

Shaka Zulu in the Polish People's Republic (PRL): exploring South African-Polish links in the late Cold War

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ABSTRACT

In the late 1980s, Poles tuned in with great enthusiasm to the miniseries *Shaka Zulu*, starring Henry Cele as the so-called Black Napoleon. The apartheid-era production was one instance of exchanges between the apartheid regime and the Polish People's Republic. This counter-intuitive consonance – the screening of an apartheid cultural production in late-Communist Poland – is a fascinating case study that provides one important lens to understand the nature of the relationship between the two regimes, as well as insight into late-apartheid international relations in the last years of the Cold War.

KEYWORDS:

South Africa; Poland; cultural studies; de-colonisation

Introduction

The literary scholar, Monica Popescu, opens a 2012 article with the recollections of the South African writer, Lewis Nkosi, relating his surprise at the screening of weekly episodes of *Shaka Zulu* in Poland in the late 1980s.¹ Popescu uses the screening of the miniseries *Shaka Zulu* and Nkosi's perceptions and commentary on Poland as a broader case study of resonances between postcolonial and post-communist studies. Her reference to the miniseries, following Nkosi's own surprised discovery is fascinating for how an apartheid-era production could become a favourite of audiences in both capitalist and communist countries. In this way consumerism and entertainment anticipated the post-Cold War world and was reflective of the process of globalisation that would subsequently become such a watchword.

This article uses the miniseries *Shaka Zulu* as a lens into the relationship between South Africa and Poland to explore the forms of exchange that existed between the two countries and their respective regimes and as a way to gauge popular awareness of apartheid in Poland 'from below'. The popularity of *Shaka Zulu* was due to a potent mix of exoticism and excitement that capitalised on Poland's limited exposure to Africa. The success of the miniseries in the communist country belied the Polish government's public stance on apartheid. It was reflective, however, of the reality that the ideological dictates of the Cold War had only limited purchase and, as this article will seek to demonstrate, there were motivating factors that drew the ideological opponents, and their societies, closer together.

These explorations inform a broader research question of what the nature of the relationship between apartheid South Africa and communist Poland was in the late Cold War. Using the reception of *Shaka Zulu* in Poland, and a comparison with its reception in the United States,

¹ Monica Popescu, "Lewis Nkosi in Warsaw: Translating Eastern European Experiences for an African Audience," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 48, no. 2 (May 1, 2012): 176, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2012.658248>.

this article argues it was a complicated and entangled relationship in which state-sponsored Communist support for the anti-apartheid struggle was belied by a susceptibility to apartheid's international propaganda campaign and a willingness to trade secretly with the apartheid regime. Exploring the popular reception in Poland of *Shaka Zulu* thus offers one way to interrogate the late Cold War. The article draws on a combination of analyses of film reviews, archival research conducted in South Africa and Poland, and interviews in Poland.

This article is the first step as part of a broader project that seeks to re-examine relations between South African and Poland during the Cold War. Several, predominantly Polish, scholars have taken a keen interest in the comparison of the two countries and direct links, but this has not been reciprocated by South African scholars. The Polish political scientist, Arkadiusz Żukowski, has published extensively on the Polish presence in South Africa, which began with his Master's research in the mid-1980s.⁵ Prof Ursula van Beek's research has been pathbreaking with the edited collection *South Africa and Poland in transition: a comparative perspective*.⁶ It provided a comparison of the transition from multiple perspectives, including

⁵ His works include amongst others: Arkadiusz Żukowski, "Polska Wobec Namibii i Jej Niepodległości," in *Wokół Teoretycznych i Praktycznych Aspektów Stosunków Międzynarodowych. Księga Jubileuszowa Dedykowana Profesorowi Mieczysławowi Stolarczykowi*, ed. Tomasz Kubin, Justyna Łapaj-Kucharska, and Tomasz Okrasa (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2020), 389–410; Arkadiusz Żukowski, "Stosunek Władz Polski Ludowej Do Apartheidu Na Forum Organizacji Narodów Zjednoczonych," in *Afryka – Pasja Życia. Tom Jubileuszowy Dedykowany Dr. Hab. Jackowi Łapottowi Prof. US w 70. Rocznicę Urodzin*, ed. Ewa Prądyńska, Anna Szczepańska-Dudziak, and Lucjan Buchalik, (Żory: Muzeum Miejskie, 2019); Arkadiusz Żukowski, "Diaspora Polska w Republice Południowej Afryki i Jej Prosolidarnościowa Aktywność w Latach 1980-1989. Wybrane Problemy," in *Za Naszą i Waszą „Solidarność. Inicjatywy Solidarnościowe z Udziałem Polonii Podejmowane Na Świecie (1980-1989), t. 1, Państwa Pozaeuropejskie*, ed. Patryk Pleskot (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2018); Arkadiusz Żukowski, "Contemporary Polish Diaspora in the Republic of South Africa and Its Attitude towards Politics," *Polish Political Science*, 2010, <http://polona.pl/item/32286054>; Arkadiusz Żukowski, *Diaspora Polska w Republice Południowej Afryki w Warunkach Współczesnej Unifikacji i Dywersyfikacji Świata* (Olsztyn: INP, 2008); Arkadiusz (1961-). Żukowski, "Polish Community in South Africa: A History of Settlement," *Africana Bulletin (Ed. 1)*, 1999; Arkadiusz Żukowski, *Polsko-Południowoafrykańskie Stosunki Polityczne* (Olsztyn: Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczna, 1998); Arkadiusz Żukowski, "Polish - South African Trade Relations and Their Prospects. Surveying Both Past and Future," *Slavic Almanach 4*, no. 5–6 (1997): 165–77; Arkadiusz Żukowski, *W Kraju Żłota i Diamentów. Polacy w Afryce Południowej w XVI-XX w.* (Warszawa: Wydawn. Nauk. PWN, 1994); Arkadiusz Żukowski, "Polish Relations with and Settlement in South Africa (circa 1500-1835)," *Historia 37*, no. 1 (1992): 1–8.

⁶ Ursula Van Beek and Stanisław Cieniuch, eds., *South Africa and Poland in Transition: A Comparative Perspective* (Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council, 1995).

youth, the role of the churches, the intelligentsia and civil society. While the volume constituted an important step, the methodology was limited, as Polish and South African experts wrote separate chapters. It was therefore left to the reader, apart from a short introduction, an excellent historical survey of early Polish connections with South Africa written by Van Beek and a brief conclusion by Lawrence Schlemmer, to draw connections between the two societies. Based at the University of Stellenbosch, the initial comparison between South Africa and Poland has enabled Van Beek to launch an international comparative project on the study of democracy that has led to several publications.⁷

Polish sociologist Elzbieta Matynia has also written insightfully about the transitions to democracy in Poland and South Africa.⁸ The historian Tom Junes found the comparison of South Africa and Poland compelling enough to write a comparative article in which he flagged the significant roles that young people played in both the collapse of apartheid and communism.⁹ Historian Adrian Guelke and Junes extended the comparative work to explore the degree to which changes in the Eastern Bloc influenced activities of the anti-apartheid opposition in South Africa. They argued there ‘was little direct contact at either state or non-state level’ but emphasise the significance of ‘mediatization of the events in Poland and other Soviet Bloc countries [which] caught the attention of opposition activists in South Africa’. They conclude that ‘[t]he South African perception of what had happened in the Bloc became an inspiration, and they copied and applied the tactics of the anti-Communist opposition.’¹⁰ This

⁷ Ursula Van Beek, “The Emergence of Democracy in South Africa and Poland: A Comparative Experience,” in *The Experience of Democratization in Eastern Europe*, International Council for Central and East European Studies (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 274–83; Ursula van Beek, ed., *Democracy under Construction: Patterns from Four Continents*, 1st ed. (Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2005), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvhktjv1>; Ursula Van Beek, ed., *Democracy Under Scrutiny: Elites, Citizens, Cultures* (Opladen & Framington Hills, MI: Barbara Budrich Publisher, 2010); Ursula Van Beek, ed., *Democracy under Threat: A Crisis of Legitimacy?* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

⁸ Elzbieta Matynia, *Performative Democracy* (London: Routledge, 2016).

⁹ Tom Junes, “Oppositional Student Politics in Poland and South Africa: Youth Rebellion as a Factor in the Demise of Communism and Apartheid,” *Studia Historyczne* 55, no. 3–4 (2012): 398–406.

¹⁰ Adrian Guelke and Tom Junes, “1989 Compared and Connected: The Demise of Communism in Poland and Apartheid in South Africa,” in *The Long 1989: Decades of Global Revolution*, ed. Piotr H. Kosicki and Kyrill Kunakhovich (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2019), 37; An earlier version of this

article complicates the conclusions of Guelke and Junes in by demonstrating the variety and vibrancy of connections between the countries that their analysis misses, both at the cultural level, as will be described, but also in trade and secret diplomatic relations.

