

Violence and Xenophobia in South Africa: Shakespeare, Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka*, and Welcome Msomi's *uMabatha*: the *Zulu Macbeth*

by

Lekan Balogun, PhD
alaafinatiba@ymail.com
Department of Creative Arts,
University of Lagos, Akoka, Nigeria

Lekan Balogun holds both BA and MA (Distinction) in Theatre Art from the University of Lagos, Akoka, Nigeria and PhD from Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, in the broad area of postcolonial (Shakespeare) adaptation, African and Diaspora Literature, Theatre and Intercultural Performance. Lekan is also an award-winning playwright, who has written plays for the Royal Court Theatre, London; FLINN Theater, Germany; British Council, Nigeria; Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization in Nigeria (CBAAC) and the National Troupe of Nigeria among others.

Abstract

This essay examines the relevance of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* to the exploration of violence in South Africa by looking at literature, with a particular emphasis on its influence on Thomas Mofolo's 1931 novel *Chaka* and Welcome Msomi's *uMabatha*, a 1970 adaptation of the Shakespearean text.

Keywords: Adaptation, Mofolo, Msomi, oral tradition, Zulu.

Introduction

To be thus is nothing/But to be safely thus.

(Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 3.1.50-1)

The bones of the innocent speak to me, they say that the vicious dog must die.

(Msomi 186)

Scholars have sought the origin of violence in several historical events including the story of Cain and Abel in the Holy Bible, the foundational myths of the so-called pagan deities that were propitiated with both human and animal sacrifices, the Passion of Christ that Christians globally consider the ultimate redemptive act upon which Christian faith and its belief is predicated, the World Wars, religious extremism and ethnic cleansing, mid-twentieth century persecution of the Jews, and to the often overlooked corporal punishment that was deemed necessary for character formation (Carroll 1-2), as well as the heinous trans-Atlantic Slave trade. Through graphic pictures of violent occurrences in the Middle Ages, similar to those in contemporary society, and their portrayal in literary and dramatic texts as well as in related medium, Eve Salisbury et al draw attention to the “heightened public awareness about the precarious nature of human society” and the global “collective expectation of moments of apocalyptic demise” (1). They insist that their book shifts critical attention though not exclusively from “manifest public violence” to engaging the “dynamics of domestic and household violence”. Yet, their definition of “domestic violence” as those behaviour or actions that are social, psychological, economic, spiritual, physical, verbal, sexual—all of which are intended to injure another person in some way (2-3), speaks directly to the heart of the issue that this essay addresses, even as I aim to examine the violence that is both outright debilitating and public, and the place of William Shakespeare in the subject, most especially *Macbeth* of our concern.

R.A. Foakes laments the troubling problem that violence constitutes to the world by drawing attention to the way Shakespeare dramatizes violence. He cites the US response to the attack on the World Trade Centre on 11 September, 2001, in order to underline the impracticable reality of extirpating violence through violence. Although he acknowledges the difference in Shakespeare’s and today’s world, Foakes contends that of all other writers in history, Shakespeare’s plays offer us the best examples of literary representation of violence and its social discontent. He insists that a study of the trajectory of Shakespeare’s plays often follows such a discernable pattern which reveals a delight in the representation of violence for entertainment, to the exploration of the various problems of violence that culminates with a detailed study of human aggression in relation to restraint (2); and of the plays in the Shakespeare canon, *Macbeth* readily fits into such a description.

Shakespeare's shortest but one of his most gruesome tragedies, *Macbeth* is widely thought to have been first performed at the Globe in London in 1611, even though some argued that a performance of the play was earlier given in court in honour of James I, the new Scottish-born King of England on 7th August 1605. Meanwhile, critics have also identified a contrast in Elizabethan and Jacobean theatres, a contrast that was also reflected in Shakespeare's own plays since he wrote in both periods. In Dunton-Downer and Riding's opinion, while "Elizabethan theatre was in the main optimistic, the Jacobean theatre was often more sombre, moralizing and introspective." Moreover, a darker undertone that characterised works of his contemporaries was also reflected in Shakespeare's early Jacobean tragedies that dwell on "violence, evil, lust and madness overwhelming love, beauty and hope" (30), which are features of *Macbeth*, the story of Macbeth, a distinguished soldier but also a heroic and ambitious man who, acting on the prophecy of three Witches and urged on by his wife, murders his king, usurps his throne and unleashes a vicious reign of violence and terror upon his kingdom.

Whereas Dunton-Downer and Riding argue that while for *Macbeth* Shakespeare draws materials from Holinshed's *Chronicles*, he does not necessarily concern himself with the political as he does with presenting "the human flaws of his protagonist [and] his transformation from a noble war hero into a tyrannical murderer" (359), the play cannot be separated completely from politics. For its performance before James I, saw Banquo (James's ancestor listed in the play's cast) presented in good light, Scotland and England are seen coming under one rule and monarch, that is, James, while King Duncan's pronouncement of the death sentence on the leader of the rebel forces in the play, MacDonwald, also recalls the execution of Guy Fawkes, one of the zealots and conspirators who, in response to the oppression of Catholics in England, planned to blow up the Parliament on 5th November 1605 in the famous Gunpowder Plot: all of these events, whether fictional or historical, deal with violence of some sort.

Although Shakespeare's world was certainly different from the present day, as Foakes writes, "the basic issues [which propel violence in human society] remain"; thus, underlying not only the assumption that irrespective of our spatial and temporal location "our world is deeply troubled by the problem of violence" but also that we all have "the instinctual drives that prompt us to defend ourselves when attacked, to use violence if necessary to defend family, groups, or nation, as well as to maintain or improve status" (1-2). In this essay, therefore, I will focus on the political dimensions of *Macbeth*, and how the play has inspired South African literature with regard to the treatment of violence, including such works as Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka* and the adaptation of the Shakespeare text, Welcome Msomi's *uMabatha* (1970), the isiZulu adaptation of *Macbeth*.

