation reflected what R. Kent Rasmussen described as "the traditional northern Nguni practice of political fission with its resultant dispersion of peoples".⁹ This practice explains why Lye posited that "His [Mzilikazi's] branch originated in the segmentation of the Khumalo in the generation of his father, Mashobana."¹⁰ If we take these features of Northern Nguni formations seriously, it is, therefore, not surprising that when the senior clan-leader Magugu displayed signs of being too powerful and dictatorial, Matshobana and Ndoda KaSiziba KaKhumalo¹¹ broke away from him and founded splinter clans which, however, remained linked together by blood solidarities. Accusations of witchcraft, succession disputes and conflicts over resources often contributed to the splitting of clans, lineages and chieftaincies.¹² Elizabeth A. Eldredge posited that the emergence of the famous kingdoms of Southern Africa "was the culmination of centuries

8 J. B. Peires, "Introduction." In *Before and After Shaka: Papers in Nguni History* ed. J. B. Peires (Grahamstown: Rhodes university, 1981), p. 5. See also S. J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "The Dynamics of Democracy and Human Rights in the Ndebele State, 1818–1934." (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Zimbabwe, 2004) and S. J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *The Ndebele Nation: Reflections on Hegemony, Memory and Historiography* (Amsterdam and Pretoria: Rozenberg Publishers and Unisa Press, 2009).

9 Rasmussen, *Migrant Kingdom*, 10.

10 Lye, *The Ndebele Kingdom*, 87.

11 Lye, *The Ndebele Kingdom*, spelled the name as "Donda".

12 Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *The Dynamics of Democracy*, 56.

of social and political developments that reflected continuity in the consolidation of the political control of ruling descent lines of small-scale chiefdoms across the entire region”.¹³ She added that:

It has long been understood and accepted that historically sociopolitical units in southern Africa were not as simple as kin groups based on lines of descent, “clans” or “lineages”, but rather have always comprised people from multiple descent lines who fall under the political authority of the dominating or ruling line of descent and its head, the chief or king.¹⁴

This argument complicates the idea of the Khumalo clans as mere kinship groups. It would make sense to suppose that whereas the Khumalo consisted of related clans, there were other people under them who were not necessarily of Khumalo origin – an argument that dispels the notion of “insular” and “immobile” communities existing prior to the Mfecane and projects a situation of flexible communities that “welcomed newcomers to settle among them individually and collectively”.¹⁵ This analysis enables us to reflect on the constitution of the political during this period and the mechanics of the making of a political community. Four constituent elements of the constitution of the political are discernible: the occupation with defence against external threats and forces; the development of creative ways of dealing with and adjudication of internal conflicts and mediation of internal tensions; the desire to maintain order; and the formulation of modes of production and reproduction of society. These developments lie at the base of the making of centralized kingdoms later.

However, what is emerging poignantly from this analysis of the origins of the Ndebele of Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo is that because of being small and fragmented political formations they were subjected to the influence of the bigger and more powerful formations such as the Mthethwa under Dingiswayo KaJobe,

¹³ E.A. Eldredge, *Kingdoms and Chiefdoms of Southeastern Africa: Oral Traditions and History, 1400-1830* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2015), p. 1.

¹⁴ Eldredge, *Kingdoms and Chiefdoms*, 3.

¹⁵ Ibid.

the Ndwandwe under Zwibe KaLanga Nxumalo and the emerging Zulu kingdom under Shaka KaSenzangakhona. It would seem that while Donda (Ndoda) became a vassal of Dingiswayo KaJobe, Matshobana was a vassal of his father-in-law Zwibe KaLanga Nxumalo, and Mzilikazi KaMatshobana served under Shaka KaSenzangakhona briefly.¹⁶ This complex interplay of power, subordination and negotiated vassalage complicated the identity of the nucleus of the people who formed the Ndebele of Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo for some observers. Some historical narrations understood them as a breakaway from the Ndwandwe of Zwibe KaLanga Nxumalo and others traced their origins to the Zulu of Shaka KaSenzangakhona. For example, in his recorded oral narrative Socwatsha told Stuart that “Mzilikazi KaMatshobana belonged to the Zwibe tribe” and Fynn made reference to Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo as one of Zwibe’s “petty chiefs”.¹⁷ What compounded the confusion is that when Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo’s people were “known to the outside world as the Matabele and their descendants would call themselves Ndebele”, Mzilikazi did not use either name. “He chose to call his people Zulu.”¹⁸

The reality is that indeed the Khumalo chieftaincies practised the strategy of *ukukhonza* (voluntary vassalage) in their relations with the powerful Mthethwa, Ndwandwe and Zulu while maintaining their semi-autonomous status. I have emphasized that “the main concern of the Khumalo clans became that of trying to play off two powerful rivals and expansionist powers which were near them”.¹⁹ Even when Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo shifted allegiance (tributary status) from the defeated Zwibe Ka Langa Nxumalo, after the Ndwandwe-Zulu Battle of Mhlathuze River of 1818, to Shaka KaSenzangakhona, it was not as a defeated leader. The shift of allegiance was a strategic move for survival as a small polit-

¹⁶ Lye, *The Ndebele Kingdom*, 87.

¹⁷ These observations claimed by early white travellers and literate observers as deriving from oral tradition were well analyzed by Eldredge, *Kingdoms and Chiefdom*, 212-214.

¹⁸ Etherington, *The Great Treks*, 165-166.

¹⁹ Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *The Dynamics of Democracy*, 58.

ical formation in an age of intensified conquest and incorporation of defeated groups into the ranks of the emerging powerful kingdoms. This is why Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo managed to set up his own villages at eNkungwini and Mhlahlandlela within the Zulu kingdom and to preside over them.²⁰ A woman known as Zitshibili, who claimed that his father was the brother of Mzilikazi's father, offered the following encounter of Mzilikazi and Shaka:

After Dingiswayo died, Shaka succeeded him, and attacked and defeated Zwide. As Mzilikazi was tributary to Zwide, Shaka directed he should become his Bulawayo *induna*. Mzilikazi demurred at this on the ground that he was an independent chief in his own right, even though Zwide had been defeated. In order to prove his ability to be independent chief and to be recognized as such by Shaka, Shaka called him to attack another chief, Maconi by name, of the tribe Ntshingila, living further north. Mzilikazi did so, and succeeded in putting the man to death. This tribe then became tributary to Mzilikazi. In addition, Mzilikazi seized a large number of cattle from the Ntshingila tribe, which he appropriated for his use. Shaka, seeing this, demanded the cattle and, as Mzilikazi refused to give them up, a quarrel arose which was the cause why Mzilikazi fled away to the Rustenburg and Marico, Potchefstroom and Kroonstad (Transvaal) districts.²¹

This version of the relationship of Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo and Shaka KaSenzangakhona is reflected in oral tradition and written records. Even the narrative of cattle being at the centre of the quarrel between Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo and Shaka KaSenzangakhona is also reflected in both oral and written sources. It would seem that Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo joined the Zulu kingdom together with his *amabutho* (soldiers) known as Inyoni, Izimpangele and Igabha undismantled, hence he was able to launch a quick and successful raid for cattle. It

²⁰ Oral stories contained in Eldredge, *Kingdoms and Chiefdoms*, 212–213.

²¹ This oral narrative is cited in Eldredge, *Kingdoms and Chiefdoms*, 213–214.

would also seem that Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo stayed under Shaka KaSenzangakhona for less than five years (1819–1822). Lye wrote that “By the end of 1823 Mzilikazi had rebelled and fled Zululand to the interior highveld with those he could save – about 300 young warriors and women.”²² Existing records highlight that when Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo broke away from the Zulu Kingdom, he was followed by between 250 and 300 people.²³

Ndebele Migrations, Nation Building and Settlements in South Africa (1824–1837)

The processes of kingdom making, state formation and nation building in Southern Africa were fundamentally characterized by conquest and incorporation of people, rather than extermination. This is why historians such as John D. Omer-Cooper, who belonged to the Ibadan School of Nationalist Historiography, celebrated the Mfecane as “a nineteenth-century revolution in Bantu Africa” that resulted in an intensive process of state making and nation building spearheaded by new capable African leaders such as Shaka KaSenzangakhona, Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo, Soshangane Nxumalo, Zwangendaba Jele and many others.²⁴ Omer-Cooper celebrated the Mfecane as an illustration of the capacity of African leaders for creative statecraft and the adaptability of traditional institutions for new purposes.²⁵ To Omer-Cooper, the careers of such leaders as Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo, and many others who were active during the Mfecane, constituted a series of experiments in state building involving the rapid assimilation of political, linguistic and cultural aliens and the development of a sense of common identity and loyalty within the new rapidly aggregated composite communities.²⁶

This nationalist-inspired analysis of the Mfecane was meant

²² Lye, *The Ndebele Kingdom*, 88.

²³ Etherington, *The Great Treks*, 159.

²⁴ J.D. Omer-Cooper, *The Zulu Aftermath: A Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Bantu Africa* (Longman: London, 1966).

²⁵ Omer-Cooper, *The Zulu Aftermath*, 24.

²⁶ Omer-Cooper, *The Zulu Aftermath*, 25–27.

to counter colonial historiography's articulation of the Mfecane as a time of "black-on-black" violence, destruction, depopulation and scattering of people across space.²⁷ In this colonial historiography such African leaders as Shaka KaSenzangakhona of the Zulu and Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo of the Ndebele were nothing other than "bloodthirsty savages" who were intent on harming other African people until they were stopped by the arrival of colonialism and Christianity together with its "civilizing mission".²⁸ Both the colonial and nationalist historiographical interventions tended to either exaggerate the violence or downplay it. For example, Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo's political career cannot be simply reduced to a "path of blood" as Peter Becker described it.²⁹ The revisionist historiographical interventions of Julian Cobbing effectively challenged the very idea of the Mfecane and its reduction to a senseless orgy of "black-on-black" violence – rather, to him, Mfecane was an "alibi" created to conceal the dirty work of white settler colonialism that commenced with raiding for slaves.³⁰ At the same time, Shaka KaSenzangakhona's political and military activities cannot be simply celebrated as innovation in statecraft.

My position on these issues is an eclectic one. I have argued that "The Mfecane itself was not simply a process of state formation... It was a period of Nguni hegemonic projects at their decisive phase."³¹ It was during the course of the Mfecane that Mzilikazi Khumalo worked tirelessly to construct Khumalo hegemony. It was never a peaceful process. Neither was it simply a process of the deployment of unmitigated violence. Typical of all other hegemonic projects, a delicate balance between coercion and consent was maintained.³² With specific reference to the Ndebele of Mzilikazi

27 The so-called Mfecane was said to be caused by the rise to power of King Shaka KaSenzangakhona of the Zulu who was bent on building the Zulu nation through the destruction of other political formations.

28 P. Becker, *The Path of Blood: The Rise and Conquests of Mzilikazi* (London: Longman, 1969).

29 Becker, *The Path of Blood*.

30 Cobbing, *The Mfecane as Alibi*, 487–519.

31 Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *The Dynamics of Democracy*, 51.

32 Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *The Ndebele Nation*, 34.

KaMatshobana Khumalo's role in the spreading of violence to the interior highveld of South Africa, Cobbing has countered this narrative to posit that the Ndebele kingdom that emerged in the highveld was essentially a defensive state that provided protection to many refugees from such slave raiders as the Griqua of Jam Bloem, Korana and whites working on behalf of the white settler capitalist colony of the Cape.³³ Margaret Kinsman also emphasized that the presence of the Ndebele of Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo on the highveld introduced a period of ambiguous peace rather than devastation of existing people.³⁴ She posited that Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo's military forces cleared the area of the "brigands" who had been destabilising the Rolong settlements with their unpredictable raids, and replaced these with a stronger Ndebele kingdom.³⁵ The vulnerable and conquered people were incorporated into the Ndebele kingdom.

The first settlement of the Ndebele of Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo was EkuPhumuleni (the place of rest) after crossing the Drakensberg Mountains.³⁶ The very fact that the Ndebele called it a place of rest means that they were poised to continue with the migration. EkuPhumuleni was located on the Olifants River. During the two years of resting (1823–1824), Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo's forces attacked the BaPedi of Thulare who lived between the Olifants and Steelpoort Rivers. They were repelled.³⁷ It would seem that by this time Mzilikazi KaMatshobana's followers were still small in number. But he began to receive Nguni refugees into the ranks of the Ndebele, as well as non-Nguni groups, which assisted him in building a heterogeneous "migrant kingdom".³⁸ His military success during this time was to drive away Nxaba Maseko, who was also migrating from the

33 Cobbing, *The Mfecane as Alibi*, 503.

34 M. Kinsman, "Hungry Wolves: The Impact of Violence on Rolong Life, 1823–1836," in Hamilton, *The Mfecane Aftermath*, 380.

35 Kinsman, *Hungry Wolves*, 380.

36 Bryant, *The Olden Times in Zululand*, 424. See also Lye, *The Ndebele Kingdom*, 88.

37 Lye, *The Ndebele Kingdom*, 89.

38 Rasmussen, *The Migrant Kingdom*.

coastal areas into the interior.³⁹ By 1825, a drought hit the area the Ndebele had chosen for resting.⁴⁰ This contributed to the Ndebele's decision to migrate again.

The Ndebele of Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo left EkuPhumuleni in 1825. In the first place, EkuPhumuleni was still very near to Shaka KaSenzangakhona's Zulu kingdom. The next place of settlement was the Magaliesberg Hills area along the Apies and Crocodile Rivers. This area belonged to the BaKwena people. By the time Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo arrived in the Magaliesburg Hills, the BaKwena people had already been attacked by other migrating groups and survived.⁴¹ The Ndebele also weakened them, but did not destroy them. The Ndebele settlement consisted of three villages: eNdinaneni and eNkungwini on the Apies River as well as eMhlahandlela at the confluence of the Crocodile River.⁴² These settlements were not too far from the present-day city of Pretoria (Tshwane). Etherington posited that Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo felt secure in the new area of settlement because "hundreds of kilometres of sparsely populated grasslands separated him from Ndwandwe and Zulu enemies".⁴³

By 1825 Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo's followers had grown from an initial 300 in 1823 to 20,000 people. This was a phenomenal growth. The kingdom was organized into a compact human settlement of "dense villages within reasonable walking distance of each other".⁴⁴ Cattle stations were at the centre of the villages. The military forces formed the outlying defence perimeter. The number of active soldiers had risen to 4,000. Lye noted that: "In 1829 the first white visitors estimated the total population at 60,000-80,000." This phenomenal growth in power – because power was expressed in terms of the number of people under the leader – emboldened Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo

³⁹ Bryant, *The Olden Times in Zululand*, 424.

⁴⁰ Lye, *The Ndebele Kingdom*, 89.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Bryant, *The Olden Times in Zululand*, 425-427.

⁴³ Etherington, *The Great Treks*, p. 168.

⁴⁴ Etherington, *The Great Treks*, p. 164.

to launch a series of raids against the independent kingdoms of the Bakwena, Hurutshe, BaPedi, Ngwato and Ngwaketse. These were formidable African formations which were able to survive the raids. At the same time, the Ndebele kingdom faced the threat from the firearm wielding and horseriding Griqua under their leaders Jan Bloem and Barends Barends, as well as the Zulu kingdom under Dingane.

The attacks on the Ndebele kingdom began in 1828. Jan Bloem of the Griqua assembled a raiding commando of Korana, Bergenaar, Tuang and Rolong with the intention of destroying the Ndebele kingdom. This attack took place while the bulk of the Ndebele forces were out raiding the Ngwaketse. The attackers collected over 3,000 cattle but they were counter-attacked by Ndebele forces on the third day which recovered the cattle. The second attack was masterminded by Barends Barends of the Griqua. When he attacked, the active Ndebele forces were away on a raiding mission across the Limpopo River. But again, three days later the Ndebele forces counter-attacked and recovered the cattle. Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo then resolved to put to an end the raiding of his people by the Griqua and Korana. He sent out a strong force towards the Vaal, which succeeded in killing some Griqua, capturing three "coloured" children together with guns, horses and wagons.⁴⁵

Unfortunately, immediately after dealing with the Griqua, Dingane of the Zulu sent a big force to attack the Ndebele in 1832. Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo also lost the commander of Nxa *amabutho* who defected to the Zulu invading army. The Zulu army inflicted some heavy losses on the Ndebele, which prompted Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo to abandon his settlement in the Magaliesburg Hills and migrate to a new settlement. He moved to the Marico Valley – an area inhabited by the Tswana-speaking people – at the end of 1832.⁴⁶ Along the Marico River, Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo built two villages at Mosega and eGab-

⁴⁵ Lye, *The Ndebele Kingdom*, 91.

⁴⁶ Lye, *The Ndebele Kingdom*, 93.

eni/eGabheni. He immediately attacked and conquered the local Tswana people. But security continued to elude him. The Griqua continued to be a threat and annoyance. The arrival of the Boers from Cape Colony into the interior also caused a major threat to the Ndebele kingdom.

The encounters between the Ndebele and whites intensified after 1832. As a shrewd leader, Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo saw an advantage in befriending whites and exploring good diplomatic relations with them because they were the suppliers of the firearms which he desperately needed.⁴⁷ It was in this context that he befriended the missionary Robert Moffat. It was also in this context that Mncumbatha Khumalo, a high-ranking leader in the Ndebele kingdom, was sent to Cape Town in 1836 and signed a treaty of friendship with the governor of the Cape Colony.⁴⁸ It would seem that Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo still wanted to use a combination of diplomacy and force to protect his kingdom. But the troublesome whites became the Boers – as put by Lye, “they differed from other white men in that they came in large numbers, they did not notify the king, and they acted as if they meant to stay”.⁴⁹

Between 1836 and 1837, the Ndebele kingdom increasingly clashed with the Boers. They were flocking into Sotho-Tswana and Ndebele territory in what became known as the “Great Trek”.⁵⁰ On 15 August 1836, the Ndebele forces had to attack the Boer group under Stephanus Erasmus which had entered territory that the Ndebele claimed to be theirs. The Ndebele forces also tried to attack another Boer group under Sarel Cilliers and Andries Potgieter, but were repelled because they used their wagons to create a laager. But the group that was led by Liebenberg was not so fortunate – the Ndebele wiped it out. On 19 August 1836, the Ndebele forces had to confront another Boer group at Vegkop Mountain. Again, the Boers used their wagons to create an impenetrable laa-

⁴⁷ Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *The Ndebele Nation*, 67.

⁴⁸ Rasmussen, *Migrant Kingdoms*, 102.

⁴⁹ Lye, *The Ndebele Kingdom*, 94.

⁵⁰ Etherington, *The Great Treks*.

ger. The Ndebele forces collected the livestock – 100 horses, 4,600 head of cattle and over 50,000 sheep and goats from the Boers.⁵¹

On 17 January 1837, 107 Boers, 40 Griqua and 60 Rolong organized themselves into a raiding commando, attacked Mosega and re-took 6,000 head of cattle and the wagons.⁵² Before the Ndebele could recover, in June 1837 the Zulu forces attacked, further weakening the Ndebele kingdom. Ndebele forces always counter-attacked successfully and recovered their cattle from the Zulu forces, but in November 1837, when Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo had made up his mind to migrate again, the Ndebele were attacked by a Boer Commando under Potgieter and Piet Uys. The attack lasted for nine days, concentrating on eGabeni as the Ndebele had already abandoned Mosega. Many cattle were captured and many Ndebele people were killed. Norman Etherington underscored the meaning of the battles of Vegkop and Mosega for the Ndebele:

The meaning of Vegkop and Mosega extended beyond the thousand lives snuffed out. In the course of three months the balance of military power between the Limpopo and Orange Rivers changed fundamentally and permanently. For a decade Mzilikazi had dominated the open plains with a spatial deployment of power on the old Ndwandwe model. Until the arrival of the trekkers, the model had proven well-nigh impregnable.⁵³

Etherington explained that Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo clearly understood this change:

Mzilikazi understood his changed circumstances. He made no further attacks on the trekkers and devoted all his energies to preserving his herds. There was no time to lose, because the smell of the blood spilled at Vegkop and Mosega attracted a host of predators eager to feast on his wounded kingdom.

It was indeed a correct understanding of the changing circum-

⁵¹ Lye, *The Ndebele Kingdom*, 95.

⁵² Lye, *The Ndebele Kingdom*, 95.

⁵³ Etherington, *The Great Treks*, 253.

stances that forced Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo to again lead his people into another migration – this time across the Limpopo River. With every forced migration, some of the people who had been incorporated into the Ndebele kingdom chose to remain behind. Lye posited that “between 10,000 and 20,000 people followed him beyond the Limpopo”.⁵⁴

The migration of the Ndebele across the Limpopo River made it easier for the Boers to invade land and institute the Afrikaner colonisation of South Africa. Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo and his brave Ndebele forces had tried to make it difficult for the Boers to penetrate the interior of Transvaal and the Orange River areas where they eventually established the two Boer Republics of Transvaal and the Orange Free State. The other important point to note is how the success of the Boer Commandos depended on their ability to mobilize the enemies of the Ndebele such as the Griqua, Korana, and various Sotho-Tswana (Tlhaping, Rolong, Tuang, Tlokwa, and Hurutshe) groups who had been conquered and displaced by the Ndebele kingdom into a grand military force. Firearms became another decisive factor in the pushing of the Ndebele out of the Transvaal and Orange River areas.

By the time the Ndebele kingdom was forced to migrate across the Limpopo River, Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo had made a name for himself as a competent nation builder and an able organiser of an effective army. His kingdom was a heterogeneous political formation consisting of the Khumalo who formed a small ruling elite, diverse Nguni groups including those who were left behind by Zwide as well as the Sotho and Tswana-speaking people (Lye wrote that “to the present day, ethnographers estimate that the Sotho element in the Ndebele polity exceeded the Nguni”).⁵⁵

The social organization of the Ndebele kingdom was in accordance with areas of origin. The Nguni group formed AbeZansi (those from the South) and the incorporated Sotho-Tswana formed AbeNhla (those from the North).⁵⁶ Lye, in his assessment

⁵⁴ Lye, *The Ndebele Kingdom*, 96.

⁵⁵ Lye, *The Ndebele Kingdom*, 96.

⁵⁶ Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *The Dynamics of Democracy*; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *The Ndebele*

of the Ndebele kingdom south of the Limpopo River, concluded that “without minimizing the traditional characterization of Mzilikazi as a warrior, a desolator and a tyrant, it is as a creative political administrator that his full stature can be appreciated”.⁵⁷

The Migration to Zimbabwe, 1838–1842

The migration across the Limpopo River took the form of an escape under heavy attack by the Boers and the Griqua, as the previous migrations had done. It was not Shaka KaSenzangakhona of the Zulu who forced the Ndebele to eventually cross the Limpopo River. Shaka KaSenzangakhona had been assassinated in 1828.⁵⁸ The Ndebele migrated across the Limpopo River ten years after Shaka KaSenzangakhona’s death. The people who made life difficult for the Ndebele between 1836 and 1837 were the Boers, who had poured into the interior through their “Great Trek” in 1835–36. Etherington wrote that “During the years 1836–38 perhaps as many as 8,000 people left the British Zone, intending to make permanent homes in the heartland” and the “new wave of invaders came heavily armed”.⁵⁹ These were the Boers, who pushed the Ndebele out of the Transvaal.

As they migrated for the fourth time, the Ndebele split into two groups. One group was led by Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo himself and the other group by Gundwane Ndiweni.⁶⁰ The Ndiweni group included Nkulumane Mzilikazi Khumalo (the oldest son, and heir to the Ndebele throne); it travelled in a straight line to the area where the present-day city of Bulawayo is situated. The Mzilikazi group wandered into the Kalahari and into the Zambezi Valley, and delayed joining the other group for a year or

Nation.

⁵⁷ Lye, *The Ndebele Kingdom*, 104.

⁵⁸ This point is often missed in oral traditions of how Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo ended up in Zimbabwe – there is still emphasis on the role of Shaka KaSenzangakhona as the cause. This narrative amounts to a dangerous telescoping of events and ignores the role of the Boers in the forced movement of the Ndebele across the Limpopo River.

⁵⁹ Etherington, *The Great Treks*, 243.

⁶⁰ J.R.D. Cobbing, “The Ndebele Under the Khumalos, 1820–1896,” Unpublished PhD, University of Lancaster, 1976.

so.⁶¹ Thus, in their settlement in what is today Matebeleland, the Ndebele had some “teething problems”. Because the group led by Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo (the legitimate king) could not be located for over a year, the senior Ndebele chiefs including Chief Ndiweni agreed to install Nkulumane Mzilikazi Khumalo as a new king. Two factors explained this decision. The first was that the Ndebele had to celebrate the culturally mandatory annual *Inxwala* ceremony, and only a king could preside over this important event.⁶² The second is that no one knew where the other group was, and whether it would ever come to join them⁶³ – when they left Transvaal they lost many of those who had earlier been incorporated. Fragmentation was not new to Ndebele history and experience.

Although the installation of Nkulumane Mzilikazi Khumalo as king in the absence of his father was not necessarily an act of rebellion or a coup, the sudden appearance of Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo precipitated the “Ntabayezinduna Crisis” (1839–1842). One version of the narrative is that Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo was deeply infuriated by the installation of his son as king while he was still alive and he descended violently on all those chiefs that were involved and killed them at a mountain near Bulawayo which became known as Ntabayezinduna (the place where the chiefs were killed).⁶⁴ This narrative also claims that Nkulumane Mzilikazi Khumalo and her mother were killed alongside *izinduna* (chiefs).⁶⁵ This narrative is countered by another, which maintains that Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo reacted to the installation of his son in a very reasonable manner and asked the senior chiefs to take Nkulumane to his maternal

61 Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *The Ndebele Nation*, 103.

62 D.G. Lewis, “Nkulumane: Umtaka Mzilikazi,” *Native Affairs Department Annual (NADA)*, 33, 21956, pp. 11–12.

63 It is said in the Ndebele oral tradition that some members of the Gundwane group thought the king (Mzilikazi) might have died. There was even a proverb in isiNdebele, that the one who has travelled and is not seen is as good as dead.

64 T.J. Hlazo, “The Naming of the Hill Intaba Yezinduna, Matabeleland,” *Native Affairs Department Annual (NADA)*, 12, 1934, pp. 72–73.

65 For this version read M.M. Sibanda, *UMBiko KaMadlenya* (Harare: Literature Bureau, 1981).

grandparents back in South Africa, to live there until such time as there was a vacancy for a new king in the Ndebele kingdom.⁶⁶ This was part of Nguni tradition.

By 1842, Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo was once again the undisputed leader of the Ndebele kingdom. This time the Ndebele kingdom had inscribed itself at the centre of what used to be the powerful Rozvi kingdom under the Mambos. But by the time the Ndebele entered the south-western part of the Zimbabwean plateau the Rozvi kingdom was a shell of its previous self. It had been attacked by Zwangendaba Jele’s Ngoni before they moved to Malawi. It was also attacked by Nxaba Maseko’s Ngoni. Finally, it was finished off by the invasion of a female Ngoni/Swazi leader, Nyamazana Jele (a sister to Zwangendaba Jele of the Ngoni), who killed the last Mambo, known as Chirisamuru II, at NtabazikaMambo.⁶⁷ Thus, by the time the Ndebele entered the south-western part of the Zimbabwean plateau, only weak fragments of the once powerful Rozvi kingdom were surviving and it was very easy for the Ndebele to subdue them and incorporate them into the ranks of the Ndebele kingdom. Most of the Ndebele-speaking people who use the surname Moyo trace their genealogy to the Rozvi kingdom but they are today identified as Ndebele-speaking people.⁶⁸

The Settled Phase of the Ndebele Kingdom, 1842–1893

Even during the settled phase of the Ndebele kingdom, the process of nation building continued. It commenced with the conquest and incorporation of the bulk of the remaining members of the Rozvi kingdom and Kalanga-speaking people living on the south-western part of the Zimbabwean plateau – but, as I have argued, the peaceful environment there enabled Ndebele society to undergo the twin-processes of de-militarization and “civilianiza-

66 This narrative has been made popular by the discovery in the past five years of a place where Nkulumane was buried in Rustenburg among the Bafokeng people.

67 D.N. Beach, *War and Politics in Zimbabwe, 1840–1900* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1986), pp. 18–20.

68 N.M. Bhebe, *Christianity and Traditional Religion in Western Zimbabwe, 1859–1923* (London: Longman, 1979).

tion” including relaxation of the law of celibacy.⁶⁹ Concurrently, with the retiring of renowned soldiers into family men, the office of the king occupied by Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo was transformed and ritualized. These changes witnessed the shift from a Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo, renowned as soldier and military strategist, to a leading figure in the cult of ancestor worship, assuming ritual roles of rainmaker and distributor of cattle and grain; and an administrator of justice.⁷⁰

It was during the settled phase that a strong aristocratic group, quite distinct from those who enjoyed elevated status because of military prowess during the migratory phase of the kingdom, emerged. Ascriptive status was gradually replaced by achievement and meritocracy in various spheres of life. Strong chieftaincies emerged around the kingship, which remained the centre of power. This reality led Julian Cobbing to posit that during the settled phase what used to be the absolute power of King Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo was kept in check by relatively strong subsidiary chiefs and headmen who maintained independent wealth and power based on personal ownership of cattle.⁷¹ One could therefore argue that the process of ritualization of the kingship, to the extent of ideological glorification, compensated for the loss of secular and military absolute power.

