

THE DENUNCIATION OF SHAKA ZULU AND THE SCAPEGOATING OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES FOR UNEMPLOYMENT CRISIS BY BOTSWANA GOVERNMENT AND CORPORATE ELITES

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Abstract

In August and September 2020, the Minister of Basic Education and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Botswana Stock Exchange critiqued the teaching of Shaka Zulu and history in schools, reflecting a government narrative that linked the humanities and social sciences graduates to youth unemployment. Their comments sparked public backlash for being short-sighted. This paper argues that the Minister and the CEO ignored the fact that military strategies and leadership from historical generals can inform modern business, even during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, discussions in business studies and entrepreneurship, including those from Botswana, reference Shaka Zulu, who also appears in mathematical sciences and operational research. Blaming the history subject and the humanities/social sciences for the unemployment crisis oversimplifies the issue. The marginalisation of history in Nigeria and South Africa caused various societal problems that prompting these countries to reintroduce history as a mandatory subject in 2022 and 2023. The World Economic Forum praises institutions like Stanford University and MIT for integrating humanities to enhance the Fourth Industrial Revolution, a perspective that has yet to resonate with Botswana which prioritise STEM over the humanities and social sciences. The paper argues that the crisis of youth unemployment in Botswana is rather rooted in corruption and bureaucratic inefficiency.

Key words: Botswana, Shaka Zulu, History, corruption, unemployment, entrepreneurship, corporate leadership, curriculum, skills mismatch, STEM, STEAM, bureaucratic inefficiency.

1.0 Introduction

In 2020 a cabinet minister who was also Minister of Basic Education, Honourable Fidelis Molao, and the Botswana Stock Exchange Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Mr Thapelo Tsheole, criticized the teaching of Shaka Zulu and the teaching of the history subject betrayed their alignment with the government's narrative of attributing the rising youth unemployment to these disciplines. This paper argues that the Minister and the CEO, representing the government and corporate elite, show a lack of understanding of established business scholarship regarding the application of military strategies and leadership from renowned Western and Asian military thinkers to modern business practices, even during the COVID-19 pandemic. There is also substantial business literature on Shaka Zulu, and he is discussed in the contexts of mathematical sciences and operational research. Blaming history or arts and social sciences for unemployment in Botswana's stagnant economy is overly simplistic, with the true causes being pervasive elite corruption and ineffective government bureaucracy.

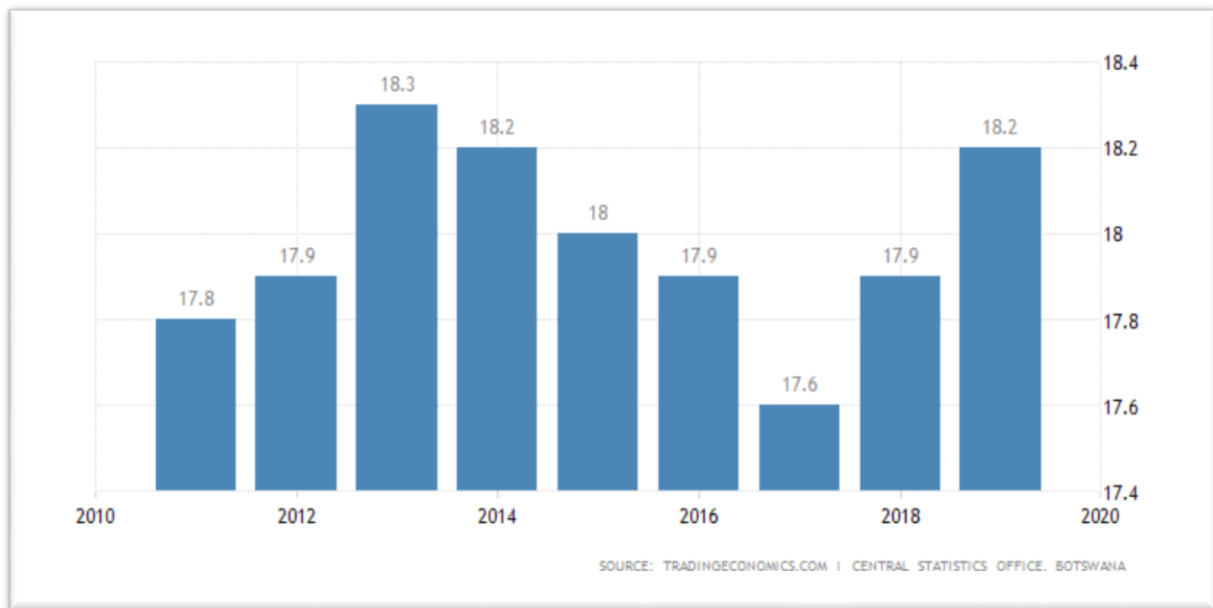
Botswana, which was one of the poorest countries in the world when it attained independence from Britain in 1966, progressed well in terms of economic development. By the early 1990s, the country was classified as an “upper-middle-income” society by the World Bank. The government was able to use revenue from diamond mining to provide services such as education, health, telecommunications, and welfare to the then impoverished population. However, poverty remained a major challenge in most parts of the country, and society also became characterised by significant economic disparities. Elite corruption and mismanagement by cabinet ministers, senior government officials, and those in parastatal enterprises began to take firm root in Botswana in the early 1990s (Good, 1994), and by the second decade of the twenty-first century, it had become endemic and systemic (Mogalakwe & Nyamnjoh, 2017). Transparency International (2024) defines corruption as “the abuse of entrusted power for private gains” and cautions that “corruption erodes trust, weakens democracy, hampers economic development and further exacerbates inequality, poverty, social division and the environmental crisis”. In early December 2020, Mokgweetsi Masisi, who became Botswana’s fifth president in April 2018, acknowledged that “corruption remains the biggest threat to the achievement of Botswana’s National Vision and the SDGs” (K, Masisi, personal communication, December 9, 2020).

