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Professionalism and Ethics in Military Leadership: Lessons from Pre-colonial Africa

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ABSTRACT
This paper examines the role of professionalism and ethics in military leadership using examples from pre-colonial Africa. The Maasai warriors of East Africa provided professional military service to their society which rose to the position of hegemony in the region. Shaka developed a professional army which, through military might, placed the Zulu in a position of hegemony in Southern Africa. However, the undermining of military ethics resulted in the decline of professionalism and eventual failure in both the Maasai military and in Shaka's military leadership. The paper concludes that military ethics must be consistently upheld to ensure professionalism and successful military leadership.

Introduction

For many centuries the sanctioned use of violence has been practiced by humanity for one reason or another. The demand for this service in societies gradually led to the development of specialised skills and technologies that eventually evolved into the professional military as known today. During these years of evolution the issue of whether military violence is justified or appropriate has always been a subject of discourse. Hence, the question of ethics had always accompanied the military through its evolution. This paper takes a look at the issues of professionalism and ethics as they relate to the military and its leadership using examples from pre-colonial African history. The Maasai warriors of East Africa serve as the basis for discussing the place of professionalism and ethics in the military while Shaka kaSenzangakhona of the Zulu Kingdom in Southern Africa provides the basis for discussing the practice of professionalism and ethics in military leadership. The Maasai and Zulu societies were purposely chosen because both societies had well developed military organisations where warriors were mobilised exclusively for military service and served as standing armies, even residing in barracks.

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This discourse begins with conceptual clarifications of military professionalism, ethics and leadership as used within the context of this paper. The next section briefly discusses the state of military professionalism and ethics in Pre-colonial Africa. This is followed by a discussion of professionalism and ethics in the military institution of the Maasai people. Next, it discusses the practice of professionalism and ethics in the military leadership of Shaka kaSenzangakhona. The paper ends with a look at some lessons from the Maasai military and the military leadership of Shaka.

The Concepts of Military Professionalism, Ethics and Leadership

This work is developed around three concepts which are military professionalism, ethics and leadership. To avoid ambiguity, it is necessary to clarify the meanings of these concepts as used here. The journey towards understanding the concept of military professionalism should begin from the concept of a profession from which it originates. According to Lucas, a profession constitutes

> a distinctive practice, or set of social practices, that in turn requires mastery of specialized knowledge and techniques through education and intensive training. Acquaintance with a language, vocabulary, and set of technical assumptions unique to those practices that enable their common mastery and performance, and (perhaps most importantly) that ultimately provide a shared understanding among the members that they and their profession are dedicated to providing a unique and urgently needed service to the wider public or the civil society within which those professions are practiced.[1]

This definition introduces the issue of specialised knowledge and techniques which are acquired through a process of education and training and are used to provide special and needed service to the society. Snider expands this further with the opinion that

> (1) professions provide a unique and vital service to the society served, one it cannot provide itself; (2) they do so by the application of expert knowledge and practice; (3) because of their effective and ethical application of their expertise, they earn the trust of the society; (4) professions self-regulate— they police the practices of their members to ensure it is effective and ethical; this includes the responsibility to educate and certify professionals, ensuring only the most proficient members actually apply their expertise on behalf of the client; and (5)

[1]George Lucas, *Military Ethics: What Everyone Needs To Know,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 10.

> professions are therefore granted significant autonomy in their practice on behalf of the society.[2]

Here, the idea of ethics as a component of a profession is introduced, and this implies that there is also a potential for the members of a profession to abuse their specialised knowledge and skills. Consequently, a profession must then have a system of self-policing and regulation in order to ensure that its members act ethically. When this system is in place, the society tends to trust and reward the profession with some level of autonomy. The military profession is deemed so because it possesses specialised knowledge in the use of sanctioned violence developed through education, training and experience, which it deploys on behalf of its society. In addition, it has self-regulating and policing mechanisms that ensures its practices are within the stipulated ethics of the profession and as such it is trusted to carry out its duties. Military professionalism, therefore, refers to these standards and parameters that distinguish the military organisation as a profession. In other words, military professionalism involves upholding and developing military knowledge and skills through military education, training and experience, in order to provide specialised military services to the society within the ethical standards of the profession and larger society, through a system of self-regulation, discipline, integrity, sacrifice and duty.

