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Power, Education, and Identity in Post-colonial Zimbabwe: the fate of King Lobengula of Matabeleland

Introduction

With a higher rate of literacy and mass-education in Zimbabwe, books on history have become increasingly important. Previously history was orally transmitted, but today history books compete with each other on the book market. In this competition, authors draw on their Ndebele identity to justify their representation of Ndebele history, and simultaneously foster Ndebeleness through their writings. History is frequently used for political ends, not least by colonial powers and nation-states. Those who have the power to represent the past, have also the means to relate the past to the present political situation. By controlling the past, one can legitimise the present, and various actors often try to do that.

In this article, I show how the indigenous historian Pathisa Nyathi represents Ndebele history as opposed to how colonial authors represent that history, on the one hand, and to how authors of Zimbabwean schoolbooks represent it, on the other hand. My aim is threefold. I want to give an example of how indigenous authors in present-day southern Africa increasingly claim the right to define their own people in written form. I also wish to describe how Ndebele belonging has been built on colonial images and indigenous counter-images of the Ndebele as either 'cruel' or 'brave' warriors. And, finally, I want to show how Ndebele identity is simultaneously constructed in relation to the colonial past and the present Zimbabwean nation-state.

The writing of history is a political as well as a scientific project that is dependent on both the author's values and the methodology one uses. Writing history is positional, as Jonathan Friedman puts it, 'that is, it is dependent upon where one is located in social reality, within society, and within global process' (1992a:194). At the same time, the writing of history is built on a methodology that follows logical rules about sources and causality presented in a linear narrative form. An author's values are thus most evident when he or she is dealing with both politically important questions and a period in the past that is difficult to reconstruct because evidence is scarce. I illustrate this by analysing how Pathisa Nyathi, the various colonial authors, and some authors of Zimbabwean schoolbooks describe three key events in Ndebele history.

Memory-texts, the colonial library, and schoolbooks

In the following, I first present Pathisa Nyathi's representation of the Ndebele genesis. Nyathi is a former teacher and headmaster, who currently works as provincial Education Officer in Bulawayo within the Ministry of Education, Sports, and Culture. He is a well-known commentator in the city, and has written extensively on Ndebele history. Significant for Nyathi's historical texts are that they largely are based on oral history, that is on interviews he has conducted with elders in Matabeleland. The Ministry of Education promotes the teaching of national history and only approves texts written in English. Since many of Nyathi's books on Ndebele history are locally-patriotic and written in *isiNdebele*, they are not used as compulsory texts in school. In Matabeleland, they are either read outside the school curriculum, or introduced under the subject *isiNdebele*.

I first met Pathisa Nyathi at the Swedish Embassy in Harare in 1993, where he gave a lecture on early Ndebele history. The lecture was an English summary of a book manuscript written in *isiNdebele*, which was subsequently published with support from Sida, the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency. Two years later, I saw the book in many bookstores and libraries in Bulawayo, as well as in school libraries in rural Matabeleland. This book was the first volume in Pathisa Nyathi's trilogy on early Ndebele history (Nyathi 1994, 1996, 1999).¹

Because of the self-defining character of Pathisa Nyathi's representation of the Ndebele genesis, it may be compared with what Valentine Mudimbe (1991:89ff) refers to as a 'memory-text'. A memory-text, Mudimbe claims, is beyond the difference between history and myth (cf. Levi-Strauss 1966). It is a discourse that via the retelling of a genesis 'validates a human geography'.

A memory-text, Mudimbe writes, is

both a legend and a dream for political power. In effect it links words and names to possessed things and spaces, designating motions of ancestors ... according to processes of appropriations of power and governance over new lands. (1991:91)

After presenting Pathisa Nyathi's description of the Ndebele genesis, I show how other, non-indigenous, authors have described three hotly debated issues in Ndebele historiography: the birth of the Ndebele state, a succession crisis within this state, and the end of the state. I also describe how some authors, and the sources they build upon, portray the Ndebele in a rather stereotyped way. These accounts were published before independence in 1980, and together they resemble what Mudimbe has termed 'the colonial library'.²

This library, Mudimbe (1994:xii) states,

represents a body of knowledge constructed with the explicit purpose of faithfully translating and deciphering the African object. Indeed, it fulfilled a political project in which, supposedly, the object unveils its being, its secrets, and its potential to a master who could, finally, domesticate it.

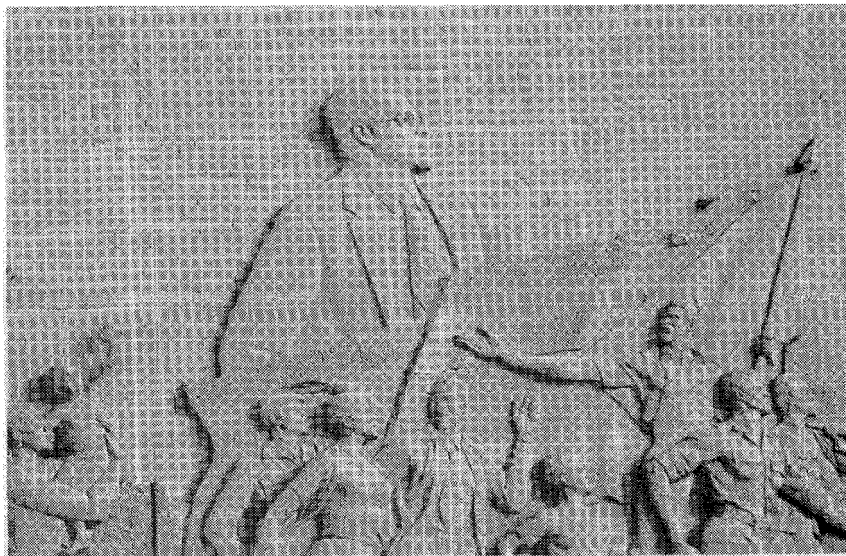
However, the colonial domestication of the African object has not been unchallenged. As a part of their nation-state projects, independent governments in Africa have made strong efforts to establish their own knowledge-producing institutions, such as universities, compulsory school-systems, and publishing houses. In sub-Saharan Africa, the number of universities has increased from about ten universities in the 1960s to almost two hundred today (Sall 2002). Since the time of independence, primary and secondary schools, as well as publishing houses, have increased in number, often with the help of foreign aid. In Zimbabwe, the school system expanded greatly after independence, and the number of African publishing houses has increased since 1980. Many of the latter are members of APNET, the African Publishers' Network, which has its headquarters in Harare (Sida 2002).