More broadly this article serves as a reminder of the centrality of race to the Cold War, as a recent international relations collection argues.¹³ In his chapter Richard Seymour shows how race was a critical element of both anticommunist tropes and efforts by the Communists to discredit the United States.¹⁴ Deborah Thompson

Shaka Zulu the miniseries

Shaka Zulu was produced by the South African Broadcasting Cooperation (SABC) and released in late 1986, although as it was distributed worldwide its origins as an SABC production were obscured by Harmony Gold its American distributor. The historian Carolyn Hamilton notes that ‘within a year it had been seen by a remarkable 100 million viewers in South Africa and abroad’.²⁷ Part of the attraction of the *Shaka Zulu* miniseries was no doubt how the main protagonist, King Shaka, was a figure who had already established something of a global reputation, from Harlem to London. Art scholar Gary van Wyk has traced the impact of Zulu designs on Harlem and noted the importance of the image of Shaka Zulu for African Americans.²⁸ American historian T.J. Tallie observes that ‘ostensibly “Zulu”

paper was published as Adrian Guelke and Tom Junes, “Copycat Tactics in Processes of Regime Change: The Demise of Communism in Poland and Apartheid in South Africa,” *Critique & Humanism* 40 (2012): 171–92.

¹³ Alexander Anievas, Nivi Manchanda, and Robbie Shilliam, eds., *Race and Racism in International Relations: Confronting the Global Colour Line* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015).

¹⁴ Richard Seymour, “The Cold War, American Anticommunism and the Global ‘Color Line,’” in *Race and Racism in International Relations: Confronting the Global Colour Line*, ed. Alexander Anievas, Nivi Manchanda, and Robbie Shilliam (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 157–74.

²⁷ C.A. Hamilton, “A Positional Gambit: Shaka Zulu and the Conflict in South Africa,” in *History from South Africa: Alternative Visions and Practices / Ed. by Joshua Brown ... [et al.]*. - Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991, 287–308.

²⁸ Cliff Hocker, “U.S Zulu Connection: The Hampton Example,” *The International Review of African American Art Plus*, accessed August 30, 2021, <http://iraaa.museum.hamptonu.edu/page/U%3ES%3E-Zulu-Connection>.

performers' had been popular in London since the 1850s and the "Zulus" a well-known topic in imperial newspapers and periodicals in the 19th century.²⁹ The inherent lure of the story itself was therefore a powerful one that mapped onto old cultural tropes.

Told predominantly from the perspective of the European settlers, the miniseries opens with the deposed Zulu king, Cetshwayo kaMpande's, audience with Queen Victoria, which took place on 14 August 1882 at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight.³⁰ The story then moves back in time to follow the explorers Francis Farewell and Henry Fynn and their quest to infiltrate the Zulu Kingdom. From the start the threat of the Zulu kingdom to African communities around them and particularly to the British Cape colony is emphasised. After the Europeans' initial audience with Shaka, played by a former South African football player, Henry Cele, the story jumps back in time once more to tell the story of Shaka's birth. Here the viewer is introduced to the second key character, Shaka's mother, Nandi, played by South African model Dudu Mkhize. The narrative covers Shaka's strategic innovations and spins a mysterious air around his development of the short stabbing spear, the *assegai*. Throughout the narrative a mysterious *sangoma* is portrayed guiding Shaka's rise to power in fulfilment of a prophecy that supposedly foretold of the rise to power of the Zulu nation. As the story develops it foregrounds religious themes, an improvisation that the screenwriter, Joshua Sinclair, later admitted was poetic licence. Although the miniseries was certainly tainted by its association with apartheid, Sinclair, who had worked as a medical doctor at the Baragwanath hospital in Soweto prior to his involvement in the miniseries, maintains that he retained his independence in the screenplay and that he gleaned many of its insights from

²⁹ T.J. Tallie, "On Zulu King Cetshwayo KaMpande's Visit to London, August 1882," *BRANCH: Britain, Representation, and Nineteenth-Century History* (blog), accessed August 25, 2021, http://www.branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=t-j-tallie-on-zulu-king-cetshwayo-kampande-s-visit-to-london-august-1882.

³⁰ Ian Knight, 'The Strange Story and Remarkable Adventures of King Cetshwayo's Cup', https://www.anglozuluwar.com/images/Journal_6/J6e_King_Cetshwayo's_Cup_-_IK.pdf

Zulu oral history.³¹ As the story unfolds the slide of Shaka's rule to tyranny is depicted by increasingly graphic scenes of violence, and culminates in his assassination by his half-brothers and the breakdown in his relationship with Farewell.

The miniseries followed in the wake of the success of the film *The Gods must Be Crazy* (1980), which was one of the first internationally recognised South African films. The comedy, directed by South African director, Jamie Uys, was set in the Kalahari Desert and narrated the journey of the San protagonist, Xi, to return a glass Coke bottle that had been thrown from an airplane window. Viewing it as a gift from the gods, Xi nonetheless seeks to return it due to the conflict it causes in his community. Like *Shaka Zulu*, the film received criticism of implicit racism, especially from the American press. Despite this it 'became the highest-grossing foreign film in the USA and was very popular in both China and Japan'. In addition, San actor N!xau, 'undertook a promotion tour, travelling to the USA, France and Japan'.³² Due to the immediacy of the plot to modern southern Africa and despite its ostensibly non-political outlook, *The New York Times* film critic Vincent Canby, underlined that it could not be divorced from its political context in the way Uys attempted. Making a point that resonated with the reception of *Shaka Zulu*, Canby observed that films were inherently political to an extent, 'both for what they say and what they don't say' and proceeded to show how several scenes and character choices carried implicit political subtexts.³³

³¹ Christian Niedan, "Camera Q&A: Joshua Sinclair on Shaka Zulu and Apartheid," September 2013, <http://www.camerainthesun.com/dev1/?p=25727>.

³² Karen Harris, Charlene Herselman, Alida Green and Hannes Engelbrecht, 'Film Culture and Destination Economy: South Africa's potential', paper presented to South African Cultural Observatory International Conference, 'Beyond the creative economy? Trends and Issues in national and regional economies,' 7-8 March 2018.

³³ Vincent Canby, "Film Review; Is 'The Gods Must Be Crazy' Only a Comedy?," *The New York Times*, October 28, 1984, <https://www.nytimes.com/1984/10/28/arts/film-view-is-the-gods-must-be-crazy-only-a-comedy.html>.

In a report prepared in December 1988 for the United Nations Centre Against Apartheid, and subsequently published as *Apartheid Whitewash: South African Propaganda in the United States* (1989), Richard Leonard observed how as *Shaka Zulu* had been distributed in the United States it had sparked protests in Los Angeles, Detroit and St Louis. It had been screened as a 10-hour miniseries in over 30 American cities between 1986 and 1987. Leonard observed how the ‘film presents a violent, primitive picture of the 19th century Zulu leader’ and had been ‘distributed in the United States by Harmony Gold, a new company based in Los Angeles, which made a considerable effort to hide the film’s links to the South African regime’.³⁴ Leonard pointed to the broader significance of the miniseries for the South African regime, citing a member of the South African parliament ‘in 1984 when the \$24 million film went into production’. Although Hamilton also cited this amount,³⁵ it has been contested by media studies scholar, Keyan Tomaselli, who argues the figure was ‘nothing more than public relations hype, an exaggeration intended to attract mass audiences’ and rather cost ‘R12.8 million (then \$6 million)’.³⁶

Although the producers of the miniseries decried any political prejudice this was belied by a tour of the United States by the miniseries’ director, William Faure, and Cele in which they spoke out against international sanctions against South Africa.³⁸ As the scholar Ron Nixon has documented, the South African government went to considerable lengths from the mid-1970s to ‘sell apartheid’ to foreign audiences to combat the Anti-Apartheid Movement’s own media campaigns.³⁹ Eddie Michel has also recently argued that despite seeing apartheid as potentially dangerous, the American government were nonetheless quietly supportive, due in

³⁴ Richard Leonard, *Apartheid Whitewash - South African Propaganda in the United States* (Africa Fund, 1989), 28, <https://doi.org/10.2307/al.sff.document.af000257>.

³⁵ Hamilton, “A Positional Gambit: Shaka Zulu and the Conflict in South Africa.”

³⁶ Keyan Tomaselli, “Shaka Zulu, Visual History and Television,” *Southern African Humanities* 15 (December 2003): 94.

³⁸ Tomaselli, “Shaka Zulu, Visual History and Television,” 95.

