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Book Reviews
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Boekresensies

The quest for a history acceptable to all South Africans

Fransjohan Pretorius (ed.), *Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika: Van Voortye tot Vandag*
Tafelberg, Kaapstad, 2012
640pp
ISBN 978-0-624-05466-5
R290.00

In the twilight years of his career, a melancholy Professor F.A. van Jaarsveld often mused on whether a general history of South Africa by an Afrikaner historian would ever be acceptable to all South Africans. In *Omstrede Suid-Afrikaanse Verlede: Geskiedenis Ideologie en die Historiese Skuldvraagstuk* (1984), his controversial study on South African historiography, he concluded that such a book with South Africa's complex, fragmented and heterogeneous society was impossible:

> 'n Algemene geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika is moontlik, maar sal nooit vir al sy inwoners aanvaarbaar wees nie. Dit is deur die praktyk van die geskiedskrywing bewys (p 203).

He furthermore pessimistically concluded that in a volatile South Africa the lifespan of any general history was that of a mirage – of very short duration:

> Geen algemene geskiedenis was vir lank standhoudend of bruikbaar nie. Snelle veranderinge wat telkens nuwe verwysingsraamwerke gebring het, het dit as onvolmaak en eensydig bewys (p 203).

But does Van Jaarsveld's pessimistic forecast on general histories still apply today? *Omstrede Suid-Afrikaanse Verlede* was written in the midst of intensifying violence as the apartheid state gradually fell apart, while his personal sense of failure as an historian fuelled van Jaarsveld's gloominess. Van Jaarsveld was controversial and polemical in his writings, seeing it as part of his duty as a public intellectual to defend, reprimand and guide the Afrikaner. *Van van Riebeeck tot Verwoerd: 'n Inleiding tot die Geskiedenis van die Republiek van Suid-Afrika* (1969), his own attempt to write the history of South Africa, was motivated by his desire to defend and justify the Afrikaner against what he saw as the anti-Afrikaner bias of books like *The Oxford History of South Africa* (1969). And yet, apart from *Van van Riebeeck tot Verwoerd* being unacceptable to most South Africans outside Afrikanerdom, it did not even satisfy all Afrikaners; some in *verligte* circles felt uncomfortable with his nationalistic use of the past. After the Soweto uprising of 1976 van Jaarsveld underwent a change of mind on Afrikaners and their history. He became convinced that Afrikanerdom was in a crisis as it had become archaic and stultified. If Afrikaners were to survive the future in a changing world, they had to break with the past. Van Jaarsveld encouraged renewal and change in Afrikaner historiography as he feared

that an increasingly parochial and bigoted history would make it difficult for Afrikaners to cope with the changes taking place in South Africa. For his efforts he was tarred and feathered as a traitor by thugs of the neo-fascist Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging in 1979.

Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika: Van Voortye tot Vandag, edited by Fransjohan Pretorius, the highly respected international expert on the South African War, challenges van Jaarsveld's forecast. The book is a product of Pretorius's concern about the state of South African historiography, especially the type of history taught in our schools. He is of the opinion that just as it was wrong in the apartheid era to exclude blacks and their history from school textbooks, it is unacceptable that since 1994 Afrikaner republicanism and President Paul Kruger can be ignored in school histories. The historical pendulum in the new South Africa has swung too far the other way. Pretorius, with the support of the Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie van Wetenskap en Kuns, set out to produce a balanced and inclusive general history for all South Africans, especially for high school pupils and their teachers. The hope is that in the process, such a book will encourage reconciliation.

Pretorius acknowledges that no historical work can be completely objective, but is adamant that the aim of *Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika* is to be as fair and objective as possible – to reflect that there are two sides to a story. The result, after six years of gestation, is a book with highly readable, wide ranging and detailed chapters dealing with prehistoric times; Dutch and British colonialism; Afrikaner nationalism; apartheid; slavery; economics; the mineral revolution; trade unionism; black resistance; church history; the environment; the identity of white English-speakers in South Africa; and the new South Africa after 1994. Although a significant number of chapters focus on the history of the Afrikaner, written by Afrikaner historians (of the sixteen main contributors only three are not Afrikaners), the book is not an apology, or justification of Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid. David Scher, for example, does not pull his punches in the chapter dealing with the founding of the apartheid state. Reading the section on Sandra Laing, who despite the fact that both her parents were white was re-classified as a coloured because of her dark complexion and curly hair, leaves one without any doubt about the brutality of the apartheid state.