It is not accidental that the issue of ethics is present in the conceptualisation of military professionalism. This is because the profession of arms by its nature requires some form of ethics to guide its activities and guard against excesses. Ethics provide the basis for finding the best reasons behind choices and policies affecting both the profession and the larger society.[3] Thus, the military ethic, being a professional ethic, is deeply embedded within military professionalism. As Snider puts it:

> A professional ethic is the evolved set of laws, values, and beliefs, deeply embedded within the core of the profession's culture, which binds individual members together in common purpose to do the right thing for the right reason in the right way. The ethic sets the conditions for the creation and maintenance of a motivational, meritocratic culture. The ethic provides a set of standards that individual professionals willingly impose on each other to keep trust with their client. Hence, a self-policing ethic is a necessity for any profession. This is of special importance for a military profession given the lethality inherent in its expertise.[4]

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[2]Don M. Snider, 'American Military Professions and their Ethics', *Routledge Handbook of Military Ethics*, ed. George Lucas, (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 16.
[3]Bill Rhodes, *An Introduction to Military Ethics: A Reference Handbook,* (Santa Barbara: ABC Clio, 2009), p. 2.
[4]Snider, 'American Military', p. 17.

While military ethics are specifically for members of the profession, they often transcend the ideological confines of the military because they are derived from the larger society. Specifically, these ethics are derived from the moral values arising from the continuous human discourse about what is appropriate behaviour.[5] In Pre-colonial Africa, these moral values were usually embedded in the customary laws of societies. Consequently, the scope of military ethics often included issues relating to the legitimacy of war, discrimination and proportionality of means. In this way the larger society was involved in the evaluation of the military profession based on the standards of these customary laws.

There is little doubt that the effectiveness of military professionalism and ethics depends on the existence of some form of leadership. The profession of arms, as a matter of necessity, is usually organised in hierarchical order. Different levels of leadership make up a chain of command which is at the core of military expertise and efficiency. This means that almost every member of the military is a leader in one or more capacities. In the context of this paper, leadership 'is the activity of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish the mission and improve the organization.'[6]

Military Professionalism and Ethics in Pre-colonial Africa

Pre-colonial African historiography has been challenged over the use of concepts of Western origin and their appropriateness and applicability. As a result, this often necessitates the need for historians to prove that these concepts are applicable in the context of African history.[7] This section is not meant for this purpose. However, it is useful to state here that the concepts of military professionalism, ethics, and leadership apply to both Maasai and Zulu armies because they were trained standing armies which provided excusive military services for their respective societies, had systems of self-regulation, codes of conduct, and were organised in hierarchical order. This section provides a brief overview of the state of military professionalism and ethics in Pre-colonial Africa.

[5]Sam C. Sarkesian, 'Moral and Ethical Foundations of Military Professionalism', *Military Ethics and Professionalism: A Collection of Essays*, ed. James Brown and Michael J. Collins, (Washington DC: National Defense University Press, 1981), p. 3.

[6]Department of the Army, *Army Leadership and the Profession,* (Washington DC: Army Doctrine Publication No. 6-22, 2019), p. 3.

[7]Donna J. E. Maier, 'Studies in Precolonial War and Peace', *Warfare and Diplomacy in Precolonial Nigeria*: *Essays in honor of Robert Smith,* ed. Toyin Falola and Robin Law (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1992), p. 2.

Africa, being a wide continent comprising numerous and varied groups of people, had different forms of military formations in various levels of development in the Pre-colonial era. Geographical location and terrain sometimes contributed to determining the kinds of military forces found during this period. For instance, between the Upper Guinea and the coast of Gambia, cavalry, infantry and naval forces existed in varied proportions from the desert to the savannah and to the coast.[8] Generally, most societies had some form of military arrangement for defensive or offensive purposes. While some societies had simple arrangements where every able-bodied male was called up to bear arms when necessary, others had highly organised and professional standing armies. The Tiv people of central Nigeria area, for instance, had no standing army and so relied on the services of every available and able-bodied male during war. Nonetheless, they were able to fight many wars and had even recorded major victories such as the defeat of the Chamba in the late nineteenth century.[9] Therefore, these kinds of temporary forces were no less effective than their professional counterparts in meeting the military needs of their societies. While many of the military forces found in Pre-colonial Africa were not professional, there were certainly some, such as the Maasai and Zulu armies, which both met the criteria for military professionalism.