After describing colonial representations of Ndebele history, I therefore also present how some Zimbabwean-produced books portray this history, and especially how they describe the fate of the second Ndebele king, Lobengula Khumalo. I concentrate on Zimbabwean history textbooks. After independence, new schoolbooks on history have been published by Zimbabwean publishing houses. Many of these books are written from a nationalist perspective. In Matabeleland, history teachers have ambivalent feelings about this, since they do not always feel included in the nation-building project. Some people have also claimed that these schoolbooks on history are somewhat 'Shona' biased.

The changes within the educational system itself are part of a larger nation-building project, from which Ndebele-speakers to a large degree have been excluded. Already in the 1980s, Robert Mugabe and the ruling Zanu-PF party sent the North Korean trained Fifth Brigade to deal with so-called 'dissidents' in Matabeleland. In reality it targeted the political opposition and its supporters in southern Zimbabwe. In this conflict, a politics was carried out in which ethnicity was central. Shona-speaking soldiers were used against Ndebele-speaking civilians, and thousands of people in Matabeleland were murdered. Memories of these atrocities influence the current political situation in Zimbabwe, and they will continue to have far reaching consequences for Zimbabwean politics (Lindgren 2002, forthcoming).

The Zimbabwean nation-state has also been described as being built on Robert Mugabe as the father of the nation, and on the Zanu-PF party, and on symbols associated with the 'Shona' (e.g. Kriger 1995). For example, Zimbabwe took its name from the ancient ruins of Great Zimbabwe, which is of symbolic significance for Shona-speakers (see Jacobson-Widding 2000). One of the stone figures from Great Zimbabwe, a bird, is portrayed on the national flag, causing Mr. Siwela in Matabeleland to refer to this flag as the Zanu-PF flag'.³ Old monuments of Cecil Rhodes have been taken away, and new monuments have been created, such as Hero's Acre where a monumental portrait of Robert Mugabe, with the stone bird on his tie, dominates a mural depicting the

liberation struggle (see Werbner 1998). Names of cities and streets have also been changed. The Rhodesian capital Salisbury has become Harare; Rhodes Avenue was renamed Herbert Chitepo Avenue, and Manika Road replaced by Robert Mugabe Road.



Portrait of Robert Mugabe, Heroes Acre, Harare. Photo: Birgitta Hellmark Lindgren, 1997.

The Ndebele genesis according to Pathisa Nyathi

I present Pathisa Nyathi's lecture as I heard it, in the first person, but in an abridged version. Nyathi's representation of the Ndebele genesis is indeed, to restate Mudimbe's words, both a legend and a dream for political power, which links words and names to possessed things and places and designates motions of ancestors. My presentation of Nyathi's account is based on a tape-recording I made of his lecture in the spring of 1993. In summarising Nyathi's lecture I have, of course, edited it, but I have retained the chronological order in which he delivered it, and I have left his words and expressions as intact as possible.⁴

Nyathi opened his lecture as follows:

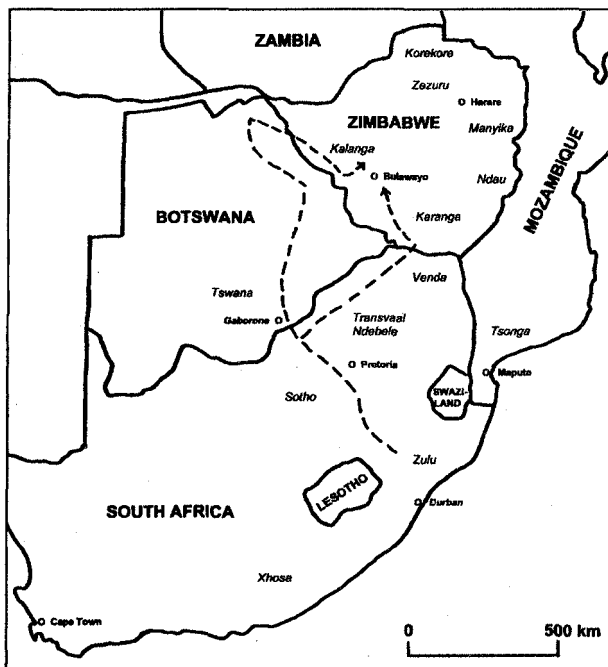
I am here in defence of a manuscript, in defence of a people, in defence of the survival of a people. As Ndebele people we do not have a comprehensive book on Ndebele history, in *isiNdebele*, in our own language. Yes, we do have a few works in English. They obviously present this history from the victor's point of view and never from the vanquished's point of view. We are making efforts therefore, funds permitting, to rewrite our own history in our own language and giving it our own perspective.

The Ndebele state was an offshoot from the Zulu state. The founder of the Ndebele state was Mzilikazi, who was a chief under the Zulu king Shaka. But Mzilikazi had an independent mind. He broke away from Shaka, not because of greed, as some people tell us, but because of the love for independence. He left Zululand in about 1820 with a small group, largely consisting of his own people, the Nguni section. Shaka, of course, sent some of his regiments to stop him, but they could not. Mzilikazi continued and more people joined him.

You realise this is east of the Drakensberg, and the people who joined Mzilikazi were largely of Nguni stock. However, the nation that Mzilikazi created was from a number of diverse disparate ethnic groups. From amongst the Nguni themselves there were several sub-groups. When Mzilikazi crossed the Drakensberg he was getting more people from non-Nguni stock, largely from the Sotho and the Tswana. Mzilikazi had that capacity of moulding a homogenous state from a number of diverse ethnic groups. Obviously they abandoned their cultures.