Because of the focus of this essay, I will necessarily adopt a historiographic approach by using key events in relation to situations dramatised in *uMabatha*, to chronicle both the history of violence in South Africa and to understand the causes and nature of the violence in light of recent and recurring xenophobic attacks of immigrants by embattled South Africans. While it is recognised that literary creation is fictional but history is not, my assumption is that literature is infinitely tied to the destiny and socio-reality of the people, hence its' potential to mirror that reality.

For example, through the combination of mimicry, farce and scorching humour, Peter-Dirk Uys's *MacBeki: A Farce to be Reckoned With* (2009), another South African adaptation and parody of *Macbeth*, treats the issue of [political] power and its (ab)use in post-Apartheid South Africa, by mirroring the conflict among the ANC leadership without doing much to hide the identity of the personalities that it ridicules, especially Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma. While this version of the Shakespearean tragedy is solid in its rendition and appraisal of postcolonial in-fighting among the ANC leadership and its dramatisation of the people's disenchantment with social life in general, *uMabatha*, as we shall see, focuses on the culture of violence with which the country has now become identified.

South Africa, *Macbeth*, and the culture of violence.

"South African literature" writes Christopher Heywood, emerged "amidst confusion, violence and conflict [and] a long tradition of resistance and protest" (1). This story of violence, carnage and resistance goes as far back as:

[The] Dutch colonisation in conditions of slavery (1652–1806), followed by British colonisation (1806–1910) and the removal of direct colonial control by Britain in the ensuing half-century. A brief interregnum was formed by the British occupation of the Cape, 1795–1802. The period witnessed widespread movements against slavery and genocide, and mounting protest against segregation and its successor, apartheid. Main events in this period were: the weakening of Xhosa (southern Nguni) power through the eighteenth century division in the royal house and the Xhosa cattle-killing of 1856; the rise of the Shaka kingdom and the *mfecane/difiqane*, a state of war between the Zulu (northern Nguni) kingdom and its Sotho neighbours; the Afrikaners' Trek into the northern grasslands during 1835–8; industrialisation after the 1880s and the wars of 1899–1902, 1914–18 and 1939–45; and the publication of the automatically banned, anti-Hamite Freedom Charter(1955). (Heywood 20-1)

Over the years, South African writers have been appropriating in their literature this history of violent extremism, including the war of 1899–1902 the circumstances of which were only matched by those of the Sharpeville massacre (1960) and the Soweto student rising (1976). While these events were significant to the development of "Protest Literature" in South African literature in general, they are equally central to its chronicling of a state of existence that has "remained persistently hostile to exploitation and encroachment through colonial and post-colonial violence" (39,21), that is still being experienced in various forms in post-Apartheid South Africa of today.

Andre Brink opines that “Protest Literature” became relevant for South Africans to engage the horrors of the South African reality under the brutal system of governance that the Apartheid system represented. According to Brink, “within the context of a situation like the one in South Africa, writing can, and does, become effective as a revolutionary act in its own, peculiar, right” for it is “imperative for the voice of the writer to be heard” most especially to “explore and expose the roots of *human conditions* as it is lived in South Africa” (151-2; emphasis in the original). Similar to Brink, Njabulo Ndebele identifies “Protest Literature” as “a rhetorical form in which the three chief rhetorical aspects [are]: one, the identification and highlighting of instances of general oppression; two, the drawing of appropriate moral conclusions from the revealed evidence and; three, the implicit belief in the inherent persuasiveness of the moral position,” although he questions its validity in recent time, on the ground that “it appears to have lost its objective basis” hence becoming “a socially entrenched manner of thinking...[that] now reproduces itself uncritically” (60-4). However, since 1976 following the brutal slaying of protesting students in Soweto, an incident which gave “Protest Literature” much impetus as mentioned, not much appears to have changed.

Although “Protest Literature” mostly developed in response to the colonial imperialist war of attrition, it also benefitted from South Africa’s abundant Nguni-Sotho oral literature most of which were collated and written while the nineteenth century conflict that led to the fall of the Zulu and Xhosa kingdoms were raging. It also served as the pretext for modern South African theatre. A.C Jordan recalls the wealth of the repertoire of Nguni-Sotho oral traditional poetry “covering, in its subject matter, the whole range of human experience and emotion” possessing as it were a “strong dramatic element”. But, he also warns that “to draw a dividing line between the lyrical and the dramatic is impossible” (17). One of the beneficiaries of this strong, equally dramatic, oral genre is Thomas Mofolo in his novel, *Chaka* (1931), which was modelled on Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* that also inspired works by other African writers including Senghor, Chinua Achebe (*Things Fall Apart*, 1958), and Wole Soyinka (*Kongi’s Harvest*, 1961). Just as Mofolo drew inspiration from oral tradition, the dramatisation of power and the supernatural that was central to northern Nguni (Zulu) poetry especially the epic of Shaka also recorded in E. A. Ritter’s *Shaka Zulu* (1956), and Mazisi Kunene’s *Emperor Shaka the Great* (1979), Msomi’s *uMabatha* that we shall discuss fully presently, also drew inspiration from the same source in order to dramatise recurrent violence in South Africa.

According to Heywood, although Mofolo gathered information for his novel that tells the story of Chaka (Shaka) from the descendants of people who “had suffered grievously during the *mfecane/difiqane*, the wars among communities neighbouring to the newly risen Zulu nation in KwaZulu-Natal, around 1820,” he was also drawn to *Macbeth* that is based on damnation due to sorcery in order to create in Shaka of his imagination “a hero drawn into murder and violence through supernatural forces” (95). According to Mofolo in his novel, “Chaka’s whole life was filled with important happenings, with marvels and mysteries that the ordinary person cannot understand” (18). The most important of these events were Shaka’s encounters with the sorcerer Isanusi who often “emerges at critical moments in the hero’s life, guiding him and exacting the murder of someone precious to him as the price for omnipotence” (Heywood 95). Moreover, as Heywood contends, it is not out of place to read the murder of Desdemona by Othello in Shakespeare’s *Othello* in the way Mofolo presents Chaka’s

decimation of his beloved and people, the murder of Lady Macduff in *Macbeth* in the murder of Chaka's mother, Nandi, and/or the murder of the unfaithful Clytemnestra by her son Orestes in the *Oresteia*, by Aeschylus (95), for Mofolo profoundly deployed the classical model that he imposed on Shaka's epic in order to reinterpret South Africa's dynamic, but equally vexed, history of violence.