In Pre-colonial Africa, military ethics and war ethics were often not clearly separated. This means that, although many societies did not have standing armies, it was common practice to develop ethics to guide warfare and the conducts of warriors. These ethics were mostly drawn from customary laws. This was because in many African societies the distinction between military, economic, social and religious institutions were not clear.[10] In Igbo society, for instance, war ethics prescribed two types of war to be practiced among the people; in one type it was permissible to kill while in the other type it was not permissible to kill. The war in which killing was not permitted was more common among kinsmen and in intra-village warfare. Their customary laws clearly dictated how war was to be fought, the kinds of weapons allowed, the days of non-hostility, the people exempted from hostilities and the cleansing rituals that must be undertaken by warriors who took lives in such wars.[11] In addition, combatants had to seek the consent of their priest prior to any war to ensure they were fighting for a

[8] John K. Thornton, *Warfare in Atlantic Africa, 1500 – 1800,* (London: UCL Press, 1999), p. 25.

[9]Ben Japhet Audu, *Wars and Changing Patterns of Inter-Group Relations in the Middle Benue Valley of Nigeria, c. 1300-1900,* (Kaduna: NDA Publishers, 2018), pp. 61-62.

[10]G. N. Uzoigwe, "The Warrior and the State in Precolonial Africa: Comparative Perspectives." *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 12, no. 1-4 (1977), pp. 20-21.

[11]U. D. Anyanwu, 'Kinship and Warfare in Igbo Society', *Warfare and Diplomacy in Precolonial Nigeria*: *Essays in Honor of Robert Smith,* ed. Toyin Falola and Robin Law, (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1992), p. 163.

just cause.[12] Indeed, these kinds of war ethics existed in many African societies but their impact was limited by their being applied mostly within the societies which had created them, they would not easily apply to wars with outsiders because their customary laws were dissimilar. Generally speaking, these ethics were contextual; the difference in cultural background, religion, and language often posed a barrier to their wide application during wars in Pre-colonial Africa.[13]

Military Professionalism & Ethics: the Maasai Warriors of East Africa

The Maasai are a Maa speaking pastoral people found today in the south of Kenya and north of Tanzania in East Africa. The Maasai political system was not organised around centralised authority and there was no hereditary leadership. Rather, leadership was provided by a council of elders or civil chiefs made up of age-set leaders who were 'elected on the grounds of their moral conduct and personal qualities'.[14] This council of elders formed the highest body of authority in Maasai society.[15] An important figure was the *Laibon* who served as the diviner and medicine man among the Maasai. Unlike the civil chiefs, the *Laibon*'s position was hereditary and passed from one generation to another. He was the spiritual authority among the Maasai and was responsible for rituals and other issues relating to initiations.[16] Maasai society was socially stratified into three distinct hierarchical layers. A boy that was not circumcised belonged to a group called *Ol-laiyoni.* After a boy was circumcised he moved up to a group called *Ol-muran* or warrior. Finally, when the warrior finished military service he retired to a group called *Ol-moruo* or elders.[17] This social organization was made possible by the age-set system in which the boys circumcised together belonged to the same age group, bore a common identity and moved up the social ladder together.[18]

Warriorhood was the core of Maasai military institution and it was fed by the age-set system. Consequently, their development of military professionalism and ethics also depended on this system. The system required that boys were circumcised in a special initiation ceremony before they assumed the position of *Muran* or warrior which

