

Perception and Prejudice of the Global North towards the Global South: Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka* in Perspective

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Abstract: Published in the year 1925 and first translated into English in 1931, *Chaka* is the third novel written by Lesotho (country in Southern Africa) writer Thomas Mofolo. Originally written in Sesotho, this novel is a mythic retelling of the life and experiences of the Zulu emperor King Shaka. It is interesting to note that Mofolo's unwillingness to denounce tribal practices infuriated the publisher, who put the original manuscript on hold for many years. Further, the first English version of the novel also ignites issues of authenticity and transparency. Daniel P. Kunene, who has translated *Chaka* in recent times, has pointed out the omission of at least two chapters from the published version that dealt with the traditions and history of the Zulu community. This paper intends to navigate the politics of publication surrounding the novel *Chaka* and to expose the colonial mindset that has forcibly tried to retain the perception and prejudice of the Global North towards the Global South. The publisher's attempt to denounce and critique the tribal traditions and cultural practices may be seen as a deliberate attempt on the part of the Global North to subjugate and subvert the identity of the Global South in a process that is reminiscent of colonial hegemony.

Keywords: Prejudice, Perception, Global North, Global South, Thomas Mofolo, *Chaka*

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent times, the fields of publication and translation have been brought under heavy scrutiny and microscopic investigation by many scholars and academicians all around the world. It is observed that the power of publication remains under the strong grip of the Global North. Several forces act as influential elements for a text to be published in its original form and then eventually come out as a translated piece. When we consider the process of publication and translation, questions like: What is suppressed? What remains the dominant voice? What needs to be translated? Who will be prioritized? and who will be marginalized, are significant. These questions also throw light on the politics and prejudices that are associated with both publication and translation. Also, sometimes a particular ideology; sometimes it is the power that plays a role. Besides ideology and power, economic factors are another cause of publication strategies and translations. All these factors contribute to one another, and one cannot make one independent of other causes. Small and independent presses are swallowed up by mainstream publishing houses. Although in today's time and space, writers of colour, LGBTQ writers, and writers from other historically marginalized populations are being published by commercial presses, the inclusion of diverse literary voices in mainstream publishing is still an ongoing and difficult process. The increased scrutiny of the publishing sector as a result of the Black Lives Matter protests brought to light the systematic biases and ongoing imbalances that writers and publishing professionals from racial, sexual, and other minorities experience, including racial wage discrepancies.

In case of publishing, there are numerous instances that demonstrate the involvement of politics, prejudices and power. Writer, editor and academic Bhakti Shringarpure has identified how East African writer Abdulrazak Gurnah's winning of the Nobel Prize (2021) created a frenzy among the Western publishers, critics and readers, as there was not much written about him. She also makes the observation that Gurnah's books were not as extensively read since he did not match the mould of the African writers that the publishing business had been elevating. The worlds he constructs are psychologically and historically complex, and his prose is dense (Pradhan 2022). Author Jennifer Makumbi of Uganda has explained how Western publishers rejected her epic novel *Kintu* (2014), which explores Ugandan history and myth from pre-colonial times to the present. Her novel was rejected on the grounds that "Western readers could read and understand books that are not addressed to them." The novel was only accepted after it was published by the independent Kwani Trust in Nairobi and welcomed by readers and reviewers across Africa (Pradhan 2022).

In the context of translation, Tymackzo and Gentzler have illustrated the ideological aspects of translation as highlighted by postmodern and postcolonial theories. As per them, "Translation is not simply an act of faithful reproduction but, rather, a deliberate and conscious act of selection, assemblage, structuration and fabrication – and even, in some cases of falsification, refusal of information, counterfeiting, and the creation of secret codes" (181-201).

Moreover, translation can be deemed as an action that is highly political in nature. Translation has been a weapon to enter into others' frontiers, influencing them to take part in a competition either to choose the alluring foreign or to ignore it for self-identity. Spivak has said that "The task of the translator is to facilitate the love between the original and its shadow, a love that permits fraying, holds the agency of the translator and the demands of her imagined or actual audience is at bay" (181). Also, she has discussed how the politics of translation often suppresses the possibility of this kind of love, as the translator cannot engage with or cares insufficiently for the rhetoric of the original (181).