By the new millennium, unemployment became a significant concern as university graduates joined the ranks of the unemployed. In September 2007, during a lecture at the University of Botswana (UB), President Festus Mogae was asked by Student Representative Council (SRC) president Mishingo Jeremia about measures to address graduate unemployment. His response angered students when he suggested they choose more marketable courses instead of “public administration and political science because you won’t find work... so you should make sure that you choose other disciplines where we need... nurses, doctors and engineers” (Setshogo, 6 September 2007). Meanwhile, the subject of history declined so much that a school history teacher had implied it was a discipline dying a natural death (Hosia, 27 March 2007). In September 2021, a ruling party parliamentarian questioned why public administration and political science were still prioritised at UB when the market was “saturated”.

A longstanding issue is the bureaucratic inefficiency or lack of implementation capacity on the part of government departments, with billions of money annually returned to the national treasury unspent. Former Cabinet Minister David Magang notes that in the 2012/2013 financial year, a whopping P4 billion (about US\$400 million) was returned to the treasury by various ministries. “Imagine what that P4 billion would have done to the economy had it actually been spent. How many jobs would have been created or maintained as a result?” (Magang 2014, p. 447). The lack of implementation capacity came under sharp focus in finance minister Thapelo Matsheka’s budget speech on 1 February 2021. He said, “the problem of ‘poor value-for-money’ associated with some Ministries has featured prominently in previous Budget Speeches, and is worth repeating here.... Coupled with this is the issue of poor expenditure outcomes; for example, an assessment of Public Investment Management by the IMF in 2017 revealed that 37% of public expenditure on infrastructure goes to waste in Botswana” (Matsheka, February 1, 2021).

Figure 1 is a graph of the unemployment rate in Botswana over a ten-year period from 2010 to 2020. It shows that by 2020, the unemployment rate in the country was almost 20% of the population; however, these official statistics are often seen as conservative estimates in some quarters. The unemployment rates of 19.8% and 17.9% from 2010 to 2012 were linked to the global economic recession that began in 2008 (Trading Economics, 2024). On the other hand, the peaks of 18.3%, 18.2%, and 18% from 2013 to 2015 were due to local factors, including insufficient economic diversification away from diamonds, as well as corruption and inefficiency (Trading Economics, 2024).

Figure 1: Unemployment rate in Botswana, 2010-2020



Source: Trading Economics (2024)

Government authorities argued there was a skills mismatch between training offered by the country’s tertiary institutions and job market needs. The government’s Tertiary Education Policy of 2008 aimed to move towards a “knowledge-based” economy. Upon becoming President of Botswana in 2018, Mokgweetsi Masisi emphasised the Fourth Industrial Revolution as a target for the education system and economy. Officials highlighted the need to prioritise and resource science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Some educationists advocate integrating arts into STEM, forming (science, technology, engineering, art and math) STEAM to produce well-rounded graduates with social values and transferable skills, including interpersonal relations, empathy, tolerance, patriotism, national identity, and academic competencies like critical thinking and presentation skills. For instance, international scholarship highlights the need for STEM students to engage with humanities and arts disciplines (TechNative, 2023), yet this is ignored by education officials in Botswana. Moreover, the World Economic Forum article, ‘Why the Arts and Humanities are Critical to the Future of Tech’, states that,

- In the 2022 edition of the Times Higher Education World University Rankings, two institutions renowned for science and technology [Stanford University and

Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the United States] topped the list for arts and humanities.

- These institutions recognize that we need a new generation of critical thinkers to guide us through the Fourth Industrial Revolution.
- New technology – particularly AI – is raising new questions about what it means to be a human being (World Economic Forum, 3 November 2021).

Perhaps, it suffices to note that corruption, mismanagement, and poor service delivery are not limited to Botswana but are major factors contributing to escalating youth unemployment in several Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries (Adjor & Kabelo, 2018), as well as Kenya in East Africa (Onchari, 2019).

2.0 Literature Review and Methodology

There is plenty of literature on the application of military strategies to business leadership and success. One book that is often cited is by the ancient Chinese military thinker Sun Tzu titled *The Art of War*. Sun Tzu is also credited for having pioneered the term/concept of “military strategy”. Other publications include *Leadership Lessons from the Ancient World: How Learning from the Past can Win You the Future* by Cotterell et al. (2006). These authors focus on how strategies of numerous ancient Asian and European military leaders can be applied to modern business for success. There are numerous publications on the applicability of Shaka Zulu’s leadership strategy and principles to business as demonstrated in the section 4.0 below. Feigen et al. (2020) published an article in *Harvard Business Review* with the title “Look to Military History for Lessons in Crisis Leadership” in which they relate business leadership and management during the contemporary COVID-19 epidemic. I elaborate on this article here.

