

# RECONSTITUTING SHAKA ZULU FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: PART ONE

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## **Introduction**

Shaka kaSenzangakhona, who ruled the emerging Zulu kingdom from the late 1810s until his assassination in 1828, has long featured in South African history-making as a Great Man. Among black people and white people, among lay people and among most academics, inside South Africa and outside, Shaka the Mighty is counted as one of the most famous of Africans. Whether as founder of a kingdom, nation-builder, uniter of black peoples, warrior leader, general, politician, bringer of peace, bringer of law and order, visionary, diplomat, resistance leader, prophet, philosopher, or as conqueror, despot, tyrant, dictator, despoiler, destroyer, murderer, savage, barbarian, his fame has become world-wide. He has been compared with Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Attila the Hun, Napoleon. In 1836 Nathaniel Isaacs described him as a 'monster'; in 1986 Mangosuthu Buthelezi described him as a 'miracle'.<sup>1</sup> Numerous other commentators in the literature have made – and continue to make - similarly hyperbolic comments on him without embarrassment.

The processes in which images of Shaka have been formed have been studied in depth by a number of scholars in recent years. Jean Sévry has examined a long succession of texts on Shaka from the time of Isaacs to that of Buthelezi.<sup>2</sup> Daphna Golan has performed a similar exercise, with the focus on the making of Zulu nationalist images of Shaka.<sup>3</sup> Dan Wylie has traced the development of what he sees as a lineage of 'white writing' on Shaka from the 1820s to the 1990s.<sup>4</sup> Carolyn Hamilton, by contrast, explicitly avoids the approach of commenting on a series of texts which rework the figure of Shaka in different ways; rather, she analyzes in detail what she sees as 'pivotal moments' (p. 35) in the historical construction of Shaka as a metaphor in effect for African rulers who wield great power.<sup>5</sup> I shall be drawing frequently on her work in what follows.

None of these authors is primarily concerned to periodize the history of imagings of Shaka. In this paper I suggest a periodization which relates broadly to the changing political contexts in which these imagings were produced. In a paper like this, there is no space to do more than hint at the nature of the political conflicts which shaped the processes of production, let alone venture into the kind of close-grained historical analysis that Hamilton engages in. My concern is more particularly to highlight a feature which is central to the argument developed by Hamilton – that, from the start, imagings of Shaka have been the product of interaction between black and white intellectuals. While fully accepting that blacks and whites have operated from very different subject positions, Hamilton argues convincingly against the common view that they have worked in separate ideological compartments, with black people producing mainly positive images of Shaka as a great leader and white people producing mainly negative images of Shaka as a bloody despot.<sup>6</sup> The views of black people on Shaka have not been uniform; neither have those of whites. The views of black informants influenced those of white writers; the views of the latter fed back into black communities.

From the 1820s to the 1990s, images of Shaka were a product of what can be characterized as colonial-type conflicts, in which white people in southern Africa and Europe sought to establish political, economic and cultural domination over the indigenous black people, and in which black people sought first to resist and subsequently to throw off white domination. In important senses this era of conflict came to an end in South Africa with the establishment of its first democratically elected government in 1994. The upshot was the startlingly rapid depoliticization of the processes in which images of Shaka were made, and the rendering of the figure of Shaka the Mighty as increasingly an anachronism in the New South Africa. Hollowed-out versions of this figure lived on in appropriations of it made by interests in business and in the heritage industry, but it was clear within a few years that its long-established power as a political metaphor was rapidly on the wane. In this context, it is possible for academic historians of Zulu history to hope that their voices, which were very largely drowned out by the political clamour of the 1980s and early 1990s, might be more widely heard (though whether anyone outside the academy will want to listen is another matter). At a later stage, drawing on the work done on the

early Zulu kingdom by academic researchers since the 1970s, I aim to follow up this paper with a more empirical study of how historians in post-colonial South Africa might seek to historicize Shaka and his times to a greater degree than was done – than perhaps could have been done - in the country's long period of colonial conflict. But first there is still a great deal of clearing-away work to be done.

### **Making the figure of Shaka the Mighty, 1820s to 1870s**

The origins of the notion of Shaka the Mighty date to his own lifetime. Carolyn Hamilton's researches suggest that his enemies in the Zulu kingdom were beginning to demonize him even before his death; certainly this process would have been intensified during the reign of his successor and assassin, his brother Dingane.<sup>7</sup> If Cape colonial records are anything to go by, reports were spreading widely across southern Africa by the mid-1820s that Shaka was one of several powerful chiefs whose depredations were responsible for the wars and migrations which were then destabilizing much of the interior.<sup>8</sup> (Other chiefs frequently named were Zwide of the Ndwandwe and, a little later, Mzilikazi of the Ndwandwe.) That Shaka was the autocratic head of a large kingdom was increasingly attested to by reports emanating from British traders who had begun operating from Port Natal in his domains in 1824.

By the later 1820s, some commentators in the Cape were suggesting that Shaka was the prime mover of the upheavals taking place to the northward. His defeat of the rival Ndwandwe power in 1826 and his mounting of large-scale cattle raids into the Transkei to the south and into Mozambique to the north in 1828 served to confirm his growing reputation as a man of war. By the same token, the ultimate migration northward into Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique of other successful raiders and conquerors of the 1820s and 1830s, like Mzilikazi, Sebetwane of the Kololo, Zwangendaba of the Ngoni, and Soshangane of the Gaza, removed from the scene figures who might otherwise have become established in southern African historiographies, both white and black, as major rivals to Shaka as sources of violence and instability. In the event it was the expansion of the Zulu kingdom under Shaka which, from the 1840s, more and more became the exclusive focus of explanations of the upheavals – the 'wars of Shaka', as they came to be called - of the preceding decades.