³⁹ Ron Nixon, *Selling Apartheid: South Africa’s Global Propaganda War* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2015).

no small part to their reliance on South African uranium for their atomic weapons in the early stages of the Cold War, and the difficulty Americans had in extricating themselves from this close relationship when it began to be deemed a liability.⁴⁰

If the American government was equivocal in its stance towards South Africa, there was a sizeable part of its society, however, shaped by the civil rights revolution, that took a clear moral stand against apartheid as the protests in American cities demonstrated. The American critic, Howard Rosenberg, who was awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 1985 for his television commentary, was representative of this opinion. Rosenberg lambasted *Shaka Zulu* in the *Los Angeles Times*, describing the miniseries as a ‘negative metaphor for South African blacks.’ Rosenberg minced no words and described the series as ‘gory, foolish and demeaning’.⁴¹

Rosenberg elaborated:

Shot in South Africa, it seems to shape history to fit a contemporary political theme. Yesteryear’s supposedly blood-lusting Zulus fill nearly every frame of “Shaka Zulu,” becoming a negative metaphor for today’s black South Africans, reinforcing a wild tribal image in contrast to “civilized” whites. The mental jump is easy to make: Where would South Africa be today (gasp) if not for a white minority government to control these bloodthirsty black savages?⁴²

Rosenberg also noted the attempts made by Harmony Gold and its chief executive officer, Frank Agrama, to obscure the series’ links to the SABC and questioned if the series could be what South African MP’s had described as “the greatest project yet undertaken by the

⁴⁰ Eddie Michel, “‘My Children, You Are Permitted in Time of Great Danger to Walk with the Devil until You Have Crossed the Bridge’: President Truman, Apartheid, and the Early Cold War,” *South African Historical Journal* 72, no. 2 (April 2, 2020): 272–98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02582473.2020.1773913>. See also David Hostetter, “Movement Matters: American Antiapartheid Activism and the Rise of Multicultural Politics” (PhD thesis, University of Maryland, 2004), 5.

⁴¹ Howard Rosenberg, “‘Shaka Zulu’: Negative Image for South African Blacks’,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 21, 1986, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1986-11-21-ca-14929-story.html>.

⁴² Rosenberg.

SABC"... in the public record of a 1984 South African parliamentary debate held in advance of shooting’.

Rosenberg took exception to the way in which the series ‘largely reduc[ed] Zulu history to mysticism’ by depicting Shaka as controlled by a witchdoctor and the lack of attempt to interpret the violence that was graphically shown, leaving viewers to assume it to be ‘the product only of barbarism or black magic’. Rosenberg quoted Mazisi Kunene, who taught African literature at the University of California, Los Angeles, and had written *Emperor Shaka the Great*, who described the series as being ‘like Hitler doing the history of the Jews’. Rosenberg noted the screening itself was deeply problematic, as some stations he noted planned to screen the series ‘to coincide with the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.’s birthday in January or “Black History Month” in February’.⁴³ Rosenberg also flagged protests, such as one involving a group of close to 40 protesters at a cocktail party to celebrate KCOP’s screening of the series at the Palace in Hollywood. A photo, purportedly of a group protesting on 9 November 1986 under the auspices of an organisation called Unity in Action, shows a group of black and white protesters with placards condemning portrayals of ‘savage Africans’, ‘apartheid propaganda films’ and KCOP’s ‘collaboration’.⁴⁴

In contrast to Rosenberg’s strong public condemnation of the miniseries, and underlying its public appeal, many were won over. John J. O’Connor, a television critic at the *New York Times* since 1977 and who had worked at the *Wall Street Journal* prior to that, took a more appreciative stance. O’Connor had been critical of the series *Roots* for its use of stereotypes and what he judged its dubious historical accuracy.⁴⁵ Surprisingly though, while he

⁴³ Rosenberg.

⁴⁴ Ron Wilkins, “Shaka Zulu Protest at KCOP,” African Activist Archive, accessed September 10, 2021, <https://africanactivist.msu.edu/image.php?objectid=32-131-3B4>.

⁴⁵ Anita Gates, “John J. O’Connor, a Times TV Critic In Years of Industry Upheaval, Dies at 76: [Obituary (Obit); Biography],” *New York Times*, November 16, 2009, Late Edition (East Coast) edition, 434227821, *New York Times*, <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/john-j-oconnor-times-tv-critic-years-industry/docview/434227821/se-2?accountid=14717>.

recognised the political intrigues surrounding *Shaka Zulu*, he dismissed them, and described the miniseries as ‘an enthralling television exercise’. O’Connor particularly singled out Cele for his convincing and intense portrayal of Shaka.⁴⁶ Writing in a smaller Florida-based newspaper, another experienced television critic, Bill Kelley, regarded *Shaka Zulu* as ‘one of the best miniseries in years’. Noting its muted publicity, Kelley regarded the chief drawbacks of the miniseries for American network television to be its length (10 hours) and the fact that it was too ‘intellectually ambitious’ for staple television fare. Kelley praised the script by Sinclair and noted the high standard of the casting made up of British stars, which Cele, Kelley noted, up until then ‘an unknown [actor]’ had dominated.⁴⁷

The mixed reception of *Shaka Zulu* in the United States and the public protests that its premiering sparked underlined its nature as a society that had been shaped by the civil rights struggle. Historian David Hostetter argued that the ‘civil rights revolution’ in the United States provided a set of ideals and discourses, which after they had been applied to domestic America, were then exported to the international anti-apartheid struggle.⁴⁸ As Hostetter explains, ‘The methods, symbols, and vocabulary utilized by the civil rights movement were applied to the antiapartheid struggle’.⁴⁹ It was notable that the release of *Shaka Zulu* coincided with the passage by the US Congress of the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act on 2 October 1986 by an overwhelming majority. The Act imposed sanctions on South Africa, despite an attempted veto by President Ronald Regan. The Act represented the culmination of efforts by non-governmental organisations, individuals, and churches to push for divestment in South Africa due to apartheid. This broad coalition referred to as the Anti-Apartheid

⁴⁶ John J O’Connor, “‘Shaka Zulu,’ a 5-Part Mini-Series,” *New York Times*, November 2, 1987, Late Edition (East Coast) edition, 426686041, New York Times, <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/tv-review/docview/426686041/se-2?accountid=14717>.

⁴⁷ Bill Kelley, “‘Shaka Zulu’ an Intellectual but Unheralded Miniseries,” *South Florida Sun Sentinel*, March 6, 1987, <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/fl-xpm-1987-03-06-8701140834-story.html>.

⁴⁸ Hostetter, “Movement Matters: American Antiapartheid Activism and the Rise of Multicultural Politics.”

⁴⁹ Hostetter, 16.

Movement exerted both indirect and direct influence on the drafting and passage of the legislation.⁵⁰ African American activists, and organisations such as TransAfrica, the Free South Africa Movement, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the Congressional Black Caucus played particularly important roles, as Francis Nesbitt has demonstrated. For some addressing apartheid was part of a wider Pan African mandate and history and leaders such as Paul Robeson and W.E.B. Du Bois were among the first to condemn apartheid and attempt to influence American policy.⁵¹ The federal legislation was echoed with ‘nineteen states and eighty-one local municipalities’ enacting anti-apartheid divestiture laws that led to the withdrawal of a total of over \$18.5 billion.⁵² Given the broader context of anti-apartheid activism ‘from below’ in the United States it was therefore unsurprising that *Shaka Zulu* elicited protests in American cities. The mixed reviews demonstrated that the miniseries had some appeal based on its originality and perhaps due to the skill of Sinclair as a scriptwriter. While Rosenberg seemed to be the exception in taking a strong stand against the miniseries he was doubtless backed by those who pushed for divestment against South Africa.

The reception of Shaka Zulu in the Polish People’s Republic

Nkosi had moved to Poland in 1987 to take up a position as a lecturer in African literature at the University of Warsaw, one of a handful of South Africans who had found a home in the Polish People’s Republic, a relatively small number in comparison to other Eastern European countries such as the German Democratic Republic. For the Polish Communist Party,

⁵⁰ Frederic I. Salop, “Public Protest and Public Policy: The Anti-Apartheid Movement and Political Innovation,” *Review of Policy Research* 9, no. 2 (December 1, 1989): 307–26, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-1338.1989.tb01127.x>.

⁵¹ Francis Njubi Nesbitt, *Race for Sanctions: African Americans against Apartheid, 1946-1994* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10087032>.

⁵² Julie Grey, “The Passage of the Federal Anti-Apartheid Act: The Culmination of Anti-Apartheid Efforts within the United States,” *Suffolk Transnational Law Journal* 11, no. 2 (1987): 397.

apartheid was low on its list of priorities. Historians Paul Betts, James Mark, Idesbald Goddeeris and Kim Christiaens remark how, ‘Warsaw rarely hosted visits from ANC delegations... [and it’s] leaders were not afforded the same status as elsewhere in the bloc’.⁵³ The relationship worsened further, despite the decades of engagement that had seen Poland championing the anti-apartheid cause at the United Nations after the emergence of Solidarity in August 1980 and the government’s subsequent declaration of Martial Law on 13 December 1981. In the face of Poland’s domestic crisis it appeared that the Polish regime was using apartheid as a way of deflecting attention from their own internal oppression.