The social organization of the Ndebele kingdom became very elaborate during the settled phase. The Nguni group formed the *AbeZansi* (those from the South). The Sotho-Tswana groups that were incorporated into the Ndebele kingdom during its migratory phase in South Africa formed the *AbeNhla* (those from the North). Those who were incorporated when the Ndebele kingdom had inscribed itself on the south-western part of the Zimbabwean plateau formed the *AmaHole* social strand.⁷² David Norman Beach argued

69 Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *The Dynamics of Democracy*, 77.

70 Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *The Dynamics of Democracy*, 78-79; See also Cobbing, *The Ndebele Under the Khumalos*, 44-49.

71 Cobbing, *The Ndebele Under the Khumalos*, 44-46.

72 The origin and meaning of the term “hole” remains unclear. Some historians argued that it was description of the long-dresses worn by the people found on the Zimbabwean plateau, which touched the ground and they had to pull them

that during the settled phase the purpose of raiding – a survival technique and an economic ploy during the migratory phase of the Ndebele kingdom – became “target-specific” and assumed the role of a political ploy meant to weaken threatening neighbours and to punish well-known recalcitrant chiefs.⁷³

The governance structure became clearly structured and elaborate. At the top was “*inkosi*” (king). The second rank was that of “*Indunankulu Yesizwe*” (senior chief who worked as the prime minister). Below were two important councils known as *umphakathi* (inner council) and *izikhulu* (outer council made up of influential and prominent men). Both councils performed advisory and deliberative roles.⁷⁴ Thus, the power hierarchy ran from the homestead head (*umnumzana*), to village heads (*abalisa*), to *zinduna* (chiefs) right up to the apex (*inkosi*). King Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo’s wives were very powerful within Ndebele society as they were distributed throughout *izigaba* (provinces) to assist chiefs in governance. The daughters of the king were also very powerful, and powerful men competed to gain their favour and to marry them as it added to their influence and closeness to the kingship. But, fundamentally, Ndebele society was patriarchal without necessarily being sexist. There was clear gender division of labour.⁷⁵

One of the most important institutions that continued across the migratory and settled phase was that of *amabutho* (age-set group). During the migratory phase, *amabutho* were termed “regiments” by white literate observers. Understood as regiments, members of *amabutho* were nothing but “soldiers” in the eyes of white literate observers who always imposed their own worldview on other societies. Cobbing identified three meanings of *amabutho* in the Ndebele kingdom: men from particular *imizi* (villages) who were available to be called out for military duty together; an actual squad of men assembled from adult population assembled for

as they walked.

73 Beach, *War and Politics*, 16-20.

74 Cobbing, *The Ndebele Under the Khumalos*, 44-64.

75 T.M. Ndlovu, D.N. Ndlovu, and B.S. Ncube, *Imikhuba Lamasiko AmaNdebele (The Traditions and Culture of the Ndebele)* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1995).

any specific national purpose; and young men grouped together in separate and temporary settlements and taught how to be an Ndebele citizen.⁷⁶ Being a member of *amabutho* was a necessary stage in the process of initiating youth into Ndebele adulthood; it was in the *amabutho* that boys from captured communities learned how to be Ndebele. Ndebele culture was inculcated through this national service institution. In other words, *amabutho* constituted a school for the youth where patriotism was taught and encouraged.⁷⁷ A Ndebele male youth was brought up to be a cattle herder, hunter, a soldier and *umnumzana* (head of homestead). Soldering was far from the only purpose of *amabutho*.

Because of the very innovative strategies of nation building developed by Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo and continued by his son Lobengula KaMzilikazi Khumalo, the Ndebele kingdom became an eclectic formation. This is clearly seen in the religious domain. Migration meant that the Ndebele had to abandon the tombs of their ancestors and other familiar religious sites of prayer for rain and for other purposes which meant that often the Ndebele found themselves reliant on conquered and incorporated people in this respect. It was the eclectic religious character of Ndebele society that led Ngwabi M. Bhebe to write about “a religious conquest of the conquerors by the vanquished” with specific reference to how the Ndebele relied on Rozvi, Shona and Kalanga religious figures in approaching the Matopos Ngwali/Mwari cults for rainmaking.⁷⁸ Their various names for the high god reflected the Nguni, Sotho-Tswana and Kalanga-Shona composition: *Nkulunkulu/Mvelinqqaki* (Nguni); *Modimo/Mlimo/Mlimu* (Sotho-Tswana); and *Ngwali/Mwari* (Kalanga-Shona). But throughout the migration the Ndebele maintained a strong belief in the role of ancestral spirits as intercessors between the living, the dead and God in the heavens. The *inxwala* ceremony, which colonial histo-

76 J.R.D. Cobbing, “The Evolution of Ndebele Amabutho,” *Journal of African History*, xv, 4, 1974.

77 Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *The Dynamics of Democracy*, 138.

78 N.M. Bhebe, “The Ndebele and Mwari Before 1893: A Religious Conquest of the Conquerors by the Vanquished,” in *Guardians of the Land* ed. J.M. Schoffeleers (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1978).

rians reduced to what they termed “a first fruits ceremony”, was fundamentally a religious national activity during which the king publicly prayed to God through the medium of “royal ancestors” deemed to be guardians of the kingdom.⁷⁹

Perhaps because of the stability and peace that the Ndebele established during the settled phase, King Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo was able to rule uninterrupted until he died of old age in 1868. The main foreign forces he had to grapple with were the missionaries to whom he granted some space within the kingdom without letting go of Ndebele religious beliefs and ways (in 1859 Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo allowed the London Missionary Society (LMS) to establish a mission station inside the Ndebele kingdom but they failed to convert the Ndebele to Christianity).⁸⁰ Although Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo left the kingdom intact he did not manage the succession properly. The heir apparent was nowhere to be found and his whereabouts became the subject of rumours.

Thus, between 1868 and 1872 the Ndebele kingdom was plunged into another crisis – a civil war precipitated by those like uMbiko KaMandlanya Masuku, who vehemently opposed the succession of Lobengula Mzilikazi Khumalo to the Ndebele throne.⁸¹ Masuku was an influential chief of Zwangendaba village who was married to one of Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo’s daughters, Zinkabi Khumalo. MaKhumalo was also opposed to Lobengula KaMzilikazi Khumalo ascending to the throne. Masuku (Mbiko) and MaKhumalo (Zinkabi) maintained the story that the legitimate successor to Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo was Nkulumane who had to be fetched from South Africa.⁸² Some senior Ndebele chiefs, including Mncumbatha Khumalo who acted as regent after the death of Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo, supported the installation of Lobengula KaMzilikazi Khumalo as successor to his father because Nkulumane was nowhere to be found. The problem with Lobengula KaMzilikazi Khumalo was that he

79 Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *The Dynamics of Democracy*, 155-156.

80 For details read Bhebe, *Christianity and Traditional Religion*.

81 Sibanda, uMbiko KaMadlenya.

82 Ibid.

was not born in the main house (*indlunkulu*) but by Fulatha Tshabala (Shabala) (*indlu-encane*, small house) whose background was Ngoni/Swazi.⁸³ However, the Zambian historian Yizenge A. Chondoka, who studied the Ngoni, indicates that Lobengula Khumalo's mother was Nyamazana Jele, the sister of Zwangendaba Jele.⁸⁴

Again, the Ndebele kingdom survived the civil war intact. Mbiko Masuku's Zwangendaba *ibutho* and its alliances were decisively defeated by those forces that supported the installation of Lobengula KaMzilikazi Khumalo, who became the second legitimate king of the Ndebele in 1872. He ruled from 1872 to 1893. Unfortunately, his reign coincided with the age of aggressive colonial invasions. Lobengula KaMzilikazi Khumalo tried to play one colonial power against the other through signing treaties and concessions while delaying colonial invasion through diplomacy, but colonial pressure had been mounting since the time of the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885.⁸⁵ European powers had agreed among themselves to conquer and share out Africa among themselves, without any consideration for African voices. Christian missionaries residing in the Ndebele kingdom collaborated with colonial forces as they were frustrated by the Ndebele people's refusal to convert to Christianity. They wrote negatively about the Ndebele kingdom and King Lobengula KaMzilikazi Khumalo, claiming that they were an obstacle to the spread of Christianity, Commerce and Civilization (the three Cs) while exaggerating the issue of raids against the Shona-speaking communities.

Between 1890 and 1893, the Ndebele kingdom found itself in the same position as between 1836 and 1837. Enemies were converging. The Pioneer Column of imperial forces gathered in South

83 If this is true, it means that MaTshabala/MaShabalala (Fulatha) was a relative of Nyamazana Jele who was married by Mzilikazi and became one of the senior wives. It also insinuates that Nyamazana was barren.

84 Y.A. Chondoka, *The Zwangendaba Mpezeni Ngoni: History and Migrations, Settlement and Culture* (Lusaka: Academic Press, 2012).

85 It was King Lobengula KaMzilikazi Khumalo who signed such treaties as the Grobler Treaty with the Boers, the Moffat Treaty with the British and the Rudd Concession with Rhodes's British South Africa Company (BSAC). See S. Samkange, *The Origins of Rhodesia* (London: Heinemann, 1968).

Africa was already stationed in Mashonaland and had already raised the Union Jack in a place that became Salisbury (now Harare).⁸⁶ Colonial leaders such as Cecil John Rhodes and Leander Starr Jameson were mobilizing Shona-speaking communities to join them in the struggle to destroy the Ndebele kingdom. Those Shona communities who had co-existed relatively peacefully with the Ndebele kingdom found encouragement from invaders like Jameson and Rhodes to raid and steal cattle from the Ndebele.⁸⁷ In fact, the immediate justification for the colonial invasion of the Ndebele state in 1893 resulted from the punishment of Shona raiders and culminated in what became known as the "Victoria Incident" in which Lobengula KaMzilikazi Khumalo launched a punitive raid targeting two Shona chiefs, Bere and Gomani, who had raided Ndebele cattle, which provoked Jameson and Captain Lendy to organize their forces to invade the Ndebele kingdom, supported by some Shona communities: Mhari of Bere, Gutu, Zimuto, Chirunhanzu and many others.⁸⁸

The newly invented Maxim gun was first used against the Ndebele in 1893 at the Shangani River Battle of the Anglo-Ndebele War. This weapon, invented by Hiran Maxim in 1885, was used alongside Gardner guns.⁸⁹ The Ndebele forces, who had not yet fully graduated from spears and knobkerries to firearms, could not match the colonial forces. In the face of inevitable defeat, King Lobengula KaMzilikazi Khumalo set on fire his royal capital Bulawayo and escaped in a northward direction never to be seen again.⁹⁰ However, Yizenge Chondoka has this to say about the fate of King Lobengula Khumalo:

Lobengula was born out of the union of Mzilikazi and Nyamazana. Thus, Zwangendaba's children were

86 R.I. Rotberg, *The Founder: Cecil Rhodes and the Pursuit of Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 288.

87 Beach, *War and Politics*.

88 P. Nyathi, *Uchuku Olungelandiswe: Imbali YamaNdebele: 1893-1985* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1996).

89 Rotberg, *The Founder*, 89.

90 J. O'Reilly, *Pursuit of the King: An Evaluation of the Shangani Patrol* (Bulawayo: Books of Rhodesia, 1970).

Nyamazana's nephews and nieces. Her children were cousins to her brother's (Zwangendaba's) children. Nyamazana was Nthuto's aunt. Therefore, Lobengula was Nthuto's (Mpezeni 1) cousin. During the Anglo-Ndebele War of 1893-94, it is believed by elders in Mpezeni Kingdom that Lobengula sneaked out of the Ndebele Kingdom in 1894 and joined his cousin Ntutho (Mpezeni 1) in Chipata where he lived for some years before he died and was buried near Sanjika hills.⁹¹

Despite the fact that the Ndebele kingdom had lost its king, the Ndebele chiefs were still able to organize Ndebele forces and the whole nation to rise against the British South Africa Company rule in March 1896. Since the disappearance of Lobengula KaMzilikazi Khumalo, the British South Africa Company had quickly invoked the "right of conquest" and was soon busy looting land and cattle, forcing the Ndebele to work for them and claiming to be the new rulers of the Ndebele. This provoked the Ndebele into fighting, again, against the colonial forces, but, again, the colonial forces' firearms tilted the chances of victory to their side.⁹²

The 1896 uprising of the Ndebele resulted in the Matopos Peace Settlement (otherwise known as "Matopos Indaba") where Cecil John Rhodes, the key figure behind the invasion of the Ndebele kingdom, appeared riding on a white horse and claiming to be "umlamlankunzi" (a peace-maker who separated the fighting bulls). At least, because the Ndebele had demonstrated their determination to fight for their dignity and to die fighting rather than accept severe treatment by colonialists, Rhodes was forced to make concessions such as the return of some looted cattle, guaranteeing the

91 Chondoka, *The Zwangendaba Mpezeni Ngoni*, 29. Chondoka elaborated that "The arrival of Lobengula at Mtenguleni in January 1894 must have been a top secret issue, for not many elders mention it in oral traditions in the Kingdom." According to Chondoka: "Lobengula died in his cousin's kingdom before the Anglo-Ngoni war of 1897-98. Ngoni oral tradition indicates that "When Lobengula died, a rock at Nsanjika hills near Shawati village in Mpezeni's country split and fell."

92 T.O. Ranger, *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia 1896-7: A Study in African Resistance* (London: Heinemann, 1967).

continuation of chiefs as chiefs, and stopping the dispossession of land.⁹³ These concessions, it turned out, were in reality only meant to stop the uprising and allow Ndebele tempers to cool before the colonialists implemented the original plan which entailed dispossessing the colonized of their land and cattle and turning them into colonial subjects without rights, who only existed to provide cheap labour to colonial mines, farms, factories and houses.

The defeat of the Ndebele in 1896 marked the death of the Ndebele kingdom. Like other peoples defeated by colonialists, the Ndebele had to accept living under colonial rule as "subjects" rather than "citizens".⁹⁴ Throughout the early colonial period, the Ndebele lived a difficult life, being a people of two worlds – the pre-colonial world where they had lived as free people and a world where they had to adjust to rule by a state that imposed its order through force on a daily basis. Drawing on the work of Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, one could argue that the Ndebele fitted neatly into the category of a defeated people with a strong communal identity and resilient ideologies of their own, who constantly tried to assert themselves against the dominant colonial order.⁹⁵ Rhodesian colonialism embraced aspects of indirect rule whereby they invented their own version of traditional Ndebele ways of chiefly governance. and reduced the Ndebele chiefs to salaried low-ranking officers of the Rhodesian Native Department under which they had to perform the dirty work of colonialism such as collecting taxes and organising young people as providers of cheap labour.⁹⁶

Prior to the Ndebele defeat in 1896, the British South Africa Company had already created the Gwai and Shangani Reserves into which they pushed the Ndebele families, exposing them to

93 Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *The Dynamics of Democracy*, 243.

94 M. Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

95 J. Comaroff and J. L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier: Volume Two* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 5.

96 T. Ranger, "Democracy and Traditional Political Structures in Zimbabwe, 1890-1999," in *Historical Dimensions of Democracy and Human Rights: Volume one* ed. N. Bhebe and T. Ranger (Harare: University of Zimbabwe Publications, 2001), pp. 31-53.

malaria and other hardships in these remote and uninhabitable areas. Throughout the early colonial years the Ndebele, led by King Lobengula KaMzilikazi Khumalo's eldest son, Nyamanda Lobengula Khumalo, who had been made a salaried chief, agitated for a homeland and the revival of the Ndebele monarchy but their demands fell on the deaf ears of the colonial native commissioners who maintained close tutelage over the Ndebele.⁹⁷ Such formations as the National Home Movement, Matebele Home Society and others demonstrated how the Ndebele tried to negotiate themselves into the colonial environment while fighting for a dignified space. Their life under colonialism was no different from that of their Shona counterparts, with whom they were lumped together into the colony of Rhodesia. The migrant labour that endured during the colonial era witnessed the migration of many young Ndebele men to work in the mines and farms in South Africa. It was another way of maintaining links with where they had been forced out in 1837.

Conclusion

The emerging lessons include that because during pre-colonial times identities were not only fluid but place-based rather than simply about collective identity, genocides were not possible. This article has tried to piece together the history of the Ndebele of Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo from the pre-Mfecane period when they existed as small clans in northern Nguniland. What arises are new questions of how to name the end product: as multi-ethnic nation or unitary state? There was no homogeneous cultural community to enable the rise of a nation state in the modernist sense of the word. I have briefly examined how the Northern Nguni groups were organized during that time and highlighted how the small Khumalo clans survived by negotiating vassalage to the bigger and powerful political formations such as the Ndwandwe, the Mthethwa and the Zulu while maintaining their

⁹⁷ A.K.H. Weindrich, *Chiefs and Councils in Rhodesia: Transition from Patriarchal to Bureaucratic Power* (London: Heinemann, 1971).

semi-autonomous status. It was during the course of the Mfecane that Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo actively built the heterogeneous Ndebele kingdom through the strategies of conquest, incorporation and assimilation of people of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. He also remained open to welcoming the refugees who emerged as a result of the Mfecane conflicts. Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo's survival tactics during the Mfecane included building an effective army, inventing a mobile/migratory kingdom and attacking and dispersing potential enemies, destroying some. He built a durable multi-ethnic nation which still survives in Zimbabwe.

Historically, the Ndebele-speaking people are a people of two places, Zimbabwe and South Africa. The historic identity linkages of the people of Matebeleland with South Africa take three broad forms. The first is the Nguni linkage: Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo hailed from the Northern Nguni political formations, which links the Ndebele genealogically to the Ndwandwe, Mthethwa and Zulu people. The second linkage is with the Ndebele of Mpumalanga from which such Ndebele-speaking people as the Sikhosana, the Mabhena, the Mahlangu and the Sibindi hail from the Ndebele of Ndzudza and Manala. The third linkage is to the Sotho-Tswana, as Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo incorporated many Tswana and Sotho-speaking people into the ranks of the Ndebele kingdom in the 1830s.

This article has covered the history of the Ndebele of Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo up to the early colonial period. But Ndebele history is also entangled with the entire history of colonialism and postcolonialism. It would be necessary to continue the research into how the Ndebele experienced and survived colonialism. It is well known that white colonialism always survived through divide and rule, to the extent that the areas inhabited by the Ndebele-speaking people were designated as Matabeleland to distinguish them from those inhabited by the Shona, which became known as Mashonaland. Ndebele history is also part of Zimbabwean nationalism. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, Rhodesia was experiencing

the pressure of the rise of African nationalism, which tried to forge black consciousness among the Ndebele and the Shona-speaking peoples as the nationalists imagined a postcolonial modern nation state known as Zimbabwe. Unfortunately, even anti-colonial nationalism could not effectively resolve the Ndebele-Shona ethnic cleavages. Thus, two dominant liberation movements emerged: the Zimbabwe African People's Union (Zapu) became associated with the Ndebele-speaking people and the Zimbabwe African National Union (Zanu) became Shona dominated.

What was even more disappointing was that the highly educated African nationalists themselves became culprits in the politicization of ethnicity while at the same time proclaiming nationalism in public forums. Inevitably, Zimbabwe was born in 1980 with a very bad ethnic birthmark – which made it almost inevitable for the triumphant Shona-dominated Zimbabwe African Union-Patriotic Front (Zanu-PF) to use state power to violently decimate the losing Patriotic Front-Zimbabwe People's Union (PF-Zapu) in the period 1983–1987. That violence, known as *gukurahundi*, which targeted the Ndebele-speaking people in Matebeleland and Midlands regions, tended to revive strong Ndebele feelings of being unwanted people, and reinforced Ndebele identity. Many Ndebele-speaking people migrated to South Africa in the 1980s to escape political persecution. The subsequent collapse of the Zimbabwean national economy ignited further migrations from the late 1990s onwards, this time of both Ndebele and Shona-speaking people.

All these highlighted issues need further research if a modern history of the Ndebele of Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo, including their efforts to revive the Ndebele monarchy and the forms of memorialization, is to be produced. Finally, if what I have written reflects a rather modernist nationalist rendition of the Ndebele-speaking people's history, where the plot is defined by the end, please bear in mind my opening sentences about the challenges of modernist baggage in the writing of the pre-colonial history of Africa – and that of the Ndebele is not even an exclusive pre-colonial history.

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DISCUSSION:

The Concepts of Tribe and Nation in African Historiography

Yahya Sseremba

Abstract

When the notion of the tribe proved to be conceptually and analytically barren, scholars went for what they considered to be more productive concepts of ethnicity and nation. In his study of the Ndebele in Southern Africa, Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni settles for the concept of nation. I show that the concepts tribe and nation have more similarities than differences. Both are products of modern history and both are founded on the ahistorical assumption of biological or cultural homogeneity. The concepts have a strong sense of the Self and the Other and have polarized the population and led to discrimination and even bloodshed where they have formed the basis for social organization. To run away from tribe and embrace nation as a category of historical inquiry is to jump out of the frying pan into the fire. The way forward is to invent appropriate vocabulary.

Introduction

The notion of the tribe has largely been excised, with deserving contempt, from scholarly discourses.¹ The concept suffered from serious handicaps that did not allow it to constitute even the least defensible basis for the study of any aspect of human and histori-

¹ The term tribe is one that explained history and politics as the consequence of culture. This became the convention in nineteenth and even part of twentieth-century anthropology. I am not interested in the earlier use of the term in referring to Bedouin or other societies, but in the use of "tribe" as a category to explain the history and politics of society.

cal phenomena. Founded on a sharp distinction between the West and non-West, between reason and tradition and between civilization and barbarism, the notion of the tribe assumed that society in the non-West is composed of biologically and culturally homogeneous members whose supposed common blood and common custom naturally determines their social and political “behaviour”.² In the place of tribe, other concepts were adopted that were considered to be more respectful to the non-West. Such concepts include ethnicity and nation. Unfortunately, these more acceptable concepts have carried with them many of the assumptions that made tribe a derisory category. By approaching pre-colonial Ndebele society as a nation, Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni reproduces some of the assumptions that anti-colonial and de-colonial scholars like him loathed and denounced with befitting courage: the assumptions underlying the notion of the tribe.

In the second of three lectures delivered at Makerere Institute of Social Research in March 2019, “The Ndebele Kingdom of Mzilikazi Khumalo”, Ndlovu-Gatsheni sets out to trace the formation, in the nineteenth century, of the Ndebele society in Southern Africa. He searches for an “original nucleus” from which the Ndebele proceeded to become a “heterogeneous nation” – through migration, through “conquest, incorporation and assimilation of both Nguni and non-Nguni groups” – and stayed “in the interior of South Africa (1823–1837) before crossing the Limpopo River and settling on the south-western part of what is today Matabeleland in Zimbabwe”.³ I focus on Ndlovu-Gatsheni’s assumptions that lead to his preoccupation with searching for an original nucleus of the Ndebele. At the centre of these assumptions is his treatment of the Ndebele as a nation.

2 Lila Abu-Lughod, “Writing against Culture,” in *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, ed. Richard G. Fox (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1991).

3 Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, “The Ndebele Kingdom of Mzilikazi Khumalo,” *Makerere Institute of Social Research Lecture Series*, (March 2019): No page numbers.

The Nation and its Purported Original Nucleus

At the outset, Ndlovu-Gatsheni acknowledges the problem of using modern categories like “nation” to study pre-colonial African societies. Yet, he proceeds to deploy such categories, and consoles himself by echoing the observation that “all histories are histories of the present”. Does this mean that terms such as the internet or mobile phone can be used to make sense of communication in pre-modern societies? In this sense, the category “nation” is no less misplaced than that of the internet or mobile phone.

It is, perhaps, this homogenising category of “nation” that prompts Ndlovu-Gatsheni to look for an “original nucleus” of the Ndebele instead of exploring multiple origins. He says:

The original nucleus of the Ndebele of Mzilikazi is a Khumalo lineage or clan that was located between the sources of Mkhuzi River and Ngome Forests in Northern Natal. Three leaders of the Khumalo clans namely Magugu, Mashobana and Ndoda are identified in existing historical records. Collectively, these Khumalo leaders belonged to the amaNtungwa Ka Mbulazi – the founder ancestor.⁴

This search for an original nucleus is a pursuit (if unwittingly) of authenticity and purity imagined by colonial administrators such as Fredrick Lugard who described the Bahima in western Uganda as having “eyes piercing... features sharp... nose often acquiline”.⁵ Ndlovu-Gatsheni acknowledges, even repeatedly, that the Ndebele came to be a heterogeneous society. Even before the intensive conquests and migrations of Mzilikazi, he accepts that the Khumalo, the precursors to the Ndebele, were never organized entirely on blood ties. “It would make sense to suppose that while the Khumalo consisted of related clans,” he says, “there were other people under them who were not necessarily of Khumalo origin.” Despite this acknowledgement, Ndlovu-Gatsheni’s use of the homogenis-

4 Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *The Ndebele Kingdom*.

5 Frederick Lugard, *The Rise of Our East African Empire: Early Efforts in Nyasaland and Uganda*, Vol. II. London (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1893), p. 158.

ing category “nation” drags him back to the assumption of original purity and prompts him to look for an original nucleus.

The idea of an original nucleus presupposes that there is something original, pure and authentic about the Ndebele that was subsequently lost as a result of contamination. This is to say that African societies were originally pure and immobile before they breathed the air of history. History begins at a certain point – everything before that point is pure. The nineteenth-century anthropologist Edward Taylor made this point quite blatantly when he laid down three stages in the development of man and civilization. The first two stages, when man is savage and then barbarian, are static (that is, outside of history) and devoid of reasoned change. Civilization is born with the emergence of history. It begins with the “art of writing”, not any kind of writing, but the “recording of history, law, knowledge and religion for the service of ages to come” in a manner that “binds together the past and the future in an unbroken chain of intellectual and moral progress”.⁶ In common language, this history writing enables civilized beings to turn their situation into something better and to create their desired future. In leftist terms, it is the kind of historical writing and thinking that leads to the resolution of “present contradictions into their inherent synthesis” to attain the productive change known as progress.⁷ Progress, in other words, is the distinguishing marker of civilized society, whereas non-civilized society remains static and pure until it comes into contact with foreign influence. Henry Maine saw this kind of purity in the tribes of the Indian interior: compared to the coast, where contact with the outside world had ushered in contamination in blood and culture, the interior represented the true and original Indian tribe.⁸ A scholar as anti-colonial as Ndlovu-Gatsheni could not have intended to think alongside Maine. Unfortunately, Ndlovu-Gatsheni’s pursuit of

6 Edward Taylor, *Anthropology: An Introduction to the Study of Man and Civilization* (New York: D. Appleton and Co, 1896), p. 24.

7 Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (Florida: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), pp. 27-28.

8 Mahmood Mamdani, *Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), p. 104.

originality and purity draw him, if without his intention, close to colonial thinkers.

Like the anti-colonial nationalists whose response to colonialism reproduced the logic of colonial rule,⁹ anti-colonial scholars like Ndlovu-Gatsheni seem to have rejected the notion of the tribe but have embraced a similarly problematic notion of the nation. Igor Kopytoff notes that the assumptions underlying the idea of the tribe are the very homogenizing assumptions underlying the idea of the nation.¹⁰ Both concepts have the same history and reinforce each other. When Europe defined and organized itself along the lines of supposedly internally identical formations known as nations with the birth of the nation-state in the nineteenth century, it constructed a history that corresponded to its new self-perception, one that identified the tribe as the embryo from which the nation developed. Modern European history thus produced the notions of the nation and tribe as two sides of the same coin:

The notion of the “tribe” that has embedded itself in popular and scholarly thought is above all a nineteenth-century European notion. It arose out of the struggle of a new Europe of self-conscious nations, rather than one of mere states, to construct a past appropriate to their new self-perceptions. In this notion, the tribe was a collectivity within whose boundaries one found a uniform “breed” or “race” (as the term was understood before modern biology gave it an exclusively genetic meaning). In its ideal form, the tribe embodied a uniformity of such traits as physique (what we now mean by “race”), custom, polity, language, character, mind and group (what we now call “ethnicity”). The unity of the tribe resulted from common descent, common blood, and a common

9 Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986); Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2017).

10 Igor Kopytoff, “The Internal African Frontier: The Making of African Culture” in *The African Frontier*, ed. Igor Kopytoff (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989)

formative historical experience. To the many frustrated nationalisms of the nineteenth century Europe, this notion gave a sense of deep roots in the past and it made their history into a progression from tribes to peoples to nation. As the embryo of the nation, the tribe served as a charter for national independence – the nation being the natural historical self-realisation of common descent, common blood, and common unique character.¹¹

The concepts of the tribe and nation both freeze diversity and history to generate biological and cultural homogeneity across time and space. Indeed, the categories nation and tribe have both had the same divisive and even bloody consequences where they have been applied as the foundation of societal organisation. In Africa, where colonial rule animated and politicized tribe by making it the basis for qualifying for land, political representation, jobs and other aspects of the so-called national cake, ethnic conflicts are the order of the day.¹² Conflicts have similarly characterized recent European history when the state organized itself on the basis of the nation to become the nation state which, according to Hannah Arendt, is founded on the claim that its members share biological or cultural traits that naturally pull them together to form a political society.¹³ Following the disintegration of the empires of Europe after the First World War, states formed based on the claim to nationhood of certain peoples, leaving out huge numbers that did not fit in the new nation states defined by blood and culture. When the new state existed in the name of the nation (people allegedly with a common origin) whose “right to self-determination was recognized for all of Europe”, those who did not belong to the nation became stateless and “lost all those rights which had been thought of and even defined as inalienable, namely the Rights of Man.” The “essential conviction” of the nation state was “the supremacy of will of the nation over” the state. The nation state makes biolog-

¹¹ Kopytoff, *The Internal African Frontier*, 4.