The history of Shaka's times was by no means uniformly presented in the writings of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, when white settler stereotypes about black societies and their histories had not yet become dominant in the literature. Some authors in the Cape and Natal and in the British metropolis, of whom Isaacs is the best-known exemplar, described the Zulu king as a bloodthirsty despot, a tyrannical Attila. Others, particularly among the missionaries and among officials in native administration, saw him somewhat more sympathetically as a Napoleon-type figure who, though dictatorial, was able to establish firm and orderly government over his subjects. Among black people, Hamilton's research suggests, the especially significant period in the making of Shaka's image as a powerful ruler and conqueror was the three or four decades after the incursion of large parties of Boers from the Cape into the interior in the late 1830s and early 1840s. For African communities in the Zulu kingdom, this was in many ways a period of increasing anxiety in the face of white expansion. In these circumstances, Shaka more and more came to be seen as having been a great founding figure and unifier of peoples, and his reign as having been something of a golden age of strong and stable government.<sup>9</sup> In colonial Natal, black people were probably more ambivalent about him to begin with, with some seeing him primarily as the destroyer of the old, pre-Zulu order when people lived under their own chiefs in peace and stability. From the 1870s and 1880s, as colonial rule bore down more heavily on the black inhabitants of Natal, it is likely that they began to regard Shaka in much the same way as he was seen north of the Thukela in the heartland of the Zulu kingdom. Ideas of this kind about Shaka, Hamilton argues in detail, intertwined with those developed within colonial society, and in important ways served to shape the policies of native administration developed by Theophilus Shepstone who, as Diplomatic Agent and then as Secretary for Native Affairs in Natal from 1845 to 1876, sought to present his system of indirect rule as being rooted in the practices of African rulers like Shaka.<sup>10</sup>

### **Stereotyping Shaka, 1880s to 1920s**

By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the figure of Shaka was well on the way to becoming established among black and whites alike as what Hamilton calls a political metaphor. Like all metaphors, it was open to widely different interpretations by different

political interests, but was based on a certain consensus.<sup>11</sup> The implications of this for the historiography of Shaka and his times are profound. As Hamilton puts it:

Once the Shaka metaphor was accepted, alternative ways of thinking about African society become very hard to imagine. Shaka as metaphor for African society made a number of very specific notions about the nature of that society seem commonplace, self-evident, and historically validated.<sup>12</sup>

Increasingly the figure of Shaka and the history of his times came to be imagined by writers both of history and of fiction, white and black alike, according to the narrow set of stereotypes which, under conditions of increasing political tensions between blacks and whites in southern Africa, had been gradually solidifying round the metaphor of Shaka since at least the 1840s. In an era when the last autonomous black societies in southern Africa were being subjugated to white rule, these stereotypes were put into wide circulation by writers like George Theal. Among the important themes which Theal developed in his copious oeuvre was the notion of Shaka the bloodthirsty tyrant as a major figure not merely of Zulu but of southern African history. He was writing at a time when the Zulu, who hitherto had hardly been heard of outside South Africa, were rapidly acquiring a world-wide reputation as a great warrior people as a result of their overwhelming defeat of a British army at Isandlwana in the early stages of the British invasion of the Zulu kingdom in 1879. Through the writings of numerous journalists and fiction-writers, particularly the popular novelist Rider Haggard, this image of the Zulu was rapidly becoming entrenched in western literary circles. For his part, Theal placed the figure of Shaka at the centre of a geographical stage which (in keeping with the contemporary expansionist aspirations of white South Africa) covered most of the sub-continent as far north as Zambia and Malawi. Directly or indirectly, Theal indicated, Shaka's armies had been responsible for the wars and migrations which had swept across the entire area in the period from the 1820s to the 1840s.<sup>13</sup>

Theal's generalized picture of the upheavals caused by the expansion of the Zulu under Shaka was given apparently firm empirical underpinning by several regionally focussed histories produced in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by authors – all missionaries or colonial officials – who were regarded in colonial circles as 'experts' in their field. The most influential of these were J.C. MacGregor's *Basuto Traditions* (1905), D.-F. Ellenberger's *History of the Basuto* (1912), J. Ayliff and J. Whiteside's *History of the*

*Abambo* (1912), and A.T. Bryant's *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal* (1929). All of them drew, if in varying degree, on information obtained from black informants as well as from the existing literature. These authors did not necessarily share Theal's uncompromisingly settlerist perspectives on the African past, but their work, particularly that of Bryant, helped to cement into place the view that Shaka and his armies had been at the root of the turmoil which spread far and wide among African societies after 1820. From the early 20<sup>th</sup> century this view was disseminated very widely in South Africa and elsewhere in academic works, popular histories and schools text books, production of which was controlled almost entirely by white writers and publishing firms in South Africa and in Britain. For decades it fed into the imaginations of readers round the world who thrilled to images of primitive, warlike Africa. After World War II it was recharged for a rapidly expanding Western readership on Africa in widely read books like Ernst Ritter's *Shaka Zulu* (1955) and Donald Morris's *The Washing of the Spears* (1965), and it has remained firmly entrenched in the popular literature to this day.

### **Black Shakas, 1920s to 1950s**

From the 1920s onward, important aspects of settlerist historiography were being explicitly challenged by a small but influential number of liberal white historians in some of South Africa's emergent universities, but this development had little effect on established notions about the history of Shaka and his times. In this post-conquest period, when South African politics were becoming dominated by problems relating to the country's industrialization and urbanization, academic historians generally were much more concerned with the history of what was coming to be called 'race relations' than with the remote precolonial past. The academic study of precolonial history was left by default largely to archaeologists and anthropologists. The notions of Shaka the Mighty and his wars that had become entrenched in the previous decades lived on largely unchallenged on the works of most historians.

In black rural communities in Zululand and Natal, detailed individual memories of the era of Shaka survived into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is attested in some of the anecdotes recounted by Magesa Fuze in his *Abantu Abamnyama Lapa Bavela Ngakona*, a history published in 1922, though written some twenty years before,<sup>14</sup> and

also in many of the oral testimonies recorded between 1897 and 1922 by James Stuart.<sup>15</sup> Particular details varied widely from one of Stuart's informants to another, but common to all of them was the notion of Shaka as having been a great conqueror and powerful ruler, whether good or bad. But by the 1920s and 1930s, a hundred years and more after Shaka's death, there can have been few oral accounts of his times that contained much by way of original detail. From then on, such accounts would more and more have tended towards repetition of an ever-narrowing range of themes in which stereotyped notions of Shaka predominated.