From there the Ndebele continued to the Pretoria area where they came into contact with Robert Moffat and other missionaries. At the same time the Boer moved north. The Boer moved quicker and had arms. In 1836 [1837-1838] the Ndebele had to move again. Mzilikazi split his people into two parts. While Mzilikazi and his regiments formed one part, a few men with women and children formed the other. Some people say Mzilikazi got lost, but the Ndebele do not think so. They say he was surveying the land. The truth is difficult to determine, but after two years without a king the group by the mountain installed Mzilikazi's first-born son as king.

However, Mzilikazi was still alive and he came back. There cannot be two suns in the sky at the same time. When Mzilikazi came back his son was probably sent south to live with



Migration route of Mzilikazi Khumalo and his followers between 1820 and 1840 from emerging Zululand to what became Matabeleland (Cobbing 1976, Rasmussen 1978), and approximate geographical use of Southern Bantu and Shona languages in southern Africa today (Bastin, Coupez, and Mann 1999, Bourdillon 1987, Doke et al. 1990, SIL International 2001). Map: Per Nordesjö.

his uncles in Zululand. Some people say he was butchered. This was in about 1839/1840. Mzilikazi regained his position as king, which he held until his death in 1868. With Mzilikazi's death came the issue of succession. Some people favoured Mzilikazi's first-born son who was sent to Zululand, while others favoured the son Lobengula, who eventually became king in 1870.

The same year Lobengula became king, Cecil Rhodes landed in Durban. At this time, missionaries, traders and hunters were already active in Ndebele territory. In Berlin in 1884, the colonial powers agreed on the rules of the game of colonisation and it did not take long before Cecil Rhodes and the British South Africa Company arrived in the area. There are some mischievous people who say Lobengula sold out the land. Lobengula signed a document, but he had no idea of the significance of this. And, let us be frank, whether Lobengula signed it or not does not matter. The country would have been colonised anyway.

In 1890 Cecil Rhodes sent an invading force, calling themselves the Pioneer Column, into Matabeleland. Cecil Rhodes wanted to have a direct confrontation with Lobengula, but the British High Commissioner in Cape Town found out about the plans and demanded that the column withdraw. The column continued to Salisbury [Harare] in Mashonaland instead. People thought Mashonaland was an El Dorado where they could find gold, but they were disappointed. So they thought Matabeleland was probably the El Dorado where King Solomon's mines were. They wanted war and now they were looking for a pretext to attack Matabeleland.

Starr Jameson, who worked for the British South Africa Company and was now in Fort Victoria, telegraphed to Cecil Rhodes that he wanted to make war on the Ndebele. Cecil Rhodes agreed by a quote from the Bible. They had then the Maxim machine gun, which had been developed by the engineer Hiram Maxim in the United States and now needed field-testing. There had been no serious wars since its invention and they were all excited about the war against the Ndebele and how it would work. Yes, they tested it, and yes, it succeeded.

A first column left Salisbury, a second left Fort Victoria, and a third came from the south. In Fort Victoria a service was held where they prayed to God to give the Christian soldiers strength to defeat the Ndebele state, or, actually to destroy it. On 1 November 1893 Lobengula's best regiment lost an important battle. The spear was no match for the Maxim machine gun. But the Ndebele died fighting, because among the Ndebele a wound in the back meant that you were fleeing, and such men were worth nothing more than food for vultures. However, Lobengula left Bulawayo before the columns reached the city.

Now, the Ndebele people are secretive people. They do not want to tell the truth. This is the case with Lobengula's fate. It is very clear that there were people with him. The field commander was there and came back. He knew exactly what happened to the king, but he didn't say anything. In any case, the Ndebele knew that if you capture the king there is no chance again in the future of resurrecting that kingship. It was therefore very important for Lobengula to flee rather than to be captured. You have only defeated a people when you have captured their king. This is why the Ndebele say the whites never defeated them, because they never captured Lobengula.

In Mzilikazi's migration from emerging Zululand, there are three events in particular that are often cited, and that seem to be important to British colonialists and academics, on the one hand, and to Zimbabwean nationalist writers of history textbooks, on the other. The first of these events has to do with the origin of

the Ndebele state: Why did Mzilikazi Khumalo leave Shaka Zulu in the early-1820s? The second event is the succession crisis within this state: What happened with Mzilikazi's son Nkulumane, who was elected king about 1840? The third event is related to the end of the Ndebele state: What happened to Mzilikazi's successor Lobengula in 1893? I will address each of these questions in turn.⁵

The origin of the Ndebele state and Mzilikazi's migration

In my description of how western authors and colonialists have portrayed the Ndebele, I intentionally paint with a broad brush. In using Mudimbe's metaphor 'the colonial library', I admittedly class together several authors, and their sometimes internally different works, under a unitary label. These authors have produced well-researched academic works, which serve as the foundation of contemporary knowledge on Ndebele history. Yet, this body of literature has certain consequences for Ndebele-speakers in southern Zimbabwe. My aim is thus, not to dismiss British, western, or colonial works as bad or wrong, but to take Pathisa Nyathi's writings seriously and to describe the type of knowledge that he counters with his writings on Ndebele history.

To start with the first question, western scholars have given both internal and external explanations as to why Mzilikazi Khumalo and other political leaders left Shaka Zulu in what has been called the *mfecane*, that is the migrations northwards of Nguni-speaking groups in the early 19th century. Like Nyathi, some scholars emphasise internal Zulu politics and the expanding Zulu kingdom as the main causes of the *mfecane* (e.g. Omer-Cooper 1966, 1993). Others emphasise the Portuguese colonisation of Mozambique and the British colonisation of the Cape as the underlying causes of these migrations (e.g. Cobbing 1988, Wright 1989, 1995).

I here give three short 'internal' descriptions of why Mzilikazi left Shaka Zulu. These descriptions are taken from three books that were published in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. The first is Kuper, Hughes, and van Velsen's *The Shona and the Ndebele in Southern Rhodesia* (1954), the second is Harold Child's *The History of the amaNdebele* (1969), and the third is Kent Rasmussen's *Migrant Kingdom: Mzilikazi's Ndebele in South Africa* (1978). The first two works were influential as guidelines for colonial administrators, the third book is of a more strictly academic character. All three works continue to be cited in academic and popular writings on Ndebele history.