In the era of COVID-19 when millions of employees lost jobs worldwide, Feigen et al. (2020) provide lessons from great historical military leaders to be learned and embraced:

- The first piece of advice is for business leaders to be decisive and not dwell on losses. For instance, after Napoleon invaded Russia and plundered its capital Moscow in 1812, Field Marshal Mikhail Kutuzov strategically abandoned Moscow to regroup and ultimately defeated Napoleon.
- Secondly, they emphasize that a business leader should be in the trenches alongside his troops or employees. “Great military leaders fight side by side with their soldiers as Hannibal did in the Second Punic War [218–201 BC]. The Duke of Wellington is said to have remarked that Napoleon’s very presence on the battlefield was worth 40,000 fighting men”.
- Agility is their third piece of advice and they justify it by saying that “Napoleon was famous for his laser-focused planning and obsession with time management. But Wellington beat Napoleon at Waterloo with agility—he famously moved constantly among the troops, repositioning whole armies on the fly”.

- Leading with confidence is the fourth piece of advice, and mood is indispensable because in a pandemic situation, workers, their families and the CEO are on the front line. Relating to military leadership we are told that “Great military leaders know they must lead with confidence underpinned by optimism”. An example given is that “At [the Battle of] Agincourt [25 October 1415], when many other commanders would have chosen to retreat, confident in his strategy and buttressed by his investment in new technology (the more accurate and powerful long bow), [King] Henry V [of England] turned and faced an army [French] three times his size. He had utter confidence in his team”.
- Fifth, a business leader is advised to communicate to inspire as British Prime Minister Winston Churchill “mobilized the English language and sent it into battle” during the Second World War from 1940 to 1945. However, a lot of information is to be avoided as it can cause confusion hence only enough information is needed to boost morale.
- The sixth piece of advice is to move leaders and tasks rapidly in emulation of military leaders who promote efficient commanders and gradually mentor struggling ones to succeed. “In this way, all leaders perform at their peak. Napoleon, Prussian Field Marshal Helmuth Von Moltke, and German General Erich Ludendorff all gave considerable latitude to their leading commanders and were quick to promote those who proved victorious”.
- It is also advisable to rest the troops to be refreshed and regroup which great military leaders are credited with doing, and this is the seventh piece of advice. “As we all work harder than ever during COVID-19, many of us glued to Zoom and a variety of screens, leaders need to make sure employees are rested, that weekends exist (if they’re not reinvented), and that, as summer approaches, ways are found to provide vital vacation time” (Feigen et al., 2020). However, COVID-19 led to frontline and essential service workers overworked with little or no time for rest.

The examples cited above are more explicitly linked to practical applications in business in section 4.0 below which focuses on the applicability of Shaka Zulu’s leadership to business. For methodology the paper utilises desktop research for qualitative analysis of the subject matter. Secondary sources, traditional media and social media discourses are made use of in the study. While there are many secondary sources on military strategy for business, only those focusing on Shaka Zulu were chosen for analysis due to length constraints. Shaka Zulu’s empire-building as a historical African leader in Southern Africa directly impacted Botswana (Hamilton, 1995) making his exploits relatable to the people of Botswana.

3.0 Making a Case for Teaching of History in Botswana Schools

This section advocates for teaching the History subject in schools and concludes with a direct connection between the value of history education and its practical implications for society and the economy. In many African countries the attainment of independence saw the promotion of history as the new post-colonial states sought to forge a new identity, create national pride as well as patriotism. As for Botswana the need to teach African history was

immortalized in the words of the founding President, Sir Seretse Khama, on 19 May 1970, just four years after independence, when he said:

We were taught, sometimes in a very positive way, to despise ourselves and our way of life. We were made to believe that we had no past to speak of, no history to boast of. The past, so far as we were concerned, was just a blank and nothing more. Only the present mattered and we had very little control over it... It should now be our intention to try and retrieve what we can of our past. We should write our own history books, to prove that we did have a past; and that it was a past that was just as worth writing and learning about as any other. We must do this for the simple reason that a nation without a past is a lost nation, and a people without a past is a people without a soul (Parsons, 1993: p. iii).

The University of Botswana as the country's sole university until the new millennium, and colleges of education continued producing humanities graduates most of whom went into the teaching profession. Some joined the civil service while others joined the private sector. Interestingly, a stigma got attached to humanities programmes perhaps because most humanities-related professions did not and still do not have handsome monetary rewards, perks, and enhanced social status. Subjects such as History, Setswana and English among others got despised and ridiculed even though English remained a language of social prestige and commerce. Moreover, fluency in English was and has been greatly admired and equated to intelligence in Botswana.

Over the years the late President Seretse Khama's rallying call was distorted to read "A nation without a culture is a lost nation" even in Government circles. As a result, Government concentrated more on the promotion of 'culture' for commercialization and entrepreneurship or 'heritage' despite it being largely distorted by popular cultural practitioners, and history got marginalized (Makgala, 2008; Parsons, 2006). Over time, the teaching of history in Botswana schools declined because it was seen as a non-productive subject which contributed little or nothing to employment creation. The officialdom got fixated on this matter so much that it failed to appreciate that students are taught history in order to be conscious and appreciative of the country's nation-building exercise, of fostering national identity, national pride, and citizenship. Entrepreneurship and self-employment can result from such endeavours as a bonus (Makgala, 2020). Pride here involves the citizens being proud of national symbols such as the coat of arms, anthem, and currency, among others. There is also a focus on the development of a responsible, compassionate, tolerant, morally upright, exemplary, and cultured citizenry which are mostly inculcated through humanities and social sciences.