[12]John N. Oriji, 'Ethical Ideals of Peace and the Concept of War in Igbo Society', *Warfare and Diplomacy in Precolonial Nigeria: Essays in Honor of Robert Smith*, ed. Toyin Falola and Robin Law, (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1992), p. 178.
[13]Francois Bugnion, 'Just Wars, Wars of Aggression and International humanitarian Law', *International Review of the Red Cross* 84, no. 847 (2002), p. 5.
[14]Kaj Arhem, *The Maasai and the State: The Impact of Rural Development Policies on a Pastoral People in Tanzania,* (Copenhagen: IWGIA, 1985), p. 12.
[15]Ibid., p. 12.
[16]Maier, 'Studies in Precolonial', pp. 87-88.
[17]C. H. Stigand, *The Land of Zinj,* (London: Frank Cass, 1996), p. 212.
[18]April R. Summit, 'Cell phones and Spears: Indigenous Cultural Transition within the Maasai of East Africa', *Indigenous Nations Studies Journal* 3, no. 1, (2002), p. 64.

marked the beginning of their military service. The period in which this initiation took place was determined by the *Laibon* and this period lasted for three to four years during which boys would be circumcised.[19] The boys, ranging in age from about 13 to 17 years, were circumcised in three batches according to how physically ready they were. The physically bigger boys were circumcised in the first year and the circumcision was right handed to mark them out as seniors. The remaining two batches of circumcision, carried out in the second and third year respectively, were left handed to mark the boys as juniors. This was a deliberate process that was done in order to establish the hierarchy and leadership inherent in the profession of arms. When these three batches of circumcision were finished, the initiation period was closed and all the boys circumcised would belong to the same age-set.[20] This process of circumcision and initiation was a stage which every able-bodied Maasai male must pass through in life.[21] Prospective warriors were expected to prove their fearlessness by not showing any sign of pain when being circumcised. Any show of weakness at this stage was frowned upon because it went against Maasai military ethics.

These newly created warriors made up a professional standing army which had no other occupation outside military service. This included protecting their people and their cattle from attack and attacking other groups for the sole purpose of cattle raiding and land acquisition. Being pastoralists, this military service was central to expanding and sustaining their economy. The warriors annexed land for grazing their cattle and seized cattle from other groups to expand their cattle stock.[22] Being skilled in the deployment of violence, they provided a specialised service for their society. These warriors had in place some techniques for ensuring professionalism and enforcing the ethics of their profession. Firstly, the warriors lived apart from the general population in barracks called *Manyata,* and each camp had a group acting rather like present day military police, called *Embika,* who enforced discipline within and outside the camp. The warriors were not allowed to marry, drink alcohol or eat vegetables. They lived on a strict diet of beef, milk and blood. In addition, they were prohibited from eating alone and could eat only in the company of their fellow warriors.[23]

The warriors had a clearly defined professional culture with which each member had to adhere. Each warrior carried a spear, a sword, a shield, and a club. The spear had

[19]Maier, 'Studies in Precolonial', p. 87.
[20]Stigand, *The Land of,* p. 212.
[21]Summit, 'Cell phones', p. 64.
[22]Basil Davidson, *The Growth of African Civilization: East and Central Africa to the Late Nineteenth Century,* (Nairobi: Longman, 1967), p. 176.
[23]Chris Peers, *Warrior Peoples of East Africa 1840-1900,* (New York: Osprey, 2005), pp. 11-12.

a two feet long sharp iron blade and an iron point on the other end for sticking the spear upright. The sword was about two feet in length, made of iron and was worn on the warrior's left side. The shield was large, oval in shape and made of either buffalo or ox hide. Markings were made on it to show the age and clan of the warrior. The club was made of hard wood and was held in the left hand under the shield. These clearly indicate that the Maasai military was a disciplined self-regulating profession capable of providing service and being trusted by its larger society. Military discipline here refers to the 'state of order and obedience among personnel in a military organization.'[24]

The Maasai military enjoyed a high level of autonomy because it was trusted by its society to act professionally. The civil chiefs had almost no authority over the warriors although their advice was respected based on the obvious fact that they were themselves retired warriors. Nevertheless, the warriors enjoyed complete autonomy on matters of warfare. They decided when and where to make war and only sought the blessing of the chiefs on departure.[25] However, they had a particularly close relationship with the *Laibon* (diviner) because 'when a raid of any scale was planned the warriors sent to him to seek charms to ensure victory.'[26] In spite of this relationship, the *Laibon* also had very limited authority over the warriors although he was entitled to a share of their spoils of war because of his spiritual role in the process.[27] This autonomy granted to the Maasai military was mainly because it was able to uphold the principles of military professionalism.