¹² Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*.

¹³ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Benediction Classics, 2009), pp. 268–275.

ical and cultural homogeneity the basis of citizenship. Far from allowing room for diversity, the nation state institutionalizes differences between the nationals – distinguished by their supposedly common blood or culture or both – and the political minorities, seen as biological or cultural aliens. Unless Ndlovu-Gatsheni can prove that this kind of institutionalized discrimination based on blood or culture defined the Ndebele before colonialism, the term “nation” would be misplaced.

So divisive is the idea of the nation that the rise of individual rights in European nations has not done away with discrimination against sections of the population considered to be biologically or culturally foreign – even when they may be pronounced citizens. Muslims, for example, are seen as a threat to the values of Europe, to the extent that numerous political parties have formed largely around a single issue, confronting the Muslim alien, and have won considerable support in Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, Germany, France and other countries, with the media reporting “a recent boom in voter support for right-wing and populist parties” driven by fears of “a dilution of national identity”. The BBC notes that although this boom of anti-Muslim parties is recent, “Nationalism has always been a feature across Europe’s political spectrum”.¹⁴ Indeed, this popular anti-Muslim mobilization cannot be adequately explained without reference to the history of nationalism and the nation state. The point I wish to emphasize here is that the nation is as divisive and explosive as the tribe. But the two concepts also have notable differences if again we look at the recent history of Europe and Africa.

In Europe, the concept of the nation creates one national political majority against the rest. In Africa, the concept of the tribe has led to far greater fragmentation. In Africa, the population is fragmented at two levels. The first pits those defined as native against those defined as settlers. Some of the most extreme consequences of this kind of polarisation include the Rwandan genocide largely

¹⁴ Europe and right-wing nationalism: A country-by-country guide. BBC. 24 May 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36130006>

against the Tutsis in 1994, the Ugandan expulsion of the Asians in 1972, and the anti-Arab violence in the Zanzibar of the 1960s. Africa is no stranger to the violence of the native against the settler, or, as Mahmood Mamdani puts it, the violence of the victim turned killer.¹⁵ The second and most serious level of fragmentation of African populations takes place within the natives themselves—between one ethnic group and another. It was the policy of the colonial state to govern the native not as one native population, but as different tribes, each with its own tribal law and tribal homeland where it has monopoly over land, political representation, jobs and other opportunities. The tribe-based variant of the state that colonial rule installed in Africa produces multiple political majorities and political minorities so that every district has its own native tribe as a political majority and other tribes become political minorities. There can be as many political majorities and minorities in an African state like Uganda as the number of ethnic groups, or at least the dominant ethnic groups, in the country.¹⁶

If Arendt explains the divisiveness of the nation state in Europe, Mamdani unveils the particular divisiveness of the colonial and postcolonial state in Africa (and Asia). The European state, through ethnic cleansing, cultural subjugation and other historical processes, was able to create one national identity, and one population bloc, that constitutes a national majority.¹⁷ This single national majority, recent and artificial as it may be, came to define itself very passionately in opposition to its political minorities. The postcolonial African state, on the other hand, only has regional or district-based political majorities, whose members instantly become marginalized political minorities when they cross to another region. A member of the political majority in the western

15 Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism and the Genocide in Rwanda* (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2001); Mahmood Mamdani, "Making Sense of Political Violence in Post-Colonial Africa," *Identity, Culture and Politics* 3, no. 2 (2003), p. 135.

16 Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*.

17 On the creation of a national identity in Europe, see, for example, Eugene Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1976).

Ugandan region of Kigezi becomes a member of a political minority when he crosses to another western Uganda region, Bunyoro. An African can easily become a foreigner in his own country. The status of a foreigner is enviable because it is recognized in law but the member of an ethnic group that is not defined as native in a particular tribal territory has no clear legal protection and lives at the mercy of the recognized native ethnic group. This explains why the Bakonzo and Bamba in the western Uganda kingdom of Toro in the 1960s had to demand that the law should be amended to name them explicitly as native tribes of Toro if they were to overcome discrimination.¹⁸ This makes the African strain of the modern state, founded on the notion of the tribe, exceptional in its polarisation and explosiveness compared to European states modelled along the concept of the nation. This difference, however, does not undermine the basic fact that both tribe and nation share the attributes of narrowness, divisiveness and explosiveness. Neither has a sense of diversity and history.

If Ndlovu-Gatsheni acknowledges the diversity of the Ndebele, his preoccupation with an original nucleus deprives the so-called original nucleus of diversity and history. The said original nucleus appears to be natural and stable, waiting for the moment when it will come into contact with history and produce the Ndebele. The history of the Ndebele is thus founded on an ahistorical origin. It supposes that there is a point before which the societies that came to be known as the Ndebele can be approached as frozen.

The idea that a phenomenon as historical as the Ndebele society can have a single origin located somewhere is reminiscent of the assumptions underlying the contest between Eurocentric and Afrocentric versions of the origin of civilization. Eurocentric accounts Europeanized ancient Greece and identified it as the origin of civilization bequeathed to modern Europe. Africa, being dark and barbarian, had no role in the history of civilization. All distinguished European philosophers of the nineteenth and even

18 Yahya Sseremba, "The Making and Remaking of 'Native Tribes' in Uganda's Toro Kingdom," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 25 no. 3, 311-328 (2019), DOI: 10.1080/13537113.2019.1639429.

much of the twentieth century shared this perspective, with Hegel describing Africa in the most vicious of terms.¹⁹ In response, Afrocentric authors like Cheikh Anta Diop,²⁰ Martin Bernal²¹ and W. E. B. Du Bois²² authored rebuttals and identified Pharaohic Egypt, which they painted racially black, as the true origin of civilization. According to Mahmood Mamdani, both the Eurocentric and Afrocentric accounts were mistaken because each restricted civilization to a single origin instead of considering multiple origins. Summoning Ibn Khaldun's inclusion of the Persians in the history of civilization, Mamdani says that civilization should be seen as an encounter rather than something flowing from one people or one place.

Bringing Persia into the frame undercut the alternatives in the debate – that civilization began in either ancient Greece or in Pharaohic Egypt – and offered a third alternative: in neither ... Maybe the origin of civilization – by which Ibn Khaldun meant the intellectual pursuits, arts and crafts associated with the stability of urban life – is not in a place but an encounter. From this point of view, the search for a single place, a single origin, appears yet another version of the continuation of the nineteenth century race-based search for purity. The alternative would be to think not in terms of one original inspiration but a plurality of influences, not a single origin but in confluence.²³

The formation of the Ndebele or any society, like the making of civilization, should be approached as a confluence of multiple historical processes, not a search for an original nucleus that does not exist. The reliance on homogenising categories like nation goes on to create more problems in Ndlovu-Gatsheni's paper. He says

19 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York: Dover Publications, 1956).

20 Cheikh Anta Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality* (Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill, 1974).

21 Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization; Volume I: The Fabrication of Ancient Greece* (London: Vintage Books, 1991).

22 W.E.B. Du Bois, *The World and Africa: An inquiry into the Part which Africa has Played in World History* (New York: International Publishers, 1965).

23 Mahmood Mamdani, "Reading Ibn Khaldun in Kampala," *MISR Working Paper* No 10, Makerere Institute of Social Research (August 2012), p. 8.

that the Ndebele formed through "conquest, incorporation and assimilation of Nguni and non-Nguni groups". To use the language of assimilation is the same as deploying such terms as "Arabization" or "Islamization" that have been used to describe historical processes in places like Sudan. Such terms assume that biological or cultural influence proceeds in a linear tendency from the biologically or culturally dominant group to the receiving end.²⁴ The term "assimilation" goes hand in hand with such concepts as nation and tribe in the sense that they do not account for the reality of cultural intersection.

If the categories that Ndlovu-Gatsheni draws from existing vocabulary and deploys to study African history are problematic, what would be the alternative? The despair he expresses at the beginning of his paper that there is no option but to use such concepts as the nation is not founded. If there are no appropriate concepts to capture reasonably the complexity of pre-colonial African history, why does he not coin his own concepts? Let us consider the example of Shahab Ahmed, who found all existing concepts too narrow or too vague to capture the diversity and contradictions of Islam. Ahmed found that the categories used to study Islam, including those focusing on the text (Qur'an and Sunnah) like Talal Asad's concept of discursive tradition,²⁵ fell short of accounting for practices that were valorized as Islamic even when they clearly contradicted the Islamic text and Islamic law. His ambition was to find concepts that would capture the Islamicity of both ideas and practices that conformed to the Islamic text and those that contradicted the same text. He thus decided to coin a set of concepts that reflected multiple sources of Islamic truth that included but was not limited to the text: Text, Pre-Text and Con-Text.²⁶ Scholars of other traditions, including pre-colonial African traditions and

24 Mahmood Mamdani, *Saviors and Survivors: Darfur, Politics and the War on Terror* (Kampala: Makerere Institute of Social Research), p. 90.

25 Talal Asad, "An idea of An Anthropology of Islam," *Qui Parle* 17, no. 2 (2009).

26 Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016)

societies that exhibit great diversity and contradiction,²⁷ can learn from the example of Ahmed. Without constantly inventing a new language, scholarship would fail to come to terms with the multifaceted complexity and dynamism of historical phenomena. If Ndlovu-Gatsheni is indeed certain that there is something about the history of the Ndebele that cannot be articulated through existing categories like nation, it is his responsibility as a researcher to create appropriate categories. The fact that he paid only lip service to pre-colonial history, as he himself acknowledges towards the end of his paper, must have made it difficult for him to even think of coining concepts that would have allowed him to excavate the diversity of the historical processes involved in the formation of a pre-colonial society like the Ndebele.

The Importance of Pre-Colonial History

To invent new vocabulary that would capture the enormous diversity of pre-colonial tradition and society requires an extensive study of pre-colonial histories. Ahmed's extensive study, for instance, draws from multiple sources in Arabic, Urdu, Persian, Turkish and other primary and secondary materials. This allowed him to critique not only the modern categories imposed on the pre-modern, but also to go beyond variants of pre-modern discourses that were considered to be the only (or at least the dominant) discourses in the pre-modern. His multiple sources allowed him to go beyond Arabia as the conventional conceptual model for the study of Islam and to explore discourses that proliferated elsewhere in the Muslim populations of India, Turkey and the Balkans. Only a rich and extensive study of the pre-modern can enable a researcher to see the impoverishment and inappropriateness of modern categories in the study of the pre-modern.

Besides understanding the past, a profound and extensive study of the pre-colonial is necessary to help us make sense of contemporary realities. Ndlovu-Gatsheni says that the Ndebele nation

27 Yusuf Bala Usman, *Beyond Fairy Tales* (Zaria: Abdullahi Smith Center for Historical Research, 2006).

today "are exhibiting a complex state of being 'rootless' and 'restless'" and are complaining of being unwanted and marginalized within Zimbabwe, seeking to restore the Ndebele kingdom. To explain this marginalization of the Ndebele and the response to it, there is need for serious research on pre-colonial and colonial history. There is need to consider the colonial history of the making of tribal homelands and the politicization of ethnicity. There is also need to examine the ways in which societies related before this colonial intervention. The absence of a profound study of the pre-colonial leads to the use of such notions as the nation in reference to ancient societies and consequently prompts scholars to try to find, in pre-colonial African history, a precedent for the contemporary politics of nationalism and ethnicity. Scholars who have recently sought to question the importance of colonial rule by drawing links between postcolonial realities and pre-colonial history include Thomas Spear,²⁸ Richard Reid,²⁹ Paul Nugent,³⁰ Carola Lentz³¹ and others. Only a careful and in-depth study of the pre-colonial can enable one to appreciate the full extent of the ways in which colonial rule transformed the relationship between society and the state and consequently between society and society. Concepts such as nation can only tempt us to find, in ancient history, antecedents and precedents for the current marginalization of the Ndebele and their ethnic-based response to this marginalization. Far from studying the pre-colonial, Ndlovu-Gatsheni's lecture is largely limited to the nineteenth century, focusing on the importance of Mzilikazi and the Mfecane in the formation of the Ndebele.

28 Thomas Spear, "Neotraditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa," *The Journal of African History*, 44, no. 1 (2003), p. 4.

29 Richard Reid, "Past and Presentism: the 'Precolonial'" and the Foreshortening of African History," *The Journal of African History* 52, no. 2 (2011), p. 136.

30 Paul Nugent, "Putting the History Back into Ethnicity: Enslavement, Religion, and Cultural Brokerage in the Construction of Mandinka/Jola and Ewe/Agotime Identities in West Africa, c. 1650-1930," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50, no. 4 (2008), p. 922.

31 Carola Lentz, *Ethnicity and the Making of History in Northern Ghana* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

Mzilikazi and the Mfecane

Key in the formation of Ndlovu-Gatsheni's Ndebele is the Mfecane and the person of Mzilikazi. Besides Mzilikazi, and to some extent his relatives and a few chiefs, there is little mention of other historical actors in the making of the Ndebele. This makes the history of the Ndebele read like the history of Mzilikazi. The tendency to reduce the history of societies and places to the history of dominant actors has long been the subject of discussion. In his critique of the historians of the Maghrib, who presented the history of the Romans as the history of the region, Abdallah Laroui says, "We are best informed about the big landowners, the *negotiatores*, the churchmen, and the veterans, slaves, servants and artisans of the cities." Laroui continues, "As for the native inhabitants, we sense their presence, working in the fields, paying the *annona*, confined to the Aures Mountains or driven beyond the *limes*, but we never see them. We should doubtless be grateful that a shadow of their presence endures, but let us not be dazzled by false riches: Roman history is not the history of the Maghrib."³² In Ndlovu-Gatsheni's paper, we can equally sense the movement of people but we really do not see them engaging in any significant political action beyond simply following Mzilikazi.

Besides Mzilikazi, Ndlovu-Gatsheni discusses the Mfecane. He rejects two views on the Mfecane before he advances his own. The first emerged from colonial historiography, which depicted the Mfecane as a period of "black-on-black violence, depopulation and scattering of people across space". For this perspective, "African leaders such as Shaka KaSenzangakhona of the Zulu and Mzilikazi KaMatshobana Khumalo of the Ndebele were nothing other than 'bloodthirsty' savages who were intent on harming other African people until they were stopped by the arrival of colonialism and Christianity together with its 'civilizing mission'". The second perspective he dismisses countered the colonial narrative by arguing that the Mfecane was actually "a series of experiments

³² Abdallah Laroui, *The History of the Maghrib: An Interpretive Essay* (Princeton University Press: New Jersey, 1997), p. 37.

in state building involving rapid assimilation of political, linguistic and cultural aliens and the development of a sense of common identity and loyalty within the new rapidly aggregated composite communities". Ndlovu-Gatsheni says that both perspectives were wrong in the sense that they "tended to exaggerate the violence or downplay it". Far from being peaceful or simply being characterized by "unmitigated violence", the Mfecane involved the use of "consent and coercion" to reorganize and build stronger societies.

Citing earlier researchers such as Margret Kinsman and Julian Cobbing, Ndlovu-Gatsheni says that Mzilikazi's Ndebele, in the course of the Mfecane, established "a defensive state that provided protection to many refugees from ... slave raiders". These slave hunters included the "whites working on behalf of the white settler capitalist colony of the Cape". He agrees with Kinsman that Mzilikazi's forces, far from destroying villages and slaughtering people, "cleared the area of brigands who had been destabilising the Rolong settlements with their unpredictable raids, and replaced these with a stronger Ndebele kingdom. Ndlovu-Gatsheni neither celebrates nor condemns the Mfecane. He seems to avoid the categories of senseless and progressive violence that have dominated discourses on political violence since the nineteenth century. Rather, he approaches the Mfecane as a historically significant moment in the production of nations such as the Ndebele. His essay would have been stronger if the role of colonial rule in shaping the Ndebele had been given more detailed treatment.

Conclusion

This article on the Ndebele reflects the challenge of the decolonization of knowledge. It is the same challenge as the decolonization of the state. The anti-colonial nationalist and the scholars of decolonization share the predicament of reproducing that which they seek to overcome. If the category "tribe" was misleading, the category "nation" that appeared as the remedy has turned out to be equally deficient. The challenge of African scholars and other critics of colonialism is first and foremost to invent a new vocabulary

that challenges the assumptions embedded in colonial concepts. Concepts born of the historical experience of Europe can do little to decolonize knowledge production in Africa and elsewhere.

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Decolonization/Decoloniality: Converging African/Latin American Thinking

Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni

Abstract

Decolonization is resurgent and insurgent in the twenty-first century. The Latin American theorists have introduced concepts of coloniality and decoloniality to name the current global situation characterized by asymmetrical power structures and relations. African scholars continue to use the traditional terms: colonialism, decolonization and neocolonialism. This article revisits the scholarly debates on modernity, colonialism, decolonization, coloniality and decoloniality. It does so by bringing Latin American and African intellectuals together with a view to evaluating areas of divergence and convergence on issues of colonialism and decolonization – and, indeed, the broader reading and naming of the current state global power dynamics. Decoloniality is posited as a name for decolonization in the twenty-first century which is no longer only about political but also about epistemic freedom. While tracing the ‘decolonial turn’ to such events the Haitian Revolution of 1791–1804 and ‘primary resistance’, it opens the canvas wide on decolonization/decoloniality to take into account the black radical tradition and diaspora pan-African thought and movements as foundational to the current debates. At the end, the article provides a distinction between decolonization/decoloniality and postcolonialism, poststructuralism and postmodernism.

Introduction

This article addresses the contemporary debates about colonialism and coloniality on the one hand, and decolonization and decoloniality on the other. What has come to be termed the “decolonial turn” is traceable to the Haitian Revolution of 1791–1804 ranged against enslavement and racism (dehumanization). Its intellectual genealogy embraces diaspora pan-African movements such as Garveyism, early black consciousness iterations such as Ethiopism; African Personality; Negritude; Pan-Africanism; African nationalist anti-colonial thought; Black Marxist thought; Black feminist thought; Nkrumah’s ideas of neocolonialism; Fanonian decolonization thought; Walter Rodney’s ideas on how Europe underdeveloped Africa; Albert Memmi’s, Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s and Chinweizu’s ideas on how Europe invaded the mental universe of Africa resulting in the colonization of the minds of African people; Cheikh Anta Diop’s and Molefi Asante’s Afrocentricity; Africana existential philosophy; Mahmood Mamdani’s thinking on how Europe ruled Africa and the long-term consequences of colonialism on postcolonial Africa; Achille Mbembe’s postcolonial thought and how Africa ruled/governed itself and the current Latin American modernity/coloniality/decoloniality.¹ This is why Nelson Maldonado-Torres defined decoloniality as a “family” of thought that identified modernity/colonialism/coloniality as a foundation of some of the major problems haunting the modern world.²

Colonialism resulted in the destruction of other civilizations rather than blending of different worlds. As a result of colonialism, human species were socially classified and racially hierarchized rather than brought into a common humanity. What emerged

- 1 S.J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, “The Cognitive Empire and the Challenges of Decolonizing the Mind.” Keynote Address delivered at the International Conference on Towards A Decolonial Psychology: Theories from the Global South, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa, 21–22 February 2019; S.J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Epistemic Freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and Decolonization*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2018).
- 2 N. Maldonado-Torres, “Thinking Through the Decolonial Turn: Post-Continental Interventions in Theory, Philosophy, and Critique – An Introduction.” *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of Luso-Hispanic World*, 1(2), (Fall), 2011.

were two zones of being – the zone of being for the colonizers and the zone of non-being for the colonized.³ It is therefore not surprising that the return, resurgence and insurgence of decolonization/ decoloniality has once again placed the problem of colonialism and coloniality at the centre of global studies as that discursive terrain which makes it impossible for a postcolonial and post-racial world to be constructed.

Besides identification of modernity/colonialism as the fundamental problem, decolonization/decoloniality challenges the present globalization and its pretensions of universalism, which hides the reality of the Europeanization and Americanization of the modern world. Colonialism and imperialism embarked on the aggressive destruction of existing diverse worlds, and they have been equally aggressive in denying common humanity as they invented and created all sorts of pseudo-science to divide people racially across the planet, and notions of stages of developmentalism to push other human beings below the invented “human line”.⁴ What is emerging poignantly today is that decolonization is a much more profound activity and process than simply obtaining political independence; it is a condition of the possibility to start a new thinking and doing aimed at a re-humanized world.⁵

This article introduces decolonization/decoloniality as both a political and epistemological movement gesturing towards the attainment of ecologies of knowledge and pluriversality. Ecologies of knowledge is a concept introduced by Boaventura de Sousa Santos which speaks to the recognition of the different ways of knowing by which people across the human globe provide meaning to their

3 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 1967; B. V. de Sousa Santos, “Beyond Abyssal Thinking: From Global Lines to Ecologies of Knowledges.” *Review: A Journal of the Fernand Braudel Centre*, xxx(1), 2007; R. Grosfoguel, “What is Racism? Zone of Being and Zone of Non-Being in the Work of Frantz Fanon and Boaventura de Sousa Santos.” In *Unsettling Eurocentrism in the Westernized University* ed. J. Cupples and R. Ramon. (London and New York: Routledge, 2019).

4 Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks*; Santos, *Beyond Abyssal Thinking*; Grosfoguel, *What is Racism?*.

5 N. Maldonado-Torres, “On Coloniality of Human Rights.” *Revista Critica de Ciencias Sociales*, 114, December, 2017.

existence and understanding of the world.⁶ The concept of pluriversality directly challenges the “one-dimensional solutions to diverse problems and impositions of universal claims to the very nature of humanity”.⁷ Pluriversality underscores a world governed by relationality and transcendence over impositions of bourgeois values, knowledge, economic logics and political perspectives masquerading as the scientism and rationality of the rest of humanity.⁸

The concept of pluriversality is drawn from the indigenous movements in Latin America, especially the Zapatista with their vision of a world in which many worlds would coexist in a pluriverse.⁹ The article begins by opening the canvas on the triple crises haunting the present world at the systemic, epistemic and ideological levels as it articulates the importance of decoloniality as an endeavour to create a post-globalist, post-capitalist and post-neoliberal world. It proceeds to redefine colonialism and coloniality so as to enable a deeper appreciation of the convergences of decolonisation and decoloniality as transformative forces. At the same time, it articulates the complex debates on the differences between postcolonialism and decoloniality. Thus, besides rebutting the postcolonial critique, the article ends by mapping a decolonial future beyond post-globalism, post-neoliberalism and post-capitalism.

Framing the Issues and Opening the Canvas

The modern world is facing a triple crisis, which is systemic, epistemic and ideological in character. At the systemic level, one witnesses a global capitalism that is haunted by a terminal crisis, a planetary ecological/environmental crisis, and exploding social

6 Santos, *Beyond Abyssal Thinking*.

7 B. Reiter, (ed). *Constructing the Pluriverse: The Geopolitics of Knowledge*. (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2018), p. 1.

8 A. Escobar, “Transition Discourses and the Politics of Relationality: Towards Designs For the Pluriverse,” In *Constructing the Pluriverse: The Geopolitics of Knowledge* ed. B. Reiter. (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2018).

9 W.D. Mignolo, “The Zapatistas’ Theoretical Revolution: Its Historical, Political, and Epistemological Consequences.” *Review: A Journal of the Fernand Braudel Centre*, 25(3), 2002; Escobar, *Transition Discourses*; Reiter, *Constructing the Pluriverse*.

divisions. It was these realities that led Slavoj Žižek to write about “living in the end times”.¹⁰ At the epistemic level, there is clear exhaustion of a once hegemonic knowledge that has been dominant for over five hundred years. This epistemic crisis was well captured by Immanuel Wallerstein:¹¹

I believe we live in a very exciting era in the world of knowledge, precisely because we are living in a systemic crisis that is forcing us to reopen the basic epistemological questions and look to structural reorganisation of the world of knowledge. It is uncertain whether we shall rise adequately to the intellectual challenge, but it is there for us to address. We engage our responsibility as scientists/scholars in the way in which we address the multiple issues before us at this turning point in our structures of knowledge.

The epistemic crisis is a product of “epistemicides” (killing and displacement of other knowledges) which made the global North lose “the capacity to learn from the experiences of the world” and to fail in learning “in noncolonial terms”. There is a glaring loss of critical nouns in conventional Eurocentric critical epistemology, which explicitly signifies an epistemic crisis. This point is delivered powerfully by Boaventura de Sousa Santos:¹²

There was a time when Eurocentric critical theory “owned” a vast set of nouns that marked its difference from conventional or bourgeois theories. These nouns included socialism, communism, revolution, class struggle, dependency, alienation, fetishism of commodities, and so on. In the past thirty years the Eurocentric critical tradition seems to have lost “its” nouns and now distinguishes itself from conventional or bourgeois theories by the adjectives it uses to subvert the meaning of the

10 S. Žižek, *S. Living in the End Times* (London and New York: Verso, 2011).

11 I. Wallerstein, *I. Uncertainties of Knowledge* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004).

12 B.V. de Sousa Santos *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide*. (Boulder, CO and London: Paradigm Publishers, 2014), p. 33.

proper nouns it borrows from such theories. Thus, for instance, if conventional theory speaks of development, critical theory refers to alternative, integral, inclusionary, democratic, or sustainable development; if conventional theory speaks of democracy, critical theory proposes radical, participatory, or deliberative democracy.

Perhaps Frantz Fanon was seeing this epistemic crisis coming when he urged humanity to “turn over a new leaf”, “work out new concepts” and “try to set afoot a new man”.¹³ With regard to the ideological crisis, Michael Neocosmos’s *Thinking Freedom in Africa: Towards a Theory of Emancipatory Politics* posed important questions:¹⁴ “How are we to begin to think human emancipation in Africa today after the collapse of the Marxist, the Third World nationalist as well as the neoliberal visions of freedom? How are we to conceptualize an emancipatory future governed by a fidelity to the idea of a universal humanity in a context where humanity no longer features within our ambit of thought and when previous ways of thinking emancipation have become obsolete?”

It is mainly because of these systemic, epistemic and ideological crises that decoloniality has emerged as a long-standing but suppressed political and epistemological movement aimed at the liberation of (ex-)colonized peoples from global coloniality. It emerged as a way of thinking, knowing and doing. Decoloniality is part of a collection of marginalized but persistent movements, from struggles against the slave trade, imperialism, colonialism, apartheid, neocolonialism and underdevelopment as constitutive negative elements of hegemonic Euromodernity. As an epistemological movement, it has always been overshadowed by hegemonic intellectual thought and social theories. Decoloniality speaks to the resurgence and insurgence of decolonisation movements in those spaces, sites and locales that experienced racism in its most detestable forms: the slave trade, imperialism, colonialism, apartheid, neocolonialism and underdevelopment.

13 Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks*, 78.

14 M. Neocosmos, *Thinking Freedom in Africa: Towards a Theory of Emancipatory Politics* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2016), p. xiii.

Latin America and Africa are good examples of those sites currently experiencing resurgences and insurgencies of decoloniality. This is so mainly because in the domains of culture, the psyche, mind, language, aesthetics, religion and many others coloniality continues to wreak havoc. At one level, decoloniality calls on intellectuals from imperialist countries to undertake “a deimperialization movement by re-examining their own imperialist histories and the harmful impacts those histories have had on the world”. At another level, it urges critical intellectuals from the global South “to once again deepen and widen decolonization movements, especially in the domains of culture, the psyche and knowledge production”.¹⁵ This takes us to the discussion of colonialism and coloniality, making clear their differences and convergences.

Modernity/Colonialism/Coloniality

The Latin American modernity/coloniality school of thought departs from the premise that the colonization of the Americas laid the foundation for the rise of Euromodernity and the existing capitalist world economy. This view is well expressed by Anibal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein:¹⁶ “The Americas were not incorporated into an already existing capitalist world-economy. There could not have been a capitalist world-economy without the Americas.” Colonialism/coloniality constitutes the discursive terrain within which many forms of domination and exploitation rest. Thus, as concepts, colonialism and coloniality have to be clearly understood. Without the reality of colonialism and coloniality there would be no need for decolonization and decoloniality.

For analytical purposes, and to gain a deeper appreciation of colonialism and coloniality, I introduced the notion of three empires: the physical empire; the commercial non-territorial empire and the cognitive empire.¹⁷ The physical empire is the easiest to identify and know because it became concrete through physical

15 K-H. Chen, *Asia as Method: Towards Deimperialization*. (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2010).

16 Wallerstein, *Uncertainties of Knowledge*, 549.

17 Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Epistemic Freedom in Africa*.

conquest and the open administration of conquered territories. Even the “direct” and “indirect” modes of rule left the physical empire exposed (for more on “direct” and “indirect” rule refer to the work of Mahmood Mamdani from which emerged details of how Europe ruled Africa).¹⁸ Earlier, Walter Rodney had explained how Europe underdeveloped Africa.¹⁹

The commercial non-territorial empire was named by Kwame Nkrumah as operating through neocolonialism.²⁰ This was one of the earliest names for the continuation of domination after the end of direct administrative colonialism. The concept of neocolonialism underscored the continued economic exploitation of the resources of the newly “independent” African states by the empires, within an undecolonized world economic order. The commercial non-territorial empire and the cognitive empire are inextricably intertwined. The cognitive empire/metaphysical empire operates through the invasion of the mental universe of its victims, in the process emptying and removing the very hard disk of previous African memory and downloading into African minds the software of European memory.²¹ To borrow a concept from Ashis Nandy, the cognitive empire lives and subsists within the victim’s body and mind as “the intimate enemy”.²²

Besides theorization, African scholars have historicized colonialism as they endeavoured to emphasize its depth. Ali A. Mazrui

18 M. Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); M. Mamdani, *Define and Rule: Native As Political Identity*. (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2013).