The teaching of history faced criticism even in developed countries such as the United Kingdom. However, Prime Minister John Major supported the teaching of History as a subject. For instance, "In a letter published on 2 October 1992, John Major... wrote that he would no longer tolerate the 'insidious attack on history' and 'challenges to the traditional core of this crucial subject'" (Sylvester, 1994, p. 21). This notwithstanding, the teaching of history seems to be thriving in developed or First World nations where history is compulsory in their school

system. This includes countries which industrialized roughly in the last 50 years such as Malaysia (Salleh et al., 2013) and South Korea (Kang, 2013) but have since become big players in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (FIR). For Malaysia “History could be used as an effective instrument to create national identity, reinforce a sense of belonging and loyalty to the country and cultivate the spirit of patriotism..... Most local universities offer the historical development of Malaysia as a subject in the first year, even in the non-arts courses such as Laws, Management, Medicine and Information Technology” (Salleh et al., 2013:1). It may be interesting to note that even in Botswana’s neighbour and Africa’s most sophisticated economy, South Africa, there is a movement to make the teaching of the country’s history compulsory in the schools (Bam, 16 November 2018).

Interestingly, Richard Reid (2014, p. 351) observes that in much of Africa “political instability and economic decline have rendered historical debate and mediation either irrelevant or downright dangerous, and ever more precarious as a profession”. Whereas, post-independence Botswana has not experienced political instability it has experienced economic stagnation in the new millennium. This has led to unemployment soaring with history or arts and social sciences scapegoated, hence the marginalisation and dismissal of history as irrelevant. This ties with Reid’s conclusion that in Africa history is “portrayed as irrelevant when set alongside the needs for economic modernization and ‘development’.”

Although in Botswana the teaching of the rich history and culture of the country was being besmirched, in the Netherlands the traditional Tswana *kgotla* system of governance and leadership had inspired a thriving multi-million-dollar business through a company called “Kgotla”. Its clients include the Netherlands Red Cross, De Beers mines in South Africa, Debswana mines in Botswana, KLM – a major Dutch airline, and the Netherlands government. Interestingly, the *Sunday Standard* newspaper of Botswana observed that “In the same way that Gary Gagliardi adapted battle strategies outlined in Sun Tzu’s ‘The Art of War’ to corporate management, the Dutch company adapted operational systems and processes of the *kgotla* to the work environment. The company proudly touts its ability to ‘facilitate complex decision-making and transformation processes for corporations, countries, and communities’” (*Sunday Standard*, 12 December 2011).

What this tells us is that students of business and others would benefit greatly from studying aspects of Botswana history which can be creatively applied to the success of their businesses. Similarly, an argument has been made by health historians in a special issue of the influential *Journal of African History* focusing on how history can help in combating the COVID-19 epidemic. Health historians “emphasize the vital importance of ensuring that biomedical researchers engage with historians’ perspectives on disease processes... [because] without an understanding of the social, cultural, political, and economic historical context of disease outbreaks and expansion, epidemiologists’ causal explanations can tend towards the naïve” (*Journal of African History*, 2020).

The value of history education and its practical implications for society and the economy lie in its ability to foster national identity, pride, and unity for development. Unity is

part of Botswana's enduring national philosophy of *Kagisano* (peaceful co-existence), which includes Democracy, Development, Self-reliance, and Unity. These principles have been central to the country's education policy (Republic of Botswana 1977; Republic of Botswana, 1993, Republic of Botswana, 1994). "A Proud and United Nation" is one of the pillars of Botswana *Vision 2016* (Republic of Botswana, 1997). This approach has led to the country being regarded as one of the most peaceful, united, and stable democracies on the African continent, which is essential for economic development and business. Hence, political economists have dubbed Botswana "an African success story" (Acemoglu et al., 2003) and "African miracle" (Samatar, 1999).

4.0 Business Literature on Leadership Lessons from Shaka Zulu

Benedict Carton and Malcolm Draper in their book chapter "Bulls in the Boardroom: The Zulu Warrior Ethic and the Spirit of South African Capitalism" state that "one could argue that either half of the name phrase 'Shaka Zulu' is the recognised brand of modern South Africa and perhaps the entire continent." Recently, Africa Geographic scrutinised this rarely verified assertion by canvassing surveys in the United States and across Europe. The magazine not only discovered that "the word most often associated with Africa is 'Zulu', but also that 'there should be something exploitable in the combination of 'Zulu' and international tourism'" (Carton & Draper, 2008, p. 593). It is also observed in other quarters that "Though short-lived, he [Shaka Zulu] was described as the African Napoleon for his military genius" (XoticBrands, 31 January 2020). Just as the exploits of famed European military leaders and conquerors such as Napoleon and Alexander the Great have inspired business scholarship and commentary, so is Shaka. For instance, in 2011 the University of the Witwatersrand scholar, Teresa Carmichael, presented a conference paper titled "Applicability of Shaka Zulu's Leadership and Strategies to Business". Carmichael tells us that her exploratory study, which by February 2021 had registered 5276 visits online, sought:

to describe and evaluate Shaka Zulu's leadership and the battle strategies and tactics he selected, in the context of those applied by contemporary leaders when making their own strategic choices.... Issues derived from the literature were: establishing a core battle strategy, insistence on continuous improvement, lack of tolerance for mediocrity, applying the principle of sacrifice, concealment of intentions, using the element of surprise, confrontation, synchronization of efforts, selective communication, establishing alliances, dealing with diminishing resources, holding unsavoury personal ambition and practising humaneness. Additional issues raised, not covered in the literature were: the use of power, monopolies, negotiation, collectivism, co-operation and risk. It was concluded that some of the battle strategies can be applied directly to the business environment, some need to be modified, and yet others are unsuitable – mainly for reasons of intolerance and brutality (Carmichael, 2011).