The social anthropologists A. J. B. Hughes and Jan van Velsen write about Mzilikazi that

after a raid, he failed to hand over all the cattle he had captured, an act of treason punishable by death, of which Shaka came to hear. Mzilikazi decided that discretion was the better part of valour, and set out with his following for the high lands across the Drakensberg. (1954:47f.)

Likewise, colonial officer Harold Child writes that Mzilikazi was entrusted with a mission that included the raiding of 'Sotho tribes':

The mission was successful and Mzilikazi returned with much booty in cattle but refused to hand them over to Tshaka [Shaka] as was customary. As a result of this in the same year he decided to flee the country with his people and possessions. (1969:6)

Finally, historian Kent Rasmussen, whose aim is to reconstruct Ndebele history in order 'to get the facts straight', argues that

The flight of the Khumalo from Zululand is the first Ndebele national epic. It is the story of the birth of the nation; as such it has been subjected in Ndebele accounts to patriotic distortions. (1978:2, 20)

Rasmussen (1978:20ff.) then relates how Mzilikazi, a vassal of Shaka, 'failed' to hand over cattle to the latter after a raid. As a result, Shaka attacked Mzilikazi and drove him out of Zululand.

In comparison to Pathisa Nyathi's representation of Mzilikazi and his followers, these three descriptions portray Mzilikazi in a more negative light. In Nyathi's words, Mzilikazi 'broke' away from Shaka because of 'love for independence' and 'left' Zululand in about 1820. Hughes and van Velsen, Child, and Rasmussen describe how Mzilikazi 'failed' to hand over cattle to Shaka, an act of 'treason' punishable by death, and therefore had to 'flee' from Zululand. Not only does Nyathi portray Mzilikazi in a better light than the other authors, the agency in the conflict between Mzilikazi and Shaka is also ascribed to different persons. In Nyathi's representation, Mzilikazi is the deciding and acting agent, in the three other accounts agency is mainly ascribed to Shaka.

In the colonial representations, Mzilikazi and his followers are also portrayed as somewhat cruel warriors, who raid neighbouring people, steal their cattle, and keep it for themselves. This image of the Ndebele is common in colonial descriptions of Mzilikazi and his followers, both during their migration, as well as during later establishment of the Ndebele state in Matabeleland. After Mzilikazi had left Shaka Zulu, they migrated northwest. During this stage of their migration they were engaged in battles with Sotho-speakers, Boers, and Shaka Zulu's regiments, which both British missionaries at the time and later academics have commented upon.

Missionary Robert Moffat, for example, described how the Ndebele, before they left the northern part of South Africa, defeated the Griqua in battle,

The Matabele, with the groaning and hissing signals of death, marched onward, levelling all they met with. In a few minutes the rout was general, when every Griqua and Bechuana who was still alive sought safety in flight. Of these, many took the wrong direction, and as the day approached fell a prey to their exasperated conquerors, who seemed determined not to let a single soul escape. ([1835]1940:6f.)

In a similar vein, David Livingstone (1857:10f.) has described the Ndebele as 'the most cruel enemies the Bechuanas ever knew'. In historical descriptions of the Ndebele, such images have been perpetuated to this day, and not only by

historians. Social anthropologists like Hughes and van Velsen, Isaac Schapera, and N. J. van Warmelo have played their part in this. Schapera (1953:15) writes about a period of 'chaos' among the Tswana, due 'mainly to the successive onslaughts of invaders from the east', among them 'Moselekatse's Tebele [Mzilikazi's Ndebele] (1825-37)'; and van Warmelo (1974:76) states that 'the Tswana seem to have multiplied and prospered until in 1825 Mzilikazi appeared on the scene and began slaughtering them wholesale'.

From many Ndebele-speakers' point of view, these descriptions are not flattering. Many men in Matabeleland conceive of themselves as proud and brave, not as descendants of 'cruel enemies' whose political leader was responsible for 'slaughtering' people 'wholesale'. More importantly, these colonial images not only belong to the past, they are repeated in representations of the Ndebele today, not least in Zimbabwean schoolbooks. They are part of a long tradition of describing the Ndebele as cruel warriors, and, in so doing, also depicting the Ndebele as a people potentially capable of waging war again.

The succession crisis and establishment in Matabeleland

The second event that a number of western writers have debated is the succession crisis within the Ndebele state that occurred, when after twenty years of migration, Mzilikazi and his followers arrived in today's Matabeleland. What happened to Mzilikazi's son Nkulumane, who was elected king around 1840? When Mzilikazi arrived in Matabeleland, he split his followers into two parties. While Mzilikazi went northwest with one group himself, one of his chiefs took the other group to the north. The two groups were separated from each other for over a year, and the group without a king decided to install Mzilikazi's son Nkulumane as king. However, Mzilikazi and his group eventually came back.

Julian Cobbing (1976:258) states that according to one tradition Nkulumane was strangled on Mzilikazi's orders, but according to another he escaped south of the Limpopo River. However, Cobbing continues, it is practically certain that Nkulumane was dead at the time of Mzilikazi's death in 1868 and Lobengula's installation as king in 1870.

The man who claimed to be Nkulumane after 1868 was an impersonator. Nkulumane was never after 1835 positively identified; and there is no single contemporary reference to his existence between 1841 and 1868. (1976:258)

Hughes and van Velsen state that when Mzilikazi came back he

immediately executed a large number of those responsible for electing Nkulumane, and also had Nkulumane himself put away. To keep this murder secret he spread the rumour that his sons had been sent to Zululand for reasons of safety. (1954:49)

According to Pathisa Nyathi's account, which is built on oral sources, it was the missionary Robert Moffat who told Mzilikazi and his chiefs where to settle in today's Zimbabwe. Kent Rasmussen (1978:140ff) refers to such popular ideas as 'the Moffat myth', however, and argues that Moffat had nothing to do with

Mzilikazi's later migration into what was to become Matabeleland. When the two groups met and Mzilikazi found out that Nkulumane had been elected king, Rasmussen writes, it 'is probable that Mzilikazi had him executed, but many Ndebele continued to believe Nkulumane was alive, and in exile in South Africa'. (1977:33)

Mzilikazi's behaviour when he entered what is now Zimbabwe has also been characterised as cruel. To kill one's own son is, of course, bad enough, but the image of Mzilikazi and the Ndebele as cruel warriors has also been ascribed to them in relation to Shona-speakers in the area. After Mzilikazi had settled in the highlands north of the Matopos, Hughes and van Velsen claim that

It was from here that Mzilikazi directed his conquering and raiding expeditions. The Kalanga who remained in the area were incorporated into the Ndebele political organization, along with captured women and youths of some tribes which were raided. ... His most profitable source of booty and young soldiers were the Shona, whose country became his favourite raiding ground. (1954:49f.)