There are, indeed, several parallels to *Macbeth* in this Zulu epic story and in the life of Shaka, who was, like Macbeth, also thought to have been met by Isangoma, who prophesied that "You are a man. Already I see a chief of chiefs" (qtd in Fischlin and Fortier 164). According to Mofolo, the witch-doctor of Bungane --- like the Sangomas in Msomi's *uMabatha* --- also predicted extraordinary future for Shaka at childhood: "[t]he events which will take place around the life of this child are of great importance; they are weighty matters" (14); and, as an adult, he was protected by the mystical power of witchcraft possessed by Isanusi, who acted as his guardian angel (54). Shaka consequently executed many Zulu leaders including his arch-rival, Zwibe and also defeated several groups which he brought under his control in order to establish the Zulu nation. In *uMabatha* when Mabatha contemplates the murder of Dangane and thinks that he hears a voice tell him "All your days, Mabatha, men will hunt you like the cowardly jackal" (Msomi 176), we are reminded of the prophecy of Shaka's witchdoctors regarding the aftermath of his conquests. Also, when Mafudu tells Mabatha while both men clash at the end of the play, "[Mabatha] your hands are steeped in blood of thousands of our people of KwaZulu that you have sent to our ancestors" (186), we are equally reminded of Shaka's brothers' reason for assassinating him.

Although *Macbeth* inspired Mofolo's *Chaka* (as well as Msomi's *uMabatha*) which also drew from Nguni-Sotho oral literature that developed from a history that was given much impetus by violent extremism, the same history does not exclude Shakespeare, who was introduced more than a century earlier into South Africa in a very brutal fashion when Khoisan traders were forcefully evacuated from their abode and rendered homeless in Cape Town, in order to build the Sir George Yonge Theatre (the so-called Africa Theatre) where *Henry IV* was premiered in September 1801. Having arrived under such a violent and oppressive circumstance, Shakespeare has remained identified with violence: with a presence that was quickly asserted through the form of Western education foisted on the people, and with his works that were read in South African schools and which became a weapon for the colonialist to "perpetuate the Manichean binaries of white/black, light/darkness, heaven/hell, good/evil binaries frequently invoked in *Macbeth*" (McMurtry 325). These events were symptomatic of the eventual ideological posture behind the Bard's tragic plays, especially during the Apartheid era and shortly after wherein, for example, a published edition of *Macbeth* given out to Black matriculants stresses, in details, the idea of order and hierarchy as well as the concept of "superior" power (Orkin 238), that is identified to be a part of the colonial imperialist agenda.

In Msomi's *uMabatha*, we are confronted with the same question of order, not in terms of colonialist attempt to subjugate the colonized but of how to bring peace to a society torn apart by many decades of violence. As a postcolonial text, and in the spirit of postcolonial studies, *uMabatha* positions itself as an "anticipatory discourse, looking forward to a better and as yet realized world" (Williams 93), in its appropriation of Shakespeare's story of Macbeth in order to dramatise a turbulent era in South African history, an era that continues to recall and replay itself even in modern times.

Msomi's *Umabatha*, Criticism and the Exorcism of Violence

Msomi wrote *uMabatha* in 1970 on the instance of Professor Elizabeth Sneddon, the then Director of the Natal Theatre Workshop Company (NTWC) and Head of the Department of Speech and Drama, University of Natal in Durban, South Africa, where he had initially planned to enrol for studies in the White-dominated school but could not due to the Apartheid policy in place. Sneddon had seen Msomi's previous plays, *Mntanami Nomhlangano* (My Child Nomhlangano) and *Qondeni*, which explore the violence in South African townships as a result of urbanization. She thought these plays didn't do much to depict Zulu people in good light. She then suggested that Msomi "prepare a play that presented his people in a more worthy light...and drew his notice to the many parallels existing between Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and the tribal history of the Zulu" (Stuart qtd in McMurtry 311). Msomi agreed with Sneddon's suggestion of *Macbeth* exactly because he also thought "the story of Macbeth would lend itself well to the Zulu idiom" (ibid). The "Zulu idiom" in question is, on the one hand, the story of the east coast of Southern Africa in the early 19th century during the reign of Shaka and, on the other hand, the recurrent spate of violence that has come to characterise South African life; hence, the play's subtitle: "Zulu Macbeth" is fitting.

Msomi resituates *Macbeth* within the spatial and temporal framework of Zulu culture, in *uMabatha*. Two army generals returning from battle: Mabatha (Macbeth) and Bhangane (Banquo) are met by the Sangomas (The Three Weird Sisters), who prophesied future events that Mabatha acted upon by killing Dangane (Duncan) and seizing the crown, with the support of his wife, Kamadonsela (Lady Macbeth). In order to perpetuate himself in office, he also orders the killing of Bhangane and his household including Kamakhawulana (Lady Macduff) and household but Mafudu (Macduff) manages to escape. He returns later with an army alongside Dangane's two sons: Makhiwane (Malcolm) and Donebane (Donalbain) who had earlier fled for fear of their safety to Swaziland (England) and the East (Ireland) respectively. Mafudu fights and kills Mabatha and then restores order into Zululand by ensuring that Makhiwane is crowned after his father.