Nkosi opened his ‘Letter from Warsaw’ by recalling how ‘When I arrived in Warsaw two years ago, Polish television was showing weekly episodes of *Shaka Zulu*’ which Nkosi described as ‘a highly fantasised version of Zulu history made in South Africa for international distribution’.⁵⁴ Nkosi had worked at the University of Zambia from 1979, where he was promoted from senior lecturer to full professor by 1985,⁵⁵ and where he met Jadwiga Lukanty, ‘a visiting historian from the Academy of Sciences, Warsaw’. Nkosi recalled how ‘one thing led to another,’ the result being on her return to Warsaw Lukanty invited Nkosi to visit her. Nkosi recalled how he had been ‘always curious [about] what it would feel like to live on the other side during the infamous Cold War’ and thus ‘finally -yielded’, moved to Warsaw and married Lukanty,⁵⁶ where they lived in the Targowek District of Warsaw.

⁵³ Paul Betts et al., “Race, Socialism and Solidarity: Anti-Apartheid in Eastern Europe,” in *A Global History of Anti-Apartheid: “Forward to Freedom” in South Africa*, ed. Anna Konieczna and Rob Skinner (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 173, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-03652-2_6.

⁵⁴ Lewis Nkosi, “Letter from Warsaw,” *West Africa*, April 24, 1989, 632. My thanks to Monica Popescu for sharing her copy of this article with me.

⁵⁵ Lindy Stiebel and Elizabeth Gunner, *Still Beating the Drum : Critical Perspectives on Lewis Nkosi* (Amsterdam, NETHERLANDS, THE: Editions Rodopi, 2005), 355–56, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pretoria-ebooks/detail.action?docID=556858>.

⁵⁶ Lindy Stiebel and Therese Steffen, eds., *Letters to My Native Soil: Lewis Nkosi Writes Home (2001-2009)* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2014), 65, https://books.google.co.za/books?id=oln7AwwAAQBAJ&dq=jadwiga+lukanty&source=gbs_navlinks_s.

During this time, between 1987 and 1991, Nkosi lectured on African Literature at the University of Warsaw.⁵⁷

Although Nkosi's motive for relocating to Warsaw was a personal one, his arrival in Poland was evidently politically advantageous for the regime. The Polish Committee for Solidarity with the Peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America and its Secretary General, Jerzy Markiewicz, supported his application to be admitted to doctoral studies at the University of Warsaw and motivated for his visa extension pending the university's decision.⁵⁸ It seems things did not go as planned and, Nkosi instead began his doctorate registered through the University of Sussex (where he had also completed his MA). The choice of subject for his DLitt was the famous Polish expatriate author, Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski, better known as Joseph Conrad. Nkosi's choice of topic, the author of perhaps the most infamous novel on Africa, who Nigerian author and International Booker-Prize winner, Chinua Achebe, famously decried as 'a bloody racist',⁵⁹ indicated a deepening of Nkosi's interest in the colonial past of one of the few noncolonial European states. Nkosi's time in Warsaw seemed to also provide him with some critical distance from the ANC's struggle against apartheid, and while in Warsaw he wrote 'a lot' of the novel *The Underground People* which casts a sardonic eye on the intellectual clichés 'the Struggle' drew upon and was only safely released in 2002.⁶⁰

The miniseries *Shaka Zulu* was first screened on the Polish station TVP2 on 18 April 1987.⁶¹

It quickly became the third-most watched series, after the wildly popular American series

Lace and the classic 1967 British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) production *The Forsyte*

⁵⁷ Stiebel and Gunner, *Still Beating the Drum : Critical Perspectives on Lewis Nkosi*, 356.

⁵⁸ Communication dated 1988/04/06, Bu 1121/72 t.2, IPN.

⁵⁹ Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa," *The Massachusetts Review* 18, no. 4 (1977): 788.

⁶⁰ Stiebel and Steffen, *Letters to My Native Soil: Lewis Nkosi Writes Home (2001-2009)*, 66.

⁶¹ "Zulus Czaka (Serial Telewizyjny)," in *Wikipedia*, November 3, 2018, [https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zulus_Czaka_\(serial_telewizyjny\)](https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zulus_Czaka_(serial_telewizyjny)).

Saga. This popularity was despite a wide choice: in 1987 Polish television screened no less than 20 Polish, 12 French, 9 American and 7 Italian series.⁶² The television choices and fare of Polish viewers thus seemed to pre-empt the Cold War's end. Despite his distaste for the series, Nkosi interpreted part of the interest of Poles in *Shaka Zulu* arising from its resonances with the Polish experience of national defeat and dispossession, which was mirrored by the Zulu experience.⁶³ A recurring theme of Nkosi's letter was the novelty of black people to the Polish population, noting how he was often greeted openly by the refrain of "'murzyn!' (Negro)'. Rather than the type of horror that Martinican psychiatrist, Frantz Fanon, famously recalled eliciting when being seen by a European child in his classic *Black Skins, White Masks* (1967),⁶⁴ Nkosi spoke of being seen with open and astonished curiosity, which was reinforced by the screening of *Shaka Zulu*.⁶⁵ Nkosi's article turned to history to explain this Polish disposition towards black people, which while admitting that 'Polish attitudes to blacks vary considerably... the dominant impression is one of gross ignorance rather than straight-forward racism',⁶⁶ nonetheless judged that 'not having colonised any black people, Poles have had no experience of what to do with them'.⁶⁷

Although Poland never had colonies and could even be viewed as being colonised itself by the nineteenth century European empires it had been partitioned by, European colonialism in Africa still permeated its culture. One of the unsuccessful requests of the new Polish government had even been to be given German colonies in the settlement of the Treaty of Versailles after the First World War when it was resurrected as a country.⁶⁸ Furthermore, as

⁶² Jarosław Kończak, "Ewolucja Programowa TVP. Od Tele-Echa Do Polskiego Zoo" (University of Warsaw, 2007), 241, https://www.academia.edu/31774902/Ewolucja_programowa_TVP._Od_Tele-Echa_do_Polskiego_Zoo.

⁶³ Nkosi, "Letter from Warsaw," 632.

⁶⁴ F. Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks* (New York: Grove, 1967), 112, cited in Popescu, "Lewis Nkosi in Warsaw: Translating Eastern European Experiences for an African Audience," 183.

⁶⁵ Nkosi, "Letter from Warsaw," 632.

⁶⁶ Nkosi, 632.

⁶⁷ Nkosi, 633.

⁶⁸ Arkadiusz Żukowski, Interview, interview by Ian Macqueen, Olsztyn, Poland, July 31, 2019.

in the case of Germany, which was something of a belated colonial power, European countries that were not part of the colonial enterprise, nonetheless were imaginatively engaged in colonialism, as David Chioni Moore observes, drawing on the work of Susanne Zantop.⁶⁹ Nonetheless, in the view of Nkosi, the Poles remained somewhat anomalous as he argued that ‘It might even be said that the only historical experience they have had with a black society was quite catastrophic and resulted in a tragic loss of life’ and went on to recount the use of Polish troops by Napoleon to try and quash the Haitian Revolution, which resulted in the large loss of Polish lives. In his rendition of this history, Nkosi also evoked the image of the Poles as “‘the white negroes of Europe’”.⁷⁰ Nkosi used this historical lesson as a basis of pointed critique of Polish emigration to South Africa, which at the time of writing in 1989 Nkosi observed had reached 300,000: ‘Most Poles are of course ignorant of this part of their history. Otherwise they would not be rushing to South Africa now’.⁷¹

It is interesting to speculate on the lessons Nkosi felt Poles should have learnt from this previous colonial disaster, as he did not elaborate on this point. From the context of his example about the Haitian disaster, it seems likely Nkosi wanted to emphasise the history of the manipulation of the Poles in a colonial setting, reinforced by Nkosi’s emphasis of the commonalities in the Polish experience with that of the colonised and his explicit reference to the image of Poles as “‘the white negroes of Europe’”. Nkosi therefore implied the danger of Polish entanglement in a colonial context, an engagement without experience or knowledge that could be abused in the way Napoleon had done. See Ron Nixon / refugee centres / SA government marketing.

⁶⁹ David Chioni Moore, “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique,” *PMLA* 116, no. 1 (2001): 124.

⁷⁰ Nkosi, “Letter from Warsaw,” 633.

⁷¹ Nkosi, 633.

If in the United States, Rosenberg had seen *Shaka Zulu* to be a ‘negative metaphor for South African blacks’ the Polish magazine *Film* took the series at face value as O’Connor and Kelley had. The review was published just a few months after the first screening on Polish television and sang the South African production’s praises, noting how it was the first time the story of the rise of Shaka had been filmed and noted approvingly, echoing Florida-based critic Kelley, that it had been ‘transformed into an exciting exotic, colourful spectacle of great cognitive value’.⁷² The last point was reinforced for the reviewer by the fact that the series had been ‘filmed in an authentic environment – in the provinces of Natal and Lesotho, today belonging to South Africa and inhabited by the people of Bantu, mainly the Zulus’. In addition, the review emphasised that ‘The creators of the series obtained the consent from the royal Zulus family to tell the story’. In accepting what was doubtless part of the marketing campaign of the film’s release so completely, the review demonstrated a profound naivety that reinforces Nkosi’s observation of Polish ignorance of colonial affairs.