Ultimately *Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika* is a good example of the historian attempting to fulfil the challenging task to understand and explain the complexity and ambiguity of South Africa's turbulent past. And yet, it is doubtful whether the book will be acceptable to all South Africans. Here the desire to lay blame for events in the past, a central theme of discussion in *Omstrede Suid-Afrikaanse verlede*, is a crucial factor. The legacy of apartheid – initiated and implemented by Afrikaners to maintain their supremacy – will in the eyes of some critics reduce *Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika* to a sophisticated case for the defence of the Afrikaner. Despite the fundamental political changes since 1984, and Pretorius's best efforts, Van Jaarsveld's forecast still stands. Pretorius will, however, confound van Jaarsveld's conclusion that all South African general histories have the

lifespan of a mirage. For many years to come, *Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika* will be an important resource for the hard pressed history teacher preparing for his or her class at high school.

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Waardevolle bydrae tot kennis oor slawe-opstand

Dan Sleigh en Piet Westra, *Die Aanslag op die Slaweskip* Meermin*, 1766*
Africana Uitgewers, Kaapstad, 2012
171 pp
ISBN 978-0-620-54596-9
R180.00

In 1766 het die pas aangekoopte 140 Madagaskarslawe, oppad na die Kaap, daarin geslaag om die VOC-bemanning van die skip *Meermin* te oorrompel en die beheer daarvan oor te neem. Op sigself was dit ’n besondere gebeurtenis, want selde in die verlede en hierna het sulke pogings, vanweë allerlei voorsorgmaatreëls, geslaag. Die opstandelinge se gebrek aan seevaart kennis, en die briljante optrede van enkele bemanningslede, het egter veroorsaak dat die seedrama in ’n fiasko uitgeloop het. In die proses verkry die leser ’n groot mate agtergrond kennis aangaande die kompanjie se slawerny aan die Kaap, die slawehandel te Madagaskar, skepe uit daardie tyd en die administratiewe opset in die jong kolonie.

Ten einde hul winsgewende handel met die Ooste te onderhou, was die VOC in die sewentiende en agtiende eeue genoodsaak om aan die Kaap ’n maritieme stasie te vestig. Hier was die kompanjie aangewese op slawe-arbeid. Van tyd tot tyd het daar weens siektes en sterftes ’n tekort aan kompanjieslawe ontstaan wat gewoonlik aangevul is met sporadiese besoeke aan Madagaskar. Madagaskarslawe het geblyk die geskikste arbeiders vir die kompanjie se doeleindes te wees. Ten spyte daarvan dat die *Meermin* se skeepsjoernaal van die bepaalde handelsreis verlore geraak het, kan nogtans ’n baie volledige beeld van die gebeure opgebou word aangesien oor die jare verskeie togte na die eiland onderneem is. Van elkeen is gewoonlik baie noukeurig boekgehou. Byvoorbeeld: die soort skepe benodig, hul toerusting, bemanning, voorrade, hul aandoenplekke en die onderhandelinge met die hoofde van die inheemse bevolking ten einde die nodige slawe van hulle te bekom. Al hierdie gegewe maak die verhaal heel boeiend.

Van belang is die skeepsdissipline en die -bestuur. Elke amp en sy voorskrifte word ontleed. Toe die bemanning van hierdie voorskrifte afgewyk het, is die slawe in staat gestel om wapens te bekom. Sodoende kon hulle maklik die oorhand kry. Hoe die bemanning onder die nuwe omstandighede opgetree en gaandeweg weer gedeeltelike beheer bekom het, is die kern van die verhaal. Bykomend is die reaksie van die plaaslike gesag op land

wat mettertyd ondersoek kom instel het. Die VOC-owerheid in die Kasteel se geregtelike ondersoek werp verder lig op die gebeure ter see en op land wat die afloop van die verhaal uitmaak.

Jammer dat die skrywers eers op 'n baie laat stadium in die boek probeer verduidelik dat nie alle slawe aan die Kaap van Madagaskar afkomstig was nie, maar net dié van die kompanjie. Gevolglik is dit vir die leser nie duidelik hoe die burgery aan hul slawe gekom het nie want dié was tog soveel meer. Dit is 'n kardinale punt in die boek omdat die indruk aanvanklik gelaat word dat die gaan haal van slawe op Madagaskar die enigste wyse was waarop slawe die Kaap bereik het.