In characterisation generally and with the female characters in particular, Msomi also incorporates historical personalities from South African life into his play. Kamadonsela did exist and was known in South African/Zulu history during the Shaka era "as a woman of unscrupulous ambition" but was neither married to Shaka nor his brother, Dingane (McMurtry 313); while Shaka's wife, Pampata, was his ablest and most ambitious war counsellor, thereby suggesting that, Msomi's Kamadonsela is an amalgam of historical

“Kamadonsela” and Pampata respectively; however, the most significant change to characterisation that foregrounds the play in “Zulu idiom” is the introduction of the Sangomas, who replace Shakespeare’s Weird Sisters, even as they underline with their presence the Zulu “earthy ontology” and shows Zulu belief (as in other African cultures), that humanity emerged from the earth. Unlike the Weird Sisters however, the Sangomas are not witches who use *abathakathi* (power/forces of malicious and discarnate evil in Zulu cosmology), but diviners and healers. As understood in Zulu culture, the Sangomas are mortals, some of whom usually undergo *ukwethwasa*, that is, training or apprenticeship to learn their art. In *Macbeth*, while the witches appear “[in] thunder, lightning, or in rain” (1.1.2) and in disappearing, “they made themselves air, into which they vanished” (1.5.2); in *uMabatha*, “they became shadows of the night” (172), blending into the earth from which they first emerged (Wright 101).

uMabatha has however been criticized for being both a less-than-palatable version of its Shakespearean hypotext and a misleading rendition and conveyor of Zulu culture and belief. According to Sarah Mayo, while Msomi uses the Sangomas (his most important introduction to Shakespeare’s play) to offer to his audience the logic of the cultural translation of the play’s Scottish environment into his own, he also “perpetuates unfortunately a post-colonial version of this misreading through the uncontextualized performance of divination practice before a Western audience that is ignorant of the difference between the figure and/or function of the sangoma and witches in Zulu culture” (190). For this seeming “misreading” of Zulu culture and what appears to be preference for commercial success than accuracy of cultural re-presentation, Mayo believes that *uMabatha* is “less a translation of Shakespeare than a translation of Zulu-ness that is simultaneously not a translation at all, but a false confirmation of Western preconceptions about what it means to be Zulu” (ibid). Also, much of the reviews of *uMabatha*’s NTWC’s 1972 presentation, courtesy of Sneddon, failed to see the play in light of its political relevance to South Africa’s continued problem of violence. Instead the reviewers only highlighted what they considered to be the play’s failure to match up to the linguistic quality of the Shakespearean hypotext and European performative style (see; McMurtry 315-20).

However, aside from the failure of Western critics to understand the play’s broad political significance, their reviews did not also consider what David Coplan terms the “principle of synesthetic interconnection” that defines some aspects of the nature of African performances as well as the ritual connotation under which the aesthetic elements of *uMabatha* is particularly subordinated. This principle, according to Coplan, determines “the flow of meaning, translation of images, and co-ordination of expression between various visual, aural and tactile media including dance, song, mime, poetry, narrative, costume, and ceremonial enactment” (9) that Msomi has turned Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* into in the adaptation, the reason why he asserts that his play is rendered in “Zulu idiom”. To ignore this fact, therefore, is to overlook “the continuity between expressive and instrumental action, which effectuates identity and social structure” including the failure to grasp how “the theme and performance mode [are] in response to specific historic contingencies” (Coplan 9-13).

Of importance in this essay, then, are those “historic contingencies,” that is, how Msomi uses *uMabatha* to explore the violence and xenophobia in his society, and to comment on them. And, in order to approach the play with the sense of “total engagement” that Khumalo suggests, one necessarily requires an understanding of the play’s political metaphor that addresses itself, through the ritual imagination that Msomi brings to bear on Shakespeare’s story, to the three stages of South African history: precolonial, colonial/Apartheid era and post-Apartheid period respectively.

The Sangomas are in fact central to the reading of the play in this light. Although *uMabatha* follows Shakespeare’s plot and echoes his poetry in many scenes, the play is also distinct through its own metaphor, most notably represented by the Sangoma. At their first appearance, the Sangomas claim to be meeting at a place, “where the earth is trodden flat with stamping and rejoicing,” and, shortly before meeting Mabatha and Bhangane, they spit venom “to the spirits of darkness and misfortune” in order to “cloud the clear water with blood” and “spread the shadow of venom between the sun and the new day” (168-70). Metaphorically speaking, the two scenes describe the pressure that South Africa has been subjected by many years of “pounding” and invasion by all sorts of forces that had unleashed wanton brutality on both the land and its people, hence, demonstrating how *uMabatha* travels “in terms of its spatial history, its traversing of the spaces of the country and of the world outside” (Gunner 260). Moreover, in Swaziland where he fled to after his father’s brutal death, Makhiwane tells Mafudu, “The calabash is broken. The beast is let loose and there is blood on the gate” (183), which suggests that the balance of the Zulu world of the play is dismantled, thus creating in effect, a social and political disruption caused by the violent seizure of peace and stability that is reminiscent of the turbulence in the real-world of the South African society.

In the last three hundred years or more, South Africa has been turned into a battlefield: a territory fought over before and during Shaka era; a site of brutal conflict among imperial powers who fought themselves in order to control the land’s natural resources during the colonial era; and there are the questions of decolonisation and institutional power and race politics all of which are central to the South African experience currently. Needless to mention that the country is also at a time where it is dealing with the disillusionment of a generation that was born expecting transformation and change and freedom as their birthright, the recurring violent extremism as reflected in the economic and physical violence the people are subjected to and, most especially, the xenophobic attacks of immigrants by South African nationals, whose feeling of insecurity stems from the inadequate resources that have failed to meet the population explosion in post-Apartheid era.

