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The construction, interpretation and presentation of king Shaka: a case study of four in-service history educators in four Gauteng schools

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ABSTRACT

This study explores and discusses how in-service history educators in four Gauteng schools re-interpret, *re*construct and re-present images of Shaka in light of their individual and collective memories of him, varied academic and popular accounts, CAPS, as well the influence of history textbooks and other teaching and learning materials. It also explores the nature of history, its uses, as well as the development of the history curriculum in South Africa post-1994 in relation to the proposed compulsory history curriculum for the FET phase by the likes of African National Congress (ANC), ANC-led government and South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU).

The findings of the study reveal that the participants under study did share and/or have similar collective memory of Shaka which was 'negative', even though they came from different backgrounds or are informed by different individual memories. This highlights the embeddedness of traditional, liberal and Afrikaner-Christian nationalist, as well Zulu nationalist *re*constructions of images of Shaka in our popular as well as institutional imaginations.

Furthermore, the findings revealed that although the participants presented themselves as aware of revisionist thinking around images of Shaka and were willing to incorporate these in their teaching; what transpired during the observations were tensions between this awareness and the implementation of such and the practicalities around it. Moreover, it seems that although all participants seemed consciously or subconsciously aware of memories embedded in their own *re*constructions of images of Shaka, and sought means to open Shaka to new imaginings and further debates by their learners, this was not easy in practice. It seems that the embeddedness of individual and collective memories (with all their layers – from home to school days to university days and beyond) could not easily be transcended. This was most evident in the educators' responses to 'challenging' questions or comments by their learners. There seemed to be an element of defensiveness and tendency to want to instil views rather than allow open-endedness in interpreting Shaka's actions. So, while re-interpretation, *re*construction and re-presentation were seemingly allowed, with the exploration of teaching strategies

like debates, the choice of textbooks, selection of sources to engage with, themes and topics to cover, questions to post to the learners etc. still reflected this embeddedness.

Therefore, the overall findings highlight that the practice teaching of history is a complex exercise. It requires qualified professional educators with a strong subject matter who are innovative in their pedagogical orientations, as well responded to the demands of the curriculum. These, are some of the things that the ANC, SADTU and other interest groups need to take into account when proposing a 'new' history curriculum.

Keywords: *King Shaka; individual memory; collective memory; historiography; mfecane; revisionist historical accounts; traditional historical accounts; compulsory history curriculum; history textbooks; history educators; imagings of Shaka; CAPS*