19 W. Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Dar es Salaam: Bogle L’Ouverture and Tanzania Publishing House, 1973).

20 K. Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (New York: International Publishers, 1965).

21 See Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks*; A. Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (London: Earthscan, 1974); O.J. Chinweizu. *The West and the Rest of Us* (New York: Random House, 1975); O.J. Chinweizu and I. Madubuike. *Toward the Decolonization of Africa Literature* (London and Boston: KPI Limited, 1980); O.J. Chinweizu. *Decolonizing the African Mind* (Lagos: Pero Press, 1987); Ngugi wa Thiong’o, *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Oxford: James Currey, 1986).

22 A. Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983).

argued that the long-term impact of colonialism on Africa can be understood from two perspectives. He designated the first perspective as the epic school which underscored that colonialism amounted to “a revolution of epic propositions”.²³ Mazrui identified six deep implications and consequences of colonialism. Firstly, colonialism and capitalism forcibly incorporated Africa into the world economy, starting with the slave trade, “which dragged African labour itself into the emerging international capitalist system”. African labour contributed immensely to the economic rise of a Euro-North-American-centric trans-Atlantic commerce.

Secondly, Africa, which had been excluded from the post-1648 Westphalian sovereign state system and was physically partitioned after the Berlin Conference of 1884-85 was later incorporated into the post-1945 United Nations sovereignty state system. One could add that the fragmented and weak African postcolonial states were admitted into the lowest echelons of the Euro-North American dominated state system of the world.²⁴

Thirdly, Africa was incorporated into a Eurocentric world culture and European languages. Fourthly, the continent was integrated into a heavily Eurocentric world of international law. Fifthly, as a consequence of colonialism, Africa was admitted into the modern technological age, including being “swallowed by the global system of dissemination of information”.²⁵ Finally, Africa was dragged into a Euro-North-American-centric moral order dominated by Christian thought. Mazrui’s conclusion was, therefore, that “what Africa knows about itself, what different parts of Africa know about each other, have been profoundly influenced by the West.”

The epic school is countered by the episodic school. It posits that “the European impact on Africa has been shallow rather than deep, transitional rather than long-lasting”.²⁶ In fact, it was

23 A.A. Mazrui, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage* (London: BBC Publication, 1986).

24 C. Clapham, *Africa and the International System: The Politics of State Survival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

25 Mazrui, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*.

26 Mazrui, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*, 13.

the Nigerian historian Jacob F. Ade Ajayi of the Ibadan nationalist school, who depicted colonialism as “an episode in African history”.²⁷ He elaborated that:

In any long-term view of African history, European rule becomes just another episode. In relation to wars and conflicts of people, the rise and fall of empires, linguistic, cultural and religious change and the cultivation of new ideas and new ways of life, new economic orientations...in relation to all these, colonialism must be seen not as a complete departure from the African past, but as one episode in the continuous flow of history.

This argument amounts to a very complacent view of colonialism as a system of power. African institutions and African leadership were destroyed by colonialism; the colonialists invented their own versions and called them African institutions, traditions and customs.²⁸ At another level, the episodic school was correct in underscoring the longevity of African history pre-dating the time of colonialism and articulating the African factor in the making of human history; the danger lies in its decoupling of colonialism from the broader wave of Euromodernity that radically transformed human history. Understood from this perspective, colonialism cannot be understood as an event/episode. Colonialism was a major part of what Walter D. Mignolo termed “global designs” that became entangled with local histories.²⁹

At the University of Ibadan itself, where Ajayi was based, the episodic school was heavily challenged by Peter P. Ekeh.³⁰ He understood colonialism to be “a social movement of epochal dimen-

27 J.F.A. Ajayi, “The Continuity of African Institutions Under Colonialism.” In *Emerging Themes in African History* ed. T. O. Ranger. (Nairobi: Longman, 1968).

28 T. Ranger, “The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa,” in *The Invention of Tradition* ed. E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

29 W. D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Essays on the Coloniality of Power, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

30 Peter P. Ekeh, “Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* Vol. 17, No. 1 (Jan., 1975), pp. 91-112.

sions”, an “epochal era in Africa”, and introduced “massive and enduring social formations”. According to Ekeh, colonialism directly transformed pre-colonial indigenous social structures, making them serve the colonial capitalist project of domination and exploitation. Even more profoundly, colonialism introduced what Ekeh described as “migrated social structures and constructs”, “literally parcelled from metropolitan centres” and “engrafted onto the new colonial situation”. At another level, colonialism invented what Ekeh described as “emergent social structures” which were “not indigenous to Africa” or “brought from outside” but “generated, born that is, from the space-and-time span of colonialism”.

The introduction of the concept of coloniality by Latin American theorists, to name the continuation of colonialism beyond its physical dismantlement, has effectively countered the episodic school. The thesis of the advocates of coloniality perspective even argues convincingly that the decolonization of the twentieth century failed to destroy colonialism as a system of power. What was delivered was far from being a “postcolonial world”. Instead, as noted by Ramon Grosfoguel,³¹ global coloniality ensued. Global coloniality cannot be separated from Euro-modernity. Today, African leaders continue to manage and maintain the global system after replacing direct colonial rulers. Mabel Morana, Enrique Dussel and Carlos A. Jauregui write about colonialism and its replicants:

In the particular case of Latin America, a discussion of post-or neo-colonialism – or that of *coloniality*, a term that encompasses the transhistoric expansion of colonial domination and the perpetuation of its effects in contemporary times – is necessarily intertwined with the critique of Orientalism and modernity, a critique that requires a profound but detached understanding of imperial rationality.³²

31 R. Grosfoguel, “The Epistemic Decolonial Turn: Beyond Political-Economy Paradigms,” *Cultural Studies*, 21(2/3), (March/May), 2007.

32 M. Morana, E. Dussel and C.A. Jauregui. “Colonialism and its Replicants,” in *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate* ed. M. Morana, E. Dussel and C. A. Jauregui. (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2008), pp. 1-2.

To Grosfoguel, Euromodernity has to be broadly defined as a racially hierarchized, patriarchal, sexist, Christian-centric, hetero-normative, capitalist, military, colonial, imperial and modern form of civilization. Grosfoguel used the term “hetararchies” of power to underscore the complex vertical, horizontal and criss-crossing invisible entanglements in the configuration of the modern global power structure that emerged from colonial encounters.³³ The epic impact of colonialism led the decolonial theorist and poet Aime Cesaire to pose the question: “what, fundamentally, is colonialism?” Cesaire understood colonialism to be a disruptive, “decivilizing” dehumanizing, exploitative, racist, violent, brutal, covetous, and “thingifying” system.³⁴

Coloniality, therefore, names the various colonial-like power relations existing today in those zones that experienced direct colonialism. The concept of coloniality was introduced by the Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano but was further elaborated by the Argentinean decolonial semiotician Walter D. Mignolo and others such as Nelson Maldonado-Torres.³⁵ Quijano identified four key levers of coloniality.³⁶ The first is control of the economy. The second is control of authority. The third is control of gender and sexuality. The fourth is control of knowledge and subjectivity. Mignolo emphasized “colonial difference” as a central leitmotif of coloniality. Coloniality is a name for the “darker side” of modernity that needs to be unmasked because it exists as “an embedded logic that enforces control, domination, and exploitation disguised in the language of salvation, progress, modernisation, and being good for everyone”.³⁷ Building on the work of Quijano and Mignolo, Maldonado-Torres formulated a very useful definition of coloniality:

33 Grosfoguel, *The Epistemic Decolonial Turn*.

34 A. Cesaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*. Translated by Joan Pinkham. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000.)

35 A. Quijano, “Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality.” *Cultural Studies*, 21(2-3), (March/May), 2007; Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*; N. Maldonado-Torres, “On Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of A Concept.” *Cultural Studies*, 21(2-3), (March/May), 2007.

36 Quijano, *Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality*, 173.

37 W. D. Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

Coloniality is different from colonialism. Colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such a nation an empire. Coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labour, intersubjectivity relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and every day.³⁸

This definition converges with Ngugi wa Thiong'o's understanding of the psychological/epistemological as well as cultural and linguistic impact of colonialism on Africa. Ngugi posited that: "The present predicaments of Africa are often not a matter of personal choice: they arise from an historical situation."³⁹ He elaborated that "imperialism is not a slogan" and explained that "It is real; it is palpable in content and form and in its methods and effects".⁴⁰ Ngugi wa Thiong'o detailed the workings of colonialism on the minds of its targets:

The biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against that collective defiance is the cultural bomb. The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to

³⁸ Maldonado-Torres, *On Coloniality of Being*, 243.

³⁹ Ngugi, *Decolonizing the Mind*, p. xii.

⁴⁰ Ngugi, *Decolonizing the Mind*, p. 2.

identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves; for instance, with other people's languages rather than their own. It makes them identify with that which is decadent and reactionary, all those forces which would stop their own springs of life. It even plants serious doubt about the moral rightness of struggle. Possibilities of triumph or victory are seen as remote, ridiculous dreams. The intended results are despair, despondency and a collective death-wish. Amidst this wasteland which it has created; imperialism presents itself as the cure and demands that the dependent sing hymns of praise with the constant refrain: "Theft is holy". Indeed, this refrain sums up the new creed of neocolonial bourgeoisie in many "independent" African states.⁴¹

It would seem that, if understood this way, colonialism and coloniality tend to refer to the same situation. At the centre of coloniality is race as an organizing principle, which not only hierarchized human beings according to racial ontological densities, but sustains asymmetrical global power relations and a singular Eurocentric epistemology that claims to be universal, disembodied, truthful, secular and scientific.⁴² Coloniality created what Frantz Fanon depicted as the wretched of the earth.⁴³ According to Mignolo: "The wretched are defined by the colonial wound, and the colonial wound, physical and/or psychological, is a consequence of racism, the hegemonic discourse that questions the humanity of all those who do not belong to the locus of enunciation (and the geo-politics of knowledge) of those who assign the standard of classification and assign to themselves the right to classify."⁴⁴ This takes us to the analysis and explication of decolonization and decoloniality as efforts to transcend the present historical interregnum and registers of post-globalist, post-neoliberal, and post-capitalist pluriversal futures.

⁴¹ Ngugi, *Decolonizing the Mind*, 3.

⁴² Grosfoguel, *The Epistemic Decolonial Turn*, 303.

⁴³ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963)

⁴⁴ Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 16.

Decolonization/Decoloniality

The decolonization of the twentieth century failed to deliver the expected postcolonial and post-racial world. Because of this failure, Latin American theorists introduced the concept of decoloniality to capture not only the continuation of colonialism beyond the dismantlement of juridical colonialism but also its “planetarisation” into global coloniality.⁴⁵ Decoloniality is, therefore, different from the anti-colonialism that dominated the twentieth century. Anti-colonialism was largely an elite-driven project in which indigenous elites mobilized peasants and workers as foot-soldiers in a struggle to replace direct colonial administrators. African anti-colonial struggles of the twentieth century did not produce a genuine postcolonial dispensation marked by the birth of a new humanity as demanded by Fanon, for instance. What was produced was a complex situation that Achille Mbembe termed “the postcolony”,⁴⁶ Gayatri Spivak described as a “postcolonial neo-colonized world” and decolonial theorists understood as “coloniality”.⁴⁷ What characterized this situation is what I have termed the myths of decolonization.⁴⁸ But decoloniality materialized at the very moment in which the slave trade, imperialism and colonialism were being launched. It materialized as resistance, thought and action.

Decolonialization/decoloniality is a broad church or family of all those initiatives formulated by the colonized, including intellectual-cum political-cum cultural movements such as Ethiopianism, Negritude, Garveyism, the Black Consciousness Movement and many others.⁴⁹ Nelson Maldonado-Torres is correct in defining decoloniality thus: “By decoloniality it is meant here the

45 Quijano, *Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality*; Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*; Grosfoguel, *The Epistemic Decolonial Turn*.

46 A. Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

47 G.C. Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*. (London: Routledge, 1990).

48 S. J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Coloniality of Power in Postcolonial Africa: Myths of Decolonization* (Dakar: Codesria Book Series, 2013); S. J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Empire, Global Coloniality and African Subjectivity* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013).

49 Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Epistemic Freedom in Africa*.

dismantling of relations of power and conceptions of knowledge that foment the reproduction of racial, gender, and geo-political hierarchies that came into being or found new and more powerful forms of expression in the modern/colonial world.”⁵⁰ Decoloniality “struggles to bring into intervening existence an-other interpretation that bring forward, on the one hand, a silenced view of the event and, on the other, shows the limits of imperial ideology disguised as the true (total) interpretation of the events in the making of the modern world”.⁵¹

Decoloniality is distinguished from imperial versions of history through its push for shifting the geography of reason from the West as the epistemic locale from which the “world is described, conceptualized and ranked” to the former colonized epistemic sites as legitimate points of departure in describing the construction of the modern world order.⁵² Decoloniality names a cocktail of insurrectionist-liberatory projects and critical thoughts emerging from Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, the Middle East and Africa. It seeks to make sense of the position of formerly colonized peoples within the Euro-America-centric, Christian-centric, patriarchal, capitalist, hetero-normative, racially-hierarchized and modern world-system that came into being in the fifteenth century.⁵³

Decoloniality seeks to unmask, unveil, and reveal coloniality as an underside of modernity that co-existed with its rhetoric of progress, equality, fraternity and liberty. It is a particular kind of critical intellectual theory as well as a political project seeking to disentangle formerly colonized parts of the world from coloniality.⁵⁴ What distinguishes decoloniality from other existing critical social theories is its locus of enunciations and its genealogy – which is outside of Europe. Decoloniality can be best understood as a pluriversal epistemology of the future – a redemptive

50 Maldonado-Torres, *Thinking Through the Decolonial Turn*, 117.

51 W.D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Renaissance: Literacy, Territory, and Colonization*. (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1995).

52 Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Renaissance*, 33.

53 Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*.

54 W.D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2011).

and liberatory epistemology that seeks to de-link from the tyranny of abstract universals.⁵⁵ Decoloniality informs the ongoing struggles against inhumanity of the Cartesian subject, “the irrationality of the rational, the despotic residues of modernity”.⁵⁶

Decoloniality is born out of a realisation that the modern world is an asymmetrical world order sustained not only by colonial matrices of power but also by pedagogies and epistemologies of equilibrium that continue to produce alienated Africans who are socialized into hating the Africa that produced them and liking the Europe and America that rejects them. Schools, colleges, churches and universities in Africa are sites for the reproduction of coloniality. So far, we don't have African universities. We have universities in Africa.⁵⁷ They continue to poison African minds with research methodologies and inculcate knowledges of equilibrium. These are knowledges that do not question methodologies or the present asymmetrical world order. In decoloniality, research methods and research methodologies are never accepted as neutral but are unmasked as technologies of subjectivation, if not surveillance tools that prevent the emergence of another-thinking, another-logic and another-world view. Research methodologies are tools of gate-keeping.

Decoloniality is premised on three concepts/units of analysis. The first is that of *coloniality of power*. It helps in investigating how the current global political was constructed, constituted and configured into a racially hierarchized, Euro-American-centric, Christian-centric, patriarchal, capitalist, hetero-normative, hegemonic, asymmetrical and modern power structure.⁵⁸ The concept of colonial power enables delving deeper into how the world was bifurcated into a “Zone of Being” (the world of those in charge of global power structures and beneficiaries of modernity) and a

55 W.D. Mignolo, “Introduction: Coloniality of Power and De-Colonial Thinking,” *Cultural Studies*, 21 (2-3), (March/May), 2007.

56 Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 93.

57 Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Coloniality of Power; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Epistemic Freedom in Africa*.

58 Grosfoguel, *The Epistemic Decolonial Turn*.

“Zone of Non-Being” (the invented world that was the source of slaves and victims of imperialism, colonialism and apartheid) maintained by what Boaventura de Sousa Santos termed “abyssal thinking”.⁵⁹ Abyssal thinking, according to Santos, is informed by imperial reason and manifests in the bifurcation of the world into “this side” (the side of complete beings governed according to dictates of emancipation, law and ethics) and “that side” (the side of incomplete beings governed according to expropriation and violence). In short, coloniality of power is a concept that decolonial theorists use to analyse a modern global cartography of power, and how the modern world works.

The second concept is that of *coloniality of knowledge*, which focuses on teasing out epistemological issues, politics of knowledge generation and questions of who generates which knowledge, and for what purpose.⁶⁰ Coloniality of knowledge is useful in enabling us to understand how endogenous and indigenous knowledges have been pushed out to what became understood as the barbarian margins of society. Africa is today saddled with irrelevant knowledge that serves to disempower, rather than empowering individuals and communities. Claude Ake emphasized that Africa had seriously to engage in struggles to free itself from “knowledge of equilibrium” that is, knowledge that serves the present asymmetrical power-structured world.⁶¹ On the sphere of knowledge, decolonial theorists are at the forefront of decolonising what they have termed Westernized universities that have been built throughout the world.⁶²

The third concept is that of *coloniality of being*, which probes into pertinent questions about the making of modern subjectivi-

59 Santos, *Beyond Abyssal Thinking*

60 Quijano, *Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality*.

61 C. Ake, *Social Science as Imperialism: The Theory of Political Development* (Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press, 1979).

62 R. Grosfoguel, “The Structure of Knowledge in Westernized Universities: Epistemic Racism/Sexism and the Four Genocides/Epistemicides of the Long 16th Century.” *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, x1 (1), (Fall), 2013.

ties, and into issues of human ontology.⁶³ African scholars engaged with the question of coloniality of being from the vantage point of what they termed “African personality” and “Negritude” among many other registers used in the African decolonial search for restoration of denied ontological density, sovereign subjectivity and self-pride and self-assertion.⁶⁴ Both African personality and Negritude were concepts developed in struggle by Africans as they tried to make sense of their predicaments within a context of dehumanising colonialism. Coloniality of being is very important because it assists in investigating how African humanity was questioned, as well as into processes that contributed towards objectification/thingification/commodification of Africans.⁶⁵ One of the continuing struggles in Africa is focused on resisting the objectification and dehumanization of black people on a world scale. It is a struggle to regain lost subjecthood and eventually citizenship, as well as having many other questions to do with being and humanism as politicized states of existence.

One grand proposition of decoloniality is that modernity has unfolded as a Janus-headed process, understandable on the basis of the locus of enunciation of the person trying to understand the fruits and heritage of modernity.⁶⁶ In decolonial thought, modernity is said to have unfolded as a phenomenon that colonized *time*, *space* and *being* and was constituted by the rhetoric of progress, civilisation, emancipation, and development on the one hand, and, on the other, by the reality of coloniality.⁶⁷ This reality has taken decolonial thinkers into historical and philosophical mediations, which are beginning to reveal the “underside” of modernity.⁶⁸

63 S. Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, after Man, Its Overrepresentation – An Argument.” *The New Continental Review*, 3(3), 2003.

64 E.W. Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967).

65 S. J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Coloniality of Power in Postcolonial Africa: Myths of Decolonization* (Dakar: Codesria Book Series, 2013).

66 Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*.

67 S. Wynter, Columbus and the Poetics of the Propter Nos,” *Annals of Scholarship*, 8(2), 1991.

68 Mignolo, *The Darker Side*.

Decoloniality pushes for transcendence over narrow conceptions of being decolonized, and consistently gestures towards liberation from coloniality as a complex matrix of knowledge, power and being. Decoloniality consistently reminds decolonial thinkers of “the unfinished and incomplete twentieth-century dream of decolonization”.⁶⁹ Decoloniality announces “the decolonial turn” as a long existing turn standing in opposition to the colonising turn underpinning Western thought.⁷⁰ Decoloniality announces the broad decolonial turn that involves the “task of the very decolonization of knowledge, power and being, including institutions such as the university”.⁷¹

But decoloniality is often confused with postcolonial theory. Decoloniality and postcolonial theory converge and diverge. On the convergence side, they have both aimed at dealing with the colonial experience. Sabine Broeck and Carsten Junker effectively delineate converging and diverging positions, approaches and trajectories of decoloniality and postcoloniality.⁷² Decoloniality and postcoloniality provide a range of critiques of modernity, but they diverge in their intellectual genealogy, trajectories and horizons. Genealogically, decoloniality, just like postcoloniality, emerges “from the receiving end of Western imperial formations”.⁷³ However, decolonial theory is traceable to those thinkers from the zones that experienced the negative aspects of modernity such as Aime Césaire, Frantz Fanon, William E. B. Dubois, Kwame Nkrumah, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o and many others, unlike postcolonial theory, which is traceable to poststructuralists and postmodernists such as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, and was then articulated by scholars such as Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha.⁷⁴ Postco-

69 Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 221.

70 Maldonado-Torres, *Thinking Through the Decolonial Turn*.

71 Ibid.

72 S. Broeck and C. Junker, eds. *Postcoloniality-Decoloniality-Black Critique: Joints and Fissures* (Frankfurt and New York: Campus Verlag, 1968).

73 W.D. Mignolo, “Further Thoughts on (De) Coloniality,” in *Postcoloniality-Decoloniality-Black Critique: Joints and Fissures* ed. S. Broeck and C. Junker. (Frankfurt and New York: Campus Verlag, 2014).

74 Grosfoguel, *The Epistemic Decolonial Turn*.

lonial theory and decolonial theory also differ in terms of where they begin their critique of modernity/coloniality. Decolonial theorists begin their critique as far back as 500 years, covering Spanish and Portuguese colonialism. Postcolonial theorists begin their critique with the British colonisation of India in the nineteenth century, in the process ignoring some 300 years of the unfolding of modernity/coloniality.⁷⁵

Postcolonial theorists somehow try to decouple modernity and colonialism, in the process missing the fact that modernity and coloniality are inextricably intertwined, paradoxically. While postcolonial theorists are concerned with dismantling meta-narratives, decolonial theorists push forward an analysis predicated on questions of power, epistemology and ontology as foundational questions in the quest to understand the unfolding and operations of modern Euromodernity.⁷⁶ The postcolonial cultural turn is different from the decolonial turn because the former is located and revolves within a Euro-North-American-centric modernist discursive, historical and structural terrain – the latter born at the borders of Euro-North-American-centric modernity and fuelled by a decolonial spirit of epistemic disobedience and delinking.⁷⁷ Whereas postcolonial theorists' horizon is universalism and cosmopolitanism, decolonial theory gestures towards pluriversality and new humanism. In short, one can say that postcoloniality and decoloniality converge and diverge across genealogies, trajectories and horizons.

Postcolonial theorists, in particular Achille Mbembe, are very critical of some forms of evaluation of modernity, colonialism, imperialism and capitalism such as Afro-radicalism and nativism. Mbembe's concern is that these forms of resistance tend to be locked

75 Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*; R. Grosfoguel, "Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political Economy: Transmodernity, Decolonial Thinking, and Global Coloniality." *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, 1(1), 2011.

76 N. Maldonado-Torres, "On Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of A Concept." *Cultural Studies*, 21(2-3), (March/May), 2007.

77 S. Amin, *Delinking: Towards a Polycentric World* (London: Zed Books, 1990); W.D. Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom," *Theory, Culture and Society*, 26(7-8), 2008.

in what he has termed "neurosis of victimhood" and "narcissism of minor difference".⁷⁸ These analyses in Mbembe's critique are based on and informed by nationalism and Marxism, which he reduces to false philosophies⁷⁹ which have been elevated into dogmas and doctrines that have been "repeated over and over again" by Afro-radical nationalists and Afro-Marxists.⁸⁰ Those that Mbembe depicted as Afro-radical nationalists are accused of promoting a "false belief that only autochthonous people who are physically living in Africa can produce, within a closed circle limited to themselves alone, a legitimate scientific discourse on the realities of the continent". Such African scholarship that blames colonialism is said to be also informed by "a lazy interpretation of globalisation".⁸¹

Mbembe's critique provoked powerful responses from scholars such as Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, who called Mbembe out for his uncritical celebration of the globalization and cosmopolitanism that underpin Eurocentric hegemony. Mbembe's call for the "internationalization" of African scholarship, which he presented as a way of "getting out of the ghetto", was equated with "globalising tendencies of neoliberal economic policies of liberalisation". Zeleza reminded Mbembe that the domain of knowledge generation in and on Africa has never been ghettoized as it has always been excessively exposed to external and imported Eurocentric paradigms.⁸²

Decoloniality is related to Afro-radical nationalist and Afro-Marxist thought, but it is also different. It is not only critical of these but is also against facile essentialism and all forms of fundamentalism. This point is stated clearly by Grosfoguel:⁸³ "This is not an essentialist, fundamentalist, anti-European critique. It is a perspective that is critical of both Eurocentric and Third World fundamentalisms, colonialism and nationalism. What all fundamentalisms share (including the Eurocentric one) is the premise that

78 A. Mbembe, "African Modes of Self-Writing." *Public Culture*, 14(1), 2002.

79 A. Mbembe, "On the Power of the False." *Public Culture*, 14(3), 2002.

80 A. Mbembe, "Getting Out of the Ghetto: The Challenge of Internationalization," (*Codesria Bulletin* 3 & 4, 1999).

81 Mbembe, *African Modes*, 269.

82 Zeleza's e-mail comments to Francis Nyamnjoh, 19 January 2004.

83 Grosfoguel, *The Epistemic Decolonial Turn*, 212.

there is only one sole epistemic tradition from which to achieve Truth and Universality.” Decoloniality is ranged against what Cesaire termed the European fundamental LIE: Colonisation=Civilisation.⁸⁴ It gives the colonized peoples a space in which to judge Eurocentric conceit, deceit and hypocrisy.

Conclusion: Towards Post-Globalist, Post-Neoliberal(ist) and Post-Capitalist Present

In its identification of coloniality as the mother and father of most modern problems, decoloniality managed to name the core source of the present historical interregnum. What decolonial theorists have presented as the decolonial turn gestures towards ecologies of knowledges and pluriversality. It is a turn which generates and asks new and correct questions about the human condition, going beyond Eurocentric epistemology that deliberately posed some human problems wrongly to continue deception and conceit. At the first level, what decoloniality does effectively and consistently is unmask what is hidden behind the rhetoric of Euromodernity as it exposes the fact that Eurocentric epistemologies are exhausted. At the second level, it introduces what has been dubbed variously as theory from the South, epistemologies from the South or decolonial epistemologies from the South in an endeavour to attain cognitive justice as a pre-requisite for other forms of liberation – political, cultural, ontological, economic and social⁸⁵ – which defined the epistemologies of the South as “a set of inquiries into the construction and validation of knowledge born in struggle, of ways of knowing developed by social groups as part of their resistance against systemic injustices and oppressions caused by capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy”.

At the third level, decoloniality articulates the re-telling of the history of humanity and knowledge from the vantage point of those epistemic sites that received the “darker/underside” of mo-

⁸⁴ Cesaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*.

⁸⁵ Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Coloniality of Power*; Santos, *Epistemologies of the South*; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Empire, Global Coloniality*; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Epistemic Freedom*.

ernity, including re-telling the story of the coloniality of knowledge which unfolded through the invasion of the mental universe of the colonized people and through such inimical activities as appropriations, epistemicides, linguicides, culturecides, and alienations as part of the story of imperial science. It is also a call for the democratisation of knowledge, de-hegemonization of knowledge, de-Westernisation of knowledge and de-Europeanisation of knowledge. This problem and its solution are laid out by Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff:⁸⁶

Western Enlightenment thought has, from the first, posited itself as the wellspring of universal learning, of Science and Philosophy; concomitantly, it has regarded the non-West – variously known as the ancient world, the orient, the primitive world, the third world, the underdeveloped world, the developing world, and now the global South – primarily as a place of parochial wisdom, of antiquarian traditions, of exotic ways and means. Above all, of unprocessed data.

This is a good diagnosis of the problem in the knowledge domain. The Comaroffs have also posited a solution which is in tandem with decoloniality:

But what if, and here is the idea in interrogative form, we invert the order of things? What if we posit that, in the present moment, it is the global South that affords privileged insight into the workings of the world at large? ... That, in probing what is at stake in it, we might move beyond the north-south binary, to lay bare the larger dialectical processes that have produced and sustained it. ... Each is a reflection of the contemporary order of things approached from a primarily African vantage point, one, as it turns out, that is full of surprises and counter-initiatives, one that invites us to see familiar

⁸⁶ J. Comaroff and J. L. Comaroff. *Theory from the South or How Euro-America Is Evolving Towards Africa* (Boulder, CO and London: Paradigm Publishers, 2012), pp. 1-2..

things in different ways.⁸⁷

At the core of decoloniality is the agenda of shifting the geography and biography of knowledge, imbricating identity into epistemology in terms of who generates knowledge and from where. Decolonial epistemology is anchored on existential realities generated by colonialism and coloniality – which are punctuated by dispossession, suffering, oppression, repression, domination, exclusion and fundamentally dismemberment and dehumanization.⁸⁸

In terms of its horizon, decoloniality gestures towards the construction of the pluriverse. The global South is underscored as rich in resources for pluriversality. Firstly, if one brings into the domain of knowledge the suppressed and displaced knowledges from global South into the academy and general human life, a “mosaic epistemology” conducive to ecologies of knowledge begins to be constructed.⁸⁹ Mobilization and the deployment of non-Western ways of thinking, doing and acting is at the core of construction of the pluriverse. Different ontologies and epistemologies would be the order of the pluriverse. The problem constitutive of the present historical interregnum is not that of a lack of ideas but that of taking ideas from a singular province of the world and making them into universal knowledge together with its limits and problems.