Perhaps the unsuitable aspects of Shaka's leadership, as noted by Carmichael, ought to be regarded as negative elements incompatible with appropriate or ethical business practices, providing balance to the discourse. Owing to limited space, this section does not delve into the details of the negative aspects of Shaka's leadership.

Nelson Sebati in his article “The Entrepreneurship of King Shaka: 6 Reasons Why Shaka Would Have Been a Successful Entrepreneur” makes an interesting case study. Sebati is described as an entrepreneur and non-executive chairman at Murason Business Services. By 2015 he was said to have had 10 years’ experience in recruitment, talent acquisition, career transitioning and on-boarding, with a specific focus on Information Technology (IT) and executive skills. In terms of qualifications he was described as a certified career strategist and job search coach. He had studied Entrepreneurship at the University of Witwatersrand Business School, and Law at University of South Africa. I provide this resume in order to demonstrate how a highly qualified and successful entrepreneur is able to demonstrate how history and Shaka Zulu’s leadership skill and talent could be successfully applied to today’s business environment. In a pan-Africanist approach Sebati writes in a manner that justifies the teaching of history as argued above:

Former President, Thabo Mbeki said it best [when he said] “I am an African. I owe my being to the hills and the valleys, the mountains and the glades, the rivers, the deserts, the trees, the flowers, the seas and the ever-changing seasons that define the face of our native land.... A human presence among all these, a feature on the face of our native land thus defined, I know that none dare challenge me when I say –I am an African”. As an African Entrepreneur my homeland, this great continent informs, inspires and anchors my business vision, strategy, processes and ethics. It is for this reason that I have decided to write my first article for 2015 on the Entrepreneurial ways of the mighty King Shaka (Sebati, 9 January 2015).

This dovetails with the African Renaissance movement championed by President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa at the turn of the new millennium (Mbeki, 1999). The six reasons Sebati cites and explains how they would have made Shaka a successful latter-day entrepreneur are: i) perseverance, ii) hard work, iii) mentorship, iv) innovation, v) leadership, and vi) criticism. We reflect only on criticism owing to limited space, and he says that during the prolonged and harsh mourning of Shaka’s mother:

one Zulu tribesman stood up to King Shaka and reminded him that his mother was not the first person to ever die in their community and that some of his bereavement methods were too harsh. King Shaka heeded this criticism, called off his lamentation measures and rewarded the tribesman for bravery in speaking up to him. The listening to and welcoming of criticism are some of the hallmarks of great Entrepreneurship as this leads to better customer service through improvements in product design or service delivery (Sebati, 9 January 2015).

Even in Botswana a business commentator, Tebogo Toteng, saw Shaka as an inspirational army general and empire builder whose vision and strategy should be emulated by entrepreneurs. According to Toteng (9 March 2015) “One of the most famous African Nation builders Shaka Zulu of the Great Zulu Empire first had a vision which translated into the great Zululand. He led the way in battles to fulfil his vision and in this column we discuss why entrepreneurs must lead the way”. German scholar and businessman Nik Eberl in his 2016

book entitled *The Courage to Disrupt: Innovation Secrets from Emperor Shaka Zulu* says that “King Shaka’s military innovations, from weaponry to battle formations and even revolutionary new societal norms, incorporate many of the strategies the world’s greatest innovators of recent times have adopted to conquer hitherto unassailable industries and build billion-dollar brands in record time –such as Uber, Airbnb, WhatsApp, and Instagram”. The book also goes by the title *Disruptive Innovation: How Emperor Shaka Built the World’s First Billion Dollar App*. According to Christensen, Raynor and MacDonald writing in the *Harvard Business Review* “The theory of disruptive innovation, introduced in these pages in 1995, has proved to be a powerful way of thinking about innovation-driven growth. Many leaders of small, entrepreneurial companies praise it as their guiding star; so do many executives at large, well-established organizations, including Intel, Southern New Hampshire University, and Salesforce.com” (Christensen et al., 2015).

The founder of the Geness Foundation Dr Sheena Geness said that “a growing partnership is developing with Dr Nik towards the ultimate establishment of the King Shaka Academy in South Africa. The scope of the King Shaka Academy will be to keep the emperor’s innovation and marketing legacy alive, whilst providing a platform for teaching and research in ideas management, marketing and branding strategies of the great emperor, for the benefit of scholars around the world” (*African Independent*, 3 March 2017). Geness also declared that “the book and the subsequent establishment of the King Shaka Academy will be instrumental in enabling entrepreneurs across the African continent to take their rightful place in the global economy and build the next generation of high impact applications and innovations that will redefine the world as we know it”.

For Joanne Carew, Shaka “was not only fierce warrior and infamous dictator, he was also an ardent traveller, a strategic thinker and a data scientist. Well, when you consider that a data scientist must be able to sift through mountains of information and have the vision to discern patterns others are unable to see, this renowned Zulu King could most certainly have added data scientist to his CV” (Carew, 9 November 2017). Carew regards Shaka as the earliest data scientist, and says it is a technical and professional expertise the demand for which is skyrocketing in the United States. She continues ‘Businesses need data scientists with business acumen, individuals who can identify the key data insights needed to take your business to the next level’. Among the seven strategies gleaned from Shaka’s leadership by XoticBrands (31 January 2020) is that “he started apprenticeships”, and a modern-day business can do the same by creating apprenticeship programmes, teaching, learning and growing. Moreover:

Apprenticeships or coaching programs are a fast way to create loyal, employable and qualified people. It also brings out the best out of your team, accelerating their growth and skill development trajectory. Coaching and apprenticeships programs ensures the team is well equipped in all positions, allowing for a strong team with no weak links. A team is only as strong as its weakest link, and coaching and apprenticeship strengthen weaker links and foster and reinforce better connections with strong links on a team. Google invented [Project Oxygen](#), after their research showed the importance of having an innovative coaching program (XoticBrands, 31 January 2020).