The first signal was the uncritical acceptance of the apartheid regime’s racial and ethnic categorization, referring to ‘the people of the Bantu’. The second signal was the uncritical assumption that the consent of the Zulu royal family gave the series legitimacy, in ignorance of the apartheid regime’s policy of separate development that had manipulated African traditional leadership, of which the Zulu royal family and the resurrection of *Inkatha* was perhaps the most extreme and tragic example as the political violence in the region would later attest to. The final paragraph was instructive about the reviewer’s extremely limited grasp of Africa in the way it attempted to juxtapose the significance of the series with productions that were more familiar:

⁷² “Czarny Napoleon,” *Film*, June 14, 1987, 13.

...the viewer's attention is caught by the expressive background characters – incredible witches and priests, warriors and advisors. Africa is known to us from the silver screen as a background for adventure stories. “Shaka Zulu” reveals something of the truth about the fascinating Black Land and its equally little-known, dramatic and tragic history.⁷³

Although the reviewer at least maintained the critical distance to acknowledge that the series only revealed ‘something of the truth’, it showed ignorance of the political context that had distorted the miniseries’ narration. The more familiar ‘adventure stories’ referred to by the review were a staple for European audiences. Especially in reference to the ‘incredible witches and priests,’ Tomaselli notes how ‘This liminal image is endemic to Western social discourses about Africans and Africa’ and surmises that they ‘seem to be largely derived from the H. Rider Haggard literary stereotypes, made into scores of films and television series since the early 1920s, for example *King Solomon’s Mines* and *Alan Quartermain*’.⁷⁴ Although the reviewer contrasted *Shaka Zulu* with this adventure film genre, Tomaselli emphasises the way in which the miniseries employed many of this genre’s tried and tested techniques such as high camera angles and sweeping expanses of land, especially when filming scenes in Zululand, to give viewers a sense of power and visual dominance over the landscape and the people who inhabited it.

In another review of the miniseries, also published in 1987, Agnieszka Ulanowska noted how *Shaka Zulu* had followed another colonially inspired series in *The Jewel in the Crown* (1984), which was based on the novels of Paul Scott and was set in the final days of the British Raj. Confirming Zantop’s point, it seems Europeans shared a joint colonial imaginary, even in the absence of direct participation, as *The Jewel in the Crown Series* had also been very popular

⁷³ “Czarny Napoleon.”

⁷⁴ Tomaselli, “Shaka Zulu, Visual History and Television,” 102–3.

in Poland. Ulanowska's review was also overwhelmingly positive, particularly emphasising how *Shaka Zulu* provided "a piece of African history and European-African contacts which is little known in Poland" and that "with a slight irony, a wink of the eye, it argues with our Eurocentrism".⁷⁵ Ulanowska was particularly appreciative of the depiction of Shaka by Cele as 'an original, multidimensional character'. She continued, noting:

Showing the other side's story, the native inhabitants of the continent, as a part of the historical-ethnographic story, seems to be the most valuable [aspect], although one can still talk about the other highlights of this series, such as great music (this title and final "bumm, bumm", has already put Chaka's (sic) admirers in the right mood), good cinematography, mystery (nasty witches), excellent roles of the already mentioned Henryk Cele as Chaka and other black actors, Edward Fox and Robert Powell (known to us from the role of the intellectual philosopher from the German film *Zanussi*).⁷⁶

Ulanowska concluded with a quote from the nineteenth century Polish explorer, Stefan Szolc-Rogozński, whom she argued, spoke out against racial domination: „Pod berłem świata rzeczywistego giną w dalekim mroku przesady i zatra się duchowe różnice ras" ("Under the sceptre of the real world, superstitions are lost in the distant darkness and the spiritual differences of races are obliterated."

It is evident that despite its questionable origins and historical inaccuracies, *Shaka Zulu* could have unintendedly positive impacts. The challenge to Eurocentrism that Ulanowska mentioned, her appreciation for the depiction of the character of Shaka, and the fact that she chose to end her review with an appeal to an end of racial domination underlined the equivocal nature of series. Of course, what was missing from the review was any reference to

⁷⁵ Agnieszka Ulanowska, "W Stronę Afryki," *Kultura* 25 (1987): 12–13.

⁷⁶ Ulanowska.

apartheid and a lack of awareness of the subtle ways cultural relativism had distorted the presentation of Zulu history.

There was something, though, to the claim of Ulanowska point that the miniseries provided a study of an African character that was widely accessible, to an extent not experienced by a Polish audience until that point. The Warsaw-born historian, Michał Leśniewski, who would go on to publish several books on South Africa and the history of imperialism,⁷⁷ credited some of his interest in the topic with his early fascination with the ‘exotic’ and the impression left on him as young person by *Shaka Zulu*, which he recalled was one of the ‘foremost popular miniseries in Poland’ at the time. In his opinion, the miniseries helped contribute to popular interest in South Africa, which became the most recognisable African country in Poland alongside Ethiopia.⁷⁸ While popular knowledge of apartheid and contemporary African struggles may have been limited, African studies in Poland had been a flourishing discipline in the 1960s and 1970s. For Leśniewski, its explosion in Poland in the period was an ‘ersatz’ engagement with Africa, a substitute for Poles not being able to travel to Africa themselves. In addition, there was a reading public who were particularly interested in South Africa, rather than Africa more broadly.⁷⁹

The boon of Polish African Studies in the 1960s and 1970s helped to strengthen Polish library holdings on the region. During Leśniewski’s Master’s research, which began in the late 1980s, he recalled being ‘astonished’ at the number of books in Polish libraries on South Africa. In addition to the mentioned expansion of African Studies, this focus on South Africa was also due to the interest the Anglo-Boer (or South African) War (1899-1902) had

⁷⁷ M. Leśniewski, *Zarys dziejów Afryki i Azji, 1869-2000. Historia konfliktów* (Warszawa 2000), (co-author); M. Leśniewski, *Wojna burska, 1899-1902* (Warszawa 2001); M. Leśniewski, *Miejsce Południowej Afryki w kształtowaniu koncepcji polityki imperialnej Wielkiej Brytanii, 1899-1914* (Warszawa 2001); M. Leśniewski, *Konflikty kolonialne i postkolonialne w Afryce i Azji, 1869-2005* (Warszawa 2006); M. Leśniewski, *Afrykanie, Afrykanerzy i Brytyjczycy. Studium wzajemnych relacji, 1795-1854* (Warszawa 2008).

⁷⁸ Michał Leśniewski, interview by Ian Macqueen, September 6, 2019.

⁷⁹ Leśniewski.

generated in Poland, being one of the high profile events in Polish newspapers from the period as Piotr Szlanta demonstrates.⁸⁰ The war would also serve as a model for Polish freedom fighters, such as Józef Piłsudski. In particular, Leśniewski recalled the availability in Warsaw libraries of the papers of Jan Smuts, edited by Keith Hancock, and the availability of translations of the memoirs of Paul Kruger, Christiaan Rudolf De Wet De Wet and Winston Churchill.⁸¹ He also recalled having access to the British and American press through the University of Warsaw library, and was able to use *The Times* to write his Masters' thesis in 1988/9 on British-Transvaal relations in the late nineteenth century. Now an established historian, in 2011 Leśniewski published a critical review of Dan Wylie's *Myth of Iron: Shaka Zulu in History*,⁸² which represents one fascinating culmination of the screening of the miniseries in Poland in the late 1980s.

Betts *et al.* also comment on the wealth of books published on apartheid in Poland; between 1951 and 1986 they list a selection of no less than 15 titles by 12 different authors.⁸³ A dissertation submitted in the town of Legionowo in 1990, by Wiesław Kowal analysed the South African national liberation struggle against apartheid and drew on many of these books and further additional Polish journal articles on apartheid.⁸⁴ Significantly, Kowal was able to complete his study drawing exclusively from Polish sources, citing many of the books mentioned by Betts *et al.* as well as articles published by renowned Polish journalist, Ryszard Kapuściński, from as early as 1963 and from Tadeusz Łętocha from 1961, as well as his book

⁸⁰ Piotr Szlanta, "Long Distance Solidarity: Polish Public Opinion and the Boer War 1899-1902," *Werwinkel*, no. 12 (1) (2017): 49–69.

⁸¹ C.R. De Wet, *Trzy lata wojny o niepodległość* (Warszawa: n.p., 1903), P. Kruger, *Pamiętniki prezydenta Krügera* (Warszawa: A.T.Jeziński, 1903) in Szlanta.

⁸² Michał Leśniewski, "Myth (De)Constructed: Some Reflections Provoked by Dan Wylie's Book *Myth of Iron: Shaka in History*," *Werwinkel*: 6, no. 2 (2011): 55–69.

⁸³ Betts *et al.*, "Race, Socialism and Solidarity: Anti-Apartheid in Eastern Europe," 165. Footnote 63.