Maasai warriors earned a reputation in pre-colonial times as fierce and bloodthirsty fighters and this did a lot to prevent and delay Europeans from venturing into the interior of East Africa. This was, however, said to be exaggerated by coastal ivory traders in order to scare away competitors and maintain monopoly of the trade in the interior.[28] While it may be true that the traders used it to their advantage, the fierceness of the Maasai was no exaggeration. They had succeeded, until the late 19 Century, in displacing other groups from a large area ranging from central Kenya to central Tanzania using superior weapons and tactics.[29] A common tactic they used in

[24]Shelton R. Williamson, 'Standards and Discipline: An In-Depth Look at Where We Once Were and Where We Are Now', *From One Leader To Another,* ed. Joe B. Parson, (Kansas: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2013), p. 154.
[25]Stigand, *The Land of*, p. 213.
[26]Maier, 'Studies in Precolonial', p. 88.
[27] Stigand, *The Land of,* p. 213.
[28]Lotte Hughes, 'Beautiful Beasts and Brave Warriors: The Longevity of a Maasai Stereotype', *Ethnicity Identity: Problems and Prospects for the Twenty-First Century,* eds. George A. De Vos and Takeyuki Tsuda (Lanham: Altamira Press, 2006), p. 269.
[20]Davidson, *The Growth of,* p. 176.

battle is called the eagle's wing, where 'the bravest warriors… form a wedge in the centre, supported by a rearguard and a flank guard on each side, and charge straight through the enemy line.'[30] Another tactic was to form a long row of spearmen who then advance upon the enemy shouting.[31]

The Maasai military, in spite of attaining the greatest height of their power in the 19 Century, began to experience decline towards the end of the same century. This decline was caused by several factors including civil wars, and several outbreaks of cattle and human diseases. The civil wars among the Maasai broke out when they began to raid each other for cattle because it became increasingly difficult for them to raid other groups.[32] This development was a clear breakdown of military professionalism and ethics since warriors were turning against each other and, by implication, the very society they were created to protect. Instead of protecting and growing the economy, the military was destroying the society itself. These internal wars devastated the Maasai population to the extent that 'the people suffered far more casualties in these civil wars than in all their external campaigns put together.'[33] In addition, successive outbreaks of cattle disease greatly weakened the Maasai because of their heavy dependence on the animals for subsistence. As Coast puts it, 'an outbreak of bovine pleura-pneumonia in 1883 was followed by devastating rinderpest in 1891, both of which had the effect of decimating livestock. The effect on the Maasai population was to force a widespread migration in search of agricultural produce from other ethnic groups, such as the Kikuyu in Kenya.'[34] This loss of Maasai livestock resulted in famine because the people depended on the animals for their food. In addition to these problems, the people were affected by a number of diseases such as smallpox which devastated their population in 1892.[35] Thus, by the time the British colonial conquest came in the early 20 Century many Maasai military units had become mercenaries who fought the wars of other ethnic groups in return for cattle. As a result, the British did not meet the expected resistance from the Maasai during their conquest. Instead, they were able to enlist some of these Maasai units as auxiliaries for use in punitive expeditions against other groups.

Military Professionalism & Ethics: Shaka kaSenzangakhona

The rise of Shaka, the son of Senzangakhona, to Zulu military leadership and prominence was not the result of his royal bloodline but by merit. His father was the

[30]Peers, *Warrior Peoples*, p. 12.
[31]Stigand, *The Land of,* p. 217.
[32]Davidson, *The Growth of*, p. 178.
[33]Peers, *Warrior Peoples,* p. 6.
[34]E. Coast, 'Colonial Preconceptions and Contemporary Demographic Reality: Maasai of Kenya and Tanzania', *XXIV IUSSP General Conference,* S50 (2001), p. 4.
[35]Ibid., p. 4.