Any construction of the pluriverse has to begin with the decolonization of knowledge. This is so because ontology is always framed by epistemology. This will culminate in deimperialisation, decorporatization, deracialization, detribalization, democratization and ultimately decolonization (the six “Ds”). It is only then that new humanism could be set afoot in a world of many sciences and many worlds in one planet.

⁸⁷ Comaroff and Comaroff, *Theory from the South*.

⁸⁸ Maldonado-Torres, *On Coloniality of Being; Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Re-Membering Africa* (Nairobi/Kampala/Dar es Salaam: East African Educational Publishers, 2009); Ngugi wa Thiong'o *Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2009).

⁸⁹ R. Connell, “Meeting at the Edge of Fear: Theory on a World Scale,” in *Constructing the Pluriverse: The Geopolitics of Knowledge* ed. B. Reiter (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2018).

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DISCUSSION:

The Limits of Decoloniality

Suren Pillay

Abstract

This article critically reviews Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni's theorization of decoloniality in the African context. It situates his intervention within recent debates, and contextualizes its relationship to the Latin American decolonial project, from which it draws its theoretical framing. The article suggests that there might be significant limitations to this endeavour when trying to think about the legacies of certain forms of colonial rule in Africa today.

In this article I respond to Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni's useful outline of decolonial thought, and the stakes involved in decoloniality, as an approach to understanding colonialism. I will do so by outlining this movement of thinking as I understand it, and try to situate his intervention in that movement by translating it into the African, and particularly South African, debates. I will, finally, put forward the reasons I think the approach is not up to making sense of the legacies of colonialism in the present, particularly in those colonies where indirect rule was the mode of domination.

A movement of thought, decoloniality emerged largely in Latin America in the wake of the end of the Cold War, and in relation to critiques of Marxism and of modernising thinking on development. Its distinctive intervention, according to one of its most forceful theorists, the Argentinian scholar Walter Mignolo, was that it makes a distinction between colonialism and coloniality, and "decolonisation" and "decoloniality". Ascribing this distinction to the senior scholar among the group, the Peruvian intellectual Anibal Quijano, Walter Mignolo describes the importance of the distinction:

First, and given this distinctive theoretical frame grounded on the colonial history of the Americas and subsequently of the world, Quijano proposed that the decolonial task (he was still using the term decolonization at that time but the meaning was what today we understand by decoloniality) consists in epistemic reconstitution. He meant that on the one hand there is a civilizational rhetoric (in the sense of persuasive discourses) of salvation being the West (West of Jerusalem, former Western Europe and the US), the saviour and the rest in need of salvation. Salvation has several designs, all co-existing today, but that unfolded over 500 years, since 1500: salvation by conversion to Christianity, salvation by progress and civilization, salvation by development and modernization, salvation by global market democracy (e.g. neoliberalism). Thus, the rhetoric of modernity is the constant updating of the rhetoric of salvation hiding the logic of coloniality – war, destruction, racism, sexism, inequalities, injustice, etc. All the “bad” things people notice today in the world cannot be changed to improve while modernity/coloniality remain in place.¹

I wish to underscore the importance in decolonial theorizations of this distinction between colonialism and coloniality. Colonialism is of limited valence, it is argued, because it views colonialism as a historically specific moment – an event – while coloniality refers to an ongoing epistemic and ontological order that is more enduring. Decoloniality, as I understand it, from the writings of Quijano, Mignolo, Grosfoguel and Maldonado-Torres, is quite explicit in rejecting a historically specific conception of colonialism that is interested in its political and administrative aspects – nor are they interested in thinking of it as a practice of identity politics. As Grosfoguel puts it: “One of the most powerful myths of the twentieth century was the notion that the elimination of colonial admin-

1 Walter Mignolo, Key Concepts, an interview <https://www.e-ir.info/2017/01/21/interview-walter-mignolopart-2-key-concepts/> [Accessed 10 October 2018].

istrations amounted to the decolonization of the world... With juridico-political decolonization we moved from a period of “global colonialism” to the current period of “global coloniality”.²

It is the question of epistemic reconstitution as the fundamental problem that structures modernity as a continuity of violences and racism. For Grosfoguel, this way of thinking about modernity illuminates contemporary racism in a different way: racism is a structure in thought rather than a specificity confined to modern biological racism.

As Grosfoguel puts it: “Racism is a global hierarchy of superiority and inferiority along the line of the human” that has been politically, culturally and economically produced and reproduced for centuries by the institutions of the “capitalist/patriarchal Western-centric/Christian-centric modern/colonial world-system”.³ Those classified above the line of the human are recognized socially in their humanity, and enjoy access to rights (human rights, civil rights, women’s rights, labour rights), material resources and the social recognition of their subjectivities, identities, epistemologies and spiritualities. The people below the line of the human are considered subhuman or non-human; that is, their humanity is questioned and, as such, negated.⁴ Here Grosfoguel draws on the influential text of Frantz Fanon to describe this distinction as a “zone of being” and “non-being”.

Racism is a hierarchy of superiority/inferiority along the line of the human. This hierarchy can be constructed and marked in diverse ways. Westernized elites of the Third World (African, Asian or Latin American) reproduce racist practices against ethno/racial groups where, depending on the local/colonial history, those considered “inferior” below the line of the human can be defined or marked along religious, ethnic, cultural or colour lines.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni established the Africa Decolonial Research

2 Ramon Grosfoguel, “Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political Economy: Transmodernity, Decolonial Thinking, and Global Coloniality,” *Transmodernity* 1, no. 1, 2011, p. 4.

3 Grosfoguel, *Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies*, 4.

4 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks*, (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

Network (ADERN) at the University of South Africa (Unisa) in 2011, as a network of academics working on decolonial theory and Africa-centred research. He explains the background:

At Unisa just like in other universities located on the African continent (universities in Africa rather than African universities), we were accustomed to consume academic material from the West. There was little awareness of rich local African scholarship and African knowledge production. I found that we needed to shift the geography of knowledge as well as the biography of knowledge. So the first thing we needed to do was to establish who the decolonial thinkers are in Africa, and establish what their contributions have been and still are.

“Initially,” as he narrates it, ADERN was a small group of researchers from different departments such as Development Studies (where I was based), Political Science, Philosophy, Communication Science, and Criminology at Unisa and also from other universities. In 2012, a few members and I went to the International Barcelona Summer School on Decolonising Knowledge and Power organized by Ramon Grosfoguel. The following year (2013), Professor Rosemary Moeketsi (executive dean of the College of Human Sciences at Unisa) also came to Barcelona; she found the Summer School initiative so educative and important that she championed the idea of an Annual Decolonial Summer School at Unisa that would enable more South African scholars and students – as well as others from the African continent – to undergo training in decoloniality. The first Decolonial Summer School was organized in 2014 in Pretoria and it has continued since then.

Another current of thought has influenced the South African academy since 1994 that has been interested in thinking about colonialism, knowledge and race: different strands drawing on older African debates at universities such as Ibadan in Nigeria, Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, Makerere in Uganda and, more generally, on poststructuralist critical theory, and postcolonial theory. I won't go into this much at this point, but I do want to suggest that both

those who have more recently been drawing from the well of postcolonial theory and those drawing on decolonial theory, turned to alternative theorizations in the wake of a feeling that a certain kind of Marxist theorization of colonialism and apartheid that was influential in the academy was no longer adequate to thinking the problem and politics of race and becoming post-apartheid. There was and is a shared unease about the valence of political economy for a previous generation on the continent, and the limits of its intellectual capacity to think through ongoing relations of power and manifestations of political violence. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni puts it:

Marxists dismissed the issue of race just like they dismissed the question of ethnicity as forms of false consciousness. That race was part of structural constitutive part of colonialism elided them. When the Soviet Union collapsed, their narrative was pushed to the background. The 1990s witnessed the mushrooming of postcolonial theories, but decolonial theories which are traceable to the very colonial encounters have been refusing to be totally displaced. No wonder why they have returned to the academy today as part of resisting coloniality. Race was not in the past. It was in the present. The decolonial intervention brought back issues such as knowledge, epistemology, question of humanism, organization of people in racial hierarchies and the invention of colonialism. The idea that knowledge has been colonized transformed us from consumers of knowledge to critics of Eurocentric knowledge.

Gatsheni-Ndlovu's rejection of postcolonial theory draws on the critique of that current of thought developed by decolonial scholars like Grosfoguel. In a 2011 piece titled “Decolonizing Postcolonial Studies and the Paradigms of Political Economy” Grosfoguel articulates his criticisms of both postcolonial theory – sometimes postcolonial with a hyphen and sometimes without, I should say – and political economy. I have alluded earlier to what the problem is with Marxist overdeterminations found in political

economy, so I won't elaborate on that aspect of his critique. And to a large extent I share it. In this paper, Grosfoguel criticizes postcolonial theory focused on the subaltern studies group. The paper opens with a reflection on a meeting he attended in 1998 at Duke University in the United States that brought some members of the South Asian subaltern studies group together with the Latin American subaltern studies group. He noted that he felt subaltern studies was writing on the subaltern but was not a "subaltern perspective", which is what he claims the decolonial theorists offer. He noted that "with few exceptions they produced studies about the subaltern rather than studies with and from a subaltern perspective. Like the imperial epistemology of area studies, theory was still located in the North while the subjects to be studied are located in the South." I must admit I remain a bit puzzled by this critique and an additional one he makes of postcolonial theorists, that they tend to be located in literature departments, because as far as I can tell one could – if one wanted to play that game – level the same charge against the main theorists of decoloniality: Maldonado-Torres, based at Rutgers; Mignolo, based at Duke; and Grosfoguel based at the University of California, Berkeley, and all in some version of literature or ethnic studies programmes. But maybe someone here can help me understand that.

Moving on, secondly, and more substantively, Grosfoguel argued that postcolonial theory, due to its reliance on poststructuralist thought, remained within the Western episteme: "By using a Western epistemology and privileging Gramsci and Foucault, they constrained and limited the radicalism of their critique to Eurocentrism ...These debates," he noted, "made clear to us the need to decolonize not only subaltern studies but also postcolonial studies." As he concludes, "the old division between culture and political economy as expressed in postcolonial studies and political economy approaches is overcome" in decolonial thinking – postcolonial studies conceptualizes the capitalist world system as being constituted primarily by culture, while political economy places the primary determination on economic relations. In the coloniality of power

approach, what comes first, culture or the economy, is a false dilemma, a chicken and egg dilemma that obscures the complexity of the capitalist world system. I do find this attempt to bring the realm of the cultural and the realm of the economic back together very productive. But I also think there are some serious misrepresentations levelled against subaltern studies, and confusing slippages he makes between postcolonialism and postmodernism in Grosfoguel and Maldonado-Torres's descriptions of these scholars' arguments. Subaltern studies is not substitutable for postcolonial theory and vice versa, and is a heterogeneous collective that emerges in India and that has a number of its own internal debates and issues of contention. But my concern here is not necessarily to defend subaltern studies or postcolonial theory. I am not wanting to set up a contest between postcolonial theory and decolonial theory. I am interested however in thinking the African present and its past, and, to quote the Senegalese philosopher Souleymane Bachir Diagne, I think we should do that "by any theoretical means necessary".

I find a number of the concepts associated with "decoloniality" productive when thinking of colonialism as a project of epistemic violence. I find in particular the concept of the "colonial wound" developed by Walter Mignolo a persuasive way of holding on to the legacies of colonialism in the present.⁵ The colonial wound as a metaphor has enabled Mignolo to suggest that there is a psychic dimension to the damage wrought by colonialism on colonized subjects, a wound that remains open, and therefore that requires attending to. The work of reparations, justice and addressing the intangible ways colonial violence leaves its trace and trauma on colonized subjects is how I read the appeal of this concept to many. And to that extent a number of scholars based in South Africa have found, and are finding decoloniality a very useful banner under which to advance the debate on the decolonization of knowledge.⁶

⁵ Walter Mignolo and Rolando Vasquez. Colonial Aesthetics: Colonial Wounds, Decolonial Healings, *Social Text online*, July 2013, https://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/decolonial-aesthetics-colonial-woundsdecolonial-healings/ [Accessed 20 June 2017].

⁶ The major and most prolific scholar here has been the Zimbabwean historian now based in South Africa, Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni. See, among a number of

There is however for me a limitation in drawing only on decoloniality as an approach to thinking of the African experience. It is not that one is suggesting that it is wrong; rather that one is suggesting that it is strongly inadequate. It would be worth marking out the historically specific conjuncture out of which decoloniality emerges as a critical intellectual intervention in Latin America, and the ways in which the settler colonial experience in Latin America, of conquest and assimilation, produces a different inheritance and a different biography of colonialism. And the same gesture would be productive to perform on “subaltern studies”.⁷ As approaches – and along with the older African intellectual debates – both interventions have been drawn on in the South African context to bring into view the centrality of the colonial project to the formulation of apartheid. They are enabling the emergence of a different language to take shape that will have a distinctive idiom through which to think about apartheid as a colonial predicament, and to think of South Africa as part of the previously colonized world.

These arguments are marshalled against an older previously hegemonic liberal scholarship, as well as the revisionist “radical” economism of certain kinds of Marxist thinking within the academy that tended to view race as epiphenomenological.⁸ To my own thinking on the question, the benefit was the way debates in postcolonial theory and in pan-African scholarly forums like the Council for Social Science Research in Africa (Codesria) had illuminated the relationship between the colonial knowledge and colonial institutions, and the ways in which late colonialism drew on theories of indirect rule in particular, which travelled via Hen-

his articles and books, his 2015 article “Decoloniality as the Future of Africa,” *History Compass*, Vol. 13, no.10, pp. 485-496. A network of scholars has also been formed around the approach, the Africa Decolonial Research Network (ADERN).

⁷ See for example Premesh Lalu, “A Subaltern Studies for South African History”, in *Re-imagining the Social in South Africa: Critique, Theory and Post-Apartheid Knowledge* eds. Peter Vale and Heather Jacklin (Scottsville: UKZN Press, 2009).

⁸ I have tracked some of these debates in Suren Pillay, “Translating South Africa, Race, Colonialism and Apartheid,” in *Re-imagining the Social in South Africa: Critique, Theory and Post-Apartheid Knowledge* eds. Peter Vale and Heather Jacklin (Scottsville: UKZN Press, 2009).

ry Maine through figures like Lugard, to Africa.⁹

My point is that there are ways in which both projects – subaltern studies in India and decoloniality in Latin America – emerge out of specific political-intellectual conjunctures, as interventions in specific debates, but travel and are translated in lively and productive ways. As Edward Said was to point out, theory travels;¹⁰ the challenge is to hold on to the specificity of their interventions, defined by geography and history, while we simultaneously put them to work in other places, at other times, for different uses. It is the putting them to work in a different conjunctural moments that requires a relation to theory that eschews being mimetic, but reworks it to offer an intervention into a debate that is self-conscious of its current problem and that does imply also being able to draw a contrast-effect, showing the contours of the difference between one’s current problem and the initial problem to which the theoretical intervention (like decoloniality or subaltern studies) was developed and had its “charge” derived from its initial deployment.¹¹

This formulation of how to think of the conceptual and political genealogy of the colonial modern is drawn from the Jamaican

⁹ Particularly important for me has been Dipesh Chakrabarty’s historical study of jute workers in colonial Bengal to theorize anew a relationship between capitalism, culture and colonialism in his pioneering *Rethinking Working Class History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989); for a theorization of the relationship between colonial knowledge and colonial rule, Partha Chatterjee’s *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (London: Zed Books, 1983); and *The Nation and Its Fragments* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993) remains important. Outside of subaltern and allied studies, also useful was Nicholas Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: An Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1987). While these historical inflections on the relationship between colonial rule and colonial knowledge in South Asia enables a thinking on episteme and institution, and the ways in which modes of rule and legacies of difference are animated, the relationship between colonial rule and a rule of difference premised on race and ethnicity as distinctions about settler and native would require a different kind of enquiry to the one that animated subaltern studies in its South Asian pre-occupations.

¹⁰ Edward Said, “Travelling Theory,” in *The World, the Text, the Critic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

¹¹ Stuart Hall’s rethinking of Marxism, via Gramsci, in relation to ethnicity and race, has also been instructive. Stuart Hall, “New Ethnicities”, in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley and Kuan Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 2006).

scholar David Scott, who encourages us to think of colonialism as having both a general and a specific career to be thought of as colonial governmentality. It is therefore distinct from governmentality in its European iteration that Foucault theorizes, and specific in its geographical and temporal career and specific in the targets of its interventions.¹² By that I read him to mean that it had a common predicament across the colonial world, but with specific answers to those predicaments in different times, and in difference places. To produce a history of the present, we would need to pay careful attention to the historically specific and sedimentations of aspects of colonial rule across time and space.

Part of the specificity, then, of the African genealogy of colonial rule, specifically but not limited to its Anglophone iterations, is the relationship between epistemology and institutions – something of less importance in Latin America because, rather than having to rule over the natives, settler colonialism there more or less decimated the natives. As an aside, I suspect that Mignolo, Grosfoguel and Maldonado-Torres are strikingly silent about settler colonialism, and prefer the more abstract and historically less specific notion of coloniality, because most of Latin America’s intellectuals, and politically its great anti-imperial figures and critics of yankee imperialism, from Bolivar to Castro, are led by those who would have to more likely trace their ancestry not to the largely decimated and now largely minoritized indigenous, but to Europe. European settler colonialism was victorious in Latin America. European settler colonialism was defeated in Africa.¹³

But to return to my point: we might say that the relationship between knowledge and the techniques of colonial rule – the career of its translation into modes of governance, modes of rule, and translation into political life as such, as administered through law, for example – is central to the African experience. These we may think of as the intersections of power, culture and politics. The

¹² David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

¹³ See Mahmood Mamdani, “Settler Colonialism: Then and Now,” *Critical Inquiry* 41, Spring 2015.

Latin American experience is useful for making sense of how the colonial project thought the “Other”, and how conquest and assimilation were rationalized. But it is less illuminating for understanding the shifting rationalities of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Africa, as an account of how “Europe ruled Africa”. In that sense, its notion of power is repressive, but not useful for thinking about the production of new political subjects as a mode in which power works. In other words, conquest does give us a vivid sense of the repressive power of colonialism and its atrocities of extermination. It also gives us a historicized sense of the shift from the Other as a religious Other, occupying a different ontology of being (as we see in the debate at Valladolid in 1550–1551 between Las Casas and Sepulveda), to the Other as a racial subject, now constituted by social evolutionary biological discourses of race (as we see in the accounts of the genocide of the Nama and Herero in German South West Africa). But, somewhat differently, colonial technologies of rule that pre-occupy colonial administrators such as Lord Lugard,¹⁴ Shepstone and George Grey give us a sense of how the late colonial answer was increasingly projected onto the manufacturing of new political subjects available for domination but not necessarily decimation. These political subjects would be thought of as neither dispensable – as Native Americans or Nama and Herero were (contra Agamben’s *homo sacer*) – nor would they be thought of as mostly part of a civilizing mission, or, as the French called it, *mission civilatrice*. In the apartheid form of its colonial iteration, this late colonial manifestation was premised on the permanence of difference, the very basis of the policy of Verwoerdian “good neighbourliness”. It is therefore, questionable that the translation, as Ndlovu-Gatsheni has done in his article, of decoloniality into the African experience of indirect rule colonialism, can illuminate the legacies of a colonial project that emphasized difference, rather than universality, in its rationality of domination.

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Trepidation, Longing and Belonging: Liberating the Curriculum at Universities in South Africa

Saleem Badat

Abstract

The article examines the essential need to decolonize the curriculum in South African universities. Decolonization should involve a radical process of change in both the curriculum and the institutional culture of the academy. The decades of colonialism and apartheid have shaped patterns of power and ways of thinking and of producing and acquiring knowledge. Curriculum transformation as a social justice programme would focus on equality, equity, redress, quality, indigenous languages and social policy measures.

Introduction

A number of scholars have drawn attention to the connection between biography, geography, social location and ideas on what knowledge is, the making of knowledge, and what knowledge should be valued and shared with others. Immanuel Wallerstein writes that a key feature of modernist and Eurocentric epistemology is the supposed irrelevance of "the persona of the scholar", and the idea that scholars function as "value-neutral analysts".¹ In similar vein, Walter Mignolo argues that Eurocentric epistemology is characterized by "disembodied and un-located assumptions

1 I. Wallerstein, "Eurocentrism and its Avatars," *New Left Review* 226, Nov/Dec 1997, pp. 93-107.

about knowing and knowledge making”, which obfuscates “the hidden geo-and bio-graphical politics of knowledge of imperial epistemology”.² He contends that “in order to call into question the modern/colonial foundation of the control of knowledge, it is necessary to focus on the knower, rather than on the known”, because the “knower is always implicated, geo-and body-politically in the known”, despite the fact that “modern epistemology managed to conceal both and built the figure of the detached observer, a neutral seeker of truth and objectivity”.³ Ramon Grosfoguel weighs in that “we always speak from a particular location in the power structures. Nobody escapes the class, sexual, gender, spiritual, linguistic, geographical, and racial hierarchies” within which we are located.⁴ Prior to these interventions, feminist scholar Donna Haraway had persuasively argued that knowledge making is about “location” and “situated and embodied knowledges”, not about “transcendence and splitting of subject and object”; we have to be “answerable for what we learn how to see”.⁵

It has been observed that “addressing colonialism and decolonization as anything more than past episodes or events”,⁶ and the call for decolonization, generates anxiety and unease in some quarters, and unsettles because it challenges long-held assumptions, adherences and identities.⁷ Responses to the call to decolonize universities and the curriculum in South Africa include a refusal to engage, ridicule of the idea, evasion and aggression, denial of the possibility of alternative ways of knowing, proclaiming the

2 W.D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2011), p.118.

3 Mignolo, *The Darker Side*, 119, 123..

4 R. Grosfoguel, “The Epistemic Decolonial Turn: Beyond Political-Economy Paradigms” (*Cultural Studies*, 21 (2-3), March/May, 2007), p. 213.

5 D. Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective” (*Feminist Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3, Autumn, 1988), p. 583.

6 N. Maldonado-Torres, “Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality,” 2016. http://frantzfanonfoundation-fondationfrantzfanon.com/IMG/pdf/maldonado-torres_outline_of_ten_theses-10.23.16_.pdf, p. 8.

7 C. Hendricks and B. Leibowitz, “Decolonising Universities Isn’t An Easy Process - But It Has To Happen,” *The Conversation Africa*, 23 May 2016.

superiority of Western paradigms, and warnings that South African universities are on the path to declining quality and to becoming parochial; of course, there is also fear of the unknown.⁸ On the one hand, the call for decolonization clearly evokes *trepidation*. On the other hand, it also expresses *longing* – for fundamental change in higher education (and beyond); a longing that was exemplified powerfully by the 2015–2016 student protests. Conjoined with this longing is a yearning for *belonging* and social connectedness, based on different logics than the prevailing mimicry, and assimilative and isomorphic rationalities rooted in ideas of Western modernity as the apogee of human development.

Fundamental changes in how we conceive of universities in South Africa, in institutional culture and in curriculum are long overdue and urgent. Strident demands by some scholars and commentators that those who support the call for the decolonization of the curriculum should provide immediate and clear answers on what would constitute a decolonized curriculum are not helpful. Nor is it productive when questions on decolonization are tinged with ridicule of the idea. Democracy in South Africa, as with many processes of change, was ultimately the product of conflict and contestation, deliberation, creativity and acumen regulated by a negotiated process. We do not have to be enamoured with every position or action of the student protestors, but should welcome their placing on the agenda the critical issue of curriculum, which has long required fundamental change. What the process of change comes to be called – decolonization, Africanization, indigenization – and what are its goals, nature, scope and so forth has to be the outcome of committed, robust, imaginative, sustained and reasoned deliberation on the part of key actors.

I address four issues: the context in which the call for decolonization of the curriculum has arisen in South Africa, the discourse of coloniality, the question of curriculum and the idea of curriculum decolonization.

8 Hendricks and Leibowitz, *Decolonising Universities*, 8; see also Maldonado-Torres, *Outline of Ten Theses*, 8.

Context of Decolonization

A state of “organic crisis” could aptly describe South African higher education in recent times. Writing about the period after the Soweto student uprising of 1976, John Saul and Stephen Gelb contended that the apartheid state was mired in an “organic crisis” because of the existence of “incurable structural contradictions” of an ideological, political, and economic nature.⁹ According to Stuart Hall,¹⁰ for Antonio Gramsci, the originator of the concept of organic crisis, “a crisis is not an immediate event but a process: it can last for a long time....” An organic crisis

erupt[s] not only in the political domain and the traditional areas of industrial and economic life, not simply in the class struggle, in the old sense; but in a wide series of polemics, debates about fundamental sexual, moral and intellectual questions, in a crisis in the relations of political representation and the parties – on a whole range of issues which do not necessarily, in the first instance, appear to be articulated with politics, in the narrow sense, at all. That is what Gramsci calls the crisis of authority, which is nothing but the crisis of hegemony or general crisis of the state.¹¹

Saul argued that an organic crisis was normally resolved either through social revolution from below, or through “formative action” on the part of the ruling classes, as opposed to purely defensive initiatives.¹² Such formative action necessitated substantive reforms and economic, political and ideological restructuring.

The economic dimension of the organic crisis – whether related to underfunding of universities or inadequate financial aid – is all too evident, and does not need to be rehearsed here. Its consequences are pervasive, disturbing and destructive. Starved of adequate funding, large (though not all) parts of South African higher

⁹ J.S. Saul, and S. Gelb, *The Crisis in South Africa* (London: Zed Books), pp.11, 57.

¹⁰ S. Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (London: Verso, 1988).

¹¹ Hall, *The Hard Road*.

¹² Saul and Gelb, *The Crisis in South Africa*, 211.

education evince a lack of effectiveness with respect to knowledge production, the quality of academic provision and the quality and numbers of graduates produced, with negative implications for social equity, justice, and economic and social development. The organic crisis is revealed ideologically by how neoliberal economic and social policies have constrained strongly the pursuit of “transformation” goals, and have reduced higher education largely to its economic and labour market value, to the detriment of its wider liberating and humanising roles. While “transformation” has remained a popular motif, we have to ask “what recedes when (transformation) becomes a view”, and consider “what (transformation) does by focusing on what (transformation) obscures”.¹³ Instead of transformation being understood as the multifaceted pursuit simultaneously of social equity, quality and fundamental institutional cultural and academic change, and as a creative confrontation with the acute paradoxes and social and political dilemmas that inevitably arise, the idea of transformation has become reduced largely to equity of access for historically disadvantaged students and staff. There has been little engagement consistently, concertedly, and boldly with critical issues such as decolonizing, de-racializing, and de-heteronormative masculinizing the academic and institutional structures and cultures of universities.

As regards the political dimension of the organic crisis, the key feature has undoubtedly been the offensive mounted in 2015–2016 by primarily black students around a range of concerns. One of the most profound and moving placards displayed during the student protests was “Our parents were SOLD dreams in 1994. We are just here for the REFUND”. Higher education was said to hold the promise of contributing to equity, justice, development and democratic citizenship. Yet, higher education has functioned in contradictory ways, and has continued to be a powerful mechanism of social exclusion and injustice, and a killing field of ambitions, aspirations and dreams for many black and working-class students. The rea-

¹³ S. Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

son for this is that higher education is not an autonomous social force. It is a necessary condition for social transformation, but not a sufficient condition. If higher education is to be more equitable, and to contribute more effectively to social justice, bold economic and social policies are required to confront and eliminate inequalities and to widen opportunities. The post-1994 African National Congress (ANC) government has not confronted inequalities effectively, even if there have been pro-poor social policies geared towards addressing certain dimensions of poverty.

Coloniality

Processes associated with colonialism and apartheid – conquest, occupation, extermination, subjugation, dispossession, exploitation, dehumanization, exclusion, and marginalization – rationalized on the basis of ideas related to “race” and “civilisation” – not only wreaked havoc on indigenous and black people physically, but also made a powerful impact on thinking and thought, and on how the colonized came to “acquire knowledge, understand their history, comprehend their world, and define themselves”.¹⁴ As Sartre has noted “colonial violence not only aims at keeping ... enslaved men at a respectful distance, it also seeks to dehumanize them. No effort is spared to demolish their traditions, to substitute our language for theirs, and to destroy their culture ...”.¹⁵ If colonialism refers to the domination of one country by another, coloniality “denotes enduring patterns of power [and] a way of thinking and behaving that emerged from colonialism but survived long after its seeming demise”.¹⁶ Coloniality goes beyond the corollaries, past and current, of colonialism in the economic and political domains. It draws attention to the “Eurocentric epistemology, ontology and ideology”¹⁷ that underpinned and legitimized European

14 H.A. Bulhan, “Stages of Colonialism in Africa: From Occupation of Land to Occupation of Being,” *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, Vol. 3(1), 2015, p. 241.