Meanwhile, as it must have become clear from my argument so far, pre-colonial South Africa is mostly identified with Shaka’s heroic. Several sections of the *izibongo* (Sotho praise poetry) are devoted to recounting the legendary warrior’s great deeds including how he expanded his territories through unusual military skill and also brought a fragile order and peace to an erstwhile badly fractured society of people; the story also mentions the amazing way in which Shaka defeated British forces alongside his Zulu adversaries while creating the Zulu nation, although the Zulu nation he managed to establish and sustain during his short

reign was thrown into renewed violence after his death in the hands of his half-brother, Dingaane, who was also brutally murdered by one of his own brothers (See: Mofolo 1931; Ritter 1955; Kunene 1979). Prior to Shaka's birth and era, the entirety of Zulu territories including the Nguni (Zulu and Xhosa), were made up of numerous aggressive and warring groups linked together in a line of relationship that includes "the ancient hunter-gatherer and early pastoralist Khoisan (Khoi and San) and their modern descendants, the Coloured community of the Cape; (b) the pastoralist and agricultural Nguni and Sotho (Nguni–Sotho), arriving from around the eleventh century C.E; (c) the maritime, market-oriented and industrialised Anglo-Afrikaner settlers, arriving since the seventeenth century; and (d) the Indian community, arriving in conditions of servitude in the nineteenth century" (Heywood 1). But, it is Shaka's story that continues to resonate in contemporary South African history and politics.

In *uMabatha's* opening night at the Civic Theatre in Johannesburg, South Africa, on 18 May 1995, the former President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela who was in attendance, also recalled the importance of Shaka to South Africa's recent history. He mentioned that, "there was no better way to highlight both the problems of, and the vast opportunity for, change from so many years of apartheid... [*uMabatha*] illustrates vividly the universality of ambition, greed and fear. Moreover, the similarities between Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and our own Shaka become a glaring reminder that the world is philosophically a very small space" (qtd in Coleman 165). Coming at the heels of that production where Mandela made the speech was the national debate on whether to ban both the spear and the shield (also used as visual aspects of the performance by actors in the play) that are very popular as a reminder of Shaka's military exploits and the material representation of Zulu identity; while the Shaka Zulu family, located in the present-day Melmoth, KwaZulu-Natal province in South Africa, is "very happy because [Msoni] never deviated from the traditions and the customs of the Zulu people" (Newstock 76), more so because, to them, Msoni chose to mirror the infighting of the Shaka royal family through Shakespeare, the genius, cultural icon and pinnacle of Western literary tradition.

The conflict and violence during colonial South Africa that *uMabatha* dramatises include the ones that involved the imperial/colonial powers and the quest to control Zululand and its resources, and the consequences of the events on South Africans. Heywood recalls the arrival of "settlers from Holland, England, France, and Germany, in the seventeenth to twentieth centuries. Horses, wheeled vehicles, and firearms ensured early military triumphs. Strife between the colonising communities led first to the Trek of 1835 from the eastern Cape into KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng (Transvaal), and the Free State, and later to the fratricidal conflict between Afrikaners and English imperialism in the wars of 1879–80 and 1899–1902" (3). According to Mary Benson, the Dutchman, Jan van Riebeeck, was the first to arrive South Africa in April 1652, to establish a slave trading base for the Dutch East India Company at the Cape of Good Hope, while the British arrived years later under the pretext of slave abolition, followed by the Boers (Europeans of German, Dutch and Huguenot descents).

However, the discovery of diamonds in the British-controlled Kimberley in 1867 and gold in the Boer Republic of the Transvaal in 1886, marked the beginning of serious conflicts between these colonial powers, thrusting South Africans into a sudden and terrible situation: the so-called Boer War of 1899 broke out because the European countries were threatened by the British encroachment of their own territories (Benson 6-27). Needless to stress that the way and manner in which these imperial powers divided the land and engaged themselves in brutal hostilities in order to exert control over their territories were reminiscent of the tribal structure that Shaka had earlier united into a Zulu nation, Msomi reminds us of this tragic situation with Mafudu and Makhiwane's allied forces from Swaziland and the East which invade Mabatha's kraal as "a swarm of locust" (185). Although the allied forces aim to rescue Zululand from Mabatha's tyranny, considering that Swaziland and the East are foreign lands in the context of the play, the metaphor applies to the historical invasion of South Africa by both the British and the European settlers.

Even though the British were in time able to exert near-absolute control over the whole of South African lands and resources, the social rupture caused by colonial control of the land generally did not end with the British government's seeming victory over the other colonial powers. Rather, it marked for South Africans most especially the beginning of bloody conflict between them and the British--- a conflict that would last a century and beyond. Earlier on in 1879, the Zulu and British were engaged in the famous Anglo-Zulu War, which the former lost although they had earlier defeated the British at the Battle of Isandlwana. By 1910, after a truce had been reached by the two warring camps and with the promise of educating the African population, the British cleverly imposed on the native White minority rule: the Native Land Act of 1913 which was used to seize lands allocated to the South Africans and then turn the natives into reservoirs of migrant labour; thus, through settler invasion, the British seized the lands and imposed taxation that forced the South Africans to work in mines.

As the example of the Marikana massacre which I discuss below shows, violence from this type of forced labour continues to rock present-day South Africa. In recent history however, the Apartheid (segregation) system of governance has remained the most telling consequence of the confrontation of the British with South Africans. Apartheid started during the colonial era under the Dutch Empire and continued after the British took over Cape of Good Hope in 1795, but became formally enforced as a system of racial segregation in South Africa after the implementation and enforcement of several acts and laws, by which racial discrimination was institutionalized in 1948. From this time to 1983, series of other laws were imposed on South Africans: millions were violently removed from their homes and forced into segregated neighbourhoods, non-white political associations were proscribed, Black people were deprived of their citizenship, schools and social facilities were separated between the White minority and the majority African population, among many of such impositions that made life generally unbearable for the South African populace (Benson 80-224). Predictably, these events sparked off violence and brutality that resulted in the imprisonment and death of many South Africans. Even as the history of British economic and political control over South Africans is intimately linked to violence and brutality, Shakespeare's entry into the country as the symbol of British cultural hegemony was also linked to brutality as I have earlier mentioned.