Chief of the Zulu clan of the Nguni people of Southern Africa. Shaka began his military career as a recruit of the *Izi-cwe* Regiment which was called up by Dingiswayo shortly after he assumed the leadership of the Mthethwa clan in 1809. Military leadership in Africa during this period was achieved through various means. Certainly, a royal lineage was an important factor in the making of military leaders but merit also was an important factor which enabled some common people and even slaves to rise to powerful positions. In addition, cases are known where military command positions were purchased for a fee.[36] In contrast, Shaka distinguished himself as an excellent warrior during the wars his regiment fought under Dingiswayo. After a victorious battle in 1810 Dingiswayo called Shaka and questioned him about his battle tactics. Satisfied with the answers Shaka had provided he promptly promoted him to the captain of 100 and gifted him 10 heads of cattle as a reward.[37]

Shaka eventually rose to the position of the commander of all Dingiswayo's forces and did so purely on merit. This position gave him the opportunity to advance his ideas on military professionalism and ethics as a military leader. He began enforcing discipline and drill among the warriors by visiting their residences in rotation.[38] However, his ideas as a military leader gained more prominence when he attained the leadership of his Zulu clan, after the demise of his father Sezangakhona in 1816, and assumed control of the relatively few warriors in that clan. He immediately began the work of building, organising and training his army, to the extent that within ten years they had grown from a few hundred to over fifty thousand fighting men.[39] Although this figure is variously disputed, there is no doubt he did build a large and efficient army during this period, and it was possible because of his application of military professionalism.

Shaka began the process of building a professional military through the conscription of all males of fighting age into regiments based on age-set. This system of regimental age-sets ensured group cohesion, and the commitment and loyalty of the warriors to each other because of their similar age and experience. These regiments were settled in military barracks situated at strategic locations in the Zulu Kingdom and each was headed by a commander. Each regiment had a distinct identity made possible by the colour and design on their shield and uniform. Periodically, Shaka called up young men

[36]Festus B. Aboagye, *Indigenous African Warfare: Its Concept and Art in the Gold Coast, Asante and the Northern Territories up to the Early 1900s,* (Pretoria: Ulinzi Africa Publishing Solutions, 2010), p. 299.
[37]E. A. Ritter, *From Folklore to History,* Vol. 2, *Makers of World History*, J. Kelley Sowards, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), p. 204.
[38]Ibid.*,* p. 205.
[39]E. A. Eldredge, 'Shaka's Military Expeditions: Survival and Mortality from Shaka's Impis', *The Power of Doubt: Essays in Honor of David Henige*, ed. Paul S. Landau, (Madison: Parallel Press, 2011), p. 210.

of fighting age and established their regiments and barracks where they would begin their military training and service. Warriors absorbed from conquered groups were incorporated into regiments appropriate to their age. To ensure strict adherence to military training and discipline, Shaka made these barracks part of the royal household and he lived with them in rotation.[40]

Military professionalism was further promoted by Shaka through the abolition of privileges based purely on royal affiliation. Military promotion was based strictly on merit so there was no difference between commoners and royalty or between native Zulu and incorporated foreign warriors when it came to leadership positions. All military barracks were deemed to be a part of the royal household, and so the cattle they fed on were provided by Shaka. He regularly distributed confiscated cattle and food to the military barracks thereby promoting the idea of an equal distribution of wealth. During military campaigns young recruits on apprenticeship were responsible for carrying food and weapons for the army. This allowed the army to move swiftly and decisively to any location without worrying about the availability of food – an issue that had previously determined the location and duration of battles. He also developed an effective military intelligence network that provided his army with reliable information on enemy plans and movements.[41] Thus, the welfare of the military was recognised by Shaka as an important factor in its effectiveness. After all, the wealth of Zululand depended to a considerable extent on the spoils confiscated by the military in wars.