15 J.P. Sartre, Preface. In F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), p. 1.

16 Bulhan, *Stages of Colonialism*, 241.

17 Ibid.

domination and European knowledge with its “colonial epistemic monoculture”,¹⁸ and to the concomitant decimation, erosion, and marginalization of the knowledges, cultures, languages and experiences of colonized people.

Coloniality divided “the world according to a particular racial logic”, and created “specific understandings of gender that enable[d] the disappearance of the colonial/raced woman from theoretical and political consideration”.¹⁹ As has been noted, “a more insidious and potent psychological advantage than use of lethal arms” was the colonizer’s “power to name the world and the self, interpret the past, and preserve memory of it”.²⁰ In opposition to coloniality,

decoloniality refers to efforts at rehumanising the world, to breaking hierarchies of difference that dehumanize subjects and communities and that destroy nature, and to the production of counter-discourses, counter-knowledges, counter-creative acts, and counter-practices that seek to dismantle coloniality and to open up multiple other forms of being in the world.²¹

Colonialism shaped the universities and higher education system that developed in South Africa after the early nineteenth century. One result was the implantation in South Africa of universities that, in their academic organisation, were imitations of European universities, rather than universities that were organically *South African* or *African*. Another outcome was universities whose institutional identities, cultures, curricula, learning and teaching, and research were wedded to Western intellectual thought, modes of knowledge making, conventions and practices. A further effect was universities that were by and large associated strongly with the reproduction of the colonial and apartheid social order, rath-

18 B. de Sousa Santos, *Another Knowledge Is Possible: Beyond Northern Epistemologies* (London: Verso, 2017).

19 G.K. Bhabra, “Postcolonial and decolonial dialogues,” *Postcolonial Studies*, 17:2, p.119.

20 Bulhan, *Stages of Colonialism*, 241.

21 N. Maldonado-Torres, *Outline of Ten Theses*, 10.

er than with contributing to an equitable and democratic order. “Every South African university,” the late Jakes Gerwel argued in 1987, “[had] a dominant ideological orientation which [described] the context of its operations.”²² He observed that “the ideology to which a university [related] [had] a correlative in some organized political movement”, and was “linked to some ideological establishment”. The white Afrikaans-language universities “stood ... firmly within the operative context of Afrikaner nationalism, networking in a complex way into its various correlative institutions, whether it be educational, cultural, religious, economic or political”; similarly, the white English-language universities functioned “within the context of anglophile liberalism, primarily linking and responding to its institutional expressions as in the English schools, cultural organizations and, importantly, big business”.

Transitions very rarely result in the total, rapid and sweeping displacement of old structures, institutions, policies and practices. Instead, there tends to be a “conservation-dissolution” dialectic, in terms of which there exist discontinuities and continuities. After 1994, there have been significant changes in the higher education institutional landscape in South Africa, and in enrolments, access, governance and funding. There has been a considerable expansion of the university system, and a wider entry of students and scholars from previously dominated social classes, groups and strata. Black students constituted 52 per cent of a total of 473,000 students in 1993, and women students 43 per cent; by 2013, black students comprised 82 per cent of the total student body of 983,698, and women students made up 58 per cent.²³ In 1994, academics at South African universities were overwhelmingly white (83 per cent) and male (68 per cent). By 2014, the representation of black and women academics had improved considerably, making up 50 per cent and 46 per cent respectively of the full-time per-

22 G.J. Gerwel, “Inaugural Address, 5 June 1987,” *Transformation* 4, p. 77.

23 Council on Higher Education *Higher Education in the First Decade of Democracy* (Pretoria: Council on Higher Education, 2004); Council on Higher Education *Higher Education Reviewed: Two Decades of Democracy* (Pretoria: Council on Higher Education, 2016).

manent academic staff of 18,250 academics.²⁴ However, alongside changes, old institutional structures, arrangements, conventions, rituals, traditions and practices have remained in place at universities. While new university-societal relationships have come into being, the old connections to which Gerwel refers have not been entirely disarticulated, and have continued to shape the operations of universities. Black and women students and staff increasingly inhabit universities, but the incongruences between their aspirations, concerns and lived experiences, and the inherited academic structures and cultures have been thrown into sharp relief, especially at the historically white universities.

Historically, the apartheid system of differentiation along lines of race, ethnicity and language conferred many advantages on those universities that were traditionally reserved for whites; and disadvantaged severely with respect to educational roles, facilities, provision and quality, geographical location, staff qualifications and funding those universities that were reserved for blacks. The historically black universities were constituted as essentially undergraduate teaching universities, while most historically white universities developed over time as research universities, a pattern that continues today. Despite opposition to apartheid from some historically white universities and from the historically black universities, both were products of apartheid planning and were differentiated functionally to help reproduce the apartheid order. Post-1994, all universities have needed to be liberated from this past, to become *South African* universities, and to serve new social and education goals. Despite efforts to change institutional cultures at the historically white universities, “legacies of intellectual colonization and racialization” remain, and are significant threats to the flowering of ideas, discourse, discovery, and scholarship, to “empowering intellectual discourse communities”, to the cultivation of graduates as critical and democratic citizens, and “to

24 Department of Higher Education and Training (2016) *2014 Permanent Instruction/Research Professionals by Race* (Pretoria: DHET, 2016). My thanks to Jean Skene of the DHET for the 2014 data on the racial and gender composition of academic staff.

academic freedom”.²⁵ The greater presence of black students and black staff has not translated into genuine respect for difference, into significant appreciation of diversity, and into meaningful linguistic, social, cultural and academic inclusion. Rather than a comprehensive dismantling and displacement of institutional arrangements, norms and practices suffused by whiteness, the practice, if not the formal policy, has been one where black students and staff historically have been expected to integrate and assimilate into prevailing institutional cultures.

At the heart of institutional cultures is a deeply embedded culture of “whiteness”. As Sara Ahmed writes, to “talk about whiteness as an institutional problem”, to “describe institutions as being white” is “to point to how institutional spaces are shaped by the proximity of some bodies and not others”.²⁶ In such spaces, “white bodies become somatic norms”. As a result, “whiteness is invisible and unmarked...the absent centre against which others appear as points of deviation”. It is a “habit insofar as it tends to go unnoticed”. However, it “is only invisible to those who inhabit it or those who get so used to its inhabitation that they learn not to see it”. A culture experienced as “natural” by white South Africans exacts significant personal, psychological, emotional and academic tolls on black students and staff, compromises equity of opportunity and outcomes, and diminishes the idea of higher education as an enriching and liberating adventure.

Social justice is not advanced by assimilation and by conformity and uniformity.²⁷ Assimilation’s “conceptual logic”, notes David Theo Goldberg in *Are we all Post-Racial Yet*, is “to pull individuals from once excluded groups into the ‘melting pot’ of prevailing political arrangements and structures”, and “to acculturate by melting into and operating on the common logics defined by dominant – namely white – interests”. Those outside the ambit of whiteness “could become white-like by adopting their values, hab-

25 A. du Toit, “From Autonomy To Accountability: Academic Freedom Under Threat In South Africa,” *Social Dynamics* 26, 2000, p. 103.

26 Ahmed “*On Being Included*,” p. 36.

27 D.T. Goldberg, *Are we all Post-Racial Yet* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), p. 19.

its, cultural expressions, aspirations and ways of being”. Stephen Bantu Biko noted that assimilation leaves the “set of norms and code of behaviour, the values and structures determining privilege and power already established self-servingly by whites firmly in place”.²⁸ The post-1994 inclusion of black students has been accompanied by simultaneous exclusion and, therefore, inclusion essentially of a subordinate nature. Ultimately, alongside insufficient student financial support, inadequate attentiveness to the meaning epistemologically, ontologically, culturally and socially of an African university, to its knowledge and education programme, to curricula that tend to deny that black people possess history, philosophy and ethics, and contribute to knowledge and to questions of institutional culture, came to incubate a popular student revolt.

The Curriculum

Louis Althusser reminds us that every society, at the same time that it produces, must reproduce the conditions of its own existence.²⁹ Although he accorded education an unduly functionalist role in the reproduction of society and left little room for human agency to contest, undermine and transform social relations in education and society, Althusser rightly pointed to the critical role of education in cultural and social re/production. Curriculum is inextricably connected with the social and educational purposes and roles that are accorded to and pursued by universities, and with cultural and social re/production. Of course, there is not a simple and unambiguous correspondence between curriculum, the roles played by universities, and cultural and social re/production; the relations are complex and suffused by ambiguities, paradoxes and contradictions. Notwithstanding state, corporatist, and managerialist erosions of all kinds, institutional autonomy, academic freedom and the holyarchical nature of universities ensure that academic units and scholars possess considerable independence to shape curricula. At the same time, universities do not

28 Cited by Goldberg, *Are we all Post-Racial*, 19

29 L. Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001).

stand outside of society, are subject to “the conflicts and contradictions of society and therefore they will tend to express – and even to amplify – the ideological struggles present in all societies”.³⁰

If the idea of “decolonization” has to be engaged critically, so does the idea of “curriculum”. Rather than being taken as a given, the delineation of the nature, scope and dynamics of curriculum is an important task if we are to have a better sense of the objects and tasks related to curriculum transformation. Questions related to curriculum and its transformation have to be the objects of vigorous, open, creative and sustained engagement among key actors concerned with higher education.³¹ Hans Weiler has made the important point that “given the nature of policy choices and the question of their legitimacy, the process by which they are arrived at may be as important as, if not more important than, the directional criteria which define (and delimit) the options to be taken”.³² Formulating goals and making choices is concerned fundamentally with the “politics of daily life – with issues of power, control, legitimacy, privilege, equity, justice and the dimensions of values generally”,³³ and shaped by social struggles. It should never be imagined that formulating goals, approaches and policies “could be the result of simply identifying and choosing the alternative that is ‘best’”, as “this ignores the obvious political fact that the ‘best’ has to be determined in the political crucible of competing interests”.³⁴

At the most basic level, curriculum is concerned with two questions. One question is what knowledge, expertise, competencies and

30 M. Castells, “Universities as Dynamic Systems of Contradictory Functions,” in *Challenges of Globalisation: South African Debates with Manuel Castells* ed. J. Müller, N. Cloete and S. Badat (Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman, 2001), p. 212.

31 See S. Badat, “From Innocence To Critical Reflexivity: Critical Researchers, Research and Writing, and Higher Education Policy-Making.” In *Knowledge, Power and Dissent: Critical Perspectives on Higher Education and Research in Knowledge Society*, ed. G. Neave (Paris: Unesco, 2006).

32 H. N. Weiler, “Education And Development: From the Age of Innocence to the Age of Skepticism.” *Comparative Education*, 14 (3), 1978, p. 19.

33 C. Lankshear, *Literacy, Schooling and Revolution* (London: The Falmer Press, 1987), pp. 231-232

34 G. Scoufe, “The Assumptive World of Three State Policy Researchers,” *Peabody Journal of Education*, 62 (4), 1985, p.116.

skills should be shared and developed as part of the cultivation of new generations of graduates. However, “to know *what* the curriculum should contain requires a sense of what the contents are for”, and implies having “a clear sense of the purpose”³⁵ of a university education, of the purpose of a university more generally, and of a South African and African university specifically. A further question is how the process of sharing, engagement and dissemination should be organized in order to realize the kinds of graduates desired, accepting that open and critical engagement means that there will be an indeterminacy with respect to the outcomes of this process.

Issues of teaching, learning, pedagogy and assessment are not neutral and technical, and there is not “one best set of means to reach pre-chosen educational ends”.³⁶ Too often, critical questions related to curriculum and pedagogy receive insufficient attention, and deep-seated conventional wisdoms that deem quality and standards to be universalistic, invariant, immutable and largely technical, rather than historical and social constructs, impede serious critical engagement with the “educational process in higher education”.³⁷ Teaching and learning, which are critical to student success, tend, especially at research universities, to exist in the shadow of research, perhaps because they are considered to be innate abilities or commonsense activities. Drawing on Gramsci, Wilfred Carr points out that “the distinctive feature of common sense is not that its beliefs and assumptions *are* true but that it is a style of thinking in which the truth of these beliefs and assumptions is regarded as self-evident and taken for granted. What is commonsensical is ipso facto unquestionable and does not need to be justified.”³⁸

Curriculum, as Pierre Bourdieu, Basil Bernstein, Michael Young, Michael Apple and others have argued, is involved intimately in economic, social and cultural re/production; it shapes

35 K. Egan, “What is Curriculum?” *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies*. Volume 1, Number 1, Spring, p. 14

36 M.W. Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum* (London: Routledge, 1979), p. 44.

37 I. Scott, N. Yeld and J. Hendry, “A Case For Improving Teaching and Learning in South African Higher Education,” *Higher Education Monitor* 6, 2007, p. 73.

38 W. Carr, *For Education: Towards Critical Educational Inquiry* (Bristol: Open University Press, 1995), pp.53- 54.

meaning and the historical and cultural identity of people. It preserves and disseminates knowledge and, in the process, confers legitimacy on knowledge. Often, this is not the knowledge of all groups but of particular social groups, which raises questions of power and the position of different social groups within economic and social relations or, more accurately, within unequal economic and social relations associated with domination and subordination, and with privilege and disadvantage along lines of class, race, gender, and other fissures.³⁹ Questions abound: “What counts as knowledge? How is such knowledge selected and organized, and by whom? Whose interests does it serve? How does its meaning, selection, organization, and transmission distort or reflect reality?”⁴⁰ Speaking about the discipline of sociology, Michael Burawoy contends that “the questions – ‘knowledge for whom?’ and ‘knowledge for what?’ – define the fundamental character of our discipline.”⁴¹

Curriculum is the product of multiple determinants. It has to engage simultaneously with “economic, cultural, disciplinary and learning-related” issues.⁴² With respect to the economic arena, curriculum has to engage with the knowledge, expertise, skills and competencies that are required for graduates to contribute to economic and social development in a context of rapid technological change and globalization. In terms of the cultural, curriculum has to take into account difference (race, class, sex, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, geography, language, age), the varied experiences and resources that students bring with them, the need to forge respect for diversity, and to build social connectedness in a divided society. With respect to academic disciplinary issues, the curriculum has to engage with “the nature of its underlying knowledge discipline”, has to induct students into disciplinary knowledge making, and has to ensure “a close coupling between

39 Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum*, p. 63..

40 H.A. Giroux, “Review of Ideology and Curriculum by Michael W. Apple,” *The Journal of Education*, Vol. 161, No. 4, Fall 1979, p. 90.

41 M. Burawoy, “2004 American Sociological Association Presidential Address: For Public Sociology,” *British Journal of Sociology* 56 (2), p. 11.

42 I. Moll, *Curriculum Responsiveness: The Anatomy of a Concept* (Johannesburg: South African Institute for Distance Education, 2005).

the way in which knowledge is produced and the way students are educated and trained in the discipline area”.⁴³

Regarding learning-related issues, the students who inhabit universities today possess increasingly diverse social and educational backgrounds and experiences. They “know different things and in different ways to ‘traditional’ student cohorts”; they have to be engaged with “not as deficient but as different”, which calls for thinking deeply about teaching and learning.⁴⁴ While “academic language ... is no one’s mother tongue, the achievement of academic literacy is more readily attainable for some students than for other students”.⁴⁵ This means giving attention to how students are supported to become academically literate. The academy’s ways of knowing are based on particular conventions and practices; these are more foreign to some students than to others. Greater student diversity entails rethinking the privileging of certain “ways of knowing”⁴⁶ and being open to other possible ways of knowledge making. The multiple realities that affect curriculum “articulate with each other and constitute affordances and constraints for each other”,⁴⁷ at the same time, they can lead to tensions between various imperatives associated with curriculum, and “to multifaceted practices that combine various accounts of the concept”.

It is clear that curriculum is connected with large and fundamental questions, and that the issue of its decolonization involves tackling simultaneously and concertedly the question of the core purpose and goals of South African universities. It should also be clear that curriculum is connected with profound questions of values, epistemology, ontology and knowledge making and dissemination, in a context of unequal social relations.

43 Moll, *Curriculum Responsiveness*, 7.

44 Burawoy, American Sociological Association.

45 P. Bourdieu and J-C. Passeron, Introduction: “Language and relationship to language in the teaching situation.” In *Academic Discourse* ed. P. Bourdieu, J-C. Passeron and M. de Saint Martin (Palo Alto CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 8.

46 My thanks to Prof. Sioux Mckenna of Rhodes University’s Centre for Higher Education Research, Learning and Teaching for this point.

47 Moll, *Curriculum Responsiveness*, 8.

Decolonization of the Curriculum

Not surprisingly, as a consequence of the “epistemicide” that occurred under colonialism, one concern of curriculum *decolonization* is epistemic justice. Colonial ontology was predicated on the belief that unlike Europeans who were Christian, civilized, and modern, Africans were pagan, primitive, and without civilization, had no history, were not part of humanity, and were incapable of rationality. European modernity was considered “isomorphic with the humanity of the human”; whereas Europe was “the epitome of humanity in this dispensation”, colonized regions such as Africa were “conceptually its *inhuman* counterpart”.⁴⁸ Africans are characterized as in permanent deficit. As Grosfoguel writes,

We went from the sixteenth-century characterisation of “people without writing” to the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century characterisation of “people without history”, to the twentieth-century characterisation of “people without development” and more recently, to the early twenty-first century of “people without democracy”.⁴⁹

A number of theorists associated with postcolonialism and the decolonial school have highlighted the problems associated with European epistemology which took it upon itself to stipulate what was knowledge and how it was produced, and proclaimed that its scientific truths were universal and “valid across all of time and space”.⁵⁰ As noted, this universalism extended to the idea that what was held to be progress and development in Europe “represented a pattern that was applicable everywhere”; it “was not only good but the face of the future everywhere”. This Eurocentrism was “constitutive of the geoculture of the modern world”, and shaped powerfully “science and knowledge in universities everywhere”. Edward Said’s great contribution was to demonstrate

48 Tsenay Serequeberhan cited by N.M. Creary, “Introduction.” In *African Intellectuals and decolonization* ed, N. M. Creary (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2012), p. 2.

49 R. Grosfoguel, “The Epistemic Decolonial Turn: Beyond Political-Economy Paradigms.” *Cultural Studies*, 21 (2-3), March/May, 2007, p. 214.

50 Wallerstein, Eurocentrism, p. 95.

how the idea of the universal within European thought is based on a claim to universality at the same time as it elides its own particularity, and how this claim is sustained through the exercise of material power in the world. His argument...is focused on exposing the ways in which relations of power underpin both knowledge and the possibilities of its production.⁵¹

For Said, Eurocentrism was an impediment to human understanding because

its misleadingly skewed historiography, the parochiality of its universalism, its unexamined assumptions about Western civilization, its Orientalism, and its attempt to impose a uniformly directed theory of progress all end up reducing, rather than expanding, the possibility of catholic inclusiveness, of genuine cosmopolitan or internationalist perspective, of intellectual curiosity.⁵²

The confinement of readings and courses to “dutifully venerated Western masterpieces, the narrowed perspectives on what constitutes ‘our’ world, the obliviousness to traditions and languages that seem to be outside respectable or approved attention [had to] be jettisoned or at the very least submitted to radical humanistic critique”.⁵³

The question of the decolonization of the curriculum did not arise for the first time in 2015–2016. The process of political decolonization in Asia and Africa after 1945 resulted in attacks on the Eurocentrism of the knowledge enterprise. Wallerstein states that the attacks were “fundamentally justified, and there is no question that, if social science is to make any progress in the twenty-first century, it must overcome the Eurocentric heritage which has distorted its analyses and its capacity to deal with the problems of the contemporary world”.⁵⁴ At the same time, he issued a salutary warning: that in overcoming Eurocentrism

51 Bhambra, *Postcolonial and decolonial dialogues*, p. 120.

52 E.W. Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 53.

53 Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, p. 53.

54 Wallerstein, *Eurocentrism*, 94.

we must take a careful look at what constitutes Eurocentrism, for ...it is a hydra-headed monster and has many avatars. It will not be easy to slaughter the dragon swiftly. Indeed, if we are not careful, in the guise of trying to fight it, we may in fact criticize Eurocentrism using Eurocentric premises and thereby reinforce its hold on the community of scholars.⁵⁵

Said reminds us that despite its laudable aims, political decolonization did not prevent the capture of societies by repressive nationalist regimes or by elites tethered to the key protagonists of the cold war.⁵⁶ And Fanon, of course, famously warned about the “pitfalls of national consciousness”, about colonized elites replacing colonists without fundamentally changing social relations, about leaders who in anti-colonial struggles embody “the aspirations of the people for independence, political liberty and national dignity” but who with independence seek to become the “CEO of the company of profiteers ...intent only on getting the most out of the situation”, and about seeing colonizers and colonized in undifferentiated terms, obscuring class and other differences within these two groups.⁵⁷

During the late 1960s, the Black Consciousness Movement advanced the demand for “black education”, conceived as a rejection of “the traditional order of subordination to whites in education”, as furthering “the preservation and promotion of what is treasured in our culture and our historical experience”, and as being “tied to the liberation of the Black people of the world”.⁵⁸ A “Charter for a Black University” produced in 1972 by the South African Students’ Organization (Saso) set out a diverse mission for the black university, and elaborated the aims of “black education”.⁵⁹ According to the Charter, academic disciplines had to

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, p. 142.

⁵⁷ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), p. 112.

⁵⁸ Saso, “Minutes of the proceedings of the 3rd GSC, St. Peter’s Seminary, Hammanskraal, 2-9 July 1972; Saso, *SASO on the Attack: An Introduction To The South African Students’ Organisation 1973*. (Durban: Saso).

⁵⁹ Saso, *SASO on the Attack*, p. 7.

be “geared at dynamising the basic perspectives on reality which have usually been of profound pessimism and fatalism, by enabling the student to gain awareness of his capacity to shape his environment ...”. The “black university” had to be concerned especially with “Black Studies” – “on Africa and African thought, history, culture, language and literature, and the Black experience”. As part of its embrace of “communalism”, Saso called on the “black university” paradoxically to both socialise students so as to counter “acquisitiveness and class structures” as well as to promote class mobility; to foster black values, identity and culture, but also to be a force for modernization.⁶⁰ There was little appreciation that the arc of modernization was Eurocentrism, an ethos of individualism, and the destruction of indigenous culture, the very things that Saso claimed to abhor. Saso creatively forged the seminal and positive doctrine of black consciousness, and instilled and activated anti-colonial attitudes, dispositions and practices among students, but was unable to transcend idealist conceptions or contradictory thinking on higher education. This highlights the challenge of moving beyond critique and building genuinely liberating institutions and practices.

Around the same time as the emergence of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa, the May 1968 movement, the civil rights movement in the United States, and other social movements spawned demands for curricular change, and gave birth to new fields such as African-American studies, Black studies, feminist studies and gender studies. Said has observed that social struggles shape academic disciplines, fields and curricula, and that the emergence of “African-American studies as a new, albeit, scandalously delayed...humanistic field represented in the academy...called into question the formulaic, perhaps even hypocritical universalism of classical Eurocentric humanistic thought...”.⁶¹ It also

revealed how the whole notion of humanism, which

⁶⁰ Saso, *SASO on the Attack*, p. 7.

⁶¹ Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, 45.

had for so long done without the historical experiences of African Americans, women, and disadvantaged and marginalized groups, was...undergirded by a working notion of national identity that was...highly edited and abridged, indeed restricted to a small groups that was thought to be representative of the whole society but was in fact missing large segments of it ...⁶²

Sartre noted that while the humanism of European thought gestured towards universalism, its racist practices resulted in invidious differentiation.⁶³

Both before and since 1994, critical voices at universities argued the need for epistemologies, curriculum, and curricula and pedagogies more appropriate for the South African and African contexts. There have been changes in curricula in various disciplines and fields. Arguably, the critical voices have been a small minority, and have had little institutional traction and support from most academics; and there has been little in the way of concerted and comprehensive institutional efforts to rethink and transform the substance of the curriculum, as distinct from the limited and largely individual efforts related to curricula in specific disciplines and fields. Positive and cumulative changes that could have developed as a result of Mamdani's critique and contestation in the late 1990s of the curriculum in African studies and the humanities at the University of Cape Town (UCT) were dissipated when his challenge was administratively subjugated. Mamdani insists that "the central question facing higher education in Africa today is what it means to teach the humanities and social sciences in the current historical context and, in particular, in the postcolonial African context", and "in a location where the dominant intellectual paradigms are products not of Africa's own experience but of a particular Western experience".⁶⁴

The call of the 2015-2016 student protestors for "decoloniza-

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Sartre, Preface, p. xiv.

⁶⁴ M. Mamdani, "Africa's Post-Colonial Scourge." *Mail & Guardian*, 27 May-2 June 2011.

tion" of the curriculum constitutes a potentially much more extensive and more radical programme than the 1960s demands for "black education", for African-American studies, and the like. Given how critical it will be for delineating the goals, scope and objects of change, the meaning of decolonization will require great deliberation. To begin with, we can pose the question of whether "decolonization" is an adequate concept for thinking and mapping the transformations that are desired in curricula. One concern is that decolonization is too narrow and limiting a lens through which to engage the debate on curriculum change. First, the historical experience has been that decolonization was not "about changing or transforming a colonized society's institutional structures".⁶⁵ Second, decolonisation "assumes that different knowledge systems are homogeneous", which ignores the social underpinnings of knowledge – the fact that all traditions feature dominant and marginal knowledges, and that "these are based on power relations and worldviews linked to race, class, gender and other societal divisions".⁶⁶ The decolonization discourse, it is suggested, has two dangers: racial essentialism and "social conservatism, which pits modernity against tradition", and assumes that tradition is static and exists in pristine isolation from other knowledge systems, rather than being "dynamic [and] evolving with changing social and economic contexts". Instead, what is needed is "epistemological diversity", a recognition of the "the universality of knowledge", predicated on "open dialogue and the interdependence of – and porous boundaries between – different knowledge traditions". Such an approach would enable "the reclaiming and affirming of African knowledge traditions".⁶⁷

Beyond the adequacy of the concept, there are numerous other questions. First, what education and social goals is decolonization intended to advance: Africanization, Afrikanization, signalling an encompassing of the diaspora, or indigenization? But, second, are

⁶⁵ A. Essop, "Decolonization Debate is a Chance to Rethink the Role of Universities," *The Conversation Africa*, August 2016.

⁶⁶ Essop, Decolonization Debate.

⁶⁷ Essop, Decolonization Debate.

Africanization, Afrikanization, and indigenization goals in themselves, or are they strategies for achieving other goals? Third, what would be entailed concretely in “Africanizing” or “indigenizing” the curriculum? One approach could be *substitution*: the total replacement of “the existing Western-based curriculum...with something...indigenous or African”.⁶⁸ Another approach could be *displacement* of the hegemonic Western curriculum in favour of another knowledge system and curriculum. A further approach could be the “decentring” of Western knowledge and curriculum, so that it becomes “one way of knowing rather than *the* way of knowing”;⁶⁹ a creative *conservation-dissolution*, that is part of the pluralisation of knowledge and the curriculum. Fourth, with respect to pedagogy associated with desired education and social goals, do we need to choose a single overriding pedagogical approach, such as student-centred pedagogy, or should pedagogical approaches be ultimately related to objectives and contexts?⁷⁰ Fifth, given the critique, failings and problems of Eurocentrism, what is the alternative: Afrocentrism? Afropolitanism? What would be constitutive of Afrocentrism – an epistemology, ontology, methodology, or a sense of place? Sixth, to the extent that there is a need to draw on philosophical, theoretical, and other resources for the praxis of curriculum change, what might these resources be: postcolonial theory, decolonial theory, critical theory, other theoretical traditions, a creative welding of different emancipatory traditions? Seventh, what would be the nature of a curriculum decolonization programme: would it be principally a knowledge programme, an education programme or a social justice programme?