In the article “What Connects Shaka Zulu, Decolonisation and Mathematical Models”, Anné Verhoef, a Professor of philosophy, and Hennie A Kruger, a Professor of Computer Science and Information Systems at North-West University in South Africa have come up with a strong and fascinating argument on how pre-colonial military history of Africa can be used to decolonise the teaching of mathematical sciences curriculum that also relates to operational research (Verhoef & Kruger, 2020). Giving a historical account of the development of operational research, the two Professors say it is taught as quantitative management, management science, decision science, business analytics and industrial engineering at different South African universities.

Kumar Singh in his article “Lessons from Shaka Zulu for Supply Chain Analytics Solution Development” claims that the greatest military genius was none of the celebrated historical Western military generals such as Napoleon, or political leaders who led their countries during the World Wars such as the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill (1940-1945); it was Shaka Zulu (Singh, 1 March 2020). Singh provides a detailed blow by blow illustration of how a Supply Chain professionals can leverage Shaka’s three core principles of war planning in developing Supply Chain analytics. The three principles he cites are i) Strategy (Planning), ii) Speed (Agility) and Physical Contact (Proximity: Be as close to the “problem” as possible).

It should be noted that some of the authors and commentators cited above are business professionals or entrepreneurs who draw on practical experience in applying Shaka Zulu’s leadership strategy to achieve success in their enterprises.

5.0 The Elite’s Denunciation of Teaching of Shaka Zulu and Response by Public

The debate on the relevance of Shaka in the school curriculum in Botswana started in August 2020 when Fidelis Molao, Member of Parliament for Shashe West and Minister for Basic Education responded to a question in Parliament by saying: “What’s the benefits of teaching a student, who was Shaka’s mother, we need education with production” (*The Voice*, 24 August 2020). Ironically, “education with production” was a concept introduced by the then South African refugee Patrick van Rensburg at schools and brigades he established in the country starting in 1963. The idea was to combine academic work with vocational training for learners to be able to produce their basic needs for themselves (Shillington, 2020). However, the BDP government spurned van Rensburg’s ideas branding him a socialist and focused more on training for “white collar” careers. The approach would later haunt the education system, forcing the government to start talking of “education with production” as the new millennium wore on and unemployment worsened. The refrain of skills mismatch in tertiary education also started taking hold in government circles.

When Minister Molao’s response reached social media, some commentators supported him, abusively denouncing history as a waste of the learners’ time and argued for change of the curriculum “to suit today’s contemporary lifestyle”. One contributor wrote that there was “Nothing wrong with history Sir. Don’t mislead the nation. If anything, we need to add more of African history. It’s science, business and IT that I have a problem with. The syllabus for

those key areas is too shallow and mediocre when it comes to the practical side'. Another defender of history wrote 'I'm very disappointed by this statement, history is not only about *boShaka*, that subject teaches us writing, speaking and critical thinking skills'. Yet another one responded with a tinge of the late President Seretse Khama's message: "We are simply becoming a lost nation... for us to understand why things are the way they are today is through knowing our history... why and I mean why are we westernizing everything, what is wrong with a child learning History?" *Shaka* was appreciated in some quarters for his leadership which could provide lessons to the contemporary society. A former student at a school started by van Rensburg and a senior official at the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development wrote that "At Swaneng Hill School Patrick van Rensburg started courses such as Fundamentals of Production and Development Studies which are essentially business related. They were taught alongside *Shaka Zulu* play in literature and *Shaka Zulu* in History of Southern Africa!" There was also support for teaching of Arts and Social Sciences subjects alongside technical ones because "The purpose of teaching is not just to produce a 'worker' but [also] to produce a thinker". Someone added words attributed to the late Steve Jobs, founder of Apple computers and billionaire American entrepreneur, "Technology alone is not enough... its technology married with liberal arts, married with the humanities, that yields us the result that make our hearts sing".

Some of those bashing history were also condescending about the national language, Setswana and its rich fairytales, which they dismissed as archaic and useless to the learners. They worshipped at the altar of European languages not knowing that "No country in the world ever undertook its development through a foreign language", to echo the passage by Dialo Diop (1999, p. 6) in the book *African Renaissance*.

Thapelo Tsheole, the young CEO for Botswana Stock Exchange (BSE), was reported to have said "What we want to do is work with the Ministry of Education so that kids can be taught about money, interest rates, and savings, not *Shaka Zulu* and Cowhorn formation. I don't think those things in this age of atomic bombs are relevant". He went on to say "I'm not saying History is not important, but there are more pressing important things in this era, like Financial Education" (*The Wrap Business Reporter*, 17 September 2020). Perhaps, it should be indicated that Tsheole was not making this declaration for the first time. He had previously made it in October 2017 but it does not appear to have caused any furore in the social media or mainstream media at the time. As part of BSE's nationwide tour to promote financial literacy in Botswana Tsheole spoke at a BSE "Open Day" event in Gaborone bemoaning generally low levels of financially literacy in Botswana. "It is not surprising that the level of understanding of the stock market is generally low in Botswana as traditionally the education system has been mainly focused on subjects that are not stock market related", he said. "To drive his point home, Tsheole gave an example of a book titled *Shaka Zulu* which is still read at schools but has no value addition to students" (*Sunday Standard*, 15 October 2017). Perhaps, taking cue from Minister Molao, Tsheole repeated the same anti-*Shaka Zulu* sentiment in September 2020.

