

# Mfecane debates

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Has the mfecane a future? In recent times historians known as “ Africanists” revived the topic of the mfecane in the early 1960s and it was well exploited and was also used to justify certain aspects of Apartheid. The word ‘ mfecane’ is a characterised product of the South African liberal history that is used by the Apartheid regime state to legitimate South Africa's racially and unequal land division. In the 1970s the mfecane has become the most widely used terms in south African history and historical literature . Finding the original meaning of mfecane could somehow be merely impossible reason being from on angle the mfecane was the Nguni diaspora which from the early 1820s which took Nguni raiding communities such as Ndebele, the Ngoni and Gaza and over more southern regional parts of south-central Africa which reach as far as Lake Tanzania. Astonishingly some of the selective use or the actual invention of evidence has produced the myth of an internally-induced process known as the black-on-black destruction centring on Shaka Zulu.

A re-evaluating from the ‘ battles’ of Dithakong and Mbolompo suggests very different ideas and enables us to decipher the motives of subsequent historiographical amnesias and knowledge. After about 1810 the black peoples of southern Africa were caught between intensifying and converging imperialistic thrusts: one to supply the Cape Colony with labour; another, at Delagoa Bay, to supply slaves particularly to the Brazilian sugar plantations. The flight of the Ngwane from the Mzinyathi inland to the Caledon was, it is argued, a response to slaving.

But they ran directly into the colonial raiding-grounds north of the Orange. The (missionary-led) raid on the still unidentified ‘ Mantatees’ (not a reference to MaNtatisi) at Dithakong in 1823 was one of innumerable Griqua

raids for slaves to counter a shortage of labour among the Cape settlers after the British expansionist wars of 1811 to 1820. Similar Griqua raids forced the Ngwane south from the Caledon into the Transkei. Here, at Mbolompo in 1828, the Ngwane were attacked yet again, this time by a British army seeking ‘free’ labour after the reorganisation of the Cape's labour-procurement system in July 1828.

The British claim that they were parrying a Zulu invasion is exposed as propaganda, and the connexions between the campaign and the white-instigated murder of Shaka are shown. In short, the African societies did not generate the regional violence on their own. Rather, were caught within the European net and were soon transformed over lengthen periods in reaction to the attentions of external plunderers. The core misrepresentations and false understandings of ‘the mfecane’ are thereby revealed; the term, and the concept, should be abandoned.

A closely related, though different, mfecane centres on the perspectives on the Zululanders and the figured mindset of Shaka. many of those in Zulu cultures and traditionalised South Africans has come to a conclusion become a revolutionary process internal to Nguni society which leads to the development of the ibutho and the tributary mode of production. Shaka is seen as a heroic figure providing a positive historical example in South African history and created a sense of self-respect for black citizens in South Africa today.

But inside these wider definitions another mfecane there are more specifically referring to the impact of Nguni raiders (the Nedbele, Hlubi and Ngwane) on the Sotho west of the Drakensberg. The mfecane encompassed

many great fields of African self-destruction which extended from the Limpopo all the way to Orange. It has allegedly depopulated vast areas of what had become the Orange Free State, the Transvaal and, with the aid of the Zulu, Natal, which thus lay empty for white expansion. At the time many Africans dispersed and survivors clustered together and within a period of time formed enclave states of Lesotho, Swaziland and Botswana.

A term known as the 'general distribution of white and Bantu landownership' in South Africa was soon established. On these African-created foundations rose the Bantustans or Homelands of twentieth-century Southern Africa. Contradictions coexist within mfecane theories with contrasts and the definitions of timing. As an era of history the latter 'trans-orangian' mfecane begins in about 1820 and ends in either 1828 with the departure of the Ngwane, or it had ended in the early mid-1830s with the arrival of the French missionaries and later followed by the Boers.