As a knowledge programme, the concern of curriculum transformation would be principally to confront dominant epistemologies and theories that are oblivious to their Eurocentrism, and to build new academic and institutional cultures that genu-

68 L. Le Grange, “Decolonisation Involves More than Simply Turning Back the Clock.” *The Conversation*. 11 July 2016.

69 Le Grange, Decolonisation Involves More.

70 See R. Tabulawa, *Teaching and Learning in Context: Why Pedagogical Reforms Fail in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Dakar: Codesria, 2013).

inely respect epistemological difference and diversity and social justice in the domain of knowledge making. Boa Ventura Santos contends that we are characterized by “abyssal thinking”, which grants “to modern science the monopoly of the universal distinction between true and false to the detriment of...alternative bodies of knowledge”.⁷¹ This results in “global cognitive injustice”, so that “the struggle for global social justice” will “be a struggle for cognitive justice as well”.⁷² Shiv Visvanathan adds that “the idea of cognitive justice sensitizes us not only to forms of knowledge but also to the diverse communities of problem solving. What one offers then is a democratic imagination... where conversation, reciprocity, translation create knowledge not as an expert, almost zero-sum view of the world, but as a collaboration of memories, legacies, heritages, a manifold heuristics of problem solving”.⁷³ In *Theory from the South*, Jean and John Comaroff contend that

Western enlightenment thought has, from the first, posited itself as the wellsprings of universal learning, of Science and Philosophy... concomitantly, it has regarded the non-West... primarily as a place of parochial wisdom, of antiquarian traditions, of exotic ways and means. Above all, of unprocessed data... [and] reservoirs of raw fact: of the historical, natural and ethnographic minutiae from which Euromodernity might fashion its testable theories and transcendent truths, its axioms and certitudes, its premises, postulates and principles.⁷⁴

Scholars from Africa are assumed, in Walter Mignolo’s terms, to be tokens of their culture; in contrast, scholars from Europe and the United States are “theoretically minded” persons; so, “the First World has knowledge, the Third World has culture; Native Amer-

71 B.V. de Sousa Santos, *Another Knowledge is Possible: Beyond Northern Epistemologies* (London: Verso, 2007), p. 47.

72 B.V. de Sousa Santos, “Beyond Abyssal Thinking: From Global Lines to Ecologies,” *Eurozine*, 33, 2007. p. 53.

73 S. Visvanathan, “The Search for Cognitive Justice.” <http://www.inia-seminar.com/2009/597/597shivisvanathan.htm>.

74 J. Comaroff and J. L. Comaroff, *Theory From the South: Or, How Euro-America is Evolving Towards Africa* (London: Paradigm, 2012).

icans have wisdom, Anglo Americans have science”.⁷⁵ Mignolo argues that there is an “epistemic dependency of Third World countries [and] scholars and intellectuals” that “is parallel to economic dependency” which is not an original state but the product of unequal relations over centuries. African scholars have to also contend with an Occidentalism in theory and policy, meaning “the tendency to ascribe a cogency to the intellectual and cultural products of the west, that it does not in fact possess”.⁷⁶ Thus, for example, says Alex de Waal, “despite sustained critique by historians and anthropologists, the Western experience of state formation remains the standard against which the rest of the world is indexed”.⁷⁷

Overcoming Eurocentrism, contends Gurinder Bhambra, “requires...a commitment to the production of knowledge that is decolonial in intent and practice”.⁷⁸ A “decolonial epistemic perspective requires a broader canon of thought than simply the Western canon”; moreover, it “cannot be based on an abstract universal (one particularly that raises itself as universal global design), but would have to be the result of the critical dialogue between diverse critical epistemic/ethical/political projects towards a pluriversal as opposed to a universal world”.⁷⁹ The tasks include deconstructing “the standard narratives based upon the universalisation of parochial European histories”, reconstructing “global narratives on the basis of the empirical connections forged through histories of colonialism, enslavement, dispossession and appropriation”,⁸⁰ and provincialising ideas that arise out of European experiences but are universalized globally.⁸¹ Santos argues that there is a need for “counterhegemonic understandings and uses of Eurocen-

75 Mignolo, *The Darker Side*, 118.

76 A. De Waal, “A Social Science in Africa Fit for Purpose” (World Peace Foundation Publications, 2015). <http://nextgen.ssrc.org/fellows/spotlight/towards-a-social-science-in-africa-fit-for-purpose/>

77 De Waal, *A Social Science in Africa*.

78 Bhambra, *Postcolonial*, 149.

79 Grosfoguel, *The Epistemic Decolonial Turn*, 212.

80 Bhambra, *Postcolonial*, 149.

81 D. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

tric concepts, such as human rights, the rule of law, democracy, and socialism” to be generated from the global South.⁸² Mignolo advocates “epistemic delinking”, and argues that “decolonizing knowledge and decolonial knowledges [are] necessary steps to imagining and building democratic, just, and non-imperial/colonial societies”; “decolonial thinking and knowing” becomes a contestation of “imperial disembodied and un-located assumptions about knowing and knowledge making”.⁸³

If “modernity in the South is not adequately understood as a derivative...a callow copy or counterfeit, of the Euro-American original, it has to “be apprehended and addressed in its own right”, and we have to “make sense of it, empirically and theoretically, from that distinct vantage point”.⁸⁴ This means two things. One is greater knowledge production in Africa and by Africans, our greater visibility and representation in knowledge networks, and the production of “more accurate knowledge of Africa”; the second is for African scholars “to formulate and apply intellectual theories and categories” that draw on African conditions and “the concrete experiences of African historical agents”.⁸⁵ The goal has to be, to paraphrase Raewyn Connell, to make Africa a place to learn from and not to just learn about.⁸⁶ However, it is about more than about just social location; it is also about epistemic location because [the] fact that one is socially located in the oppressed side of power relations, does not automatically mean that he/she is epistemically thinking from a subaltern epistemic location. Precisely, the success of the modern/colonial world-system consist in making subjects that are socially located in the oppressed side of the colonial difference, to think epistemically like the ones on the

82 B. V. de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide*, (London: Routledge, 2015). I am grateful to Helen Murray for sharing her PhD proposal with me, which includes a very useful review of postcolonial and decolonial literature.

83 Mignolo, *The Darker Side*, 118-119.

84 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Theory From the South*, 7.

85 Creary, Introduction, 3.

86 Cited by Hendricks and Liebowitz, *Decolonising Universities*.

dominant positions.⁸⁷

A decolonial approach labours to “bring into intervening existence an-other interpretation” that advances “on the one hand, a silenced view of the event and, on the other, shows the limits of imperial ideology disguised as the true (total) interpretation of the events”.⁸⁸

If curriculum transformation is seen largely as an education programme, attention would have to be focused on issues such as curriculum content, syllabi, course texts, pedagogy, assessment, and the logic and adequacy of the current structure and duration of undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, which do not serve students well. Post-1994, much energy in South Africa was devoted to specifying the goals of academic courses and their intended outcomes, to the formal structure of qualifications and academic programmes, to making explicit the credits and notional learning hours associated with them, and so forth. However, significant systemic interventions around degree structures that could have great promise for equity and quality have been lacking.

Curriculum transformation as a social justice programme would focus attention especially on at least six issues, without necessarily excluding the matters discussed above related to knowledge and education. One issue would be *equality* of provision, opportunity, and outcomes in a context of ongoing class, race, gender and other inequalities. A second issue would be *equity* for achieving substantive equality, given that equality of treatment and opportunity is a necessary but not sufficient condition for eliminating systemic historical and structural higher education inequalities. A third issue would be *redress*, through measures that would discriminate positively in favour of those who were and are disadvantaged. A further issue would be ensuring *quality* education provision, as a necessary condition for the formation of the intellectual and other capabilities of individuals. A fifth issue would be extending the use of indigenous languages in higher education, including their use in teaching and learning. Finally, there

87 Grosfoguel, *The Epistemic Decolonial Turn*, 213

88 Mignolo, *The Darker Side*, 35.

would be the question of instituting wider social policy measures, on the recognition that South Africa’s economic and social structures with their attendant class inequalities significantly constrain equality, equity and redress in education, good quality higher education, and social justice. Transformation of the curriculum and of universities would be “part of the broader project to constitute and liberate African humanity and subjectivity”.⁸⁹

The pursuit of curriculum transformation has to be alive to some dangers. First, Said warns against an approach that imagines that “historical and cultural identity [can] be confined to one tradition or race or religion”⁹⁰ He argues that demographic and other transformations mean that “nativist cultural traditions that pretend to authenticity and aboriginal priority ... [are] ... the great patently false and misleading fundamentalist ideology of the time”. He has strong words for what he calls “the falsifiers and reductivists, the fundamentalists and deniers ... who ... adhere to doctrines that leave out, denigrate, demonize and dehumanize on presumably humanistic grounds”. What might be the implications, for example, for human and intercultural understanding and exchange and for knowledge production, if transformation was conceived in terms of substituting white scholars with black scholars: Marx with Du Bois, Freud with Fanon, Heidegger with Sylvan Winter, Hegel with Biko, Judith Butler with Angela Davis, Max Weber with Ibn Khaldun, and Picasso with Dumile Feni?

Second, any university worthy of its name has to embody a fundamental commitment “to the spirit of truth”,⁹¹ and to the principle of academic freedom that is for good reasons enshrined in the South African Constitution. We have to beware, in the name of decolonization, of demands for allegiance to particular theories and methodologies that breed new kinds of dull homogeneity and plodding conformity, and that crush heterodox thought, alternative ways of theorising and methodological experimentation. Jakes

89 Creary, Introduction, 7.

90 Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, 47.

91 G. Graham, *The Institution of Intellectual Values: Realism and Idealism in Higher Education*. (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2005), p. 163.

Gerwel, even as he called in 1987 for the University of the Western Cape to become aligned with the mass democratic movement, and to become the intellectual home for the left, sagely noted his doubt about a university ever having a corporate opinion.⁹²

Assume that we agree that a transformed curriculum should build the capabilities of students by inducting them effectively into knowledge and to different approaches to knowledge making and their underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions, by equipping them with historical, cultural, and scientific understanding to interpret past and present, and to shape the future by enabling them to address vexing questions that confront humanity, and by cultivating in them the expertise, competencies, and skills required to contribute productively to economic, social, and technological change. How might we approach these ends? One approach could be a humanist education. At the core of humanism are three ideas. One is that the “historical world is made by men and women ... and that it can be understood rationally”.⁹³ A second idea is that humans have the “capacity to make knowledge, as opposed to absorbing it passively, reactively, and dully”. The final idea is that humanism “is ... critique that is directed at the state of affairs in, as well as out of, the university ... and that gathers its force and relevance by its democratic, secular, and open character”. Concomitantly,

humanism is not about withdrawal and exclusion. Quite the reverse: its purpose is to make more things available to critical scrutiny as the product of human labour, human energies for emancipation and enlightenment and ... human misreadings and misinterpretations of the collective past and present.⁹⁴

While we can make knowledge, Said’s contention was “there is always something radically incomplete, insufficient, provisional, disputable, and arguable about humanistic knowledge”.⁹⁵ That

⁹² Gerwel, Inaugural Address.

⁹³ Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, 11.

⁹⁴ Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, 22.

⁹⁵ Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, 12.

means we can “be critical of humanism in the name of humanism”, be aware of “its abuses by the experiences of Eurocentrism and empire”, but still “fashion a different kind of humanism that [is] cosmopolitan”. Moreover, instead of approaching “humanism as a form of smugness”, it has to be “an unsettling adventure in difference, in alternative traditions, in texts that need a new deciphering within a much wider context than has been hitherto given them”. Said’s comment on the supposed opposition between traditional and canonical and new and contemporary thought is pertinent: if one possible way of way understanding the term “canon” is as fixed and bounded, another way is as “expressing motion, playfulness, discovery, and ... invention”.⁹⁶

[When] viewed in this way, the canonical humanities, far from being a rigid tablet of fixed rules and monuments bullying us from the past ... will always remain open to changing combinations of sense and signification; every reading and interpretation of a canonical work reanimates it in the present, furnishes an occasion for rereading, allows the modern and the new to be situated together in a broad historical field whose usefulness is that it shows us history as an antagonistic process still being made, rather than finished and settled once and for all.⁹⁷

A humanist education is connected to the idea of higher education as the “cultivation of humanity”.⁹⁸ “Three capacities, above all,” writes Martha Nussbaum, “are essential to the cultivation of humanity”.⁹⁹ “First is the capacity for critical examination of oneself and one’s traditions – for living what, following Socrates, we may call the ‘examined life’ ... Training this capacity requires developing the capacity to reason logically, to test what one reads or says for consistency of reasoning, correctness of fact, and accuracy

⁹⁶ Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, 23, 25.

⁹⁷ Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, 25.

⁹⁸ M. Nussbaum, *Education for Democratic Citizenship*. Institute of Social Studies Public Lecture Series 2006, No. 1. (The Hague: Institute of Social Studies, 2006).

⁹⁹ Nussbaum, *Education for Democratic*, 5.

of judgement”.¹⁰⁰ The “cultivation of humanity” also requires academics and students to see themselves “as human beings bound to all other human beings by ties of recognition and concern” – which necessitates knowledge and understanding of different cultures and “of differences of gender, race, and sexuality”. Third, it is, however, more than factual knowledge that is required. Also necessary is “the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person’s story, and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have”.

The decolonization of the curriculum, or however key actors agree to term the process of change, constitutes an enormous, challenging, yet exciting agenda of theorising, research, development, planning and implementation at institutional and national levels. The modalities and processes by which curriculum transformation occurs will be as important as the content. Serious attention will need to be given at institutional levels to ensuring the participation of all key actors in curriculum change. The aftermath of the student protests makes it clear that work is required to overcome misrecognition, and forge social connectedness and trust at all levels and in all arenas of the university. There will necessarily be extensive debate on the meaning of participation, on kinds of participation, and on the involvement of experts, non-experts, and the like. There will also be argument about the nature, scope, pace, mechanisms and instruments of curriculum transformation. Said’s perspective on invention is helpful: invention requires “reassembling from past performances, as opposed to the romantic use of invention as something you create from scratch. That is, one hypothesizes a better situation from the known historical and social facts.”¹⁰¹ There is a need to call forth “intellectual performances on many fronts, in many places, many styles that keep in play both the sense of opposition and the sense of engaged participation”.¹⁰² Bourdieu, convinced that “the whole edifice of critical

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, 140.

¹⁰² Ibid.

thought [was] in need of critical reconstruction”, was doubtful that the work of reconstruction could be undertaken “by a single great intellectual, a master-thinker endowed with the sole resources of his singular thought, or by the authorized spokesperson for a group or an institution presumed to speak in the name of those without voice, union, party, and so on”.¹⁰³ Instead, transformation calls for the collective intellectual, understood as ad hoc collections of individuals working on common questions, who “play an irreplaceable role, by helping to create the social conditions for the collective production of realist utopias”.¹⁰⁴ Alongside coordinated efforts, there is also place for everyday acts of resurgence.¹⁰⁵

Conclusion

The liberation of the curriculum is urgent and long overdue. There is a historic opportunity for liberating the curriculum from old and pernicious orthodoxies that impede knowledge making, arbitrarily value certain modes of knowledge making and certain knowledges, and devalue other modes of knowledge making and other knowledges, and constrain the construction, teaching and assessment of courses and syllabi. If a key question in the 1990s was about physical access and epistemological access for the historically disadvantaged and marginalized as part of democratising access to knowledge,¹⁰⁶ the question today, equally, is access to which and whose epistemologies and knowledges, as part of the projects of democratizing knowledge and of creating African universities. At the same time, liberating the curriculum is inextricably connected to transforming institutional cultures, and to clarifying the purposes, goals and roles of universities in South Africa, a society that must pursue simultaneously (not consecutively) environmentally sustainable economic development, social equity and the deepening of democracy.

¹⁰³ Cited by Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, 138.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ E. Ritskes, “What is Decolonization and Why Does it Matter?” *Intercontinental Cry*. 21 September 2012. <https://intercontinentalcry.org/what-is-decolonization-and-why-does-it-matter/>

¹⁰⁶ W. Morrow, “Epistemological Access in the University.” *AD Issues*, Vol. 1, No. 1. 1993, p. 3.

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Travel Writing as an Empirical Mode of Knowing: A Methodological Critique of James Bruce's Travels and Adventures in Abyssinia

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Abstract

This article examines the ways the traveller Bruce described the places, people and incidents encountered on his travels, and the terminology, or "categorizations" he used, particularly his use of "barbarism". The article selects and questions the major categories through which Bruce described and analysed empirical information; this exercise, which closely examines how his categories played a role in silencing some and accentuating other representations of Abyssinia, is done through cross-referencing local chronicles written before and during his visit. These sources illustrate the limitation of Bruce's account of Abyssinia by noting what he did not see or must have ignored. Local chronicles and other kinds of historical writings are used to illuminate the conceptual limitations of Bruce's categories and of possible historiographical flaws. This article is organized around four sections. The first situates it in the context of intellectual debate on Bruce. The second explores Bruce's historiographical views and categories. The third is devoted to identifying Bruce's historiographical flaws in view of alternative categories and historiographical views from chronicles and other historical sources. The fourth concludes the article with

the need to study the contradictory aspect of Bruce's intellectual legacy in Oriental Studies and Black Studies.

Introduction

This essay attempts to examine the nature of James Bruce's narrative and the categories he used to compile a travel account of his trip to Africa between 1769 and 1772. *Bruce's Travels and Adventures in Abyssinia*, published in 1860, deals with his travels in Egypt, Abyssinia and Sennar. In addition to his personal encounters with these societies, the book includes a detailed description of the social, cultural and political lives of societies, mainly in Abyssinia and Sennar. But the book influenced the portrayal of Abyssinia in Europe with categories based on European intellectual concepts, and it fed into Europe's intellectual and ideological perspective by providing empirical evidence of the "barbarian" condition: Bruce's travel writing is one of the major source materials extensively used by Thomas Robert Malthus to theorize about "uncivilized" Africans, and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel cited Bruce in his essay on the philosophy of history.

An important feature in the history of Egypt is its descent from Upper to Lower Egypt—from the South to the North...this is connected [to] the consideration that Egypt probably received its culture from Ethiopia; principally from the island Meroe, which, according to recent hypotheses, was occupied by a sacerdotal people.¹

Yet, as Robert Bernasconi argues in "The Return of Africa. Hegel and the Question of the Racial Identity of the Egyptian",² Hegel, through Bruce and others, was informed about the Meroe and Ethiopian links to Egyptian racial identity and thus their role in the Egyptian civilization. Robert Bernasconi contends that Hegel was cognisant, from Bruce's empirical account, that the ra-

1 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (Kitchener, Canada: Batoche Books, 2001), p. 220.

2 Robert Bernasconi, "The Return of Africa. Hegel and the Question of the Racial Identity of the Egyptians," in *Identity and Difference: Studies in Hegel's Logic, Philosophy of Spirit and Politics* ed. Philip T. Grier (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2007).

cial identity of the Egyptian was black. The same argument was made by W.E.B. Du Bois, using Bruce's empirical description and analysis – that the racial identity of the Ethiopian civilization was black, not semitic.³

Fikru Gebrekidan revives Du Bois's argument to offer a critique of the orientalist tradition of modern Ethiopian studies.⁴ He emphasizes that the missing link to the black intellectual and historiographical tradition in Ethiopian studies is its virtually unchallenged orientalist heritage. It is the contradictory legacy of Bruce's account that merits its being part of an ongoing intellectual debate.

Another layer of analysis examines the ways in which historians use information that comes from travel writing and from missionary writings such as those of Bahiru Tafla,⁵ Richard Pankhurst,⁶ Sergew Hable Selassie⁷ and Shiferaw Bekele.⁸ However, interrogating these sources for their historical accuracy and reliability could limit any analysis to the level of merely checking accuracy. Usuf Bala Usmans,⁹ on the other hand, asserts the need to go beyond assessments of accuracy and reliability in analyzing the written records of travellers, to explore the underlying assumptions guiding their selection and the use of categories, and to make sense of the empirical information they observe and describe.

3 See Fikru Gebrekidan's recent article on W.E.B Du Bois's position on the Blackness of Ethiopia. Fikru N. Gebrekidan, "Ethiopia in Black Studies from W.E.B. Du Bois to Henry Louis Gates Jr." *North East African Studies*, Vol. 15, No.1, 2015.

4 Gebrekidan, *Ethiopia in Black Studies*, 1-34..

5 Bahiru Tafla, *Asma Giorgis and His Work: History of Galla and the Kingdom of Shewa* (Stuttgart: Steiner-Verlag, 1987), p. 150.

6 Richard Pankhurst, "The Medical Activities in Eighteenth Century Ethiopia of James Bruce the Explorer". *Medizinhistorisches Journal*, Bd. 17, 1982, pp. 256-276.

7 Sergew Hable Selassie, *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270*. Addis Ababa: United Printers, 1972.

8 Shiferaw Bekele, "Reflections on the Power Elite of the Wara Seh Masfenate (1786-1853)." *Annales d'Éthiopie* Vol.13, 1990.

9 Usuf Bala Usmans, "The Critical Assessment of Primary Sources: Heinrich Barth in Katsina, 1851-1854." *Kano Studies*. N.s. 2 (3), 1982/1985, pp. 138-153.

What Bruce Saw and Described

In his travels to Abyssinia, Bruce's major task was to describe and analyse Abyssinian history and "customs". In so doing, Bruce recognized Abyssinia primarily as a barbaric nation. His concept of barbarism was the classification through which he made sense of Abyssinian history, social and political organisation and practices. This article attempts to expose the ways Bruce made use of categories such as "barbarian", "savage" and "negro" in describing the people of Abyssinia. As is noted by Usuf Bala Usman, critical analysis of travel narratives requires a close examination of categories and assumptions, combined with interrogating the accuracy and reliability of sources. Examining categories such as "barbarous" enables us to unearth the underlying assumptions embedded in conceptualising the history of the people of Abyssinia. Bruce's account of Abyssinia is understood to be both a theoretical and an empirical analysis.

This is what makes it relevant to examine the categories he used in his travelogue on Abyssinia because they differ from the ways in which the people of Abyssinia and Sennar perceived themselves and others. The notion of barbarism is mainly used to assert relations of difference between Europe and the non-European world. Noting and presenting the narratives of difference is one of the objectives of using categories such as "barbarous", "negro", "savage" and "tribe" in describing and analyzing the people, the social and political organization and the geography of Abyssinia and Sennar. Bruce's narrative of the people tends to represent a non-European people, comparing Europe to the non-European other. In this article I read Bruce's travel account less to examine his historical accuracy but more to unearth the categories he used to make sense of Abyssinia and Sennar and to present what he did *not* see because of his preconceived ideas.

This attempt to unpack the classifications used by Bruce will be followed by examples of alternative categories and narratives derived from local historical accounts of the time. First, I focus on an analysis of the ways the categories are used, and their under-

lying assumptions. Local historical accounts of the time provide an alternative historical narrative to that of Bruce. Barbarism is one of the terms broadly used by Bruce to describe the people of Abyssinia; it is the unit of analysis he used to represent the entire population. It could even be argued that the terms barbarism, negro, pagan, Christian, Moor and Mohametan are central to the construction of his travel account as they are extensively used as identity markers of groups of people in Abyssinia and Sennar. These categories are not, however, merely the lens through which he saw and described the people of Abyssinia – they were also for making the distinction between Abyssinia and Europe.

Barbarism seems to define difference, and the term was used to make sense of that which is not part of the European self. Bruce's travel account presented both a theory of barbarism and a historiography of Abyssinia at the time of his travel. Before adopting and using Bruce's historical account of Abyssinia as a primary source for historical reconstruction we need to consider how the problematic aspect of his narrative resulted from the ways he deployed his terminology.

In Europe, the term "barbarian" implies the values and behaviour of a lesser-known subject. Bruce's travel mandate was to discover and document the geography and ways of life of the barbarian, and to bring some material evidence of the barbarian condition to the royal collection. From the start, Bruce's mission had been to discover the source of the Nile in order to supplement Britain's imperial ambitions by providing narratives of lesser-known geographies as well as of barbarian nations. The condition of barbarism is a pre-defined condition:

...the coast of Barbary, which might be said to be just at our door, was as yet but partially explored. No details had been given to the public of the large and magnificent remains of ruined architecture which travellers vouched to have seen in great quantities, and of exquisite elegance and perfection, all over the country. He wished, therefore, that I should be the first, in the reign just beginning,

to set an example of making large additions to the royal collection.

In the above, barbarism is an already existing concept used to identify non-European people, and the journey to Abyssinia is to uncover the conditions and amass detailed information about the barbarous nation. The distinction between the self and the barbarous other is already made – without any real knowledge of the barbarian. Words such as “the coast of Barbary” and “our door” inform about “us” and “others” as the narrative framework in which the condition of barbarism is a pre-existing category defined against the “European self”. Accordingly, it is a non-European condition – barbarian nations are not part of Europe. The conception of a world inhabited by self and barbarians occasions a binary conception of world history comprising Europeans and barbarian “others”; it is notable that Bruce’s travel begins with a mindset that presupposes such a binary categorization, which reaffirms a universalist narrative of difference between Europe and the non-European world. The need to explore and learn about the barbarian other is part of imperialism. The non-European barbarians are seen to be the object study that is made accessible through exploratory travel. European explorers such as Bruce were the knowledge seekers and bearers. Such perspectives were propagated by later orientalist historians. In *James Bruce of Kinnaird*, Edward Ullendorf observes that:

Perhaps the most important aspect of Bruce’s travels was the collection of Ethiopic manuscripts which he brought with him from Abyssinia. They opened up entirely new vistas for the study of Ethiopian languages and placed this branch of Oriental scholarship on a much more secure basis... Bruce presented a fine and specially prepared copy of the Book of Enoch to Louis xv in Paris.¹⁰

Beyond the empirical descriptions they offered, travellers collected and disseminated texts, artifacts and plants. However, it was

¹⁰ Edward Ullendorf, “James Bruce of Kinnaird,” *The Scottish Historical Review*, Vol. 32, No.114, 1953, p. 133.

their descriptions and knowledge that made the subjects intelligible to the Europeans. Bruce’s empirical observation is one of the principal texts for the establishment of Black Studies, and both the text and his travel collections have been inherited by institutions and individual scholars in the orientalist tradition whose objective is to undermine the black heritage of Ethiopian studies. In her work, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Mary Louise Pratt asserts that the intellectual products of the European travellers should be seen not only with regard to producing empirical information and collecting the artifacts of the barbarians – their role was crucial in stimulating their European audience’s interest in the imperial project.¹¹

It is in this sense that one notes the ideological role of travellers’ accounts, which should not only be examined for their accuracy and reliability in reconstructing history. European travel exploration must be situated within the context of British imperial formation of the time. One needs to discern the ideological gaze of travel narrative in making use of the historical account it provides.

Although travel narratives are usually backed by empirical observations, one needs to unpack the categories that enable the production of empirical information in the interpretation of the history, social and political practices of the non-European world. Bruce’s travel to Abyssinia was an attempt of the British Empire to discover and describe the geographical wonders of barbarian nations. But the notion of barbarism that came before it was supplemented with fact, and therefore if we are to understand the concept of barbarism we should critically engage with what it refers to in Bruce’s characterization of the Abyssinians and the people of Sennar, and the ideological gaze produced in this travel narrative and further reproduced.

¹¹ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 3.

Bruce on “Abyssinians Manners and Customs”

Dahalac Island is one of the places that caught Bruce’s attention. According to his narrative the island was in a wretched condition.

The state of Dahalac at present is so miserable ... nothing which violence and injustice can ruin, ever can subsist under Turkish government. The Arabs at Dahalac naturally objected to work without salary, and in time they become ignorant of the fishery in which they were once so skilled. ... No Nation can now turn them in to any profit but the English East Indian Company. If they do not I am persuaded the time is not far off when these countries shall, in some shape, or other be subject of a new master.

This narrative asserts that the people of Dahalac Island are unable to govern their own polity. Turkish administration has ruined the island, and the English East India Company needs to intervene. The people of Dahalac, the Turks and the English East India Company are the three groups introduced; these three identities are made to signify three layers of relations. The residents of Dahalac are described as unable to govern themselves and the Turks denote an unjust governing body, but the English East Indian Company is construed as a rescuing governing structure that could elevate the island from its wretched condition.

The description does not merely present the situation on the island – it also involves an interpretation, using preconceived ideas, values and assumptions. The Ottomans are depicted as sources of anguish for the natives, who are incapable of self-rule, whereas the British Empire is their saviour. Bruce argued that the British Empire has the mandate to protect and rescue the Christian population in Dahalac from the Turks. He also assumed that such an intervention would not face any resistance because local populations were aware of the British Empire as “the head of their religion”.

Here, it should be noted, the religious category plays a role in pointing to the natures of two imperial powers. While the Muslim Ottoman Empire is taken to be a regressive and oppressive form of administration, the Christian British Empire is seen as an em-

pire that does not contradict the values of the local population and will administer the islanders on the basis of their own consent. Although both Ottomans and British empires are seen as a form of administration installed from outside, the British are portrayed as the legitimate body owing to their religious affiliation whereas the Turks are depicted as even more barbarous than the local Christian population. There is no empirical evidence in this framework of analysis. Christianity is a defining source of the differences. Further, regardless of their adherence to Christianity, local populations are incapable of self-rule and would consent to be ruled by the English East Indian Company. Here, Bruce was speaking on behalf of the local population, and making speculations and recommendations on the basis of his own historiographical views about the nature of the political administration of Dahalac Island. Indeed, one of the characteristics of such travel narratives includes assumptions and recommendations made by the explorer on behalf of local people. Although travel narratives can provide empirical data about place in its time, they are not free from the embedded ideological gaze.¹²

Without using Christianity as a category of difference, Bruce would not have been able to speculate about the improbability of local resistance to British administration. He made use of the binaries: Christianity and Islam, locals and outsiders. Although Christianity is a category used to alienate Ottoman Turks, it is not used to embrace the local Christian population but, rather, to categorize British as the only legitimate administration.

In addition to describing Dahalac as degraded and in need of external intervention to establish authority, Bruce further used the category “barbarous” to refer to the slave trade, certain acts of punishment, language and the calendar; and categories such as “savages” and “negroes” to describe the people he encountered in Abyssinia and Sennar. The practice of slavery and the “selling of children” is one that he called barbarous, and carried out by “both Moors

¹² See also Bahiru Tafla, *Asma Giorgis and His Work: History of Galla and the Kingdom of Shewa*. Stuttgart: Steiner-Verlag, 1987 and Usmans, *The Critical Assessment*, 3-5.

and Christians, including the priests of Tigre, who were “openly concerned in this infamous practice. A transaction which occurred while I was in Ethiopia ... illustrates this barbarous system.”