The black authors who were beginning to write histories, novels and plays about Shaka from the 1920s onward all saw him as a great conqueror, but were divided about his status as a heroic figure. Writers sympathetic to the emerging Zulu nationalist movement tended to see him as a great founding figure and ruler.<sup>16</sup> Others, influenced at least in part by ideas about 'civilization' imparted by a mission school education, saw him as a destructive despot.<sup>17</sup> A narrowing of views began in the later 1930s, when black intellectuals could hardly any longer doubt the determination of white governments to enforce strict racial segregation in South Africa, and generally began to align themselves more and more overtly with the cause of African nationalism. From this time onward, black writers generally sought to cast Shaka in a positive light as one of an emerging pantheon of African heroes. Much research is needed on this topic, but it seems that in African nationalist circles, as well as in narrower Zulu nationalist ones, he soon came to be portrayed virtually exclusively in this light.<sup>18</sup>

Views of Shaka and his times produced by black and white intellectuals continued to influence one another profoundly. The case of Rolfes Dhlomo's fictionalized history, *UShaka*, published in 1937, provides a good example. This book, which was very widely read in Zulu schools until at least the 1980s, has usually been seen as based on Zulu 'traditional' history. More recently, detailed research has revealed that, whatever oral sources it may have used, it drew largely on several of the five Zulu readers published by James Stuart in the 1920s,<sup>19</sup> and on Bryant's *Olden Times*. Bryant in turn drew in part on Stuart, who drew directly on statements given to him by numbers of his Zulu-speaking informants.<sup>20</sup> A clear dividing line between black and white constructions of Shaka and his times is here, as in other eras, impossible to establish.

To understand the kind of perspective from Dhlomo wrote *UShaka*, we need to know something not only of the sources which he drew on but also something of the sources which he did **not** draw on. Particularly pertinent is Petros Lamula's *UZulu kaMalandela*, a compilation of African and Zulu history which has recently been brought back to the attention of academic historians by Paul la Hausse's biographical study of its author.<sup>21</sup> Written in Zulu and first published in 1924, the book took a much more critical stance towards European colonialism than any other Zulu-language book of its time. Lamula, who was a pastor in the Norwegian Missionary Society, moved in the more radical fringes of black politics in Natal, and a number of passages of *UZulu kaMalandela* have a distinct socialist as well as nationalist edge to them. The book attracted a good deal of attention, both complimentary and critical, from teachers, 'native education' officials and missionaries in Natal. Two revised editions were published in the 1930s, but it was never prescribed as a teachers' setwork. La Hausse indicates that it was turned down by an alliance of education officials, missionaries and 'moderate blacks' in the Natal Native Teachers' Union who were wary of Lamula's brand of radicalism.<sup>22</sup> Interactions between white and black intellectuals produced not only 'voices' but 'silences'. Dhlomo would certainly have known of, and read, *UZulu kaMalandela*, but there is no indication that he allowed it to influence the approach to history that he took in his own *UShaka*. As a member of the black intellectual establishment in a way that Lamula never was, he preferred to align himself with the approaches taken by white 'moderates' like Bryant and Stuart than with those of a black radical.<sup>23</sup>

### **Academic Shakas, 1960s to 1990s**

In the 1960s and 1970s, academic historians, white and black, became widely involved for the first time in the imaging of Shaka.. Against the background of the decolonization of Africa, historians in western Europe, North America and Africa north of the Limpopo began to produce histories which for the first time put their main focus on the doings of Africans rather than of Europeans in Africa. In the new histories of southern Africa that were produced at this time, Shaka the Mighty remained a central figure but now came to be seen generally in a much more positive light than in the previous academic literature. Where before he had been widely portrayed in stereotyped terms as a bloody tyrant, now he was frequently described as

a great statesman. Where his conquests had often been seen as having led to violence and chaos, now they were seen as having set in train a process of ‘state formation’ and ‘nation building’ among African peoples. The ‘wars of Shaka’ were dressed up with a new name, the *mfecane* (in the history of Nguni-speaking areas) or *difaqane* (in Sotho-Tswana-speaking areas),<sup>24</sup> and in this guise rapidly became embedded in the new revisionist historiography, at first outside South Africa and then, from the early 1970s onward, inside it as well.

The 1970s and early 1980s were something of a golden age in the researching and writing of the precolonial history of southern Africa by academic historians, as numbers of the more liberally and radically minded among them took up the study and teaching of the history of black societies as a counter to the settlerist history which was strongly propounded by the apartheid state. The history of the Zulu kingdom in particular attracted attention from a new generation of researchers: Henry Slater, David Hedges, and Jeff Guy, and, a little later, John Wright and Carolyn Hamilton.<sup>25</sup> Using new concepts, particularly from materialist theory, and more critical approaches to the source material, these researchers developed a much more closely historicized periodization of the emergence of the Zulu kingdom, and a much more detailed contextualization of Shaka’s coming to power. In addition to the long-established sources on the period, they also had available James Stuart’s invaluable collection of records of oral testimony, which had been housed in the Killie Campbell Library (later the Killie Campbell Africana Library) in Durban since the late 1940s, and the volumes of *The James Stuart Archive* which began appearing in 1976 (see note 15 above).

In much of their work, these and other academic historians of the 1970s and 1980s implicitly or explicitly moved a long way beyond many of the basic assumptions that were embedded in the common stereotypes about Shaka: the notion that history was made mainly by Great Men; the notion that Shaka had come to power primarily through the use of military force; the notion that he had launched successive campaigns of destruction and bloodshed over wide swathes of southern Africa; the notion that he had ruled over a territory which had extended from Mozambique to the Transkei. Some of these researchers, Hamilton in particular, were beginning to make a critical examination of the historical processes in which images of Shaka the Mighty

had come to be formed,<sup>26</sup> but it was not until the ‘mfecane debates’ of the late 1980s and early 1990s that the validity of these images came to be more widely questioned, at least among academics. As is well known, the often heated and vitriolic arguments of the time were triggered by a polemical article published in 1988 by Julian Cobbing, who asserted that the mfecane, the series of violent upheavals that had supposedly been set in motion by the explosive expansion of the Zulu kingdom under Shaka, had in fact been caused by the impact of slave-raiding into the interior from Delagoa Bay and from the Cape colony.<sup>27</sup> By the time the debates simmered down in the mid-1990s, numbers of historians, though rejecting Cobbing’s brasher statements about the role of slave-raiding, particularly in the Delagoa Bay region, were coming round to accepting that the upheavals of the 1820s and 1830s were the product of complex interactions over many decades between black and white societies in southern Africa.<sup>28</sup> Far from being the cause of the upheavals, the Zulu kingdom was one of the products of political conflicts that had begun before Shaka was born. Concomitantly, the status of Shaka as the mighty warrior of the stereotype began to look uncertain.