The image of the Ndebele as cruel warriors helped to justify the war in 1893 and subsequent colonisation, and this stereotype is still often referred to, used, and spread. Sometimes this assessment of the Ndebele is not even tied to a particular person or event in the past, but is used as a general description of *the* Ndebele's 'usual technique' of fighting, that is as a description of how the author imagines the Ndebele: as cruel warriors. In a textbook from the 1980s, for example, the American historian William Lye writes:

Even though the Ndebele were few in numbers, they struck terror in the minds of their neighbours. ... Their usual technique was haughtily to warn their foes of their coming, and then surround them by night. At dawn they would drum their heavy shields like thunder to startle their sleepy victims. Then they stormed the village, stabbing their short assegais into everyone in sight and firing the huts. No one survived except the young men who could be drafted into the regiments and young maidens who could reward the valour of the fighters. (1985:32f)

These examples should be seen as parts of a greater whole, in which the Ndebele have been over-represented in relation to warfare and as male warriors. Some authors have, to a certain degree, balanced their presentation of the Ndebele as cruel warriors by explaining the economic and social factors behind the Ndebele migration (see Cobbing 1976, Proctor and Phimister 1991). But there are numerous descriptions in the colonial literature of the Ndebele as cruel warriors, from Robert Moffat's 1835 portrayal of Ndebele who 'with the groaning and hissing signals of death, marched onward, levelling all they met with', to William Lye's 1985 description of Ndebele who 'stormed the village, stabbing their short assegais into everyone in sight'.

The fate of king Lobengula and the end of the state

The third event of importance for Ndebele-speakers, western scholars, and Zimbabwean national writers alike, is related to the end of the Ndebele state:

What happened to Mzilikazi's successor Lobengula in 1893? Mzilikazi died in 1868, and his son Lobengula became king in 1870. At that time, missionaries had already started to settle in Matabeleland. In 1893, Cecil Rhodes's British South Africa Company and British soldiers marched together towards Bulawayo, the capital of the Ndebele state. King Lobengula and his regiments defended their city, but were, in the end, not able to resist the British army. Lobengula himself disappeared from the scene.

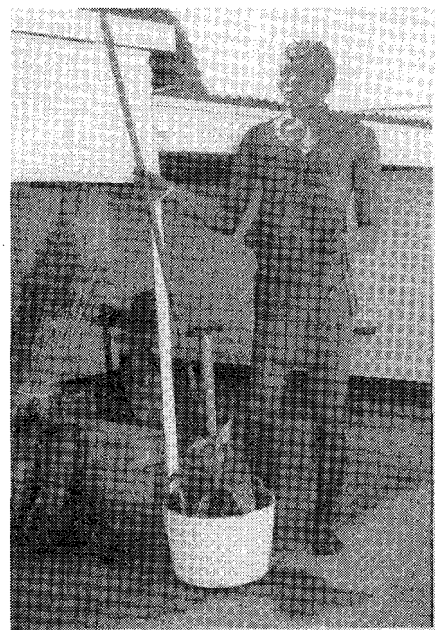
Of the various events in the Ndebele past, the fate of Lobengula is perhaps the most debated. As the *nkosi* ('king') of the Ndebele state at the time of the British invasion, Lobengula has been a strong symbol of the Ndebele as a unified people, even though they are a conglomerate of people from many different origins. Indeed, Lobengula may be feared as a unifying symbol as much by the present Zanu-PF government as by the British colonial administration. Perhaps it is a coincidence, but I have not yet come across a statue of Lobengula in Zimbabwe, apart from a two-metre-high sculpture hidden away in the backyard of the National Art Gallery in Bulawayo.

Within the colonial literature, several versions exist of the fall of the Ndebele state. According to most accounts, the British defeated the Ndebele in 1893, and King Lobengula died soon thereafter. In his book on the *The Matabele War*, Stafford Glass (1968:238) refers to a colonial report that confirmed that Lobengula had died of fever about 22 or 23 January [1894], some 30 or 40 miles south of the Zambezi river'.

Prior to that, Captain Wilson and his men, who had set out to follow Lobengula, had all been found dead after a battle with Lobengula's body-guard at the Shangani River.

Hughes and van Velsen write about Lobengula that

the most probable and generally accepted story is that he died somewhere near the Kana River, either by his own hand or as the result of the dropsy from which he suffered; the site of his alleged grave has been declared a national monument. But the Ndebele mostly hold that he did not die here, but survived somewhere in the north, a story which is also current among the Fort Jameson Ngoni. (1954:52)



Statue of King Lobengula Khumalo in the backyard of the National Art Gallery in Bulawayo, 1995.

In a similar vein, Julian Cobbing (1976:382) writes, 'Lobengula had disappeared at the end of 1893 and

most traditions have it that he died in January or February 1994; he certainly never reappeared'. In a footnote, Cobbing adds: 'In June 1895 there were rumours at Tete that Lobengula was still alive and had crossed the Zambezi ... that is unlikely however'.

Colonial administrative officer Jones (1945:19) is more certain about Lobengula's fate. Under the pseudonym Mhlagazanhansi, he writes that 'from the full story, as it has come to us through the official investigation, it is possible to reconstruct the circumstances and conditions of the King's end'. He concludes that Lobengula poisoned himself and was buried in a grave in Matabeleland.