Dwarsdeur die hele boek is die taalgebruik verrassend nuut. Talle uitdrukkings lees vreemd soos "tussendeks' (p 26); "aan dek" verskyn (p 27); "aan dek spring" (p 127); "gelyktydig aan dek is nie" (p 127); "stenge en ra's hys" (p 37); "elf dae lank teen 'n swaar teensee opgeloef" (p 62); en "verhale uit die vooronder" (p 64). Mettertyd raak die leser aan die taalgebruik gewoond. Ou skeepsterme is volop, soos dat die "grootmarsseil, die basaanmarsseil en die buite kluiver aan stukke gewaai" is (p 75). Onbekende terme soos "handspake" (p 17); "voorwant" en "agterwant", raak naderhand algemeen. Die plasing van volledige afbeeldings van die *Meermin* se oorspronklike bouplanne, met aanduidings waar en wat hierdie terme verteenwoordig, dra by tot 'n beter begrip. Alles dwing die leser tot kennismaking met hierdie rykdom aan woorde wat oor die jare in onbruik geraak het. Dog vreemd is die gebruik van die benaming "negers" vir slawe wat na die Kaap gebring is maar nie afkomstig is van Wes-Afrika nie (pp 70 en 71).

As kritiek moet genoem word dat die proefleeswerk soms aan die gebrekkige kant is. Daar is verskynsels soos "onvol-doende" (p 21) wat binne 'n reël voorkom; of 1958 wat 1758 moes wees (p 21); "matrose Moreu van Amsterdam *and* Jan Arendz van Groningen" (p 95); "Ek sal hom *sou* gou as moontlik oorstuur" (p 101); 'n lys maak "en dit Kaap stuur" (p 113); 'n "enkele kleed om hulle *naaktyd* te bedek" (p 128); "l' Abillionni" in plaas van "l'Abillionni" (p 39); en "*Dit* skip was" (p 90). Soms ontbreek kommas waar dit in goeie taalgebruik hoort. Wat sou die volgende sin beteken: "Haar storie is later bevestig deur 'n swart hoofman wat eers vir gesagvoerder Harms en sy tolk tot stilte gesweer het" (p 39)?

In die geheel is die boek interessant en 'n besondere bydrae tot ons kennis van die voorval. Daar is baie goeie navorsing oor hierdie vergete gebeurtenis uit die kompanjiesperiode gedoen deur twee goed onderlegde skrywers en navorsers.

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A "forgotten book" on the Cape's cultural history

C.E. Boniface, *Narrative of the Shipwreck of the French Vessel the Eole on the coast of Kaffraria in April 1829* (translated with an Introduction and Notes by D.J. Culpin)
National Library of South Africa, Cape Town, 2012
193 pp
ISBN 978-1-920-34943-1
R220.00

The back cover of the *Narrative of the Shipwreck of the French Vessel the Eoleon the coast of Kaffraria in April 1829* by C.E. Boniface informs us that it "is a forgotten book about a forgotten shipwreck (…) [which] makes strong claims on the interest of the modern reader". David Culpin's translation of Boniface's text, complete with a comprehensive introduction and notes, aims to set the record straight by bringing alive a little-known and fascinating moment in South Africa's cultural history.

This new edition of Boniface's *Narrative* is important for several reasons. Firstly, it constitutes additional scholarship on the role of that author in the early nineteenth-century cultural life of Cape Town. In the introduction to the translation, Culpin provides the reader with absorbing insights into Boniface's life and activities in the capital city of the colony of the Cape of Good Hope. Charles Etienne Boniface, who was born in Paris in 1787 and fled France with his family at the age of 12, settled in the Cape Colony in 1807. There he became a leading light in the cultural life of Cape Town. A teacher of singing and the Spanish guitar, he also furnished the local amateur French and Dutch theatre companies with numerous plays, including *De Nieuwe Ridderorde, of De Temperantisten*, a landmark text in that it was one of the very earliest attempts to use Khoi-Afrikaans in written form. A few months after the French vessel the *Eole* was wrecked on the Wild Coast, during her return journey from Calcutta to Bordeaux, Boniface met the shipwreck survivors. They had by then been transported by ship to Cape Town. Boniface agreed to tell their story. Published in November 1829, the *Narrative* is, then, the author's account of material provided by the survivors themselves. The longest piece to have flowed from Boniface's pen, it constitutes the only example of travel writing by him.

Secondly, in terms of book history, the new edition of the *Narrative* makes an important contribution to existing knowledge of travel writing. Although one earlier French work had been published in Cape Town before the *Narrative* (the *Remarques généralessur le Cap de Bonne Espérance* by Baron A. van Pallandt, published in 1803), as Culpin indicates in the Introduction, that work did not have the authorisation of the governor and was, furthermore, a brochure which ran to only 30 printed pages. Boniface's *Narrative* can therefore claim to be the first French book and travel narrative published in South Africa.