### **African nationalist and Zulu nationalist Shakas, 1960s to 1990s**

Within academia, then, inside and outside South Africa, far-reaching changes in ideas about the history of Shaka and his times were taking place from the 1970s onward. These ideas had little apparent influence on the views of Shaka propounded by black writers of the time, either inside South Africa or among those living abroad in exile from the apartheid system. Instead, many of them continued to draw on the same white writers as the previous generation of black writers had done. In his compilation of Zulu royal praises, *Izibongo Zamakhosi*, C.L.S. Nyembezi drew heavily on texts collected by James Stuart.<sup>29</sup> A much-cited essay on Shaka by one-time Liberal Party member and later Inkatha supporter, Jordan Ngubane, relied largely on Bryant’s *Olden Times* as a source of historical detail. He also cited two other books with a strongly ‘mixed’ heritage – Ritter’s fictionalized account of Shaka’s life, much of which was based on Bryant’s work, and Trevor Cope’s edition of Zulu praises as originally collected by James Stuart.<sup>30</sup> In the historical introduction to his well-known epic poem, *Emperor Shaka the Great*, Mazisi Kunene expressed determination to ‘cut through the thick forest of propaganda and misrepresentation that have been submitted by colonial reports and historians’ (p. xii), and then proceeded to make

copious use of *Olden Times*, which many commentators would regard as a ‘colonial’ source.<sup>31</sup> Also from an avowedly anti-colonial, anti-apartheid perspective, Thando Zuma published in *The African Communist* a commemorative article on Shaka which cited Ritter, the maker *par excellence* of colonial images of Zulus.<sup>32</sup>

The generation of new ideas about Shaka by academics and the reproduction of old stereotypes about him by African nationalist writers were alike almost entirely overshadowed in the 1980s and early 1990s by another development: the raising of Shaka to an unprecedented pitch of Mightiness in the ideologies of a new Zulu nationalism. Contrary to a common view, as Carolyn Hamilton and I have argued elsewhere, Zulu nationalism does not date back to the emergence of the Zulu kingdom, which cannot be seen as having constituted a cohesive and united ‘nation’; rather, it began emerging in response to the rising pressures exerted by British imperialism and settler colonialism from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onward.<sup>33</sup> Even then, Zulu-speaking intellectuals and political figures remained torn between the calls of a narrower Zulu ethnic sentiment and a broader African nationalism. By the same token, numbers of ordinary Zulu-speakers were caught between the often contrary pulls of local clan loyalties, Zulu ethnicity, African nationalism, and rising working-class and trade union loyalties.

Modern Zulu nationalism can be said to have begun in the 1950s and 1960s, when it was provided with both political stimulus and political space by the apartheid government’s energetic suppression of African nationalist movements and African trade unions, and its promotion of ethnically based ‘homelands’ or bantustans. By 1970 an alliance of Zulu chiefs, Zulu petty traders, and Zulu bureaucrats, under the leadership of Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, was firmly in control of the administration of what became the KwaZulu bantustan. By the mid-1970s the alliance’s spokesmen (they were almost all men), of whom Buthelezi was far and away the most important, were articulating a Zulu nationalism aimed at winning support from among the mass of Zulu-speaking people for Buthelezi himself, for the KwaZulu administration, and for Inkatha, the political organization which he founded in 1975. After his break with the African National Congress in 1979, Buthelezi fell back more and more for support on a Zulu ethnic constituency in KwaZulu and on conservative white business interests in Natal. From this time onward, he began proclaiming an increasingly

exclusivist Zulu nationalism; after the emergence of opposition organizations in the form of the ANC-aligned United Democratic Front in 1983 and the Congress of South African Trade Unions in 1985, his brand of nationalism became increasingly chauvinist and bellicose.<sup>34</sup>

One of the most striking features of Buthelezi's public pronouncements was his propounding of a version of Zulu history which constantly harked back to the greatness of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Zulu kingdom and of its first ruler, Shaka. In speech after speech to a wide variety of audiences, most notably on the occasion of KwaZulu's most important public holiday, Shaka Day (24 September), Buthelezi exalted the 'achievements' of the Zulu people, and proclaimed the right of the Zulu 'nation' in South Africa to seek to regain the power and influence which it had once had. In the process, he came to portray the KwaZulu bantustan as the historical successor to the precolonial Zulu kingdom, and himself in effect as the legitimate political successor to Shaka.<sup>35</sup>

The people who supported Buthelezi's brand of Zulu nationalism most fervently seem to have been mainly 'traditionalists' in the rural areas of KwaZulu, migrant labourers in the cities of Natal and the Transvaal who maintained close links with rural communities, and the socially and economically marginalized inhabitants of the burgeoning shacklands round Durban. In the 1970s and 1980s, as the South African economy went deeper and deeper into depression, and as apartheid society began to unravel, these groups in particular were experiencing increasing social stresses and strains, and were particularly receptive to political messages, like Buthelezi's, which held forth the promise of a return to the kind of order and stability that had supposedly existed in Zulu society in Shaka's time. But by no means all Zulu-speakers responded in the same way. Large numbers of them, particularly among established urban communities, by now supported the UDF and ANC, even if it was politically dangerous to do so in the face of the apartheid government's 'security' legislation and of Inkatha leaders' claims to be the sole legitimate representatives of the 'Zulu nation' as a whole.