This version is repeated some fifty years later in a widely-distributed national guide to the Matopos. Curator of Antiquities C. K. Cooke writes in this guide that Lobengula

died as a fugitive and was buried at Malindi having, it was said, taken poison. How sad it is to think that only the grave, far from the haunts of the ancestral spirits, may be all that remains of Lobengula, second and last king of the Amandebele. (1992:16)

The fate of king Lobengula is a politically important event both for Ndebele-speakers and for western authors. Lobengula's death or disappearance marks the end, if not of the Ndebele nation as an idea, at least of the Ndebele state as a political entity. It is an event that is incorporated in people's memories throughout Zimbabwe. In contrast to the western authors' diplomatic handling of the early colonisers, Nyathi treats these head-on as invaders. He shows an interest in unifying the Ndebele as a people and lessening social tensions among Ndebele-speakers. In his account, Mzilikazi and Lobengula are the ancient kings of all Ndebele, whether of Nguni, Sotho, or Shona origin.

When Pathisa Nyathi says that Lobengula did not die and that the whites, therefore, never defeated the Ndebele, he is representing an inclusive Ndebele history in a public-spirited way. He identifies with the Ndebele, and his representation reinforces an Ndebele-speaking reader's identification with the Ndebele. His account of Ndebele history is both history and myth that aspires to increased political power for the Ndebele. In contrast, Glass, Hughes and van Velsen, and Jones not only state that Lobengula died, but also explain how, when, and where Lobengula died. Yet, they differ internally regarding the cause, the time, and the place of Lobengula's death. These authors are positioned within superior nation-states and superior academic communities. Their publications reinforce the existing power relations between these nation-states and communities, on the one hand, and the Ndebele as a people, on the other.

Pathisa Nyathi has come back to the fate of King Lobengula many times in written texts, for instance, in two chapters in his book on the period 1993-1995 (Nyathi 1996). His argument is that Lobengula did indeed cross the Zambezi River and migrate to the Ngoni in what is today northern Zambia. This is the interpretation that Hughes and van Velsen, in the 1950s, noted 'the Ndebele

mostly hold'. When talking about Lobengula, Nyathi often uses the term disappear, as many other Ndebele-speakers do. 'When you disappear it is not the same as saying you are dead', Nyathi explains, 'it could mean you are dead, it could mean you are not dead'. 'Personally, I am convinced that the fellow crossed the Zambezi into northern Rhodesia, Zambia today'.⁶

I once asked a Mrs Mloyi about the fate of Lobengula. Mrs Mloyi is an old woman who lives in Nkayi, not very far from the Shangani River where Captain Wilson and his men were killed while they were tracking Lobengula.

I cannot say that Lobengula died. My father-in-law just said that Lobengula disappeared. By then people were telling lies. There were some people who tried to find his grave. ... My father-in-law used to get beaten because of it, because he knew that Lobengula didn't die, and up to now nobody knows where his grave is – not even one person.⁷

Whether Pathisa Nyathi and other authors are conscious of it or not, there is something more at stake here than an academic debate about 'getting the facts right'. When Nyathi writes on Ndebele history, he is simultaneously engaged in a self-defining project, and when western authors write on this history, they are engaged in a project of defining others. Pathisa Nyathi exclaims, 'You have only defeated a people when you have captured their king. This is why the Ndebele say the whites never defeated them.' In contrast, in the 1950s, when Hughes and van Velsen write that the site of Lobengula's alleged grave has been declared a national monument, they are writing about the nation of Southern Rhodesia, and they are making Lobengula's death both public and consistent with the British victory over the Ndebele.

Since independence in 1980, the Zimbabwean government has had an interest in building national unity, unfortunately by very brutal means. In the guide to Matopos, Cooke (1992) concludes not only that Lobengula died as a fugitive by taking poison and that he was buried at Malindi, but that he was the second and *last* king of the Ndebele, thereby ruling out the possibility of installing one of Lobengula's existing relatives as a third king.⁸ This downplaying in the national literature of a subaltern representation of Ndebele history is seen by some Ndebele-speakers as part of the Zanu-PF government's continuous oppression of them. After the British conquest, they, as Ndebele, simply are not allowed to have a supreme leader, neither in the past, nor in the present.

Ndebele history and Lobengula in national schoolbooks

Although Pathisa Nyathi writes in opposition to the 'colonial library', he also writes against what we may call the Zimbabwean 'national library', and especially against how national history textbooks portray Ndebele history and King Lobengula. For any nation-state, mass-education is a means to legitimise the state, to foster its citizens, and to shape national unity (e.g., Anderson 1983). After independence in 1980, the Zimbabwean government prioritised educat-

ing teachers and rebuilding the school system. In this process, new history textbooks were also written, many of which are still in use today. Among them are Seidman, Martin, and Johnson's (1982) *Zimbabwe: A New History* (Book 1) for primary schools, Neil Parsons's (1985) *Focus on History* for secondary schools, and Proctor and Phimister's (1991) *People and Power* (Book 1) for studies at O-level.

Before they may be used in the schools, history books must be approved by the Ministry of Education. This means that they to a certain degree control which books are produced for educational purposes. There are three major publishing houses in Zimbabwe that publish history textbooks: Zimbabwe Publishing House, College Press, and Academics Books Zimbabwe. Publishing houses are aware that they must produce books that are in line with government representations of history when they contract authors to write history textbooks for the schools. They need their profits, and the market for schoolbooks is lucrative. As a result, all the different schoolbooks on history are rather standardised. On the one hand because of the colonial heritage, and on the other hand because of the present government's policy on education.

Many of the Zimbabwean history textbooks share three characteristics. The first characteristic is that they all are influenced by British history writing and colonial sources. Indeed, many schoolbooks are written by British or western authors, such as the ones mentioned above. As a consequence, in these books the descriptions of the end of the Ndebele state are similar to the colonial representations. In the same way as the colonial state had an interest in the death of Lobengula and the end of the Ndebele state, the Zimbabwean state has no interest in making Lobengula a hero or in resurrecting the Ndebele state or nation.

Although some of the Zimbabwean schoolbooks portray Mzilikazi and his followers in a more favourable way than is done in the colonial accounts, many schoolbooks share the colonial view that Lobengula died soon after the Ndebele conquest, and that with that, the Ndebele nation came to an end. For example, in *Zimbabwe: A New History*, Seidman et al. state that having fought off Captain Wilson's force at the Shangani River, Lobengula 'died soon after, in January 1894' and that 'his burial place was kept secret' (1982:54). And, in *People and Power*, Proctor and Phimister write that after having retreated towards the Zambezi River, Lobengula 'died a little while later in 1894' (1991:219). In the latter book, pupils are also given an assignment to 'write an obituary for Lobengula', as if to make sure they understand that Lobengula is dead and buried (even if some Ndebele-speakers say his spirit is guarding them).