The response to Tsheole's utterance took the same lines as that for or against Minister Molao. "We cannot surely proceed with a Eurocentric approach of the world as offered by the

dear CEO! What will become of us, our history and our values if it is not to be taught?” retorted one commentator. A related contribution read: “I have been fascinated by how the westerners loves (sic) their history and even protects (sic) it. Some of the historical places around Europe are used for both academics and as tourists attractions (sic). I remember visiting some of the war graves around Belgium and France where some of our African brothers were buried. Yes history is a key component of our society and deserves to be taught and preserved. Even China teaches their children about their history”. Someone further said that “I know that European, Americans and Chinese still teach about their history. And that’s why they are very loyal to their own countries. They know where they come from”.

Furthermore, it was also responded “That he dismisses Shaka points to a myopic mind... in fact Shaka was fighting for the economy of the land [which] is an important part of our current lives”. While some argued that Botswana was a democracy and the CEO was entitled to his opinion, critics were relentless and some rather abusive. After using unpleasant words one contributor noted that “Shaka Zulu teaching[s] are an introduction to strategy. That’s why they are used by the likes of Harvard”. As shown above Shaka’s leadership and military strategies have influenced reviews in reputable Western journals. For example, on 13 June 2005 the esteemed and influential *Harvard Business Review* (HBR) published a review of Manfred Kets de Vries’ book titled *Lessons on Leadership by Terror: Finding Shaka Zulu in the Attic (New Horizons in Leadership Studies)*. The review of the book had the sub-title “A nineteenth-century warrior king in the management spotlight’ (*Harvard Business Review*, 13 June 2005). The influential HBR is described as “The world’s most management magazine since 1922” (<https://hbr.org/magazine>). Furthermore, someone wrote that “I am a business executive (Actually more of a Business Practitioner) and I have applied and still apply some of Shaka Zulu’s strategies in business”. A commentator by the name Moemedi Kepadisa wrote “Why business literacy is always privileged over social literacy (history, human rights, languages, environment, social studies, art?). Is there an assumption that we don’t need critical thinkers in society-lawyers, historians, writers, artists, philosophers, social workers, poets, architects, painters, care givers, political scientists, sociologists, archaeologists? Who said all of us in society are motivated by profit, and therefore, we want to be business people? We are not all left brained? We also have a right to live”. Another interesting observation was that:

Western Societies operate differently from us. A man or woman can forego the opportunity to make money. I am talking hard currency because he or she derives pleasure from teaching, research or WRITING. A man can choose to teach at Oxford University over an opportunity to consult for Airbus, BMW or Rio Tinto. People like Joe Biden, the US Democratic presidential candidate chose the path of public service and not to be a billionaire and he is still relevant to that civilization. Ironically, for us a society that does not know how to make money, we monetise everything. To many of us wealth is the summit of our objectives. Anyone who is not talking money does not make sense.

Nonetheless and unsurprisingly, Molao and Tsheole received strong support from the Director of Curriculum in Molao’s ministry, Shadrack Majwabe, who strongly dismissed the

teaching of Shaka Zulu, branding it as a waste of time and resources, and needed to be discarded (*The Wrap Botswana*, 26 September 2020). The Curriculum Director, who was echoing collective responsibility alongside his Minister, also did not escape the wrath of the public. “I didn’t like History but appreciate importance of its study in learning. Therefore, it’s disappointing to hear a Curriculum Director lambasting it. Maybe he has been misquoted”, wrote one contributor. There was also a sentiment expressed by several people on “how they [the elite] are always attacking African history but never European history”. Edward Tswaipe, an educationist and trade unionist, wrote that Tsheole:

Touched on too many education issues, possibly unaware. And these issues are controversial on their own: curriculum selection/mix, curriculum content, subject/programme mix, delivery methods, assessment, curriculum outcomes, learning/assessment objectives, curriculum dynamism, adaptability, relevance and innovation... so many issues in one breath. So, he is understood differently by different audiences... For instance some celebrate that he wants History out of the syllabus. Yet that’s not what he meant; he wants a reform of delivery methods of the same subject or a change in the allocation of content or an emphasis on particular aspects, to give room to other areas e.g., Business Literacy (Tswaipe, 27 September 2020).

Whereas Tswaipe defends Tsheole by saying that he had not recommended the discarding of history from the curriculum, as he points out earlier in his submission and as also mentioned by other contributors, as the CEO of the Botswana Stock Exchange Tsheole commands significant influence and ought to tread with care and avoid making what could be perceived as inconsiderate statements in public.

A lengthy input was made by Moses Ndiriva Kandjou, a teacher of history at Matshekge Hill School in Bobonong. He lamented how history teachers had followed with silence ‘the violence on the subject and on our persons as instructors’ and continued:

If we are to take the topic on SHAKA ZULU as you chose it, you need to know that in the syllabus, Shaka’s career is discussed with the careers of other leaders like Moshoeshoe, Sebetwane, Mzilikazi, Sechele etc, and this comes under the major topic of Nation Building after the Mfecane Wars. I believe, as a subcontinent we can learn the art of nation building from these 19th century leaders, and in the process learn their mistakes and avoid them.