If Buthelezi (and his speech-writers, some of whom, like Walter Felgate, were white) was the chief articulator of Zulu nationalist history in this period, his was by no means

the only influence which served to shape it. Large numbers of white people in Natal and elsewhere – with readers of Bryant, Ritter, and Morris no doubt well represented among them - responded to his declarations on Shaka with recognition and approval. Like Zulu-speaking audiences, they had long been primed to hear stories about Shaka's greatness. By the early 1980s, an initial suspicion of Buthelezi's political aspirations among the white political and business elite in Natal was giving way to acceptance of him as a major ally in resisting the rise of a popular African nationalism and of a black working-class consciousness. Increasingly, Buthelezi was able to win the support of the white-controlled media in the province, and to find a sympathetic outlet for his particular version of Zulu history. By the late 1980s his pronouncements on Zulu history had become something of a public orthodoxy. Shaka had been placed in the forefront of public consciousness as far and away the most important figure in the history of both KwaZulu and Natal, and the notion that the kingdom which he had founded had been re-incarnated in the KwaZulu bantustan was, outside the ranks of a few resistant academics (whom Buthelezi sought to slap down), largely unchallenged.<sup>36</sup>

Some white opinion-makers, nervous of Inkatha's – and South Africa's - increasingly violent politics, sought to inject into public discourses notions of Zulu history which in some respects diverged from Buthelezi's. The best-known case was that of the TV series 'Shaka Zulu', which was first screened by the SABC in 1986 and which drew huge audiences in South Africa and abroad. In Hamilton's view, the series 'offered the SABC an opportunity for presenting black and white viewers in South Africa with a drama advocating interracial collaboration and portraying the dangers of its failure' at a time when, against a background of increasingly violent resistance in the country's townships, the apartheid regime was edging towards political reform. At the same time, in depicting the chaos which resulted when Shaka rejected interaction with white people, the series 'offered a strong warning to independent black politicians such as Buthelezi [like Shaka, a personification of Zulu politics] not to try to go it alone'.<sup>37</sup> But, given the towering presence in the series of Shaka the Mighty, in the person of actor Henry Cele, few viewers would have noticed these subtleties; if anything, the series served hugely to reinforce stereotyped notions of Shaka and the Zulu kingdom among viewers round the world.

### **Commercializing Shaka in the New South Africa**

As political violence intensified in South Africa during the constitutional negotiations of the early 1990s, with Buthelezi using the threat of yet more violence from the ‘Zulu nation’ to try to strengthen his hand, the figure of Shaka the Mighty (now more and more in the role of Shaka the Bloody) loomed larger than ever in Zulu nationalist history-making and in South African politics. Then, in the mid-1990s, in what must be one of the most remarkable acts in the history of the country’s political theatre, he virtually disappeared from the stage. Almost overnight, strident public invocations of the glorious Zulu past and the awesomeness of Shaka largely came to an end. Such public references as Zulu leaders made to him were now in a much more modulated register, and for the first time, if not very convincingly, notions of him as the Great Democrat and the Great Reconciler began to be put about.

Behind all this, of course, was the implementation of a new constitutional and political order in South Africa from 1994 onward under a Government of National Unity headed by the African National Congress. Though the Inkatha Freedom Party (as it had been called since 1990) came to power in the newly renamed province of KwaZulu-Natal, which was the product of an amalgamation of Natal and KwaZulu, it was with just over fifty percent of the total vote in the province. The result gave the lie to the IFP’s long-standing claim that it represented the ‘Zulu people’ in general, and for the first time since the 1950s provided the ANC with a strong and legitimate political presence in the province. As important, was the effective disappearance from the regional political scene of Chief Buthelezi, who went on to higher things in Pretoria and Cape Town after accepting the position in the Government of National Unity which new national President Nelson Mandela cannily offered him. Also politically significant was the public shift made soon after the elections by Zulu king Zwelithini from a more or less reluctant identification with the IFP towards a politically more neutral position.

With the KwaZulu bantustan having been dissolved, with Zulu-speaking people clearly divided in their political allegiances, and with the main ideologue of Zulu nationalism having achieved his long-standing ambition of forcing his way to the centre of national politics in South Africa, Zulu nationalism quite suddenly lost most

of its driving force. As the researches of Kerri-Ann Hampton and Laurence Piper have indicated, it became clear that Zulu nationalism – as distinct from Zulu ethnic identification - had all along been the ideology of a conservative ethnic elite and its supporters rather than of Zulu-speaking people generally.<sup>38</sup> Now that constitutional apartheid had been overthrown, and now that the IFP was a partner in the Government of National Unity, the political mobilization of a specifically Zulu constituency against other ethnically and racially defined groups (‘whites’, ‘Xhosas’, ‘Indians’) was suddenly rendered not only anachronistic but positively offensive in a way that had not been the case in the apartheid era. By the same token, calls for Zulu-speakers to fight (literally) for the freedom of the Zulu nation became largely meaningless.

All this added up to a marked depoliticizing of the processes in which KwaZulu-Natal’s pasts were constructed. This in turn was an important factor in opening the way for the rapid growth after 1994 of the particular genre of history commonly known as ‘heritage’ (understood here as having to do with the uncritical celebration or commemoration of aspects of the past selected for their ‘feel-good’ features). In the KwaZulu-Natal region, various ethnically and racially defined heritages – ‘Zulu’, ‘black’, ‘white’, ‘British’, ‘Afrikaans’, ‘Indian’, and others – had been constructed and celebrated for many years, but mostly under the control of political leaders. From the mid-1990s, as the number of tourists, both local and international, visiting the region multiplied and the importance of suitably packaged samples of heritage as saleable commodities increased, the making of the region’s public history more and more came to be influenced by business interests, large and small. This resulted in a further narrowing of its focus to produce the sort of marketable history-bites that tourists were prepared to spend money on.

Much the most important products of this kind were made up of carefully selected elements of ‘Zulu history’ and ‘Zulu traditional culture’ in which the figure of Shaka was an important feature. The marketability of Shaka and Zulu history had of course been recognized by the author of the original draft of the book *Shaka Zulu*, Ernst Ritter, together with his editors and publishers, as far back as the mid-1950s, and by numerous other writers and film-makers subsequently. The commodification of Zulu culture and history specifically for the post-apartheid tourist market can perhaps be said to have been inaugurated by the successful development in the late 1980s and

early 1990s of the holiday resort and theme park Shakaland on one of the sets used for filming the series ‘Shaka Zulu’.<sup>39</sup> In the 1990s, ‘Zulu cultural villages’ of varying degrees of authenticity and commercialization sprang up all over KwaZulu-Natal to tap into the expanding market among mainly white tourists for a taste of indigenous culture.<sup>40</sup> Tourism KwaZulu-Natal adopted first ‘The Kingdom of the Zulu’ and then ‘The Zulu Kingdom’ as the brand name for selling the province as a destination for national and international tourists.<sup>41</sup> Indissolubly linked with the name of the kingdom in the minds of many tourists would have been that of Shaka, its first and greatest ruler.