The second common characteristic of Zimbabwean schoolbooks is that they are all very anti-colonial, often with a strong leaning towards Marxist theory. The series *People Making History* (Book 1-4), for example, is advertised as having been written from a 'socialist perspective'.⁹ In this series, secondary

school pupils are taught about socialist history and historical materialism (Book 1), and later, when studying for O-levels, about pre-capitalist modes of production in Africa, about various forms of capitalism, and, finally, about revolution and socialist transformation (Book 3). Within this discourse, the Ndebele state is sometimes portrayed as having been based solely on cattle rearing and raiding, and without the ability to produce enough food for its people.

In *Focus on History*, Parsons writes about the Mfecane wars and the Ndebele state:

The Mfecane Wars saw the rise to power of a new type of state in Southern Africa – the military state. Men under the age of about thirty had to be soldiers. They lived together in regiments and did not stay with their families. In other words, they did not help to produce food or goods but only consumed them. The only food they produced was by hunting and herding ... So the military states raided and conquered the surplus production of other people. (1985:81)

The old, colonial image of the Ndebele as cruel warriors is still evident in some of these Zimbabwean schoolbooks, not always in words but often in pictures. These pictures are almost always reproductions of colonial drawings and photographs of the Ndebele. Although some of these pictures are commented on in such a way that the pupils understand that they are colonial images of the Ndebele (e.g., Proctor and Phimister 1991:59), other pictures are simply reproduced, perpetuating the colonial image of the Ndebele as cruel warriors, and passing it on to new generations of Zimbabweans (e.g., Garlake and Proctor 1985:160, and, especially, Barnes et al. 1991:67).

Finally, the third characteristic of Zimbabwean history textbooks is that they are all strongly nationalistic, describing pre- and post-colonial times with pride, and colonial times as times of oppression. Some of these schoolbooks are, however, in Pathisa Nyathi's terms, rather 'pro-Shona' and 'not very kind to the Ndebele'.¹⁰ One example of the pro-Shona bias is Martin and Johnson's (1981) *The Struggle for Zimbabwe: The Chimurenga War*, which has been criticised for giving an overly one-sided, Zanu-PF point of view of the struggle for independence to secondary school pupils (see Bhebe and Ranger 1995:6). Another example is Parsons's conclusion in the chapter on 'the Mfecane wars and the Ndebele state' in *Focus on History*, which practically blames the Ndebele for the subsequent colonisation:

The new Mfecane states turned from production to destruction and from trading to raiding. They did not solve the crisis. They made the crisis worse. Instead of opening up a new period of development for Southern Africa, the Mfecane Wars (like the slave trading wars elsewhere in Africa) opened Africa up to a period of European development through colonialism. (1985:88)

For any government, mass-education is a means to foster citizens and subjects, and the use of history is an important tool for doing this. There is a continuous public debate in Zimbabwe about 'western' values replacing 'African' values,

and about the Zimbabwean youth forgetting their African past. The control of the production of Zimbabwean schoolbooks, and the standardisation of these texts as anti-colonial, socialist, and nationalistic, is an indication of this. Indeed, in 2001 it was decided that history should become a compulsory subject in school, and in Matabeleland it will replace the language *isiNdebele* as a compulsory subject. This has raised a number of questions among teachers in Matabeleland, among them, what kind of history will be taught in the future? Further, it makes it difficult for books such as Nyathi's works on Ndebele history in *isiNdebele* to reach a wider audience in the schools.

Contesting the past: power, education, and identity

To write history is a political activity in that the author is positioned in society and in the world, and from that position 'produces a relation between that which supposedly occurred in the past and the present state of affairs' (Friedman 1992b:837, see also 1995). Since a writer always represents the past from a subjective point of view, history is related to questions of identity. An author has to choose both which events to write about, and how to write about them. Moreover, various representations of the past, which have been published and distributed in books, influence people's memories of the past and shape different kinds of belonging in the present. Writers of history, Eric Hobsbawm (1992:3) has remarked, are always mixed up in politics, and they supply the raw material for ethnicity and nationalism.

Mzilikazi Khumalo's migration, from emerging Zululand in South Africa to what is today Matabeleland in southwest Zimbabwe, is a well-known story. It took place at a time when the British were colonising southern Africa, when Shaka Zulu was building his state, and when the Boers were setting out on their 'Great Trek'. The story of the migration has a beginning, a middle, and an end, it has main characters, and it has a geographical environment, as other stories do. Since the political intrigues, military battles, and state-building projects during this migration have been documented by many people, various historians have had a relatively rich material to work with. At the same time, since it is a story told by many people at different times and in various languages, there are several versions in existence.

Most representations of Ndebele history have been written either by British and other western authors, or by the authors of Zimbabwean schoolbooks. Lately, Ndebele-speakers have also started to give their view of Ndebele history. Within this framework, Pathisa Nyathi's presentation of Ndebele history is similar to what Mudimbe terms a memory-text, which validates a people's geography via the retelling of a genesis. Nyathi emphasises that the formation of the Ndebele people was largely a result of voluntary acts. He describes Mzilikazi as a man with the 'capacity' to build a homogenous state, a man who people 'joined' when they 'abandoned' their cultures. In Nyathi's representation, Mzilikazi's son Nkulumane is sent to the south rather than

'butchered', and Lobengula did not die but escaped; thus the whites never defeated the Ndebele.¹¹

Today, not only writers, but also many musicians and artists, purposely produce indigenous representations of reality as alternatives to colonial and Zimbabwean national representations (Eyre 2001). Of the various ways available to combat colonial and national representations of reality from a subaltern position, the representation of a people's genesis from their own point of view is perhaps one of the most effective. This is especially the case if the genesis is told in the vernacular language and distributed to school libraries. Pathisa Nyathi is clearly identifying himself with the Ndebele, and his representation of the Ndebele genesis greatly influences an Ndebele-speaking reader's identification with the Ndebele.

