

the creation of the One Big Union and to the entrance of women into the machine shops. We need to know much more about the breakdown of the attempts to unite workers and farmers. There is important work to be done on comparing cities such as Winnipeg and Montreal, two cities in which Jewish socialists and women played especially important roles on the left, and cities in which urban, immigrant socialists attempted to broaden a struggle while literally encircled by a rural and religious political culture. The inclusion of northern Ontario in the equation is a must, and the inclusion of Newfoundland and the north would represent valuable additions as well. We need to know much more about the 1920s, with less emphasis on the destruction wreaked by mass culture on working-class culture and more attention paid to the ways in which the working-class held on to its values and fought the imposition of an upper-class defined conception of British citizenship. It is a tall order, but the editor and authors of *Workers' Revolt*, the criticisms here notwithstanding, have raised the bar and it is now up to the rest of us to respond to the challenge.

Peter Campbell  
Queen's University

Carolyn Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

Carolyn Hamilton's book on Shaka Zulu is not a study of the early nineteenth-century ruler, but of the invented traditions that have centred around him. She reveals the various ways in which the image of Shaka has been used in political struggles in eastern South Africa, from his lifetime right up to the present day. Her work has real relevance to contemporary politics, addressing the extreme bloodshed in Natal in the late 1980s, and the possibilities of drawing on the region's "heritage" to create the reconciled "rainbow nation" in the early 1990s.

A central contention of her book is that "invented" traditions are not crudely the product of white "inventors" in the African colonial context, but are rather "contested" or "negotiated" traditions. African actors are also involved in the creation of invented traditions. White colonisers could only manipulate indigenous symbols within the limits set by local understandings of those symbols – and these local understandings were themselves the product of contestation and negotiation within and between African communities. The meanings of the image of Shaka Zulu in contemporary politics reflect and continue this process.

Hamilton is explicitly challenging the thrust of recent, influential, scholarship, which emphasises the appropriation of indigenous symbols and systems by the colonial project. This scholarship, represented here by the

ethnographers John and Jean Comaroff, but in a lineage traceable to Gayatri Spivak, illustrated how far “traditional” African systems had been irrevocably altered by the colonial encounter, to the extent that they were no longer available to analysis. Indigenous symbols, expressing ideas about religion, authority, and history, were harnessed in service to the “civilising” mission of the colonialists. Moreover, these appropriated symbols became ossified, both in writing and in institutions, within the overall context of the colonial worldview. Their essentially flexible nature, which encapsulated a large part of their meaning, was thus lost forever; that which remained now represented something different.

This approach significantly advanced our understanding of the colonial encounter, and gave added depth to the idea of invented traditions. By revealing the “modern” nature of much that passes for “tradition,” we have been able to trace the creation of the “traditional” as a force in contemporary political ideology. We have also become better able to recognise imperialism in its hegemonic, as well as its coercive, forms.

Nonetheless, Hamilton identifies important weaknesses in applying this approach too crudely to “traditional” symbols. She demonstrates in this text both the need for, and the possibility of, a more nuanced and historically-sensitive understanding of the symbols of “tradition” in Southern Africa. The main thrust of her criticism is to demonstrate that, in certain historical circumstances, colonisers could not simply reshape existing African institutions in terms of their own criteria. Instead, they had to adopt them in a form that reflected indigenous meanings as much, or more, than colonial meanings, “with significant regard to their full cultural complexity” (207). In such circumstances, the invention of tradition was confined within parameters set by African, not colonial, symbolic systems.

To demonstrate this argument, Hamilton makes detailed examination of four episodes during which the image of Shaka was reinvented in reaction to specific historical circumstances: the development of white trading and settlement at Natal during and after Shaka’s reign; the attempt by Theophilus Shepstone to appropriate the symbolism of Shaka’s power at the end of the nineteenth century; the research by John Stuart into Zulu history at the start of the twentieth century; and, at the end of the twentieth century, a TV series and theme park depicting Shaka as working in co-operation with the white settlers.

Shaka represented both order and despotism, and it was the readiness to use despotism to enforce colonial order that made Shaka a suitable symbol for adoption (but not appropriation) by colonial powers. The key historical moment was when Shepstone, the Secretary for Native Affairs in Natal, began to exploit indigenous images of Shaka. Hamilton’s detailed history comes to an end with this representation of Shaka becoming embedded in the work of John Stuart, an official in the Natal Native Affairs Department during the early twentieth century, laying one of the foundations for the segregationist

discourse which dominated most of the twentieth century. The later period, which includes some wonderful material and analysis, works primarily to demonstrate the continuing resonance of conflicting interpretations of Shaka in the present day.

Hamilton looks first at images of Shaka created by factions of the white communities during his lifetime, and by both whites and Africans in the years immediately after his assassination. It was these images which were available to Shepstone. The contexts in which they developed determined the symbolic limits of "Shaka." Careful consideration is given to the possibilities of reconstructing contemporary African images of the king, from later oral records. These demonstrate a core set of claims about Shaka's life and character, which seem to remain constant, despite discrepancies in the oral accounts attributed to the differing political agendas behind the oral traditions.

Hamilton then moves on to the end of the nineteenth century, when Theophilus Shepstone, the Secretary for Native Affairs in Natal, hampered by tight financial constraints, utilised an invented tradition of Zulu kingship in order to assert authority over the African communities within the province. The essential element of this image of Shaka was his imposition of order and authority over a large number of African communities. Shepstone needed to lay claim to that authority, since he lacked the resources that might have enabled him to impose "civilization" on African communities in Natal. The outward manifestations of Shaka's heritage, as devised by Shepstone (including a cloak supplied by an amateur dramatic society) were colonial inventions. However, Hamilton convincingly demonstrates that the effective meaning of Shaka's legacy at that time had arisen out of internal politics within the African communities in Zululand since Shaka's assassination in 1828. Moreover, it was these politics which made Shaka as an image available to Shepstone, since conferring the status of Shaka onto Shepstone also suited factional purposes within Zululand. African politics set limits on the "Shaka" to which Shepstone could lay claim.