II. DISCUSSION

This paper sets out to examine the politics of publication surrounding the novel *Chaka* and to expose the colonial mindset that has forcibly tried to retain the perception and prejudice of the Global North towards the Global South. The publisher's attempt to denounce and critique the tribal traditions and cultural practices as presented in the novel *Chaka* may be seen as a deliberate attempt on the part of the Global North to subjugate and subvert the identity of the Global South in a process that is reminiscent of colonial hegemony. This paper also locates how the Global North has always been involved in the process of translating the works of the Global South in general and Mofolo's *Chaka* in particular to perpetuate the imperialistic and hegemonic attitude, igniting the issues of authenticity and transparency.

Chaka is a literary masterpiece that is at once mysterious and brilliant. Written by the Southern Sotho or Sesotho writer Thomas Mokupe Mofolo, this novel, over time, has been under scholarly investigation and interpretation. This novel has become well-known as one of the great masterpieces of African literature since Kunene's revised translation was released in 1981, particularly in the last several years. Moreover, it has the ability to communicate a series of meanings to readers both now and in the past.

This novel is a mythic fictional retelling of the story of the life and experience of the Zulu king Shaka. This novel talks about the mighty Chaka, the Zulu king's journey of self-discovery and eventual downfall. His psychological evolution rests at the core of the story. The situation of the hero's unlawful conception and birth sets the tone for the narrative. It tells the tale of Zulu monarch Chaka from his birth to his ascent to prominence and eventual demise. This is not a history; rather, the author re-narrates his own experience, grounded in the life of the historical character. Mofolo was clearly writing for an African readership. This much is reflected not only in but also in his decision to use the reinterpretation of a local historical figure. From the perspective of storytelling, the novel skilfully combines Sotho or Sesotho oral tradition with modern historical reality. Mofolo bases the formal organization of his works on the oral tradition, notably the traditional heroic cycle. The narrative is presented in brief chapters that each focus on a different event in the life of this fictionalized Zulu king.

By all accounts, *Chaka* is written in the pure Sotho or Sesotho language. Despite its brilliance, Mofolo was forced to undergo troubles to see his work published in his native language. For instance, the *Chaka* manuscript caused strong opposition when it was initially presented to the missionaries in charge of the Morija press. A few of these early readers felt the work was provocative because of the pagan beliefs and against Christian principles, and they recommended against publishing it. Others disagreed, claiming that the document contained positive educational value and that nothing in it contradicted the mission's principles.

One of the pertinent reasons is that Mofolo wrote under the most unfavourable circumstances any African artist has faced. He was writing at a time when no fellow South African, individual or group, owned a printing press, much less a publishing house. He was therefore at the mercy of missionaries for publication facilities. If a work or text was rejected by missionary publishers, it was unlikely that an African author would find another press willing to publish it. Manuscripts could be rejected for various reasons, including foreseeable real or alleged seditious, disrespectful, and ideologically unorthodox principles. Therefore, the first and most common form of text control was pre-publication censorship justified on religious or political grounds. It is undeniable that the missionary institutions that owned and controlled the means of publication in early 20th-century South Africa applied forms of pre-publication censorship to the production of literature.

In *Lovedale and Literature for the Bantu*, Shepherd himself has specified that "No MS. is accepted, even though the author is prepared to meet the cost of publication, unless it is found after close scrutiny to have reached a certain standard of excellence" (19). Another academic, Leon De Kock, has referred to Lovedale when discussing the censorial practices of religious institutions. He has said that:

As far as literary form is concerned, it has been said that Lovedale in the Eastern Cape, along with other institutions and individual missionaries, not only established a widespread literate order that incorporated institutional surveillance, but in doing this, it sought to 'translate' indigenous forms of subjectivity into excessively narrow limits determined by Western literary forms of expression. This process relied to a very

great extent on the existence and continued refinement of a growing culture of print and on the reification of the Book as a pre-eminent source of both knowledge and human understanding in a normative sense. (55-56)