The colonial accounts of Ndebele history and their images of the Ndebele as cruel warriors may, to generalise a bit, be equated with what Mudimbe has termed 'the colonial library'. These representations are, in Mudimbe's words, fulfilling a political project by deciphering the African object and thereby domesticating it. Along the same lines, the national accounts of Ndebele history in Zimbabwean schoolbooks may be regarded as belonging to a 'national library'. These representations are influenced by British history writing and sources, and often perpetuate the image of the Ndebele as cruel warriors and disperse it to new generations of Zimbabweans. These schoolbooks, too, fulfil a political project: to redefine the colonial era in the national attempt to shape Zimbabwean citizens.

The writing of history is both dependent on values, because researchers are guided by different values when representing history, and on methodology, because authors follow conventions about sources, causality, and narrative form. As stated, an author's values comes to the fore most clearly when he or she deals with politically significant events that are difficult to reconstruct because evidence is scarce. The different accounts, of the origin of the Ndebele state, of the succession crisis within this state, and of the end of the state, exemplify this. In descriptions of these three politically charged events, the positions of 'Ndebele', 'colonial', and 'Zimbabwean' authors are especially apparent since evidence of what actually happened is scarce and contradictory.

These conflicting indigenous, colonial, and national representations of Ndebele history should not be regarded as merely a game. 'It is not a question of semiotics, of sign substitution, of the intellectual game of truth-value and museological authenticity', to cite Jonathan Friedman (1992b:845). 'It is a question of existential authenticity of the subject's engagement in a self-defining project.' This is why Pathisa Nyathi writes about the Ndebele past in his own language, in *isiNdebele*, and this is why he maintains that Lobengula 'disappeared' rather than died. Colonial and national representations promote certain other kinds of belonging, but Pathisa Nyathi's representation is both built on and fosters Ndebele identity. Ndebele-speakers who read Nyathi's

account of the Ndebele genesis identify themselves with the Ndebele, not with the British or their descendants, or with the Zimbabwean nation-state.

During the colonial era, Mudimbe (1994:xii) writes, Europe subdued the world to its memory. The representation of the Ndebele past is still to a large degree subsumed by the European past, as well as by the past of the nation state Zimbabwe. Today 'the Ndebele' struggle, as Pathisa Nyathi puts it, is to 'present themselves to the world the way they want to be presented, and not the way they have been portrayed by other peoples'.¹²

Notes

1. Apart from Pathisa Nyathi's (1994) first book on the Ndebele genesis, which covers the period between 1820-1893, he has published two additional books in *isiNdebele* covering the period 1893-1895 and the year 1896 (Nyathi 1996, 1999). In these two books, he develops some of the arguments laid out in the first book in more detail (taped interview with Pathisa Nyathi at his office in Bulawayo, 15 March 2000.) Parts of the third book appeared in English as a series of articles on the Ndebele rising in 1896, published in *The Sunday News* between March and June 1996. Apart from his trilogy on early Ndebele history in *isiNdebele*, Nyathi has also written some other English texts on Ndebele history and culture, among them *Traditional Ceremonies of the amaNdebele*, (2001), and *The Material Culture of the Ndebele*, (forthcoming).
2. An earlier version of Nyathi's 'memory-text' in relation to the 'colonial library' is published in Mai Palmberg's (ed.) *Encounter Images in the Meetings between Africa and Europe*. See Lindgren (2001).
3. Discussion with Mr. Siwela outside his house in Esigodini, Matabeleland South, 14 July 1995. In this remark, Mr Siwela associated the stone figure from Great Zimbabwe, the national flag, and the Zanu-PF with the 'Shona'.
4. Lecture by Pathisa Nyathi on 'The History of the Ndebele 1820-1893', tape-recorded at the Swedish Embassy in Harare, 25 March 1993.
5. Apart for these three events, Nyathi takes up several other debated issues in his account. For example, many authors hold that it is wrong to categorise the Ndebele as a 'Zulu off-shoot', since Shaka Zulu's kingdom was yet to emerge when Mzilikazi Khumalo left 'Zululand' (e.g. Ranger 1994:187). The relation between Mzilikazi Khumalo and Shaka Zulu is also debated, and some scholars regard Mzilikazi as an independent leader rather than Shaka's 'chief' (see Cobbing's (1976) discussion on the relation between Mzilikazi and Shaka). And many of the various people who joined Mzilikazi Khumalo did not 'abandon' their cultures. Indeed, the 'Ndebele' are today best understood as a conglomerate of people of many different origins (Lindgren 2002).
6. Taped interview with Pathisa Nyathi at his office in Bulawayo, 15 March 2000.
7. Taped interview in *isiNdebele* with Mrs Mloyi at her homestead in Nkayi district, 5 June 1995. Roy Mpofu, interpreter.
8. According to Cobbing (1976:417ff.), the Ndebele did in fact install a third king, Nyamanda, in 1896.

9. Garlake and Proctor 1985, Book 1, back cover. See also Garlake and Proctor 1987, Book 2, Barnes et al. 1991, Book 3, and Prew et al. 1991, Book 4. All have been reprinted and are used in schools today.
10. Taped interview with Pathisa Nyathi, 29 March 1997, at his home in Lueve, Bulawayo.
11. I have concentrated on three key events: the origin, succession crisis, and the end of the Ndebele state. There are, however, several other examples of how, compared to colonial representations, Nyathi describes Mzilikazi, Lobengula, and the Ndebele in a more positive way. For instance, in contrast to Hughes and van Velsen, Nyathi states that Mzilikazi was 'surveying the land' rather than that he had 'lost contact' with his people before reaching today's Matabeleland. He claims that Lobengula was 'fooled' into selling land rather than that he 'granted concessions' to colonisers, and he argues that, in 1893, the Ndebele were attacked by an 'invading force' rather than a 'Pioneer Column' (see Hughes and van Velsen 1954:49ff., and Hughes 1956:4ff.).
12. Taped lecture by Pathisa Nyathi on 'The History of the Ndebele 1820-1893', recorded at the Swedish Embassy in Harare, 25 March 1993.

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