As it were, the reviews of *uMabatha* that I also mentioned earlier, suggest this historical polarity, making it possible to consider the views as a commentary on the nature of violence which Shakespeare, as a symbol of colonial cultural capital and economic aggression, has come to represent in South Africa. As Mabatha in thoughtful reflection says, “It is a cold wind that blows and takes our breath away” (186). In dramatizing how the English Bard continues to play a “deeply compromised role in larger histories of imperial violence” as Johnson contends, *uMabatha*’s relevance to depicting violence in post-Apartheid South Africa becomes more palpable, particularly in the way the people also abuse themselves ironically, by using the same tools formally used against them by the colonialists.

Post-Apartheid South Africa’s politics should necessarily be viewed from 1994 after the inauguration, as the first democratically elected leader of the country, of Nelson Mandela. As Marcia Blumberg writes, the “Mandela years” saw “an initial period of euphoria, patience and hope” which was however gradually replaced from 2001 (towards the end of Thabo Mbeki’s first term in office) by the “second interregnum” and the “desperation to break silences”; it was a period that was plagued by morbid symptoms of disaffection and political intrigues (Blumberg 139-40). This latter period, including Thabo Mbeki and the present leader, Jacob Zuma’s regime, is marked by “idiosyncratic interregnum” even as it oscillates “between reconciliation and disaffection” (Farred 64), owing to the systematic revival of the Apartheid system of segregation and oppression, as well as “the increasingly tenuous division between classes in the new South Africa, oppression [which] occurs economically, but also culturally and socially as indigenous customs and knowledge are displaced by characters that revere and adopt colonial culture[and] embrace the social codes and mannerisms of European or apartheid colonizers” (Rose 2). As Anne-Maria Makhulu also contends, “National reconstruction, though a corollary of liberation, has been much complicated by the liberalization of markets in the past decade or so, fostering the conditions for perpetuating rather than eradicating inequality” (553). In 2012, although writing separately, both Bill Schiller and Brent Meersman identify the same pattern in the social situation in South Africa, of how “inequality was starting to track class not racial lines” and of “the Stats SA in 2008 [which] confirmed that the highest inequality is now within the African black population” owing to the visible institutionalisation of the class structure and the increasing gap between the wealthy and poor South Africans, as well as the systematic entrenchment of another form of brutal Apartheid economic inequality policy.

Two significant historical incidents well capture the description of the country as I have painted it thus far: the massacre of miners at the Marikana platinum mine situated at Nkaneng near Rustenberg, and the economic malfeasance called the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), supposedly introduced by the South African government to facilitate economic equality among the South African populace. These two incidents cast a heavy shadow over the supposed post-Apartheid “nation-building” plans of the Mbeki and Zuma governments. Of significance is the way the incidents at Marikana and the BEE both represent, and continue to engender, brutal violence among South Africans including their effect on foreign nationals in the country who are continually attacked and brutalised in a series of xenophobic attacks against them by embittered South Africans.

Marikana mine, owned by Lonmin a British company based in London, has its operational headquarters in Johannesburg, South Africa, with many influential South Africans in its employ. At the time of the tragedy now known as the “Marikana massacre,” the mine was trading at US\$1,600 an ounce, yet the mine workers were subjected to pathetic conditions of work (use of open-pit latrine and inadequate housing) superintended by the local South African politicians and businessmen. Mabatha’s claim in *uMabatha* that he hates “to see Mafudu die for a cause that is not [Mafudu]’s own” after he has ordered the assassination of Mafudu’s wife and household “because of [Mafudu’s] ill thinking” (186), illustrates how the oppressor often blames the oppressed for being oppressed. Similar claims were made by South African politicians against their own people: the striking miners that were killed by the police.

Moreover, as Arnold Wehmhoerner writes of the neo-colonialism that the condition of works at Marikana represents, the company had by 2014 achieved revenue earnings from sales estimated at \$965 million from an operating income of \$52 million, which suggested that if there was any difference in 2012 when the miners went on strike over better condition of service, safety and welfare package among other demands, it would have been minimal. However, as an indicator of the socio-economic and political state of the country which grapples with violent extremism and cruelty of all kinds, the miners’ protests were met with police brutality that led to the death of 44, most of whom were shot in the back by the police (Wehmhoerner 1-2). Thus, the “Marikana massacre” is considered by many reports as the single most lethal use of force by South African forces against civilians since the Sharpeville massacre of 1960, even as it represents how inequality is fast becoming a feature of national life, how the gap between the rich and the poor continues to widen, how foreign investors who are backed by local politicians use the police (the South African Police Service (SAPS) which claims that its members were threatened by the protesting worker), as a violent tool to silence and oppress the poor, and how South Africans themselves also oppress and brutalise foreigners in what has come to be identified as xenophobia which I discuss below.

In fact, the incidents that led to the “Marikana massacre” also recall the operation of the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) which was established, according to Coplen Rose, to serve as “a necessary...intervention to address the systematic exclusion of the majority of South Africans from full participation in the economy” through affirmative action, private-sector agreement and an “increase in the proportion of South Africans owning and managing businesses” (4). In practical reality however, BEE has proved to be everything else but a mechanism used by South African politicians and entrepreneurs to exploit the poor population, “BEE businesses [are] engaged in ruthless labour practices, while ‘tenderpreneurs’ further impoverish (if not actually kill) the poor” (4). Thus, contrary to the initial plans of its establishment, BEE failed in its task to rebalance the historical inequalities experienced in the country. Rather, BEE operation “brought to light an apparently new form of subservience to the economic system of capitalist power” (Robert Young 45), thus dimming irreparably the initial hope which greeted the collapse of Apartheid represented in South Africa.