⁸⁴ 'Praca dyplomowa – "Południowoafrykański ruch narodowowyzwoleńczy w walce z apartheidem"; praca napisana przez mł.chor. Wiesława Kowala, pod kierownictwem naukowym mjr mgr Andrzeja Słaby w Katedrze III, 1990. Translation Andrzej Turkowski, Bu 001708/3840, IPN.

Republika Południowej Afryki - kraj apartheid (1967).⁸⁵ Kowal's dissertation provides a convincing snapshot of the commitment of Polish intellectuals to engaging with apartheid over an extended period.

In contrast to this intellectual commitment to condemn apartheid, the positive reception depicted in the film reviews emphasised the extremely limited knowledge of apartheid 'from below' in Poland, a problem it shared with Hungary, in contrast to the GDR according to Betts *et al.*⁸⁶ A punk rock group called Tempelhof illustrated this in an interesting way, with a simple fun vinyl pamphlet, now held in the Polish Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) Białystok archives, roughly translated as 'Have you heard of the political system of apartheid in RSA'. The name of the punk rock group was full of Cold War symbolism: Tempelhof was the site of a major American airbase that had been crucial to the Berlin airlift (1948-1949).⁸⁷ Radek Orłowski, the vocalist of Tempelhof and the author of the pamphlet, recalled learning of apartheid from the state broadcast television and recalled a sense of identification with the oppressed in South Africa that he shared with others.⁸⁸

The African character in the Tempelhof pamphlet (figure 1) was drawn proclaiming 'Equal rights for all people'. It also included on its back page the picture of an African child above the statement "No one has the right to be happy being separated from others", together with what had the appearance of an anti-status quo motto, roughly translated as "Why should it be

⁸⁵ R.Kapuściński, 'Republika Południowej Afryki. Faszyzm karłowaty'[Republic of South Africa. Dwarf fascism], *Polityka*, 51-52 (1963); R.Kapuściński, 'Republika Południowej Afryki. Ous Staad,' *Polityka*, 1 (1964); R.Kapuściński, 'RPA. Kościół i partia' (RSA. The church and the party), *Polityka*, 6 (1964); T. Łętocha, 'Afryka dzisiejsza. Chrześcijaństwo wobec kraju segregacji rasowej,' (Africa today. Christianity towards a country of racial segregation), *Argumenty*, 11 (1961); T. Łętocha, 'Afryka dzisiejsza. Biblia i synowie Chana' (Africa today. The Bible and the sons of Cain), *Argumenty*, 12 (1961); T. Łętocha, 'Afryka dzisiejsza. Kościoły wobec rasizmu' (Africa today. Churches towards racism), *Argumenty*, 13 (1962); T. Łętocha, *Republika Południowej Afryki - kraj apartheid* (Warszawa 1967)

⁸⁶ Betts et al., "Race, Socialism and Solidarity: Anti-Apartheid in Eastern Europe," 171.

⁸⁷ S. Shead, 'The story of Berlin's WWII Tempelhof Airport which is now Germany's largest refugee shelter', *The Independent*, 20 June 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/world-history/the-story-of-berlins-wwii-tempelhof-airport-which-is-now-germanys-largest-refugee-shelter-a7799296.html>

⁸⁸ Email correspondence, Radek Orłowski to Andrzej Turkowski, 2 June 2020.

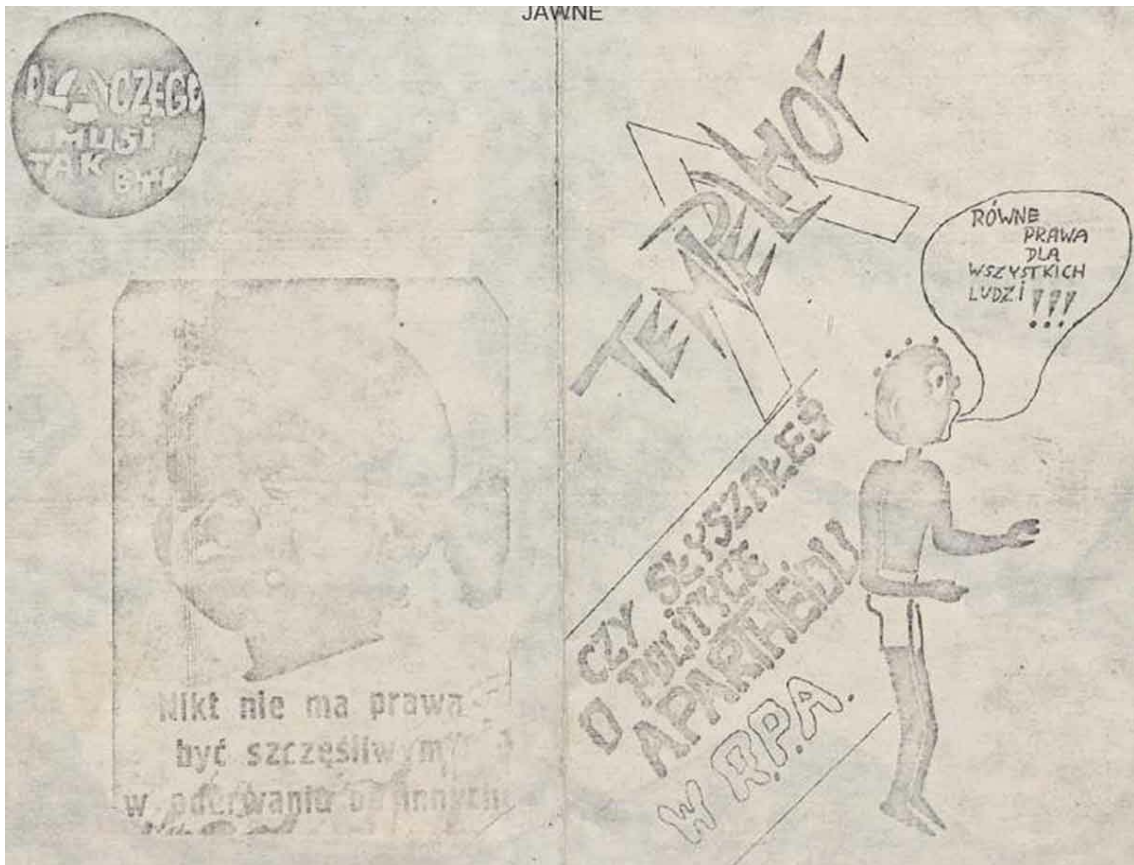


Figure 1. The front cover of the Tempelhof funvinył 'Have you heard of the political system of apartheid in RSA', Credit: Bi 611/1, IPN.

so?’ While one could certainly point to the limits of artistic ability as being one of the chief reasons for the nature of the depiction of the African figure on the cover, the pamphlet’s illustrations were a snapshot of the cultural world of Orłowski and surely reflected the images he had seen of Africa.

[Figure 1 near here]

[Figure 2 near here]

Other elements in the pamphlet help us to discern further links. The pamphlet parodied (figure 2) an extract of the well-known Polish nursery rhyme *Murzynek Bambo* (Little Negro Bambo) by the Polish poet, Julian Tuwim, written in the early 1920s in the newly independent Poland. The poem was included in Marian Falski’s *Elementarz*, a book of elementary lessons that many Polish children used. In the particularly well-known version, which included the 1957 illustrations by Jerzy Karolak, Bambo was drawn with his back to the reader, a decision that rendered him faceless, as noted by the literary scholar, Maciej Tramer.⁸⁹

Tempelhof’s version of the poem, which was also recorded as a song,⁹⁰ borrowed the opening lines of Tuwim’s poem but adapted it (represented in italics below) to comment on apartheid:

Negro Bambo lives in Africa, he has black skin / Negro Bambo lives in Africa, our friend diligently studies every morning from his Negro elementary readings / Negro Bambo lives in Africa, he has black skin / *It’s difficult for him, he has got problems / his homeland is RSA / Brave Bambo doesn’t drink milk, he eats only rye bread / In this way he protests against apartheid / Bambo wants to mislead the enemy / He is*

⁸⁹ Maciej Tramer, “Bambo Can Go,” *Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Litteraria Polonica* 6 (2016): 146.

⁹⁰ Email correspondence, Radek Orłowski to Andrzej Turkowski, 2 June 2020.

*organising an underground front / Bambo, Bambo, don't surrender / They will never murder you.*⁹¹

Tempelhof's well-meaning commentary revealed further ignorance, such as the assumption that rye bread was consumed in South Africa by the poor, but also showed some knowledge by referring to the existence of an 'underground front'. The pamphlet also issued a call 'If you are like us, then join us and don't let people finish each other off'. Despite the clumsiness of Tempelhof's attempt at raising awareness of apartheid, in using the Tuwim poem it is apparent that they were using the cultural reference points available to them.