Publication of the translation of Boniface's text is also of consequence in increasing our knowledge of travel writing. Although the genre was a very

popular form of literature in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, approximately only 7 percent of travel narratives dealt with Africa. As Culpin points out, "there are comparatively few descriptions of encounters between Europeans and the indigenous populations of sub-Saharan Africa" (p xxi). In this case, the eight cold, hungry, exhausted and frightened survivors of the *Eole* shipwreck walked barefoot and injured for six and a half days over 150km of inhospitable terrain. They made their perilous way from the site of the wreck, close to present-day East London, to the eastern frontier of the colony, establishing along the way contact with the Xhosa. Those first-hand encounters form the substance of Part II of the *Narrative* in which early nineteenth-century Xhosa customs, clothing, dwellings, food and agriculture are described in illuminating detail.

Of equal significance in this new edition of Boniface's work are the descriptions of settlements the survivors passed through (Grahamstown, Port Elizabeth and Plettenberg Bay). It is noteworthy that these descriptions provide essential information on those communities only a few years after they had been established. Also of historical interest are the insights into the government and administration of Cape Town and the Cape Colony in the late 1820s. When the survivors arrived in Cape Town, which is described in the text as "the capital of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope, … perhaps not the largest and richest, [but] certainly the cleanest and the best laid-out city in the southern hemisphere" (p 127), Boniface showed them, amongst other attractions, the Company Gardens, various churches, the Grand Parade, the Supreme Court of Justice, the Commercial Exchange and the theatre. The account of those visits includes information on, among other aspects, the replacement of Dutch by English in the legal system; and the introduction of English currency into the Cape Colony. The list of those persons who subscribed for the original printing of the *Narrative*, "at the rate of three Rix-dollars for each copy", makes for particularly fascinating reading, providing evidence of the active members of the Cape Town cultural community at the time.

Culpin's translation into English of this original early nineteenth-century French text thus makes accessible to an Anglophone readership important information for our understanding of the cultural life of the Cape Colony. The translation itself is well rendered. The translator has made every attempt to respect the length and complexity of the sentence structure of the original. Coupled with judicious lexical choices, this makes for a narrative which captures the essence of the age. Furthermore, the humour with which Boniface enlivens many of the descriptions and his occasional recourse to satire, including a particularly challenging piece of doggerel, have all been skilfully captured.

The new edition of Boniface's *Narrative of the Shipwreck of the French Vessel the Eole on the Coast of Kaffraria in April 1829* can now stand alongside other celebrated narratives of shipwreck and survival in South Africa, such as that of the *Grosvenor*. It complements the studies previously undertaken on Boniface which have focused on his contributions to cultural life in the Cape and Natal in the fields of music, drama, and

journalism. In addition, the *Narrative* provides a rare account of an encounter between Europeans and the indigenous populations of southern Africa and an even rarer topographical description of the eastern frontier regions. The publication of this "forgotten book" by Charles Etienne Boniface; the carefully researched introduction and footnotes; and the well-chosen illustrations, certainly make an important contribution to our knowledge of cultural history of the Cape Colony.

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The Enlightenment, the colonial Cape and post-apartheid discourse

David Johnson, *Imagining the Cape Colony: History, Literature and the South African Nation*
UCT Press, Cape Town, 2012
222 pp
ISBN 978-1-92049-975-4
R250.00

Imagining the Cape Colony is a slim but dense work which examines how this part of the world has been written up and analysed as a political community by eighteenth-century travellers, thinkers and theorists from Europe; but also by settler rebels, emancipationists and early African nationalists who drew on Enlightenment precepts of equality and governance in various ways, and for various reasons. Surrounding and giving texture to this enquiry is attention to a wide range of historical and literary works, allowing us to see how certain elements of the past come into cultural visibility at certain moments, and why. For "poetical genius", to quote the young radical Robert Southey who appears in these pages, "is certainly a barometer that rises or falls according to the state of the political atmosphere" (p 21).

In a short, incisive introduction, Johnson considers influential Anglo-American theorists of national imaginaries (Benedict Anderson) and the cultural pressures of "national allegory" in the newly postcolonial state (Frederic Jameson), as well as their critics from the global South. Partha Chatterjee, Maya Jasanoff and Aijaz Ahmad are invoked to question the idea of those in the postcolonial world as "perpetual consumers of modernity" (p 2), and to probe less determined, more locally specific ways of figuring the social in the wake of decolonisation. Heeding such warnings, but still retaining a sense of the need to "interrogate the nexus between national/political and literary narratives" (p 7), Johnson offers southern Africa as a particular case study through which to read debates surrounding colonial historiography and postcolonial imaginings of the nation.