Branding commodities with the name or image of Shaka had for years been used as a way of enhancing their marketability among black working-class people.<sup>42</sup> From the 1990s it was more and more being used to advertize items made for tourists with money to spend.<sup>43</sup> In 2004 a major step in the Disneyfying of the name came with the opening of uShaka Marine World, a large aquarium and tourist resort in a run-down part of Durban’s harbour precinct (TV advertizing slogan to go with the name: ‘Wet Yourself’). Numbers of previous residents, many of them very poor, together with owners of small businesses, were pushed out to make room for what was essentially a new playground for middle class consumers,<sup>44</sup> but in the new South Africa, as would have been the case in the old, this counted for relatively little in the face of an investment of some R750 million from American and South African property developers (who now included black empowerment enterprises). EThekweni mayor Obed Mlaba enthused, ‘Every time I go to uShaka Marine World I am filled with pride when I see this amazing theme park, the neat and well trained staff, the beautifully maintained gardens, the shops and restaurants, and when I see all the development in the Point area I know that all our plans that we planned so carefully are eventually coming to fruition’.<sup>45</sup>

Shaka’s name was appropriated for commercial ends in other ways by members of South Africa’s rising black middle classes. In 2000, lawyer and strategy consultant Phinda Madi published a motivational book for business people entitled *Leadership Lessons from Emperor Shaka the Great*.<sup>46</sup> Among his injunctions to his readers were ‘To be a conqueror, be apprenticed to a conqueror’, ‘Lead the charge (from the front)’, ‘Know the battlefield (better than the enemy)’. and, with an eye on Shaka’s

downfall, ‘Never believe your own PR’. South Africa’s Deputy President Jacob Zuma, himself Zulu-speaking, wrote in the Foreword to the book, ‘UShaka kaSenzangakhona kaJama is universally acknowledged for creating and consolidating amaZulu as one of the most powerful and respected nations on the African continent and indeed on earth. His wisdom, leadership, strategic prowess, military genius, valour, wit and sagacity are legendary. In short it is difficult to imagine a handful of equals in history’. He concluded, ‘Among its peers this book finds good companionship in *The Prince* by Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu, *The Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun* by Wess Roberts and *Jesus CEO* by Laurie Beth-Jones’. It was all a far cry from Buthelezi’s blood-curdling invocations of Shaka half a dozen years before.

Today Shaka remains a revered founding figure for many Zulu-speakers, and continues to be seen as an important historical figure by very large numbers of other people. But there is little active interest in political or intellectual circles, black or white, in continuing to revamp him as an icon of Zulu political might; for the ‘modernizers’ who dominate politics at both provincial and national levels, the traditional figure of Shaka the Mighty is rapidly becoming an archaism. The most active invokers of his name are entrepreneurs in the province’s tourist and heritage industry. Alongside exaggerated and misleading notions of Shaka the Warrior Leader we now have hollowed-out notions of Shaka the Great Patron of money-making. Over the foreseeable future, images of this kind are likely to become more widespread. They are being propagated by numbers of people who make some or all of their living from selling heritage, and they fit in with the agendas of the province’s political elites, who, whatever their differences, are now largely united in not wanting the kind of public history that disturbs, and in wanting to see the expansion of tourism as the basis of a potentially important growth industry. If the figure of Shaka the Mighty was a product of the colonial era, in post-colonial KwaZulu-Natal it is in the process of becoming safely domesticated.

### **Conclusion**

Is this, then, all there is to the historical figure of Shaka Zulu? Is it nothing but image and metaphor? Is there no ‘real’ Shaka that we can get our hands on? Will it be his fate, in the era of globalization, to end up as no more than an atrophied memory? It

has to be reiterated that the massive edifice of Shaka the Mighty which has come down to us at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is based on colonial-era stereotypes which were in place nearly a hundred years ago, stereotypes which drew on evidence from a small handful of what academic historians would call primary sources. But more positively, from an academic historian's perspective, it can also be said that the archive of sources on the history of Shaka and his times is a good deal more substantial than is often thought. The body of critical studies of these sources is beginning to expand. Now that we do not automatically have to think of Shaka as a Mighty figure, the way is opening for revised – and potentially much more interesting – assessments of his place in history to be made.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Nathaniel Isaacs, *Travels and Adventures in Eastern Africa*, Cape Town: Struik, 1970, p. 151; Mangosuthu Buthelezi, 'King Shaka Day', unpublished text of address in Clermont Township, Pinetown, 28 September 1986, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Jean Sévry, *Chaka: Empereur des Zoulous: Histoire, Mythes et Légendes*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1991.

<sup>3</sup> Daphna Golan, *Inventing Shaka: Using History in the Construction of Zulu Nationalism*, Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner, 1994.

<sup>4</sup> Dan Wylie, *Savage Delight: White Myths of Shaka*, Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Carolyn Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention*, Cape Town: David Philip, 1998.

<sup>6</sup> This view remains widespread today. See the exchanges between Fred Khumalo and Alex Parker in *ThisDay*, 4 June, 10 June and 14 June 2004, and Khaba Mkhize's letter in *ThisDay*, 17 June 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty*, pp. 53-6.

<sup>8</sup> The passages which follow draw from John Wright, "'The wars of Shaka', the 'mfecane', and beyond', unpublished paper, North-Eastern Workshop on Southern Africa, Burlington, Vermont, April 2002.

<sup>9</sup> Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty*, 72-85, 94-102.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 36-7, 47-69, 72-104.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 32-5.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>13</sup> G.M. Theal, *History of South Africa since September 1795*, London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1908, vol. 1, chs. 14 and 15; vol. 2, ch. 27; vol. 5, chs. 80 and 83.

<sup>14</sup> It was privately published in Pietermaritzburg. An English translation by H.C. Lugg, edited by A.T. Cope, was published in Pietermaritzburg by the University of Natal Press in 1979 under the title *The Black People and Whence They Came*.

<sup>15</sup> See Stuart's records as published in C. de B. Webb and J.B. Wright, eds., *The James Stuart Archive of Recorded Oral Evidence Relating to the History of the Zulu and Neighbouring Peoples*, vols. 1-5, Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1976-2001 (in process).

<sup>16</sup> E.g. Fuze, *The Black People*.

<sup>17</sup> S.M. Molema, *The Bantu Past and Present*, Cape Town: C. Struik, 1963 (first publ. Edinburgh: W. Green and Son, 1920), pp. 79-81.

<sup>18</sup> Tim Couzens, *The New African : A Study of the Life and Works of H.I.E. Dhlomo*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985, ch. 7.