In *uMabatha*, Msomi uses various incidents as a metaphor for the kind of fear and trepidation that are unleashed on the country by the combination of the socio-political and economic conditions that I have earlier discussed, including Kamadonsela's strange sickness that illustrates as a point of reference the effect of the negative use of cosmic power (both by her and the Sangoma), and its broader social and political ramification as evident in Danganane's murder by Mabatha. In reporting her condition to Mabatha, her maid, Isahakozi says "She is sick. There is poison within her that she must vomit out" (184); another maid, Isalukazi, who was present when Kamadonsela seizes the hide around her loins and tears it with her teeth in the manner of a wild animal, says she is sick because, "there is some animal caged within her that fights to be free" (184), and prior to this scene, Inyanga similarly describes her condition that, "She has a strange sickness...a wild animal has entered her" (182). Meanwhile, in Swaziland where he fled to after his father's brutal death, Makhiwane tells Mafudu, "The calabash is broken. The beast is let loose and there is blood on the gate" (183): while "the beast" in question is Mabatha, the animal imagery and its associated violence recall the strange and inhuman Apartheid policy, including the perpetuation of such cruelty in contemporary South Africa. Mabatha confirms that he is "the beast on the loose" after his meeting with the Sangomas who tell him to beware of Mafudu, whom he threatens to attack, "I will strike, swifter than the crouching lion who smells the terror of his prey. I will destroy Mafudu's kraal, his wife, his children, all, and waste no time" (182). Throughout the play, Msomi deploys such animal symbolism of viciousness and violence; his metaphor, then, for South African socio-political situation is palpable and strong and. As I have discussed so far, while the Marikana tragedy and the failed BEE represent aspects of the failures of successive post-Apartheid governments including the brutal economic policy that encourage violence, Msomi's picture of a beast on rampage also describes recent situation in which foreigners are gruesomely attacked by South African nationals in what global media has termed "xenophobia" in the country.

Xenophobic violence against immigrants by South Africans shows the effect of institutionalised racism that the African National Congress-led government of Nelson Mandela fought doggedly to stamp out, but which his successors appear to glorify, if not sanction. South Africa is "a society that remains deeply divided, perhaps more so now than at any time since 1994" writes Chris Gibbons; a statement that captures the recurrent trend of the brutal attacks being carried out by South Africans against immigrants. Since Mandela's inauguration as the elected President of South Africa in 1994, the country has witnessed an unprecedented rise in immigrants' population in the country. Predictably, the influx of people into the country has led to increased urbanization but inadequate facilities to meet the exigency. Following the opening up of markets to capitalist ventures which the failed BEE has come to represent and the imbalances that have been created as a result, South Africans and the immigrants have been pitched against themselves in the search for better living conditions in the cities, thus creating in effect a situation of stiff competition for survival that has degenerated over time into full-blown violence.

As recent events have shown clearly, xenophobia in South Africa is one of the problems of post-coloniality that is equally associated with the politics of the dominant group versus the dominated one following independence. This is in addition to the feeling of superiority on the part of the host and, worst of all, the disillusionment following the failure of successive governments. These factors have coalesced into an intense hatred by South Africans towards immigrants who now come to represent the social failure that they (hosts) wish to extirpate at all cost. As Nyamnjoh aptly puts it:

With inspiration from the apartheid years, South Africans sometimes subject *Makwerekwere* [a derogatory term used for a black person who cannot demonstrate mastery of local South African languages and who hails from a country assumed to be economically and culturally backward in relation to South Africa] to the excesses of abuse, exploitation and dehumanising treatment on the basis that they have the ‘wrong colour’ to invest in citizenship. The rights of undocumented *Makwerekwere* are particularly severely circumscribed as they are reduced to living clandestinely and being exploited with virtual impunity by locals enjoying the prerogatives of citizenship. (xx)

Needless to stress, xenophobia underlines the consequences of violence to peaceful co-existence and social cohesion as much as it reveals the failure of government to live up to its expectation by meeting the needs of its citizenry. Blumberg observes that a number of recent South African productions “stage successful acts of reconciliation” by articulating powerfully South Africans’ disenchantment with continued oppression especially by minority groups after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and thus drawing attention to the role that theatre (as well as literature) plays in creating awareness about the morbid symptoms of South African life of today (qtd in Rose 1). *uMabatha* also belongs to this class of theatre and literature that speaks directly to its own reality by exploring the present through the past, and underlining the fact that it should not be read as a parallel of a Scottish/Shakespeare past dramatised in *Macbeth*, contrary to the Western reviewers’ perception that we earlier mentioned.

Conclusion

Like Mofolo’s *Chaka*, Msomi’s *uMabatha*’s social relevance is indeed underlined by the ways in which it dramatises and condemns violence that has come to represent South Africa in recent time--- violence that runs through from prior to and after the Shaka era, to the various colonial/Imperial powers’ domination of the country, the British colonial system and the Apartheid policy, and to the continuation of such an inhumane system of rule (represented in part by the Marikana tragedy and the failed BEE) by successive South African leadership, particularly Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma.