The rest of the book develops this theme. Invented tradition is not monolithic, but can contain paradoxes and contestations within it. An invented tradition may have many meanings, and may change its meanings over time. However, invented traditions are limited, to a greater or lesser extent, by the historical circumstances of their invention. Study of those historical circumstances can reveal how and why limits on invention have effect. In particular, the African sources of these "traditions" impose restrictions on what can be appropriated and used by colonial powers. These restrictions are both discursive (they cannot transgress existing meanings attached to "traditional" symbols) and historical (they cannot ignore the historical reality which gave rise to the tradition). A very important corollary of such limitations, as Hamilton demonstrates, is that the pre-literate, indigenous, basis for colonial "traditions" can be recovered, as the traces remain in the written records and

invented traditions.

In the course of developing her argument, Hamilton makes valuable contributions to several specialist debates within Southern African historiography. "The Invention of Tradition" is, of course, itself the invention of a specialist on Southern African history, Terence Ranger, who introduced the term to historical studies jointly with Eric Hobsbawm, in their edited collection of the same name. As well as building on this aspect of Southern African historiography, Hamilton authoritatively addresses the question of the *mfecane*, the putative scattering of peoples as a result of Zulu expansion at the turn of the nineteenth century, which has inspired much debate and revisionism over the past decade. Her work illustrates that this was, indeed, a period of intense political upheaval, but that this was the opportunity for, rather than the result of, Zulu expansionism. Moreover, Hamilton refutes the argument that government in the early nineteenth century Cape viewed Shaka as a dangerous and expansionist tyrant. She demonstrates that this picture of Shaka was invented by traders in Natal as a ploy to get assistance from the Cape for their trading activities, quickly rescinded, and not taken seriously by those in authority. The image of the blood-thirsty and expansionist Zulu is, rather, a product of the period after Shaka's death, when the Cape authorities wanted to annex territories adjacent to Zululand. Failure to recognise the historical circumstances behind views of Shaka in the archival record has led, as Hamilton shows, to a failure to understand the *mfecane*. Moreover, her work on Shepstone contributes usefully to the study of the whole region, since Shepstone's protégés took influential posts in other territories, most notably in Southern Rhodesia.

Hamilton's argument has significance well beyond the confines of Southern African studies. Her emphasis on the historical dynamics of invented traditions is salutary. Her insistence that local politics and cultural systems place limits on the invention of tradition carries lessons for all those who, following Edward Thompson, aim to rescue their subjects from "the enormous condescension of posterity." Her methodology, too, has wider application. In particular, she demonstrates how it is possible to make effective historical use of written records of oral traditions, passed on within a non-literate community. Hamilton carefully reconstructs the motivations, method and historical circumstances that led to the collation of oral traditions about Zulu history by John Stuart. This enables her to illuminate the history lying behind the traditions, as well as the transformations of that material by the informants and by Stuart. All of these are part of her story of the invention of the Shaka tradition. This analytical approach is helpful to historians dealing with collections of oral and folk traditions across the world.

The elegance and comprehensiveness of Hamilton's study of these "discursive moments" suggests that we are coming towards a resolution of the great intellectual upheavals in Southern African studies posed by the challenge of

post-modernism. We see how hegemony operated, but we also see its weaknesses. The task of re-reading the archives as discursive accounts of colonial power seems to have few surprises left for us. Hamilton's book is inspiring, not least, because it suggests a life beyond post-modernist relativism. Having unraveled the complexity of discursive elements in the exercise of power, perhaps there is a case for returning again to the material elements influencing historical events.

In any event, it seems that a new consensus is emerging regarding the role of colonial discourse in the history of Southern Africa. Hamilton's work can be put alongside, for example, Paul Landau's work on missions in Botswana, or Jocelyn Alexander's on chiefs in Zimbabwe. Landau shows that Africans could appropriate white symbolism as effectively as whites appropriated African symbolism. Alexander shows, like Hamilton, that the symbols of African authority did not necessarily lose their original meanings when appropriated as "invented traditions" by colonial powers. There are significant continuities between the symbolic systems of the pre-colonial, the colonial and the present. To note this is not to deny colonial influences on indigenous institutions, but to recognise their limitations. It is perhaps only now, at this distance from struggles for majority rule in Southern Africa, that we can begin to pay serious attention to the ineffectiveness of the white states, rather than emphasising their injustice.

Diana Jeater  
University of the West of England

Donald Caton, *What a Blessing She had Chloroform: The Medical and Social Response to the Pain of Childbirth from 1800 to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999);

Jo Murphy-Lawless, *Reading Birth and Death: A History of Obstetric Thinking* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1998).

Reviewing these two very different books illustrates the wide variety of scholarship within what might loosely be called the Social History of Medicine and in particular the breadth of opinion amongst those interested in the history of childbirth. While there have been enormous intellectual developments within the History of Medicine which, in general, have led towards new theoretical approaches and greater interdisciplinarity, the histories of "great men," "great discoveries" and "great institutions" (upon which the discipline was founded) still appear to have a place. These two texts represent the opposite ends of this intellectual spectrum: Murphy-Lawless combines historical enquiry with feminist theory and medical sociology to produce a