Developing military expertise through training was central to Zulu military professionalism. Shaka revolutionised warfare through his redesigning weaponry and tactics. He promoted the adoption of a short stabbing spear in combat and phased out the traditional long throwing spear. He also redesigned the shield so it could be used as an offensive weapon in addition to its defensive purpose. He banned warriors from the use of sandals in battle in order to increase balance and speed. He also developed the 'bull horns' technique for enveloping an enemy for a decisive defeat.[42] Shaka was not only a skilled member of the military but he also provided leadership by example. For instance, to ensure that his army was used to doing battle on bare feet he trained

[40]Ian Knight, *The Anatomy of the Zulu Army: From Shaka to Cetswayo 1818-1879,* (London: Greenhill Books, 1995), p. 33.
[41]Mazizi Kunene, *Emperor Shaka the Great: A Zulu Epic,* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2017), pp. XXX-XXI.
[42]Calvin R. Allen, *Shaka Zulu's Linkage of Tactic and Strategy: An Early Form of Operational Art?,* Monograph, (Kansas: School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, 2014), pp. 9-10, pp. 14-15.

them in dancing on hard ground and on thorns.[43] As a result his army was better trained and was more disciplined than many surrounding military forces.

Shaka enforced professionalism in the military through a number of ways. Firstly, members of the military had to live in their designated barracks unless told otherwise. They were forbidden from getting married or having sexual activity until they retired from active military service. Living in barracks and celibacy were both regarded as the indispensable foundation of military discipline by Shaka.[44] Warriors were required to go to battle and return with their spears or face execution. In addition, any warrior who withdrew from battle without being ordered to do so was executed. Shaka had a spot called the cowards bush where anyone who exhibited cowardice was held like a goat and stabbed with a spear in full public view.[45] The quality of any military, according to Sun Tzu, is assessed using seven criteria, namely; how promptly its members respond to command, how skilled its leader is, how well it utilises the terrain, how strict discipline is enforced, how skilled its members are, how highly trained its officers and men are, and how consistent reward and punishment are administered.[46] Based on these criteria it is not surprising therefore that Shaka's military had achieved the kind of success in battle it did in the early nineteenth century.

In seeking military excellence, however, Shaka superimposed his ideas of military professionalism over the military ethics that had long been developed and observed by the Nguni people, of which the Zulu were a part. Prior to the ascension of Shaka to military leadership, war was essentially light in casualties and sometimes combat was even substituted for by poetry and dancing competitions.[47] This practice was not because the Nguni people were unaware of total warfare but because they had decided deliberately to humanise war by minimising or even eliminating human suffering as a result of it. In fact, Dingiswayo once remarked that although Shaka's ideas of war were good, he preferred the use of minimal force to achieve his objective.[48] Shaka discarded the traditional Nguni war ethics in favour of a form of total and decisive warfare where the enemy was completely destroyed and the remnants incorporated into the Zulu Kingdom. Although this technique served the purpose of permanently disabling the enemy it was generally bloodier and ran against the accepted Nguni ethics of war.

[43]Kunene, *Emperor Shaka,* p. XXX.
[44]Uzoigwe, 'The Warrior', p. 41.
[45]Knight, *The Anatomy,* p. 243.
[46]Sun Tzu, *Sun Tzu on The Art of War.* Translated by Lionel Giles, (Leicester: Allandale Online Publishing, 2000), p. 2.
[47]Kunene, *Emperor Shaka,* p. XXXVI.
[48]Ritter, *From Folklore,* p. 204.

Over time Shaka drifted away from true military professionalism by abusing his military powers through excessive bloodshed in war. There is evidence pointing to his sometimes discarding the traditional practice of sparing non-combatants, like women and children during war.[49] In addition, he killed his own subjects indiscriminately:

> Shaka carried out executions and even massacres of villagers who were his own subjects as individual and collective punishments, behavior so repugnant even to the people closest to him that his mother reprimanded him for killing his own people. The numbers of people under Shaka's rule who were killed by his order in executions and massacres appear to have amounted to as many as the deaths inflicted and incurred in military expeditions and battles.[50]

There is no doubt that Shaka carried out numerous executions of his own subjects in addition to many other forms of abuses that would today amount to war crimes.[51] This was clearly an abuse of military expertise and a failure by Shaka to lead by appropriate example. By killing his own subjects indiscriminately, he was setting a standard for his warriors to follow. This was not only unethical but also clearly below the standards of true professionalism. Shaka's eventual assassination in 1828 by his own brothers was attributed to his use and abuse of military power against his own people.[52]