<sup>19</sup> These were *uTulasizwe* (1923), *uHlangakula* (1924), *uBaxoxele* (1924), *uKulumetule* (1925), and *uVusezakiti* (1926). All were published in London by Longmans, Green and Co.

<sup>20</sup> John Wright and Carolyn Hamilton, "'Black" histories, "white" histories, "mixed" histories? Perspectives from Zulu historiography', unpublished paper for conference on The Burden of Race? "Whiteness" and "Blackness" in Modern South Africa, University of the Witwatersrand, July 2001.

<sup>21</sup> Paul la Hausse de Lalouvière, *Restless Identities: Signatures of Nationalism, Zulu Ethnicity and History in the Lives of Petros Lamula (c.1881-1948) and Lymon Maling (1889-c.1936)*, Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2000.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>23</sup> Wright and Hamilton, "'Black" histories, "white" histories, "mixed" histories?', pp. 21-2.

<sup>24</sup> The central text in the recasting and renaming process was John Omer-Cooper's *The Zulu Aftermath: A Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Bantu Africa*, London: Longmans, Green, 1966.

<sup>25</sup> Some basic texts relating to the history of the early Zulu kingdom: Henry Slater, 'Transitions in the political economy of south-east Africa before 1840', unpublished D.Phil. thesis, University of Sussex, 1976; David Hedges, 'Trade and politics in southern Mozambique and Zululand in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1978; Jeff Guy, 'Ecological factors in the rise of Shaka and the Zulu kingdom', in Shula Marks and Anthony Atmore, eds., *Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa*, London: Longman, 1980; Jeff Guy, 'Analysing pre-capitalist societies in southern Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 14 (1987), pp. 18-37; John Wright, 'Pre-Shakan age-group formation among the northern Nguni', *Natalia*, 8 (1978), pp. 23-9; John Wright, 'The dynamics of power and conflict in the Thukela-Mzimkhulu region in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: a critical reconstruction', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1989; Carolyn Hamilton, 'Ideology, oral traditions and the struggle for power in the early Zulu kingdom', unpublished MA thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1985; John Wright and Carolyn Hamilton, 'Traditions and transformations: the Phongolo-Mzimkhulu region in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries', in Andrew Duminy and Bill Guest, eds., *Natal and Zululand from Earliest Times to 1910: A New History*, Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press and Shuter and Shooter, 1989, pp. 49-82.

<sup>26</sup> Carolyn Hamilton, 'Authoring Shaka: models, metaphors and historiography', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, John Hopkins University, 1993.

<sup>27</sup> Julian Cobbing, 'The mfecane as alibi: thoughts on Dithakong and Mbolompo', *Journal of African History*, 29 (1988), pp. 487-519.

<sup>28</sup> An important compilation of papers in this field is Carolyn Hamilton, ed., *The Mfecane Aftermath: Reconstructive Debates in Southern African History*, Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press;

and Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1995. For comments on the debates see John Wright, 'Mfecane debates', *Southern African Review of Books*, September/October and November/December, 1995, pp. 18-19.

<sup>29</sup> Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1958. See also the comment in Golan, *Inventing Shaka*, p. 60.

<sup>30</sup> Jordan Ngubane, 'Shaka's social, political and military ideas', in Donald Burness, ed., *Shaka King of the Zulus in African Literature*, Washington DC: Three Continents Press, 1976, pp. 127-64; Trevor Cope, ed., *Izibongo: Zulu Praise Poems*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968.

<sup>31</sup> Mazisi Kunene, *Emperor Shaka the Great: A Zulu Epic*, London: Heinemann, 1979.

<sup>32</sup> Thando Zuma, "'Bayete Nkalakata! uShaka Ka Senzangakhona'", *The African Communist*, no. 111 (1987), pp. 76-84.

<sup>33</sup> Carolyn Hamilton and John Wright, 'The beginnings of Zulu identity: the image of Shaka', *Indicator South Africa*, 10, 3 (1993), pp. 43-6. See also John Wright, 'Notes on the politics of being Zulu, 1820-1920', unpublished paper, Conference on Ethnicity, Society and Conflict in Natal, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, September 1992.

<sup>34</sup> Gerhard Maré and Georgina Hamilton, *An Appetite for Power: Buthelezi's Inkatha and South Africa*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987, chs. 3-5; Bill Freund, 'Confrontation and social change: Natal and the forging of apartheid 1949-1972', in Robert Morrell, ed., *Political Economy and Identities in KwaZulu-Natal: Historical and Social Perspectives*, Durban: Indicator Press, 1996, ch. 5; Mzala, *Gatsha Buthelezi: Chief with a Double Agenda*, London: Zed Books, 1988, ch. 3-7; Gerhard Maré, *Brothers Born of Warrior Blood: Politics and Ethnicity in South Africa*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1992, chs. 4 and 5.

<sup>35</sup> For analyses of Buthelezi's constructions of history in these years see Paul Forsyth, 'The past in the service of the present: the political use of history by Chief A.N.M.G. Buthelezi 1951-1991', *South African Historical Journal*, 26 (1992), pp. 74-92; Patrick Harries, 'Imagery, symbolism and tradition in a South African bantustan: Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Inkatha and Zulu history', *History and Theory*, 32, Beiheft 32 (1993), pp. 105-25; Golan, *Inventing Shaka* (1994), ch. 1; Gerhard Maré, 'Versions of resistance history in South Africa: the ANC strand in Inkatha in the 1970s and 1980s', *Review of African Political Economy*, 83 (2000), pp. 63-79.

<sup>36</sup> John Wright, 'Making and remaking Zuluist and settlerist histories in Shaka's once-upon-a-time kingdom', unpublished paper for Conference on Memory and History: Remembering, Forgetting and Forgiving in the life of the Nation and the Community', University of Cape Town, August 2000, pp. 5-8.

<sup>37</sup> Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty*, pp. 171-87. The quotations are on pp. 181, 184.

<sup>38</sup> Kerri-Ann Hampton, 'The decline of Zulu nationalism as a defining feature of IFP policy 1994-1997', unpublished MA thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1998; L. Piper and K. Hampton, 'The decline of "militant Zulu nationalism": the sea-change in IFP politics after 1994', *Politikon*, 25 (1998), pp. 81-102; Laurence Piper, 'Nationalism without a nation: the rise and fall of Zulu nationalism in South Africa's transition to democracy, 1975-99', *Nations and Nationalism*, 8 (2002), pp. 73-94.