The result of the failures includes the xenophobic attack of foreign nationals by embittered, disillusioned South Africans. Generally speaking, in re-imagining the violence associated with *Macbeth*, in the way Mofolo creates Shaka of his imagination from oral tradition that he sourced from the people, Msomi presents in *uMabatha*, his Zulu version of the Shakespearean tragedy, a play that not only dramatises violence but also suggests that South Africa, like many other countries on the continent, is a nation in search of a peaceful future. This is the more reason he ends his play in a highly-significant fashion that aims to establish peaceful political dispensation:

Makhiwane: The dog who snarled and showed his teeth
Is dead. And the evil one, his wife,
Has taken her own life
...
All those loyal warriors who fled
From the tyrant's cruel hand
Can return and live in peace
The spear has broken

(He throws the spear into the ground. Makhiwane is crowned the new king...Drums and chanting. Warriors exeunt, led by Makhiwane)

Works Cited

- Benson, Mary. *Nelson Mandela: The Man and the Movement*. London: Penguin Books, 1986.
- Blumberg, Marcia. "Reconciling Acts: Theatre Beyond the Truth and Reconciliation Commission" *SA Lit Beyond 2000*. eds. Chapman, Michael and Margaret Lenta. KwaZulu-Natal UP, 2011.137-158.
- Brink, André. "After Soweto" *Writing in a State of Siege: Essays on Politics and Literature*. Summit Books, 1983.128-153.
- Carroll, Stuart. *Culture of Violence: Interpersonal Violence in Historical Perspective*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Coleman, David. "Welcome return for playwright" *Natal Mercury*, 5 July, 1996. Web. 7 September, 2016.
- Coplan, David. "Dialectics of tradition in South African black popular theatre" *Critical Arts* 4.3 (1987): 5-27.
- Coplen Rose, J. "Class Movements in the New South Africa: Post-Colonial Politics, Neocolonialism, and Mimicry in Pieter-Dirk Uys's *MacBeki A Farce to be Reckoned With*" *Modern Languages and Literatures Annual Graduate Conference* (2013):1-31.
- Dunton-Downer, Leslie and Alan Riding. *Essential Shakespeare Handbook*. Dorlin Kindersley, 2004.
- Farred, Grant. "Bulletproof Settlers: The Politics of Offense in the New South Africa" *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*. ed. Mike Hill. New York UP, 1997. 63-78.
- Fischlin, Daniel and Mark Fortier. *Adaptations of Shakespeare: A critical anthology of plays from the seventeenth century to the present*. Routledge, 2000.
- Foakes, R.A. *Shakespeare and Violence*. Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Gibbons, Chris. "Analysis: The Spear, The Prophet, 'Them' and 'Us'." *Daily Maverick*. 21 May 2012. Online
- Gunner, Liz. "Resistant medium: the voices of Zulu radio drama in the 1970s" *Theatre Research International*, vol. 27, no. 3 (2002): 259-274.
- Heywood, Christopher. *A History of South African Literature*. Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Jordan, A.C. *The Wrath of the Ancestors*. Lovedale Press, 1960.

- Johnson, David. *Shakespeare and South Africa*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.
- Kunene, Mazizi. *Emperor Shaka the Great: A Zulu Epic*. Heinemann, 1979.
- Makhulu, Anne-Maria. "The 'Dialectics of Toil': Reflections on the Politics of Space After Apartheid" *Anthropological Quarterly* 83.3 (2010): 551-580.
- Mayo, Sarah. "'What witchcraft is this!': The Postcolonial Translation of Shakespeare and Sangomas in Welcome Msomi's *uMabatha*" *Postcolonial Interventions*, vol.1, Issue, 2 (2016): 189-226
- McMurtry, Mervyn. "'Doing Their Own Thane': The Critical Reception of *uMabatha*, Welcome Msomi's *Zulu Macbeth*" *The Critical, Ilha do Desterro Florianopolis*, 36 (1999): 309-35.
- Meersman, Brent. "The Problem is Not Black and White." *The Mail & Guardian*. 22 January 2012.
- Mofolo, Thomas. *Chaka: An Historical Romance*. Trans. F.H. Dutton. Oxford University Press, 1931.
- Mortimer, John. "Zulus on the loose" *Observer*, London. 9 April, 1972. Online
- Msomi, Welcome. "*uMabatha*." *Adaptations of Shakespeare: A critical anthology of plays from the seventeenth century to the present*. eds. Fischlin Daniel and Mark Fortier. Routledge, 2000. 164-87.
- Ndebele, S. Njabulo. "Redefining Relevance" *South African Literature and Culture: Rediscovering the Ordinary*. Manchester University Press, 1994. 60-74.
- Newstok, Scott. "'Why *Macbeth*?' Looking back on *Umabatha* after forty years: an interview with Welcome Msomi" *Shakespeare in Southern Africa*, vol. 21 (2009): 73-80.
- Nyamnjoh, F. B. *Insiders and Outsiders. Citizenship and Xenophobia in Contemporary Southern Africa*. Zed Books Ltd, 2006.
- Orkin, Martin. *Drama and the South African state*. WUP, 1991.
- Ritter, E.A. *Shaka Zulu: The Rise of the Zulu Empire*. The University of Virginia Press, 1955.
- Salisbury, Eve, Georgiana Donavin, and Merryl Llewelyn Price. *Domestic Violence in Medieval Texts*. University Press of Florida, 2007. 1-27.
- Schiller, Bill. "How South Africa's dream turned into a grim reality" *The Star.com*, 8 December 2012.

Stuart, Carroll (ed). "Introduction" *Cultures of Violence: Interpersonal Violence in Historical Perspective*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.1-43.

Stuart, Huntley. "Umabatha" *South African Panorama* 17.8 (1972): 36-39.

Uys, Pieter-Dirk. *MacBeki: A Farce to be Reckoned With*. Peninsula, 2009.

Wehmhoerner, Arnold. "The Marikana Massacre: the history of post-apartheid South Africa?" *Federation for European Progressive Studies*, Cape Town: South Africa (2012):1-5.

Williams, Patrick. "Outlines of a Better World: Rerouting Postcolonialism" *Rerouting the Postcolonial: New Directions for the New Millennium*. eds. Janet Wilson, Christina Sandru and Sarah Lawson Welsh. Routledge, 2009.

Wright, Laurence. "Umabatha: Zulu Play or Shakespeare Translation?" *South African Shakespeare in the Twentieth Century. Special Issue of the Shakespeare International Yearbook* 9 (2009):105-30.

_____. "Umabatha: global and local" *English Studies in Africa*, vol. 47, Issue 2 (2004): 97-114.

Young, Robert J. C. *Postcolonialism: A Historical Introduction*. Blackwell Publishing, 2001.