Grzegorz Piotrowski observes how in the 1980s in Poland 'youth groups and grassroots mobilizations connected to the punk rock subculture... played an important role in mobilizing different cohorts of society and introducing previously unmentioned issues into public debate'.⁹² It is notable that another page of the Tempelhof pamphlet warned of an AIDS plague ('*uwaga AIDS dzuma*').⁹³ The Tempelhof pamphlet appears to be part of what is now described as 'third circulation' material, a form of information distribution that fell outside of either official or established dissident channels. It was characterised by a conscious rejection of recognised rules, including 'in terms of aesthetics'.⁹⁴ Piotrowski writes of how 'The second half of the 1980s saw a steep rise in publication of zines, brochures and pamphlets, attracting a great deal of attention from rebellious youth'⁹⁵ and notes the way in which 'punk rock with its rebellious lyrics, nihilistic attitude and radical aesthetics, became a perfect

⁹¹ 'Kopie elektroniczne materiałów promocyjnych zespołu "Tempelhof", plakatów koncertowych innych zespołów punk rockowych oraz ulotek antysystemowych', Bi 611/1, IPN.

⁹² Grzegorz Piotrowski, "Punk against Communism: The Jarocin Rock Festival and Revolting Youth in 1980s Poland," in *A European Youth Revolt: European Perspectives on Youth Protest and Social Movements in the 1980s* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), 203.

⁹³ 'Kopie elektroniczne materiałów', Bi 611/1, IPN, Bi 611/1.

⁹⁴ Piotrowski, "Punk against Communism: The Jarocin Rock Festival and Revolting Youth in 1980s Poland," 210.

⁹⁵ Piotrowski, 210.

language to express the needs and frustrations of young people in Poland during the 1980s'.⁹⁶ As such, Tempelhof's pamphlet serves as an interesting clue to the awareness of Polish youth and their sympathies with those oppressed under apartheid, but also stresses the limits of this identification due to the limited cultural exposure to Africa. It would seem that because of this popular void that the miniseries *Shaka Zulu* could be such a runaway success and the mixture of exotic cinematography and powerful characters could form an irresistible combination.

Polish-South African Links in the 1980s

The goal of this final section of the paper is to demonstrate how the cultural and academic links that provided a context for the reception of *Shaka Zulu* in Poland mirrored political and economic links. In doing so this section elaborates on arguments made by scholars but draws attention to further evidence of inter-state links and forms of exchange between the countries that underlines the ambiguity of the relationship.

As an important recent chapter by the historians Kim Christiaens and Idesbald Goddeeris convincingly demonstrates, while being relatively well-connected to the West, Solidarity was largely hapless in its engagement with the anti-apartheid movement and demonstrated a lack of knowledge of apartheid. As a result, the movement was slow to connect their fight for democracy with the struggle of black South Africans, only organising a belated anti-apartheid reggae concert in Gdańsk in 1989.⁹⁷ This lack of international awareness was evident in its declaration, issued by the Coordinating Office Abroad of NSZZ Solidarność in

⁹⁶ Piotrowski, 214.

⁹⁷ Kim Christiaens and Idesbald Goddeeris, "Solidarity or Anti-Apartheid? The Polish Opposition and South Africa, 1976–1989," in *A Global History of Anti-Apartheid: "Forward to Freedom" in South Africa*, ed. Anna Konieczna and Rob Skinner (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 291–315, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-03652-2_10.

acknowledgement of the award of the Noble Peace Prize to Lech Wałęsa. In a letter, relayed to South Africa's Department of Foreign Affairs and Information from the South African embassy in Paris,⁹⁸ Jerzy Milewski Director of the Coordinating Office Abroad of NSZZ Solidarność, attached the declaration which used the opportunity to plead with 'Free World societies' to acknowledge the plight of Polish political refugees. Noting that 'Thousands of Polish emigrants roam the world without work, bread and a roof over their heads' the declaration promised that these emigrants' 'antitotalitarian state of mind is a guarantee of their loyalty towards their host countries'⁹⁹ and went on to give their cooperation 'with the authorities of Australia and the Republic of South Africa... as a positive example for other states'. 'It is in these countries' the declaration noted 'that emigrating members of "Solidarność" have found the most advantageous conditions to settle down'.¹⁰⁰

The positive Polish view of South Africa evident in the 1983 Declaration is also discernible in other sources. On 27 May 1981, the South African Embassy in Brussels communicated a request for tourist brochures from a Mr Sobczak in Walbrzych in Poland, who claimed to be the president of a Polish/South African friendship society which had 'held 197 exhibitions and 330 conferences "for the Republic of South Africa" in Poland' the previous year. While South African officials were justifiably sceptical of the man's claims they saw 'no harm in assisting him'.¹⁰¹ Positive sentiment for South Africa was also evident in another, more desperate approach, communicated in a letter forwarded to the South African government from the *Maatskappy vir Europese Immigrasie* (Company for European Immigration). The letter in Polish, from a 38 year-old Polish man addressed to Prime Minister P.W. Botha

⁹⁸ 'Verklaring Uitgereik Deur Solidariteit', Letter from South African Ambassador to Direkteur-generaal, Buitlandse Sake en Inligting, 10 November 1983, 1/37/1, Department of International Relations and Cooperation Records, Pretoria (hereafter DIRCO).

⁹⁹ Letter from Jerzy Milewski, 22 October 1983 and 'Declaration', Coordinating Office Abroad of NSZZ Solidarność, 22 October 1983, 1, 1/37/1, DIRCO.

¹⁰⁰ 'Declaration', 2.

¹⁰¹ South African Embassy in Brussels to Department of Foreign Affairs, 27 May 1981, 1/37/1, DIRCO.

expressed appreciation for the Prime Minister and South Africa. He requested financial assistance of 200 US dollars to acquire a passport to enable him to emigrate to South Africa, where he promised to work to repay the money.¹⁰²

The openness of the South African government to requests for information also facilitated the start of the research career of Arkadiusz Żukowski. In the mid-1980s he was searching for an interesting topic for his Master's in maritime trade. As Żukowski reflected, the somewhat exceptional position of Poland, allowed students a relatively freer connection with the West than other Eastern bloc countries, and it was during a stint as a student in West Germany that Żukowski was able to approach the South African embassy in Bonn for information. He was also able to request information from South African universities. He recalled receiving a wealth of official documents from the South African government, as well as publications from the African National Congress. On the strength of this material, he was able to complete his Master's thesis on the topic of the impact of apartheid on the South African economy. For his doctoral research in the late 1980s he recalled being sponsored by South African sources and the Polish diaspora after his efforts to get funding from the editor of *Gazeta Wyborcza* and the veteran anti-Communist activist, Adam Michnik, proved fruitless.¹⁰³

This lack of support from Michnik for Żukowski's South African research was perhaps unsurprising given the near ambivalent attitude of Solidarity to the anti-apartheid cause before 1989 that Goddeeris and Christiaens document. Michnik had purportedly written a letter to Bishop Tutu from Barczewo Prison in August 1985 after the Polish activist had been imprisoned during the Martial Law that was declared in December 1981. It was published in the *Uncensored Poland News Bulletin* issued by the London-based Information Centre for Polish Affairs (UK) with support from the North American Study Center for Polish Affairs.

¹⁰² Letter from H.H. van Niekerk to Mnr Aldrich, February 1982, 1/37/1, DIRCO.

¹⁰³ Żukowski, Interview.

Although Michnik made no reference to it, the letter must have been inspired by the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Tutu in Oslo on 10 December 1984, a decision which the Association of Poles in Southern Africa incidentally condemned.¹⁰⁴ In the letter Michnik expressed his ‘unreserved solidarity with the struggle of your countrymen against the system of apartheid and for a democratic order and human dignity’.¹⁰⁵ Michnik, however, expressed no visible recollection of the letter when I presented him with a copy.¹⁰⁶ One is therefore left to wonder, if this represents the vagaries of memory or if the letter was an organisational response to international opinion that was moving in favour of the anti-apartheid movement in the mid-1980s and expected a synergy between the struggles in Poland and South Africa. If the Communist Party sought to use apartheid to deflect international attention from its own crackdown on internal dissent, Polish activists also attempted to use apartheid to their advantage to discredit the Polish Communist regime, by uncovering its trade links with the apartheid state in the 1980s, noting specifically that ‘experts in chemical and mining industries are traveling from Poland to South Africa, which has the greatest tools of the world to produce oil from coal (and the only ones working on an industrial scale)’.¹⁰⁷ There is ample evidence of the activists’ claims. Polish historian, Przemysław Gasztold, concludes his frank assessment of Polish Cold War relations with Africa by stating that, rather than Communist ideology, it was economic benefit that guided Polish policy. In short, ‘Pragmatism ruled the Polish approach to Africa’.¹⁰⁸ Gasztold notes how ‘Polish-South African economic relations... flourished in the late 1950s’ and that plans by the Polish government to establish ‘mutual diplomatic relations with South Africa’ were only shelved when news of the

¹⁰⁴ Żukowski, “Contemporary Polish Diaspora in the Republic of South Africa and Its Attitude towards Politics,” 199.