<sup>39</sup> For an analysis of the kind of history portrayed by Shakaland as it was in the early 1990s, see Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty*, pp. 187-205.

<sup>40</sup> Sabine Marschall, 'Mind the difference: a comparative analysis of Zulu cultural villages in KwaZulu-Natal', *Southern African Humanities*, 15 (2003), 109-27.

<sup>41</sup> *Witness*, precise date unknown (July 2004).

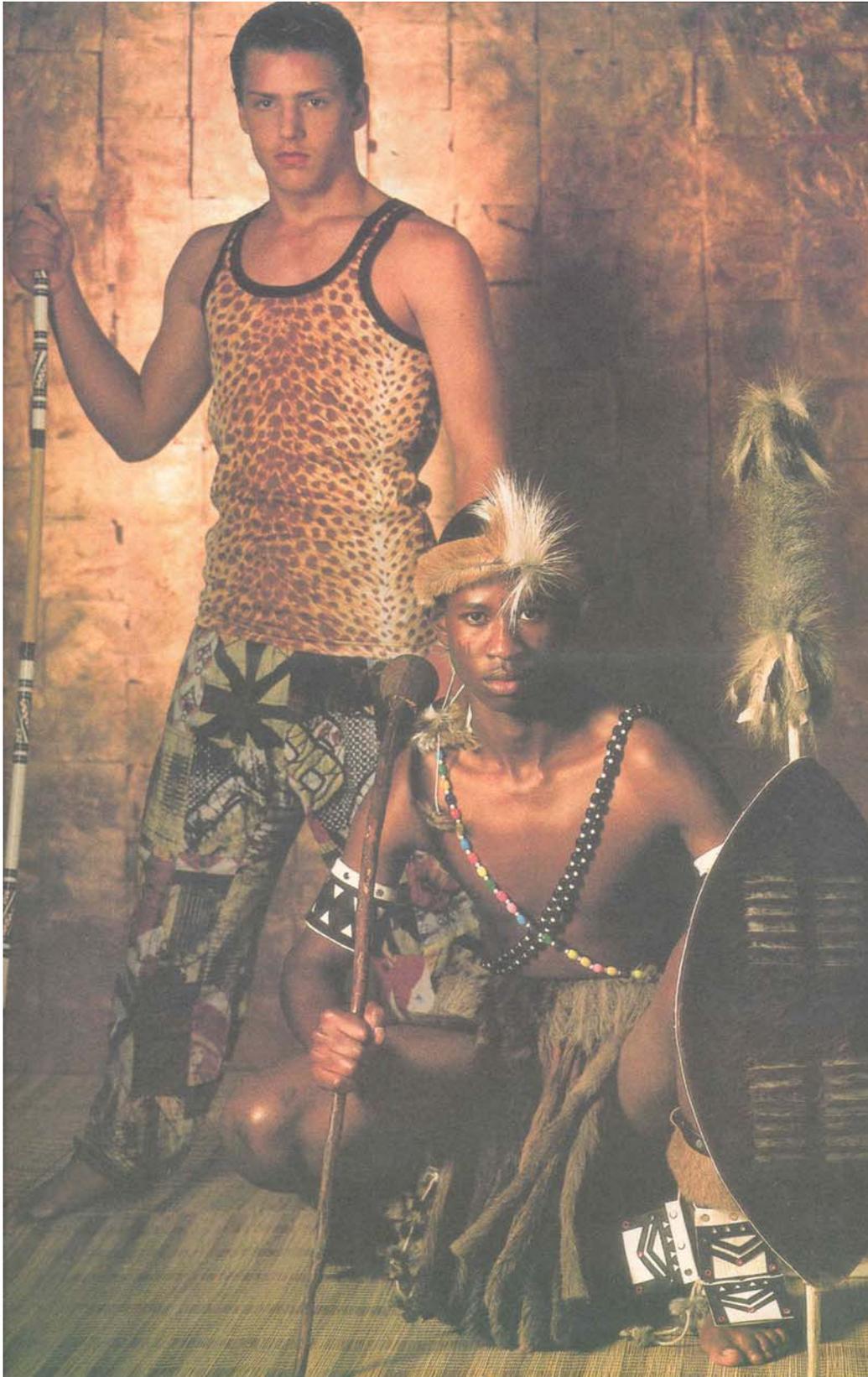
<sup>42</sup> For one example see Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty*, p. 8.

<sup>43</sup> See the accompanying illustration from S'camtoPrint, *Sunday Times* supplement, 13 May 2001. The caption reads, 'Shaka's Pride: These proud impis are both dressed by Tee & Tee Connection, Market Theatre, Johannesburg. Rodney's traditional furs and accessories (R2 500) go way back to the days of the great Zulu king. Justin makes a modern Zulu statement in leopard print vest and pants (R500).'

<sup>44</sup> Chris Makhaye, 'Getting to the Point', *ThisDay*, 3 March 2004.

<sup>45</sup> Obed Mlaba, 'From the mayor's parlour', *Metro* supplement to *Witness*, 3 September 2004.

<sup>46</sup> Randburg: Knowledge Resources, 2000.



**SHAKA'S PRIDE:** These proud impis are both dressed by Tee & Tee Connection, Market Theatre, Johannesburg. Rodney's traditional furs and accessories (R2 500) back to the days of the great Zulu king. Justin makes a modern Zulu statement in a leopard print vest and pants (R500).



Shaka Zulu is said to be one of the greatest military leaders in African history, and perhaps all of history. There is controversy around the brutality of his methods, and the strictness with which he trained his troops, but in many ways, he improved warfare methods forever. Born in 1787 in what is now South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal province, he died in 1828. Sketch of a Zulu warrior. Not losing any time in testing his military knowledge in real life, Shaka went after conquering the first and then more of his neighboring tribes. The Langeni, where he spent part of his childhood, were among the invaded people. Military success came quickly to Shaka as he was outstanding in organizing his army. His regiments were armed with new weapons called assegais. Interesting enough, while Shaka acted as a terrible tyrant for the people back home, he was friendly enough with the first white traders who arrived at the port Natal around 1824. The warrior sent delegates to greet the visitors, and he also allowed them to use some of the lands of his kingdom.