Bruce seemed to be puzzled by the practice of slave trading among Abyssinian Christians. He asserted that Abyssinians, although they claimed to be Christians, were no exception to the selling of children like that of Arabs and pagans. Yet his description of the nature of slave trade along the Abyssinian Red Sea coast informs us about trade relations among Arabia, India and Africa and this in turn pushes us to ask about the conceptions, role and nature of slave trade in this region. Although Bruce called the slave trade a barbaric act there are also the ways in which the slave trade was conceived and practised, and its role in the social and political organisation of the region. Bruce himself noted that the slave trade constituted a crucial role in Abyssinian political culture. In writing of the role of the slave trade in strengthening provincial political authority, Bruce admitted that Christians in Abyssinia were both players and victims. The church and political authorities were both involved. While the political authorities of the Abyssinian hinterland exchanged slaves for firearms the Naybe administration on the Abyssinian side of the Red Sea coast also benefitted economically from the slave trade. Bruce seemed to be arguing that Abyssinian Christianity was not significantly different from Islamic and pagan practices. Bruce also characterized the nature of punishment in Abyssinia as barbaric.

In Abyssinia, when a prisoner is condemned to death, the sentence is immediately executed. Among the capital punishments of this country are crucifixion, flaying alive, and stoning, all of which as well as the instant execution of the sentence, we found to have been common in Persia. The barbarous punishment of plucking out the eyes, which we know to have prevailed in Persia, is at present time frequently inflicted in Abyssinia. This is a cruelty which I but too often saw committed during my short stay in the country. It is frequently inflicted up

on rebels. The bodies of criminals slain for treason and murder are seldom buried in Abyssinia. The streets of Gondar are strewn with pieces of their carcasses, which bring the wild beasts in multitudes in to the city as soon as it is dark, so that it is unsafe to walk in the night. In this respect, again, Abyssinia resembles ancient Persia.

Bruce not only described some aspects of punishment in Abyssinia as barbarous but also drew similarities between Abyssinia and Persia with regard to punishing rebels, in so doing producing another regional category. Whereas his analysis of the slave trade noted a network of trade relations between Arabia, India and the Abyssinian side of the Red Sea coast in Africa, his analysis of the barbarous nature of punishment noted an Abyssinian affinity to Persia and Egypt. In both instances Abyssinia is portrayed as a place of barbarism, sharing this heritage with Arabia, India and Persia. This signifies that the category of “barbarism” is not only for slave trading and punishment practices but also combines Persia, India, Arabia and Abyssinia as similar in their manners of political and cultural practices.

Although Bruce made these claims, his writing is devoid of any historical and political analysis as to why and how these common court and political cultures exist; it merely describes the punishment he encountered as a barbarous act common to Persia and Abyssinia. Bruce saw Abyssinia as a place where Persian and Eastern custom was preserved through the presence of a writing culture and absence of external conquest.

... the custom mentioned as peculiar to Persia were common to all the East, and they were lost sight of when the countries were overrun and conquered. The reason why we have so much left of the Persian custom [in Abyssinia] is that they were written, and so not liable to alteration. While these customs, once common to all, the East, have in their countries been to a great extent swept away by the invasion of strangers, they have been preserved in Abyssinia, which has not been thus overrun since the in-

roduction of letters.

Writing is conceived as a tradition that keeps “custom” intact and conquest is seen as a historical force that dismisses pre-existing custom. Bruce seems to have assumed that the nature of authority and the court system in Abyssinia had its origin in and was common to Persian and Eastern custom conceived as an unchanging legal and political order. Apart from punishment, Bruce defined the slave trade and the Abyssinian calendar system as equally barbarous.

James Bruce on the People of Abyssinia and Sennar

Bruce described the people of Abyssinia comprising Amhara, Agow, Tehare and Gafat:

Abyssinia has been named Habesh, “the assembled nation” these tribes probably came from Palestine, whence fled to escape the exterminating sword of Israelites, led by Caleb and Jashua. The names of these nations are Amhara, Agow, Tehare, and Gafat. To gratify the curious in the study and history of language, I with great pains and difficulty got the whole of the book of Canticles translated into each of these languages. This barbarous polyglot I have presented to the British Museum.

Accordingly, Bruce represented “nation” as composed of different sets of tribes – a heterogeneous entity. He speculated that the tribes who made up the Abyssinian nation were migrants from Palestine whose language he classed as barbarous. His category “barbarous” included Palestine, implying interaction between Abyssinia and Palestine. This could be taken as a historiographical note on Abyssinia: that it was created by migrants from outside.

This region began...without inhabitants...it is an undoubted fact, at all events, that here the Cushites with unparalleled industry, and with instruments utterly unknown to us, formed for themselves commodious yet wonderful habitations in the heart of mountains of granite and marble which remains entire and great to this day.

For Bruce, the Kushites were the founders of the Abyssinian na-

tion. He was appreciative of those migrants who were able to change their environment through their innovation and invention. One can note the historiographical argument embedded in “the Cushites with unparalleled industry and with instruments utterly unknown to us” which denotes the presence of innovation not linked to European knowledge. Accordingly, Abyssinians are cast as distinct groups of migrants from Palestine, known for their innovative cultures (since the migration thesis has no historical explanation in Bruce’s text one can only take it as speculation). Yet we have to ask why he speculated on this episode and not others. Here we must look at how Bruce created a region comprising Persia, Abyssinia and Egypt when he discussed the nature of punishment. It seems to me that classifying the Abyssinians as tribes who have migrated from Palestine seeks to construct them – as well as their practices such as writing, mastery over nature and tools, the nature of government and court system – as exceptional, and distinct from other groups of people. It could also explain why he noted that other “tribes” in Abyssinia, the Galla, Shangalla and Siho, were less advanced. This is clearly illustrated by the way Bruce chose to describe other “tribes” such as the Galla.

Galla were formerly carriers between the Indian and Atlantic Oceans, and supplied the interior part of the continent with Indian commodities. The Galla have contributed more towards the weakening of the Abyssinian Empire than all their civil wars, and all their other enemies put together.

Because of their role in weakening the power of Abyssinia, people like the Galla, in the view of Bruce, belonged to the category of Moor or Turk.

Bruce tended to construct his travel narrative using comparative methods although, as we have noted, his comparative methodology is not backed by historical explanations and thus can at times be ahistorical. He described and analysed people by comparing and contrasting their customs. His description of the people of Siho and Hazorta illustrates this point. Unlike Abys-

sinians and Gallas, who are described by their role in history or what they have done, the Siho and Hazorta people are described by their complexions, their clothing and their houses. Bruce introduces “negro” as a category in describing the Shangallas and the queen of Sennar.

The Shangalla, or negroes, who seem to be miserable remnants of the once powerful and polished Cushites or Ethiopians... they live under a shade of a trees... for food they hunt elephants, rhinoceros, hippopotamus, and other large animals... they have but one language... they worship trees, serpents, the moon, planets and stars... on the accession of every thorn of Abyssinia, there is among other amusements a general hunt after the Shangalla. Inroads are made up on them, also, from time to time by the governor of adjacent countries who are obliged to render as tributes to the kings of Abyssinia a certain number of slaves.

Bruce used “negro” synonymously with Shangalla, and it is unclear whether negro is a category on its own or exclusively for the people of Shangalla, but later it is revealed as a category when he used “negro” to refer to a queen he met in Sennar. The Shangallas, apart from being negro, are described as slaves in Abyssinian society, a temporary status because it is implied that they “once used to belong to a powerful group”. The inference is that Bruce did not view slavery as natural but as conditioned by one’s status in society. However, the category negro seems to carry another characteristic whereby it is compared to animals, not other humans.

A few days afterwards... the king told me that several of his wives were ill, and desired that I would give them my advice. I was admitted to large square apartments, very ill lighted, in which were about fifty women, all perfectly black, without any covering but a piece of cotton rag about their waists. While I was musing whether or not all might be queens, or whether there was any queen among them... one of these, who I found was the favour-

ite, was about six feet high, and corpulent beyond all proportion. She seemed to me, next to the elephant and rhinoceros, to be the largest living creature I had met with. Her features were perfectly like those of negro... her ears reached down to her shoulders, and had the appearance of wings; she had in each of them a large ring of gold.

Negro is a category with animal-like features. It is also a category used in describing groups as well as individuals. While the Shangalla are the group prototypes, the queen of Sennar is believed to have fulfilled the physical features. Bruce’s use of animal metaphors in describing a human raises the question of whether his conception of negro is entirely human. Indeed, his conception seems to contradict his own argument on the need to describe people in their own terms.

It has been the custom to describe these people as vicious and immoral in the highest degree... [but] to describe them justly, we should see them in their native purity of manners, among their native woods, living on the produce of their own daily labour... after being torn from their own country and connections, reduced to condition of brutes, to labour for a being they never before knew; after lying, stealing, and all the long list of European crimes have been made, as it were, necessary to them; after the delusion occasioned by drinking spirits is found to be the only thing that frees them, though only for a time from the sense of wretchedness; in short, after we have made them monsters, we describe them as such, forgetful that they are not as their Makers created them; but that we ourselves have wrought the change, for ends I fear will one day be found not to be a sufficient excuse for the enormities they have occasioned.

Although Bruce called for a cautious approach to using superimposed categories, we have seen that he was not so critical of his own methods and categories; this enables us to observe that the categories barbarous, negro and tribe must have been completely

natural to him. It is important however to recognize the autocratic nature of his argument regarding his understanding of slavery – as a product of oppression rather than an inherent identity characteristic of people.

Bruce produced a historiography of hierarchies of people and custom. Abyssinians are represented as the superior grouping in Abyssinia, and Shangalla are the lowest. Similarly, Bruce rated the British Empire as the superior authority over nations on earth and the kind of history he attempted to write in his travel narrative is a history of British supremacy. His representation of Britain as a mighty power can be seen as the underlying unit of analysis that informs the ways he deployed categories such as barbarous, negro, tribe and nation. These hierarchies seem to remain intact when he described the geography of the region.

James Bruce on Geography

The climate and the landscape of Europe are the units of comparison in describing Abyssinia. It is obvious that he was talking directly to a European audience.

The mountain of Abyssinia...uneven-edge mountains which would be counted high in any country in Europe...Every tree was full of birds variegated with an infinity of colours but destitute of songs, others, a more homely and more European appearance, diverted us with a variety of wild notes, in a style of music still distinct and peculiar to Africa, as different in the composition from our linnets and goldfinch, as our English language is from that of Abyssinia.

Europe is compared with Abyssinia in terms of landscape. Geography becomes the only category in which Europe and Abyssinia are equal. The two landscapes are compared to assert their difference. The physical characteristics of Africa may appear like that of Europe but are still idiosyncratically African. There is a sharp divide between African and European ecology, regardless of similarities in appearance. His description of the geography is present

ed through comparison and extreme fascination.

The Nile here is confined between two rocks, and runs in a deep channel, with great roaring and impetuous velocity. The cataract itself was the most magnificent sight that ever I beheld...the river. Though swelled with rain, preserved its natural clearness...it was a sight that ages added to the greatest length of human life, would not deface or eradicate from my memory; it struck me with a sort of stupor, and a total oblivion of where I was, and every other sublunary concern.

As Bruce described the people and custom of Abyssinia, his method of describing and analysing the land itself – magnificent and with no parallel in Europe – assumes an inherent difference to that of Europe.

Alternative Categories and Narratives

As the term signifies, the idea of “alternative” categories and narratives presupposes the existence of another source and a different point of view. The Chronicle of Ase Sisoniyous, the Royal Chronicles of Abyssinia 1769–1840 and Tarike Negest (The history of kings) are the few Amharic chronicles used to offer alternative historical perspectives and categories. Ge'ez-Amharic and Amharic-Amharic dictionaries are consulted to note the root meaning of a category called *neged*, a term used by the chroniclers to refer to people who shared paternal genealogy, rather than “tribe”.

Earlier in this essay we saw that Bruce wrote about the local population of Dahalac Island and their inability to rule themselves, and that Ottoman rule had left the island in a state of ruin. Bruce had emphasized the need for the English East India Company to occupy the island. An earlier chronicler had provided a narrative as to why an alliance was established with the Ottomans rather than any European powers of the time. The chronicler captured the historical processes from the late sixteenth century till the mid-seventeenth century which had led Abyssinian rulers to follow a closed door policy towards Christian Europe:

...the second phase of his [Ase Susenyos's] reign was characterized by a quarrel with the Orthodox church...beginning from the post middle-ages era, Ethiopian rulers started to be impressed by the economic and cultural developments of Europe. The coming of Portuguese Catholic missionaries illustrated Europe's advances in military equipment. Missionaries also propagated Europe's advanced naval power, their victory over the Ottoman Turks, about their civilization in administration. Consequently, Atse Libene Dingel and Sertse Dingel wrote letters of cooperation to King Emmanuel of Portugal and his predecessor, saying "send us people to teach us how to make weapons...so that Ethiopia could be a strong state and its people could advance in modern techniques...unlike his predecessors Ase Susenyos is attracted to the spiritual heritage of Europe. He is of the idea that ancient Ethiopian church heritage has contributed to the social and cultural backwardness of the country. He is sympathetic to missionaries' concern that "Ethiopian Christianity is mixed with Jewish and pagan practices" thus the king was converted to Catholicism, which has resulted in local resistance, mainly from the people of Lasta. This resistance turned to rebellion and resulted in bloodshed. Then the king announced that the law that forces people to be converted to Catholicism was cancelled, and that led to the end of his regime. After the missionaries were expelled and killed Ase Fasil established diplomatic relations with the Islamic reign of Ottoman Turks along the Abyssinian Coast.¹³

The emergence of Ottoman power along the Abyssinian Red Sea coast has its roots in a strategic shift of the Abyssinian kings who turned their backs on Christian Europe, considered to be the most civilized nation in the eyes of Abyssinian rulers before Susenyos.

¹³ Alemu, Haile. *Ye Ethiopia Tarik 1597-1625: Ye Atse Sisonyinos Zena Mewail*. Addis Ababa: Sirak Publishers, 2005. xiv-xviii). The text is originally in Amharic, translation by the author.

However, the conversion of Ase Susenyos to Catholicism and the subsequent religious controversies led to a hostile relationship with Christian Europe and thence to alliances with Ottoman power over coastal administration and trade relations. It is in this sense that I argue that Bruce's narrative of the absence of proper political administration in the Abyssinian Red Sea coast can be challenged by another historiographical view of the time which, unlike Bruce's, recognizes Abyssinian kingdoms as central actors in shifting the regional dynamics of coastal administration. This change was not limited to the way the Island of Dahalac and the Abyssinian harbour of Masuah were administered but also established a strict closed-door policy towards Catholic missionaries from progressing into the interior. This point was also verified by Bruce:

Some were for the most expeditious, and what has long been the most customary, method of treating strangers at Masuah, to put me to death, and divide my property. Others were for waiting to see what letters I had from Arabia to Abyssinia, lest this might prove an addition to the storm just ready to break upon them on the part of Metical Aga and Michael Suhul...if I was a priest...they might do with me as they pleased.

Connecting these two narratives, it could be said that it was possible for Bruce to make connection with another, earlier perspective on the nature of political authority on the coast, a text which was available at the time of his travel. This is by no means to argue that the chronicles are the only valid and reliable sources for historical construction (in fact, owing to the political biases they reproduce I would argue to the contrary) but this does not mean that they are to be discarded. One can still get alternative historiographical perspectives on political authority embedded within the existing system of governance and the centrality of the ruler in the writing of history.

Bruce, on the other hand, described and analyzed according to categories that he used *prior* to his encounter with the nations so described, which suggests that these categories are not mere descriptions but, perhaps, widely-used concepts to make sense

of nations in given locations. It is in this sense that Bruce could have reconsidered his ahistorical categories such as “barbarous” by noting the role of historical justification in existing Abyssinian chronicles. The conceptual limitation of barbarous seems to have influenced Bruce’s interpretation; the presumption that “barbarous” nations are unable to administer themselves seems to have made him ignore alternative analyses of political administration. Instead of reading the shifting alliance among local populations, and competition for rule in the Red Sea region, he seems to have mobilized his empirical observation to fit conceptual categories for the inability of Abyssinians to administer the coastal town.

Bruce used behavioural and physical attributes as categories to describe and interpret what he labelled as an inhospitable reception in the coastal town of Masuah by the Naybe of Arkeko.

Ras Michael’s letter to the Naybe was very short. He said the king’s health was bad, and wondered at hearing that the physician sent to him by Metical Aga was not sent forward without delay to Gondar, as he heard he had arrived in Masuah sometime before. He ordered the Naybe, moreover to furnish me without necessaries, and send me without loss of time ... we got everything in order without interruption, and completed our observation up on this inhospitable island, infamous for the quantity of Christian blood treacherously shed there ... on the 14th I waited up on the Naybe, according to the appointment, having first struck my tent and got all my baggage in readiness ... received me with more civility than usual and said with a grave air that he was willing to further my journey in to Habesh.

Tarique Negest captures the extent of Ras Michael’s power at the time: extending from the river of Angeber in the interior of Tigre province to Masuah, a coastal town.¹⁴ This also helps us to note that the Ottomans worked with local officials called Naybes who,

¹⁴ Tekle Tsadik Mekuria, *Tarique Negestina Dejazmach Hailu Eshete beZemene Mesafint Wust*. (Published in Amharic, 1976), p. 63.

although they came from a local town, were nonetheless appointed by Ottoman authority. The Naybes held the strongest authority over the region – at times they were more accountable to the Ottomans than the Ethiopian regional lords. Understanding this political dynamic between the coast and the hinterland enables one to decipher the political nature of this incident – that the change in treatment by the Naybe of Arkiko after receiving Ras Michael’s letter denotes the nature of relations between the two political administrations. In Tarique Negest, the power of the ruler is exalted and the degree and extent of his might is registered. Bruce, on the other hand, seemed to focus on the barbarous aspects of coastal administration. Not only was his observation on the changing nature of his reception by the Naybe historically inaccurate; it can be presumed that he was biased against his host on an “inhospitable island, infamous for the quantity of Christian blood treacherously shed there”. Had Bruce not been caught up by his pre-existing assumption about the chaotic nature of administration on the Abyssinian Red Sea coast he would have perceived the importance of Ras Michael’s letter and the Naybe’s reaction other than as mere arrogance.

The change in political authority seems to have had a regional dimension at that time, known as *Zamana Masafent*, the Era of the Princes (1769–1850s). The Abyssinian part of the Red Sea coast was controlled by of the Ottoman Empire, then by Egypt and later by the British. Trade relations were affected. While the dominance of the Ottomans and the Egyptians assured the rise of trade relations between the Ethiopian hinterland and the coast, and further to Arabia, European power in the mid-eighteenth century led to decline in trade relations in the region. Ottoman power was re-established at the beginning of the nineteenth century, which led to the proliferation of trade and an increase in pilgrimage to Mecca from the interior – in turn this led to greater demand for Ethiopian commodities,¹⁵ and to the expansion of Islam. Regional dynamics also influenced internal politics. A focus on the narratives of change in regional as

¹⁵ Hussain Ahmed, *Islam in Nineteenth-Century Wallo, Ethiopia: Revival, Reform and Reaction* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), p. 176.

well as internal political dynamics would offer a better conception of political authority than its calamitous absence or its barbarous presence. This in turn raises questions about the nature and role of historiographical perspectives and conceptions of political authority in the chronicles of the time. It would not only bring Bruce's inaccuracies to light; it would also provide an alternative category to his notion of "tribe", and to issues such as the nature of punishment.

Conceptions of History Recording and Political Authority

The recording of history in the form of a chronicle is integral to the practice of rule. The Abyssinian chronicler notes that both – the authority to rule and the role of recording the history of the ruler – are duties ordained by the divine order and are inseparable. The chronicler begins the narrative by setting out the relationship of the recording of history and the authority to rule, and also notes the royal name and the genealogical origin of the ruler as well as important dates of his reign.

In the Name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. And by this Will of the Holy Spirit, the Royal Secretary begins to write the History of his Lord Mika'el Chief of the Dignitaries, and Power of the Negus, in the following tenor ... On the 8th Teqemt (18 October 1769), Sunday, the grace 432 of the Holy Spirit which descended from above upon him, move and impelled Mika'el the Archangel and Holy Created Being to cause to reign the eldest son of King Johannes, and made Takla Haymanot Negus. Have you observed the acuteness of the intelligence and subtlety of mind of Mika'el, prince of the wise men? ... Know ye not that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are those that grant a Kingdom.¹⁶

Not only did Abyssinian chroniclers of this time regard their roles as accomplishing eternal duty; they also claimed to have collected sources, in compiling their narratives, from the beginning of the

¹⁶ The Royal Chronicle of Abyssinia 1769–1840. <http://www.archive.org/details/royalchronicleofwelduoft> [Accessed 29 September 2013].

world, from Adam and Eve until the time of the current ruler. In so doing, the narrator claimed to know the entire history of the world and to write the past from the vantage point of the ruler. Lost texts were recovered from sacred places such as monasteries in remote areas. This notion of history depicted historical writing as an act of obedience to a regime of rule that sought to connect the present with the past; to present the ruler with an unbroken heritage of rule extending to the remote past – the entire world history, with nothing external to it or before the beginning of its world, and written so as to be significant to the day's regime of rule.

Comparing the duty to write such a narrative with Bruce's mandate to discover, document and describe, we note a world of difference in the ways and the purpose of compiling narratives. Bruce's aim was to describe a nation barely known in Europe, a barbarous nation, and to collect its artifacts for the royal collection. The chroniclers' notion of history writing was about justifying royal authority and the glory of the current ruler. Citing the sources, mainly biblical, was vitally important, and the chroniclers claimed to find their sources in local monasteries. Bruce did not find it necessary to cite the sources he used in constructing his narrative, but he did take back information from Abyssinia and he placed it in the British Museum for future researchers. The ideas of recovery, collection and the recording of day-to-day events was central to the Abyssinian chronicler. The ideas of discovery, collection, documentation and description were crucial to Bruce as a European traveller of the time. Such difference as exists in the nature and function of history writing, or the description and interpretation of events, entails a difference in the nature and purpose of political authority. Bruce's underlying assumption seems to have been the need to know or to describe barbarous nations in order to civilize them whereas the chronicler's conception of political authority was to legitimize and glorify the ruler.

For both, the method of history writing was mainly embedded within the logic of their respective locations and times. Thus, examining the existing "body of discourse", as Bala Usman points

out, is central in understanding their roles in constituting and being constituted by the “regimes of truth” to which they belonged. Both types of sources can be used for historical reconstruction by teasing out the complementary perspectives from each.

This point can be illustrated by the presentation of alternative conceptions of punishment; of the nature and the formation of the Abyssinian political elite; and an alternative notion of “tribe”.

Punishment as Incoherent and Contested Reality

The ways in which punishment was carried out by the regional lords of Abyssinia is a contested matter. The nature and type of punishment is less coherent. Since the period is known for countless numbers of rebellions against and among the provincial lords, punishment referred mainly to punishing a rebel or war captive. In “Tarike Negest Dejazmach Hailu Eshete Be Zemene Mesafint Wust”, Tekle Tsadik Mekuria attests that although the power to punish lay with the victor there was less agreement on the nature and extent of punishment.¹⁷

We note that punishment was used as a pretext to resist and rebel against the supreme authority of the regional warlord Ras Mikael. This notion of punishment was not about penalising the wrongdoer but about legitimacy. If a provincial or royal authority was perceived to exhibit harsh punishment against his opponent’s warlords this act could delegitimize his orders and provoke rebellion against them. Provincial lords could legitimize their rebellion against a ruler on the basis of the nature and extent of punishment the sovereign afflicted on his war captives.¹⁸

Contrary to Bruce’s account of the nature of punishment in Abyssinia, as a tradition emanating from ancient Persia and Egypt, the practice of punishment presented in Tarike Negest is connected to the nature of political authority in Abyssinia at the time. Either Bruce did not fully understand the character of Abyssinian political authority or he purposely distorted it.

¹⁷ Tekle Tsadik Mekuria, *Tarique Negestina*, 64.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Ethnic Mingling and Abyssinian Political Elite Formation

Bruce’s claim that the Gallas had played a role in weakening the Abyssinian empire is contradicted by local narratives of the time which offered a perspective in which Gallas were a part of the Abyssinian ruling elite. Bruce discussed Abyssinians and Gallas as separate people and identified the former as a nation made up of sets of tribes who had migrated from Palestine. Tekle Tsadik Mekuria, in *Tarique Negest*, provides us with an opinion that the ethnic composition of the then ruling elite in Abyssinia came about not through migration but through the processes of political marriage, and that intermarriage among the Abyssinian ruling elite led to an increase of population among the people of Tigre, Amhara and Oromo or Gallas.¹⁹ Accordingly, the Galla ruling elites could not be depicted as forces contributing to the weakening of Abyssinian rule of the time.²⁰

In classifying the different groups of people he encountered in Abyssinia, Bruce used the term “tribe”. I have observed however that the chroniclers cited in this essay and the author of Tarike Negest use the category “people” as in “people of Galla” and “people of Agow”, and at other times use the plural forms of each group referring to the entire group. As Bruce did, the English translation of “The Royal Chronicles of Abyssinia 1769–1884”, used “tribe” referring to *neged*. Such linguistic and conceptual variation necessitates a thorough study of these concepts and their variation among texts. The translation of the notion of “people” and *Neged* into the notion of “tribe” seems to involve how group identities are understood in the regime of knowledge Bruce came from and made intelligible to his readers through a simplified version of conceptual translation rather than an empirical one.

This tension in the use of concepts can be verified in the ways in which local chronicles used multiple categories to describe a

¹⁹ For a detailed discussion of political marriage in nineteenth-century Ethiopia see Heran Sereke-Brhan, *Building Bridges, Drying Bad Blood: Elite Marriages, Politics and Ethnicity in 19th and 20th Century Imperial Ethiopia*. (Michigan State University, Department of History, 2002).

²⁰ Mekuria, *Tarique Negestina*, 58.

collective. Engaging in the ways in which texts or the people describe a collective was not of interest to Bruce, who simply used “tribe” to refer to groups of people. The chroniclers, by contrast, tended to identify groups of people by the name of their provincial town – the people of Kuara, the people of Lasta, and so on. At other times, chroniclers used the provincial lord and his subject population together, such as “Ras Goshu and his people”. Aleqa Kidane Wolde Kifle further elaborates on the constitutive aspect of the category *neged* as:

...people who have similar paternal genealogy. Moreover this category also includes group of soldiers and people of lower ranks are also classified as part of the family of their ruler thus belong to the same *neged* with their leader.²¹

There is no strict way of identifying groups. In both the chronicles and *Tarike Negest* the authors use the notion of people and *neged* indiscriminately. Although the *neged* denotes sharing common paternal origin and language, as it is discussed by Kidane Wolde Kifle, its constitution is not strictly genealogical. Therefore, it could be argued that Bruce and the English translators of the Royal Abyssinian Chronicles both had the option of using “people” and *neged* instead of “tribe” which denotes a linguistically and genealogically homogenous group distinct from other tribes. Bruce’s use of categories such as tribes indicates that his terminology is determined by pre-defined concepts rather than empirically-driven classifications.

Conclusion

In this article, Bruce’s description and interpretation of the people of Abyssinia is found to have exhibited historical and historiographical tensions. Reading Bruce against the local chroniclers of the time, who offered alternative historiographical views and categories, one can see that his descriptions and categorisations – as

²¹ Aleqa Kidane Wolde Kifle, *Metsihafe SewaSwe WeGes WeMeziqebe Kalat KeGe;ez Wede Amarigna*. (Ge’ez - Amharic Dictionary) Addis Ababa: Artistik Matemiya Bet, 1940..

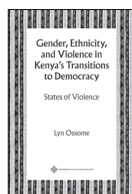
well as those of the chroniclers – were influenced by the underlying purpose for which these narratives were written at the time. While the vernacular authorities depended, in their chronicles, on preserving the tradition of rule, imperial powers such as the British were dependent on knowledge formulation for the empire, embedded in travel writing. Empires extend and sustain their desire to rule through the knowledge of places elsewhere, using symptomatic conceptual categories. Bruce’s travel narrative offered ethnographic and historical information about Abyssinia through the lens of conceptual categories recognizable to the ruling and intellectual elite. This interface between the need to travel, describe and collect artefacts and to accumulate ethnographic and historical information through travel writing, and the need to chronicle daily stories of ruler-centred local historical formation in Ethiopia invites further comparative studies between these two kinds of sources. Bruce employed a priori categories such as barbarous to interpret his ethnographic information; but did not use the labels consistently, and it may be worth further engaging with this contradictory aspect of his intellectual legacy that has enriched the orientalist tradition as well as empirical and conceptual histories in black studies.

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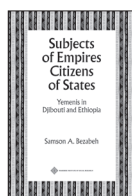
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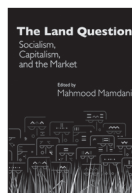
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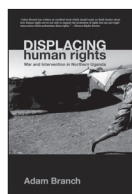
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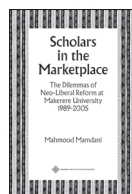
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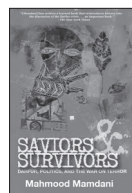
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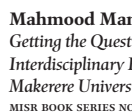
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