Why does all this matter? Because, the author suggests, we need to hold in mind the dissonance between the democratic, egalitarian values espoused by Enlightenment thinkers – values underpinning the Western European "blueprint" of the modern nation state, and taken up (selectively)

by Thabo Mbeki's presidency, for instance – and the persistence of structural inequality in a place like South Africa. Postcolonial and post-apartheid returns to this eighteenth-century legacy yield (in Johnson's sternly Marxian reading) both a lofty language of political inclusion, and a grim logic of neo-liberalism, economic deregulation and chronic unemployment. This contradiction in the present "functions as *the* organizing problematic for reading the histories and literatures of the Cape Colony, 1770–1830" (p 5).

The Khoihoi victory over the Portuguese Viceroy Almeida in 1510 and its literary afterlives; French representations of the Cape "Hottentots" in the late eighteenth century; Dutch settler republicanism and the failed "revolutions" at Graaff-Reinet and Swellendam between 1795 and 1799; the impressions of American visitors to the Cape following the War of Independence; the complex history of the Griqua nation as embodied in Andries Waterboer's and Hendrick Hendricks's "writing back" to European ideas of nation – such far-flung topics are dealt with in chapters which generally perform a dual function. First, they assess how "egalitarian discourses of the northern-hemisphere revolutions" are deployed on the Cape frontier during "the violent expansion of capitalist economic relations into Xhosa and Khoikhoi societies" (p 137). Second, they track twentieth-century (and in particular 1990s) revisitings of such events – by ANC politicians, by poets, novelists and playwrights – and generally find much to be anxious about in the way that such violent ructions in southern African history are cherry-picked and packaged into a succession of all too usable pasts. In this sense, figures as different as Mbeki and André Brink are revealed as failing in the principal task that Georg Lukacs ascribed to the historical novel: that it should represent the past as "the concrete precondition of the present" (p 140).

The book is a joint publication between the university presses of Edinburgh and Cape Town, and one sees the logic of this structural underpinning in the way that Johnson tracks the intersections between the Scottish Enlightenment and the Cape: a geopolitical rest-stop on the way to somewhere more profitable that was (as Kipling put it) "snatch'd and bartered oft from hand to hand" by various European powers. As such, the early chapters trace a dense network of associations between social ferment in France and discourses of political economy in Edinburgh; this in turn allows us to explore the relation between aesthetic and political representation in texts about Britain's new colonial possession at the tip of Africa. In a meticulous way, then, close readings of figures like Rousseau, Adam Smith, Southey, Francois Levaillant and Lady Anne Barnard enable us to approach a central paradox in the constitution of modern South Africa: that because of its tragically delayed decolonisation, ours is a country that could only begin to assert its nationhood at a moment when that very category was being undermined by the high tide of economic globalisation.

This vexed historical juncture is dramatised forcefully as the book tracks Mbeki's erratic invocations of the colonial encounter. In November 2003 he praises Robespierre and Rousseau at France's National Assembly

(while asking for investment); but at the reburying of Sarah Baartman in August 2002 he condemns French scientific racism as represented by Baron Georges Cuvier, who dissected her body (a speech that has been read by Neville Hoad amongst others, as a coded discussion of his HIV/AIDS policy). In 1999, at the retirement of Nelson Mandela, Mbeki reactivates a long dormant narrative of indigenous resistance to Portuguese encroachment, evoking the 1510 Khoikhoi victory over Dom Francisco de Almeida on the shores of Table Bay. Yet at the Mozambican National Assembly in May 2002 he refers warmly to Vasco da Gama's description of this part of Africa as a *Terra da Boa Gente* – a phrase which was, Johnson remarks, "an anomalous precursor to centuries of plunder" (p 189). The author wonders what the Mozambican audience made of this, but his own verdict is unwavering: placed in context, such citations of the colonial encounter (we read in the book's closing lines) "point … to what is suppressed: the imagining of political community under neo-colonialism" (p 193).

The admonitory and sometimes hectoring tone here reveals the difficulties associated with Johnson's approach. At the launch of the work in Cape Town, he spoke about the difficulties in balancing what Ernst Bloch referred to as the "warm current" and the "cold current" of Marxist thought, and quoted Antonio Gramsci's gnomic phrase: "pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will". Finishing this book with a great deal of admiration for the calibre of scholarship and the careful textual work that it contains, I nonetheless wondered if the cold tap had been left on too long. There is a rather melancholy feel to the text, stemming perhaps from a sense of belatedness. Today, the strenuous and prickly intellectualism of the Mbeki presidency seems very far away indeed. Public discourse has shifted in populist, not to say recidivist, directions; the South African-funded libraries of Timbuktu that Mbeki harnessed to his vision of an African Renaissance remain empty. On Human Rights Day 2012, the ANC under Jacob Zuma summarily relocated the commemoration of the Sharpeville massacre to Soweto's Kliptown, never mind some distant episode in the colonial archive.