Lessons from Maasai Warriors and Shaka kaSenzangakhona

The decline of the Maasai warriors as a major military force in East Africa towards the end of the nineteenth century was the result of a number of factors including animal and human disease. However, the breakdown of military professionalism was a major factor which resulted in the weakening of Maasai military might. The civil war which broke out among the Maasai, when they started raiding each other for cattle, meant that the military skills of the warriors were no longer used only for the betterment of Maasai society. Rather, the warriors' decades of military knowledge and experience was being used to destroy their own society. By attacking each other, and their own society, the warriors were no longer providing needed services to their people. This act also meant that there was no order and discipline among the warriors which, by extension, meant the failure of military regulation and self-policing mechanisms. Consequently, professional ethics were cast aside by the warriors who began abusing their military expertise. A military force which could no longer be trusted by its society, which provided no beneficial service to its people, which could not regulate

[49]Eldredge, 'Shaka's Military', p. 220.
[50]Ibid., p. 231.
[51]See Donald R. Morris, *The Washing of the Spears: The Rise and Fall of the Zulu Nation,* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1966), chap. 3.
[52]Eldredge, 'Shaka's Military', p. 231.

the actions of its personnel, and which abused its expertise in disregard of military ethics could not be acting professionally. Thus, it was not surprising that many Maasai military units became mercenaries hired to fight the wars of other peoples in exchange for cattle.

Shaka, being the military and societal leader of the Zulu, had no system to ensure his adherence to military ethics. Consequently, the Zulu military focused its attention on acquiring military expertise and skills without having much concern for military ethics especially as it related to society and humanity. This clear failure in professionalism was made even worse because it involved the military leadership. Shaka was supposed to be responsible for ensuring that military ethics were observed, through exemplary actions and enforcement of standards. He clearly failed to fully uphold military ethics and as such ultimately failed as a military professional. In any military, the tendency for combatants to lose their sense of values and morals because of the horrors of war is a grim reality. Thus, military leadership serves as an outside authority reemphasising and enforcing ethical standards. Without this leadership, those actually involved in combat would be more prone to carrying out actions amounting to war crimes. This is because military professionalism is not possible where the very society meant to be served by the expertise of the military is in reality being abused by it.

The potential for the military to abuse its power is behind the necessity for it to set up effective regulatory measures to enforce ethics. True military professionalism requires that that every individual or group within the military works for, and not against, the very society which created it. Without military ethics, it becomes impossible for military professionalism to be achieved. Even if military ethics are clearly stipulated but never enforced, military discipline becomes impossible, and so professionalism is undermined. The decline of Maasai warriors as a major military power in Pre-colonial East Africa was inevitable after they began using their military expertise against their own society. Military professionalism became impossible when they failed to enforce the fundamental ethic of protecting the society which had created them. In the same way, Shaka lost his professional standing as a military leader when he began abusing his powers. By discarding the traditional Nguni war ethics, he effectively removed the mechanism that could regulate his actions as a military leader.

Upholding military ethics would not only have ensured the maintenance of military professionalism but would also likely promote the longevity of the Maasai military and Shaka's military leadership. However, the opposite was the case in both situations. The military power of the Maasai warriors declined until they ceased to be a powerful military force in Pre-colonial East Africa. Similarly, the popularity of Shaka as a military leader declined steadily until his assassination. Both outcomes illustrate the indispensability of ethics to military professionalism.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the issue of military professionalism and ethics in military leadership using examples from Pre-colonial Africa. The Maasai people developed a professional military which established itself as a dominant force in East Africa. However, towards the end of end of the nineteenth century, the Maasai military ignored their previous ethics and began raiding their own society. This was accompanied by the inevitable decline in military professionalism and the Maasai military eventually losing its place as a dominant military power. In Southern Africa, Shaka rose to the position of military leadership while serving under Dingiswayo. He later built a powerful professional military after assuming the leadership of the Zulu clan. His military reforms, however, led him to discard the traditional war ethics of the Nguni people which were aimed at minimising bloodshed in war. Consequently, Shaka began abusing his military power through excessive bloodshed in war and by indiscriminately executing his own subjects. In the end Shaka lost his position of military leadership through assassination.

These two examples show that military ethics are indispensable to military professionalism and leadership. The consistent upholding of military ethics is necessary for the maintenance of military professionalism and the success of military leadership.