The Zulu-centred mfecane on the other hand begins with the career of Dingiswayo at the end of the eighteenth century and continues until the end of the Zulu kingdom which ended in 1879. Sub continental mfecane does continue until the 1890s. In short, I would say there is no one definition of the mfecane. It can be referred to people, to an era or to a process of internal development. It could be destructive, constructive; anti-African; pro-African; geographically narrow, or sub continental. Not all of these contradictions can be resolved as a whole, but there is a need for answers and its existence requires an explanation, since their origins of the mfecane are by now very much buried in the heart of South African historiography. Firstly, my mission of this essay is attend to the origins of the mfecane, how

it started and give brief overviews and backgrounds between those who played a very important role in the era of Shaka Zulu and the period of the mfecane. My intentions are also to unravel the development within the mfecane as it has been handed down in South African historiography.

Many writers have had a hand in creating the mfecane. The poor taste of the dish derives from the poor quality of the initial ingredients. In the second part, I suggest some lines of attack on the pillars of mfecane mythology, and leave it to the reader to decide whether the concept is worth salvaging. Julian Cobbing known best as a being against the mfecane and the critical analysis of south African history, he also had he's own point of the subjects of who the important characters like Shaka Zulu had and the effects, whether he did or did not control the southern part of Africa or whether he played a minor role in the mfecane era.

The the evolution between the ibutho amongst the Ngune, the wars between Zulu and the Ndwandwe traditions, and the rise of the Zulu kingdom are half a century after Bryant, had made integral to the mfecane. Shaka becomes a hero and Mzilikazi a creative state-builder. 'The movement as a whole' has also expanded to bring in Swaziland and the career of Mswati, Gazaland and the careers of the Soshangane and Mzila, as well as the Ngonistates of Mbelwa and Mpezeni. The validity of both these conceptual and the geographical expansions with their linkage to the original concepts of the mfecane has so far still remained unremarked.

As to the linkage of the mfecane to 'an understanding of the contemporary Situation of the' Omer-Cooper's analysis is (unsurprisingly)subjective. It is also highly contradictory. In the one direction, ' the traditions towards the <https://assignbuster.com/mfecane-debates/>

Mfecane have retained their fascination because they provide a bulwark of self-respect, a shield against the crippling of inferiority, encouraged by the structure of white dominated society. ' Whereas in the other, 'the battles and massacres of the Mfecane being accounted for the general distribution of white and Bantu landownership [in South Africa today]. This is the latter that a few Africans would claim and accept. Omer-Cooper's two claims for the mfecane have in turn underpinned two incompatible to the mfecane traditions in the 1970s. The more liberal part of the various traditions is located mainly within in Europe, the United States and in The South African English-speaking universities. There are list historians of Africa who have adopted ideas of Omer-Cooper of the mfecane as a positive revolutionary idea.

Before 1966, and the publication of Zulu Aftermath general text books on African History had not yet pick up the mfecane. By 1970 it was being integrating virtually all of them. July's over simplifications are typical. 'The driving force,' he wrote, 'was land hunger caused by population pressure among migrating cattle keepers and the vehicle was the military outburst known as the Zulu Mfecane. ' In 1969 Leonard Thompson discussed a concept known as the difaqane in the influential Oxford History of South Africa. W. F. Lye has built an academic career on the mfecane.

He wavers between Ellenberger's older version in which Matiwane and Mzilikazi are denigrated and the newer one in which they are talented state-builders. R. Kent Rasmussen in an analysis of the early Ndebele state describes the state as an unambiguously positive manner. In the 1960s and 1970s the mfecane was updated. Inside South Africa it was adapted to explain the origins, if not the Creation of the black homelands and societies,

at a time when South Africans badly needed all the help they could get in justifying this processes both to an international audience and to their own up and upcoming generations.

At the same time, bizarrely, historians mainly outside South Africa, not having noticed the use in which the mfecane was being put south of the Limpopo and hitched the mfecane to an alternative history that is stressed the glories of the Africa's past and attempted to provide for Africans self-respect, defences against European suggestions that the African past was sterile, barbaric and static. Racist interpretations have been shielded from view by the Africanist one. The result must surely bewilder any student who attempts to definite mfecane with any concise coherence.