More than anyone else, Thomas Mofolo knew about his terrible situation. Yet, the sheer faith in his creative craft led him to spend the year, especially 1909, travelling all over Natal, South Africa, the site of Chaka's Zulu empire, gathering and checking background material for his book. In 1910, the novel *Chaka* came to be as a finished manuscript. But Mofolo waited a long fifteen years before his work could be published. The only publishing house was a Christian setup established by the European missionaries in his country. This was done to spread religious ideas, tracts and propaganda for converting Africans. Kunene's insistence that Christian values dominate the novel has not only been accepted by several subsequent scholars, but was the primary demand from the missionaries themselves during the time of its publication in Sesotho in 1925. The prejudice of the missionaries towards Mofolo in particular and Africans in general was apparent. They firmly believed in the creative output of the West and found Africans incapable of creative genius. Mofolo's work, bearing the bold, open stamp of genius, unnerved them. What was more, Mofolo had already written three works. This fact was held against him. One white missionary declared it was unwise for an African to show such high creativity. They called *Chaka* an evil book, as it treated traditional African issues seriously. An upset Ellenberger described the book as nothing but an apology for pagan superstition. "It is strange that a religious establishment like our mission published such a book; it should not be permitted that the literary value of a book makes us forget the pernicious effects it can have" (87-97). He regarded *Chaka* as an evil book (87-97). Not only that, he asked

...who is responsible for the publication of this book which, in his eyes, will only have harmful effects of its readers because it is an apology for pagan superstitions. It is strange that a religious institution like our Mission should publish such a book; we should not let the literary value of a work make us forget the pernicious effects it can have. (129)

Yet the novel's intention was clear, and it was African in its truest sense. It took 15 years for the missionaries to decide to release the book after all. *Chaka* was Mofolo's third novel, and like the previous two, it was published by the Paris Evangelical Mission (PEMS) in Morija, Lesotho. The Sotho or Sesotho publication was in 1925. An English version appeared in 1931; a French version in 1940. But the missionaries did one thing. They managed to scare Mofolo away from his creative work or at least ask for publication.

In the context of publication and translation, four distinct lineages of Mofolo's *Chaka* have been identified. This means, with each translation of this novel, an ideological construct is attached to it. Over time, this novel has been considered as the mission text, the English colonial text, the French colonial production and the postcolonial text. As a product of the mission press, this novel is showcased as a piece of moralising missionalia. It serves as a Sesotho missionary novel that propagates the values of Christianity and PEMS mission itself. The publisher's emblem or colophon, the use of small format and the ornamental capital letters locate the missionary vision. Mofolo's *Chaka* is also identified as the English colonial text. This can be traced as per the first translation into English and its publication in 1931 for the International Institute of African Languages and Culture in London by the Oxford University Press. With an introduction by Sir Henry Newbolt and the translator being F.H. Dutton, this translated version upholds colonial supremacy and colonial authority over an African novel. The predominant tone in the English version of *Chaka* is set by the coloniser, highlighting the ownership over the colonised. It is also vital to understand that the pre-publication deliberation of the English version of *Chaka* was not done with Mofolo. Rather, Newbolt and Dutton were given full authority. Moreover, the alleged subtitle *An Historical Romance* to the English-translated novel *Chaka* abounds in the issue of fixity of meaning. The French translation of the novel *Chaka* is yet another way of embedding the literary production from the Global South into the mould of the Global North. In his article *History by Paratext: Thomas Mofolo's Chaka*, Corinne Sandwith talks about the incorporation of mainstream French literary elements into the translated version of *Chaka*. The French version too has an added revision in the form of a subtitle, *A Bantu Epic*, in order to establish the authenticity of the translation and give the credit to the translator V. Ellenberger (grandson of the veteran PEMS missionary D.F. Ellenberger). Here too, one finds the clear sidelining of Mofolo for biographical information, evident enough by the preface written by Zakes Mangoela. Lastly, as *Chaka* is also interpreted as a postcolonial novel due to its new renditions in the 1980s, which can be aligned with the resistance against the apartheid rule in South Africa. Also, the republished version in English of this novel by Daniel Kunene in 1981 as a part of AWS serves as a break from colonial attachment and a movement towards postcolonial negotiation and discussion. With this version of *Chaka*, Kunene has not only noted but also uncovered the rigid colonial mindset by pointing out the existence of at least two chapters in the original Sesotho manuscript which describe in some detail the history and customs of the Zulus, as well as their military system.

III. CONCLUSION

Yet, the most important aspect of the novel, keeping in mind all the troubles that Mofolo had to undergo for his novel to be brought to light in terms of publication and translation, is the author's sheer determination to subvert the dominant ideology of their time by demonstrating the sophistication of African social existence, contemporaneously and in the past.

In its true sense, this novel has attained a unique status for itself, not only for Mofolo's plight to see his literary efforts being actualised but also as an exemplary example of what African literature has in store for all the readers, critics, publishers and academicians all around the world.

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