And surprisingly in the backdrop of the GBV [gender-based violence] issues that has (sic) engulfed our country, my friend... fails to pick what role Shaka’s behaviour after the death of his mother can play in assisting us to see some of the underlying causes of GBV. If you really know the topic on Shaka’s career, you will remember him as a child exposed to the GBV on his mother, who was rejected by the husband’s people, and them living as vagabonds, moving from 1 area to another. Shaka was in the process exposed to serious and continuous bullying, and this built in him a cruel character he became. The killer in Shaka was a societal creation, just like we do to many Shaka’s

today. We create monsters in the children we reject, and abuse, and then we cry about crime...

We need HISTORY now more than ever, and we need it as a core subject for all our kids. There is a big gap in our society, coz of the killing of this GREAT SUBJECT. And I challenge you to go back in history and study all great leaders who liberated Africa, they were all students of History. And you will agree with me that, we had them as the best, compared to what we have today. History is our future (Kandjou, 2020).

The mention of Sechele and nation-building by Kandjou is quite important and needs to be elaborated on briefly. Sechele was the great nineteenth century leader of Bakwena in Botswana. When several Tswana groups fled the loss of their land and cattle as well as repression at the hands of the Boers of the Transvaal Republic they readily found sanctuary in Sechele's territory. He also flatly refused to hand the refugees back to the Transvaal Boers which led to a skirmish between the well-armed Sechele and his Tswana allies on the one hand, and the Boers on the other hand at the Battle of Dimawe from 1852 to 1853. Although the Bakwena and their Tswana allies suffered heavy defeat at the hands of the Boers they managed to retain their land which has been seen by historians of Botswana as a seminal development in the evolution of modern-day Republic of Botswana (Magang, 2008; Ramsay, 1991). Ignorance of the centrality of the Battle of Dimawe in the country's history led to one contributor to the "Shaka Zulu debate" dismissing the teaching of history by writing that "people were fighting at Dimawe, so what? Innovation, technology, creativity, way to go". This arrogance-tinged ignorance, instead of pride, is explained by the historian of Botswana, Jeff Ramsay when he says:

Although the Boers began the hostilities, by invading south-eastern Botswana, it was they who, nonetheless, soon found themselves on the defensive. After being besieged in their *laagers* for five months, they sued for peace. For the next quarter of a century, until the imposition of [British] colonial rule [in 1885], local Batswana-Boer relations remained peaceful. Today few Batswana are aware of the decisive outcome of the Batswana-Boer War of 1852-53. This is because its events have been generally seen as either an episode in the career of David Livingstone [Scottish missionary doctor who operated among Sechele's people] or a minor incident in the early history of the Transvaal. Botswana's most important armed struggle has thus been reduced to a footnote in the annals of others. And so, instead of learning about their own ancestors' great victory, local students are still miseducated to believe that their nation was spared Boer rule by British 'protection' (Ramsay, 1991, p.193).

Interestingly, one of Botswana's foremost successful indigenous entrepreneurs and prolific author, David Magang, has penned his voluminous autobiography with the title *The Magic of Perseverance* (2008) and a two-volume critique of Botswana's economic development he calls *The Delusions of Grandeur* (2015), and delves deep in the country's history in both publications. Magang, an attorney who studied history and advocates its teaching in schools (Magang, 2018), makes a passionate demonstration of the significance of the Battle of Dimawe in the evolution of Botswana.

While the production of humanities and social sciences graduates is blamed for the country's unemployment crisis, it has been observed that "The trend of low labour absorption has cut across all sectors, defying the adage that science and finance are relatively untouched by the plague of unemployment [in Botswana]" (Lewanika, 23 June 2023:22). Interestingly, the government's rigid subscription to STEM seemed to be loosening, at least at the level of rhetoric, as reports in August 2023 indicate that the government had embraced arts into STEM and produced STEAM as part of its much talked about "Reset Agenda" and "Mindset Change". In embracing STEAM, the Minister of Communication, Knowledge and Technology, Honourable Thulaganyo Segokgo stated that "the current globalisation era, which is defined by rapid technological advancements, requires harnessing the power of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) to drive Botswana society forward. He said that ground-breaking discoveries and innovations are now leveraging inclusion of arts in the innovation value chain implementation" (Morapedi, 19-25 August 2023, p. 11). However, experience shows that such pronouncements will remain just pronouncements in Botswana.

6.0 Conclusion

This paper has contextualised the 'Shaka Zulu debate' in Botswana within the country's troubling unemployment crisis and some aspects of the curriculum content misconstrued by the country's elites as the cause. Moreover, the paper argued that the major cause of unemployment is corruption and mismanagement of public resources, which is even acknowledged by the President. With the fight against corruption virtually a lost cause, the offering of the arts and social sciences is, therefore, a soft target and convenient scapegoat for escalating unemployment.

In addressing the country's employment crisis, which is occasioned by poor economic performance, the authorities are fixated with the symptoms and not the cause. This has led to the dogmatic but erroneous standpoint that the teaching of history is not a priority but luxury the country can ill-afford, all too common on the African landscape where poverty and economic decline or stagnation are prevalent. Oversight institutions exist to combat corruption and mismanagement in many African countries, but the political elite undermine them to protect their interests. Strengthening these institutions would enhance the fight against corruption and the wastage of public resources.

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