As a literary scholar, I found much to agree with in Johnson's suggestion that, far from transcending "the prosaic discourses of history and law", many recent literary re-imaginings of the colonial encounter project to a disconcerting degree "the anxieties and concerns of their contingent political present(s) onto the past" (p 140). The phrases are from a textured account of how Cape slavery appears in novels, poems and plays from the early nineteenth century onwards. The long historical reach of Johnson's enquiry allows us to read abolitionist discourse and early adventure yarns like *Makanna* (1834) and Edward Augustus Kendall's *The English Boy at the Cape* (1835) alongside late twentieth-century literary revisitings, from V.M. Fitzroy's *When the Slave Bell Tolled* (1970) to the late and post-apartheid works of Brink, Rayda Jacobs and Yvette Christiaanse. What many of them share, Johnson suggests, is the portrayal of slavery as "a safe target, as deserving the righteous loathing of a self-congratulatory readership" (p 145). And also, a refusal to admit linkages between past and present: such literary works "have typically ignored, denied or repressed the

continuities between exploitation under slavery and exploitation under capitalism" (p 153).

However, in seeing all cultural texts as so wholly determined by (and symptomatic of) their economic function, much of the work settles into a rather predictable form of argumentation. Asking about the "asymmetry between the cultural representations of the Khoisan and their economic plight" (p 37) – the disjuncture between the |Xam motto enshrined on the national crest and the material conditions of a place like the Smitsdrift resettlement camp – Johnson poses the following questions:

> [D]o the more positive representations of the Khoisan serve a compensatory ideological function? Do such representations offset the economic devastation inflicted upon them by the expanding capitalist economy of the settlers? Crucially, for Mbeki, has this eighteenth-century contradiction between cultural representation and economic impoverishment been transcended in post-apartheid South Africa? (p 37)

To which (one can hazard a guess), the answers are going to be, respectively: yes, no, and no. If that is, they are answerable in any meaningful sense. The questions, then, may well be purely rhetorical, and they isolate the problem of how to write with suppleness and surprise at the interface between economic history and literary studies. Is it too much to ask that a work of cultural critique begin with questions that it does *not* know the answers to already? Is it naïve to wonder if a close attention to texts as linguistic texture might allow us to think new things, rather than simply confirm old ideas?

Perhaps it is. The statistics and grim social indicators that Johnson reels off at regular intervals might incline one to abandon such thinking as woolly idealism. But I couldn't help feeling that some of this ground has been covered before, in more vital ways. Both J.M. Coetzee's *White Writing* (1988) and Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes* (1992) are texts about imagining the Cape Colony that – while also working to demystifying history within a cultural materialist paradigm – nonetheless remain rich, surprising, often flawed but still compelling pieces of scholarship: texts that do not release all their insights on first reading, and do not assume that they have the master-key to cultural analysis.

Finally, rather than the sometimes mechanistic sense of literary texts as easily decoded ideological apparatuses that hovers behind Johnson's work, I wanted an infusion of the warmer, more writerly cultural Marxism that he name-checks but does not seem to activate: the density and unpredictability of Gramsci, Jameson or Walter Benjamin. At the launch, Johnson invoked the latter's dictum that "every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably" – and so the task of the critic is to "seize hold of a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger". But as always in Benjamin, the high seriousness and mystical turn of phrase is mixed with a dissonant

and worldly irony: an awareness that "recognising" the past, or bending to our own present purposes, is inherent to all cultural production. And so we can't, ever, be too sure of ourselves.

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An interdisciplinary investigation of memory and representation

Pumla Dineo Gqola, *What is Slavery to Me? Postcolonial/ Slave Memory in Post-Apartheid South Africa*
Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 2010
247 pp
ISBN 978-1-86814-507-2
R216.00

In *What is Slavery to me? Postcolonial/Slave Memory in Post-Apartheid South Africa,* Pumla Dineo Gqola offers a nuanced analysis of the ways in which slave memory, as well as its enduring reverberations in contemporary South Africa, resists simplistic relegation to binary categories. She approaches the subject of South African slave memories by suggesting that it is more important to differentiate between various "sources and modes of historical authority" than it is to "rigidly establish a distinction between history and memory" (p 7). While her research falls within the field of postcolonial memory studies, she incorporates a range of conceptual and theoretical tools and her book will appeal to scholars from many disciplinary backgrounds.