¹⁰⁵ ‘Adam Michnik’s Letter to Bishop Tutu, August 1985’, *Uncensored Poland News Bulletin*, 18 (1985): 16.

¹⁰⁶ Adam Michnik, interview by Ian Macqueen and Andrzej Turkowski, Warsaw, October 21, 2019.

¹⁰⁷ Cited in Betts et al., “Race, Socialism and Solidarity: Anti-Apartheid in Eastern Europe,” 174.

¹⁰⁸ Przemysław Gasztold, “Lost Illusions: The Limits of Communist Poland’s Involvement in Cold War Africa,” in *Warsaw Pact Intervention in the Third World: Aid and Influence in the Cold War*, ed. Philip E. Muehlenbeck and Natalia Telepneva (London and New York: I.B. Taurus, 2018), 214.

Sharpeville massacre made it diplomatically impossible for Warsaw to proceed. Despite these setbacks, Polish ships regularly called on South African ports ‘where they bought oil and supplies’.¹⁰⁹

The importance of this trade to the South African government was underlined by its response to Polish sailors who sought to use Cape Town and Durban to attempt to desert. One instance that occurred in November 1972, drew the concern of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, who issued an Aide-Memoire to the South African Government, over two Polish seamen who had sought asylum in South Africa. The young men, who expressed fear of imprisonment and ‘threatened suicide if returned,’ were nonetheless refused permission to remain in the country and were placed back on board the same Polish ship when it later stopped in Durban again.¹¹⁰ The High Commissioner sought for clarification from South Africa ‘bearing in mind the internationally accepted principle of the non-return to their country of origin of persons who have fear of persecution’. The South African authorities used the technicality that the Polish seamen had not ‘appealed for political asylum or refuge’.¹¹¹ From this episode it is entirely plausible to assume that the South African authorities did not want to jeopardize the view of South African ports as safe for Polish ships to call on due to the trade relationship in place.

In 1979 correspondence from J. van Delsen, Secretary of Foreign Affairs, to South Africa’s ambassador in Paris, cited trade documentation that showed: ‘there has been a considerable trade between South Africa and the Poles over the past number of years and in fact, as far as South Africa is concerned, there are no obstacles in the way of South African businessmen

¹⁰⁹ Gasztold, 206.

¹¹⁰ ‘Polish Refugees in South Africa’, South African Permanent Mission, Geneva, 3 May 1973; ‘Aid-Memoire’, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees’, 27 April 1973, 9/3/2, DIRCO.

¹¹¹ ‘Seamen “did not ask for asylum”, *Rand Daily Mail*, 09 November 1972.

who want to trade with Poles'.¹¹² Further official advances by the Polish regime were reported in the middle of 1980 by the South African ambassador in Canberra, John Oxley, from his Polish counterpart, Ryszard Frackiewicz. While the first inquiries were for the purchase of South African wool, Oxley also noted Polish interest in 'Sasol technology,' South Africa's successful project to extract oil from coal on an industrial scale, and a possible approach to the apartheid regime 'for a financial loan'. As he explained 'the Ambassador himself (having recently returned from leave in Poland approached me informally and spoke of the keenness with which his country and government wish to develop closer but covert links with South Africa.'¹¹³ Oxley's advice, which was shared by the Director General of Foreign Affairs and Information, was that such trade links should be set up through the South African Embassy in Bonn. By May 1981, W.W. Rautenbach, 'South Africa's Minister (Commercial) in Bonn' had been nominated 'as a possible contact man'.¹¹⁴ By September 1981, the South African National Intelligence Service approached South African Customs and the Department of Industries, Commerce and Tourism for trade statistics with Poland as it was reported that 'a Polish trade delegation was due to visit South Africa'.¹¹⁵

The South African regime was also able to exploit the country's history of support for Polish refugees. In this respect, Dr J.G. Boyazoglu, who served as Counsellor (Agricultural/ Technical) at the South African Embassy in Paris¹¹⁶ and represented South Africa on the Board of Management of the International Food Irradiation Project, directed by Dr P.S. Elias

¹¹² 'Moontlike Handelskontak met Pole: Gesprekke van Mnr Roswadowski in Pole', 1 October 1979, 1/37/3, DIRCO.

¹¹³ Letter from John Oxley, 19 December 1980, 1, 1/37/3, DIRCO.

¹¹⁴ Ambassador to the Director-General, Foreign Affairs and Information, 'Relations with Poland', 19 May 1981, 1/37/3, DIRCO.

¹¹⁵ O.G. Albers to Mr Sunde, 17 September 1981, 1/37/3, DIRCO.

¹¹⁶ '[BOYA] Boyazoglu collection of French Africana', <https://www.uj.ac.za/library/informationresources/special-collections/Pages/Archival-Collections.aspx> (accessed 9 September 2020). Dr Boyazoglu, was also recognised by Dr JWL De Villiers, President of the Atomic Energy Board, as South Africa's representative 'on the Board of Management of the International Project' at the National Symposium on Food Irradiation, held in Pretoria from 4 to 5 October 1979.

of the Federal Republic of Germany,¹¹⁷ suggested a man by the name Rozwadowski, likely Frank Rozwadowski,¹¹⁸ to South Africa's Secretary of Foreign Affairs as a good facilitator for possible trade with Poland. As a Polish wartime refugee, who had risen to become General Manager of 'two of our largest Cape fruit producers (Lombardi and Gants)', Rozwadowski had been the Western European representative of the Deciduous Fruit Board, Boyazoglu reported. In August 1978 he had been appointed to the Paris office of the Agricultural Technical Services for fruit industry matters, and Boyazoglu described him as 'one of our most experienced experts in the field'. It was on the pretext of Rozwadowski visiting family members in Poland, that on his return Boyazoglu could report the possibility of pursuing this 'channel of contact with the Poles' and could vouch for the loyalty of Rozwadowski, who he saw 'can play a valuable role in this regard'.¹¹⁹

In a further twist in February 1982, the South African Department of Transport communicated a request it had received from Polish airline, LOT, for permission to land in Cape Town with 120 Polish sailors on board and to then collect 80 sailors to return to Poland. Reading the deliberations on how to respond to the request provides a fascinating insight into the competing imperatives that were at play in the relationship between the apartheid state and the PPR – a key Warsaw Pact member and thus prime enemy in apartheid propaganda of the '*Die rooi gevaar*' ('The Red danger') that was an integral part of South African security and propaganda discourse. In their consideration of the request the long-standing relationship

¹¹⁷ H. Beyers, H.T. Brodrick, and W.C.A. Van Niekerk, eds., *Proceedings of the National Symposium on Food Irradiation* (Pretoria: Atomic Energy Board, 1979), 141, https://inis.iaea.org/collection/NCLCollectionStore/_Public/11/570/11570261.pdf.

¹¹⁸ Frank Rozwadowski was hired by Edmond Lombardi, founder of the company Lombardi, as recalled by his son Dave Lombardi: 'My father had absolutely no previous experience in farming of any sort. But what he did have was a keen sense of all aspects of business and was able to grasp the key issues required to make a success... he recruited one Frank Rozwadowski, an experienced Polish agriculturist. [He] brought on board several other Polish experts (Kormornicki, Rosenwerth and Herbowicz)', 'Elgin Valley History' <http://elginvalleyhistory.blogspot.com/2018/07/> (accessed 9 September 2020).

¹¹⁹ J.G. Boyazoglu to Mr. Fourie, Secretary for Foreign Affairs, 8 June 1979, 1/37/3, DIRCO.

with KLM, who had been responsible on for the transport of ‘such sailors on a regular basis’ was noted as being important.

Conclusion

The popular reception of *Shaka Zulu* indicated the transformative power of post-war social movements to inflect public debate, as seen in the case of protests in cities in the United States and the mixed reception of the miniseries by American reviewers. The absence in communist Poland of this grassroots engagement, despite state posturing, points to the importance in the Cold War period of organisations such as the Anti-Apartheid Movement. As we have seen, this lack of popular awareness in Poland, paradoxically sat alongside a substantial intellectual commitment to analysing and commenting on apartheid by Polish intellectuals, as the 1990 dissertation convincingly demonstrated. This was complicated by counter-cultural groups, such as punk bands, who had a limited sense of what was taking place in South Africa and extended their support as far as they could.

The route of *Shaka Zulu* from a South African studio to Polish television sets in the late Cold War is illustrative of a relationship that was constrained by ideology but that was still attractive enough to elicit secret initiatives from both sides. For both South African and Polish government officials trade was a priority that needed to be kept secret but was nonetheless pursued for the mutual benefits it represented to both countries. The global market for original television series ensured that even a miniseries with dubious origins, such as *Shaka Zulu*, could nonetheless be cleverly packaged and become popular across both sides of the Cold War. In this way the miniseries indicated how consumerism and entertainment already formed a single market that usurped the ideological dictates of the conflict. The miniseries was also a graphic representation of relationships between states where forms of

exchange existed, even where political rhetoric condemned trade partners as ideological rivals.