In Chapter 1, "Remembering Differently: Repositioned Coloured Identities in a Democracy", Gqola contributes to scholarly debates on coloured identity by investigating a number of texts in which memory, representational politics and identity construction shape one another in ways that are both complex and exciting. Academic attention to these dynamics remains important because coloured identity "continues to be susceptible to marginalisation in post-apartheid South Africa".[1] In Chapter 2, she again traverses well-travelled theoretical terrain with a contribution entitled "(Not) Representing Sarah Bartmann" as she explores how "African feminist literary projects" (p 69) offer alternative engagements with this historical figure. It is a testament to Gqola's innovative approach that her chapters on such extensively analysed topics as coloured identity and Sarah Bartmann manage to come across as fresh and valuable rather than rehashed and repetitive.

The issue of shame has been a crucial component in studies of both coloured identities and Bartmann, yet Gqola also traces this phenomenon in her chapter on "whiteness". The need to problematise whiteness rather than simply assuming it as the default or normative subject position is as urgent

1. B. Janari, "The Making and Staging of Coloured Identity", *Historia,* 57, 1, May 2012, p 199.

as ever in South Africa. Gqola also tackles this topic from an original vantage point by reading "specific new ways of negotiating Afrikaner/white identities with reference to claimed slave ancestry" (p 106). One of South Africa's most widely read literary negotiations with white identity, namely Antjie Krog's *Country of my Skull,* is analysed alongside a lesser known television series and televised documentary in a chapter entitled "Whiteness Remixed, or Remembered Impurity, Shame and Television".

Two of Gqola's chapters consider slave memories in relation to the construction of Malay identities in South Africa. In the first of these chapters, she finds it necessary to perform some complex theoretical manoeuvres as she argues that a combination of theories on diaspora is the most "productive lens through which to decode the enactment of Malayness in contemporary South Africa" (p 133). She begins this exploration with a useful reflection on the politics and implications of naming in terms of the labels, such as *Maleier*, Muslim, Malay, Cape Malay and *slamse*, which are used to describe this identity. Many of these terms remain imbued with the traces of colonial and apartheid ideologies and they thus cannot be used in an unproblematic way. After a careful mixture of diaspora theorisations, Gqola continues to offer a close reading of Rayda Jabobs' *The Slave Book* to consider the feasibility of religious diaspora as "home spaces" (p 149).

Gqola follows her analysis of written texts with a discussion of what she refers to as two "visual sites that individually and collectively encode diasporic slave memory" (p 165), namely installations by Berni Searle and Cape Malay/ Capetonian Muslim food. Her exploration of these sites results in a fascinating chapter entitled "'Is the Secret in the Cooking?' Coded Food, Spice Routes and Processing Malay Identities". Food emerges as a rich and multi-layered metaphor that reflects the complex association between food and Cape Malay identities. By building on the research of Gabeba Baderoon, Gqola reveals how the nature of food as a site of memory retains its profoundly gendered dynamics, even when men take the primary responsibility for the preparation of the food. This section, like the rest of the text, will be of particular significance to scholars who are interested in the gender dimensions of both historical and contemporary phenomena.

The provocative cover image of Gqola's text is taken from one of Berni Searle's installations called "Girl" from the "Colour Me" series. The piece offers the viewer three repeated photographs, in three rows, of the artist's naked body. Each row, and thus each photographed body, is divided into four boxes. Glass bottles with spices in different colours are arranged in neat rows on top of each quartered photographic segment. Although this is not immediately apparent from the reproduction on the book cover, the bodies are covered with a different coloured spice in each row. Baderoon notes that the images in the "Colour Me" series "draw attention to the role of the spice [trade] in exoticising and exorcising a black presence in South Africa's colonial past".[2] This analysis, with its focus on the way in which

2. G. Baderoon, "Approach", in M. Stevenson (ed.), *Berni Searle: Approach* (Institute of Research in Art, Johannesburg Art Gallery, Johannesburg, 2006), pp 12–15.

Searle's use of her own body "interrupts bodies of knowledge and offers her body as evidence" (p 178) usefully extends the discussion in the chapter on Bartmann by further exploring the dynamics involved in the exhibition of women's bodies. Gqola contributes to the scholarly conversation about the additional ideological factors that come into play when the bodies on display are those of black women.

In her succinct conclusion, Gqola neatly ties together all the strands of her argument and she leaves the reader convinced "that creative renditions and rememoryings of slavery in contemporary South Africa [continue to] offer fertile ground for examination" (p 203). Gqola's text constitutes an intervention into existing academic work on these topics that will be both accessible to general readers and valuable to scholars who wish to enter these research fields from any number of disciplinary perspectives.

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With a Norwegian in the veld

I. Schrøder-Nielsen, *Among the Boers in Peace and War* (edited by I. Rudner in collaboration with Bill Nasson)
Africana Publishers, Cape Town, 2012
224 pp
ISBN 978-0-620-52802-3
R180.00

Ingvald Schrøder-Nielson was a Norwegian who came to South Africa in August 1889 at the age of 27. He was trained as a telegrapher, but worked in the Western Transvaal as an assistant land-surveyor. He kept a diary, which was confiscated by his British captors during the Anglo-Boer War of 1899 to 1902, and he published his reminiscences in Norway in 1925 as *Blandt Boerne firedog krig* (Among the Boers in Peace and War). In 1990 Jalmar and Ione Rudner completed a rough translation of the book. (They also translated and edited a number of accounts of earlier travels in southern Africa by Scandinavians; and three of these books were published by the Van Riebeeck Society.) Jalmar Rudner passed away in 2003, but Ione revised and edited the Schrøder-Nielson manuscript. She was assisted with the editing process by Bill Nasson, who also wrote an excellent introduction to the book ("South Africa's Modern Great War", pp 11–20).

In Part I of the book (pp 23-60), Schrøder-Nielson describes his experiences in South Africa before the Anglo-Boer War broke out in October 1899; his trip from Cape Town to Rustenburg; and his work as an assistant land-surveyor in the Western Transvaal bushveld. He elaborates on the living and working conditions among the Boers, and as Ione Rudner correctly points out in the Foreword, his "narrative is straightforward and honest, [and] deals compassionately and sometimes light-heartedly with the rural folk and their ways" (p 8). In Part II of the publication (pp 61–91), Schrøder-Nielson describes how he experienced the first few months of the

Anglo-Boer War, from where he was residing at Hill Side. This includes references to the Scandinavian corps of volunteers who fought on the side of the Boers and suffered severe casualties at the Battle of Magersfontein on 11 December 1899.

Schrøder-Nielson came to respect the Afrikaner (Boer) people for standing up to British imperialism; and in due course, he decided to join them in their liberation struggle. While most foreign volunteers were only in the field with the Boers during the first three (semi-)conventional phases of the war, and left after the British occupied the Boer capital cities (since the general impression was that the war was now over and that the British had won), Schrøder-Nielson joined the Boers in the field when the guerrilla phase (i.e. the fourth and final, very long phase of the war) had already started.

In Part III of his book (pp 92–169), he describes the Boer army during the guerrilla phase of the conflict; his role as part of a Boer commando near Mamagotla, west of Krugersdorp, and his baptism of fire. He refers to the British scorched-earth policy and the concomitant establishment of camps for civilians (which this reviewer prefers to call internment camps rather than concentration camps, so as to make a clear distinction between the camps of the Anglo-Boer War and the (extermination) camps of the Second World War). He also comments on the British employment of armed black people. He describes the battle at Vlakfontein (29 May 1901; not 30 May as indicated by Schrøder-Nielson, or as in note 69), as well as the battle at Moedwil (30 September 1901). He sheds light on life in the field and how he and his fellow guerrillas trekked around, reconnoitring, but also doing all they could to avoid being cornered and captured by the (numerically) vastly superior British forces, who were supported by those Boers who had forsaken the republican cause and joined the British, as well as by black people who had been recruited by the British Army.

Shortly after the battle at Moedwil, Schrøder-Nielson was captured by the British. In Part IV of his book (pp 170–201), he describes his experiences as a prisoner of war (POW). He wrote poignantly of the last hours and execution of the Dutch volunteer Piet Schuil, a young fellow POW, on trumped-up charges. Schrøder-Nielson was himself threatened with execution and was moved from one prison to another: from Rustenburg to Krugersdorp, then to Johannesburg, to Pretoria, to Ladysmith, and from there to Durban, before finally being incarcerated in POW camps on the Bermuda Islands: first on Hawkins Island, and then on Burtt's Island. There, on 2 June 1902, the POWs received the news that peace had been declared on 31 May. On 12 July 1902, Schrøder-Nielson left Bermuda and sailed to New York, and from there returned to Norway.

Ione Rudner, in collaboration with Bill Nasson, annotated the text. In this regard, see pp 202–217 for 106 annotations in the form of endnotes, which – ideally – should have been printed as footnotes, enabling the reader to read the text and notes together more easily. It is a pity that over and above the information contained in the reminiscences, the editors have not

supplied any other biographical information with regard to Schrøder-Nielson. Where in Norway was he born; what did he do before he came to South Africa; what did he do after the war, and when did he die?

These comments aside, the translators and editors must be commended for preparing the little-known but fascinating story of Ingvar Schrøder-Nielson for publication. Narratives like this one vividly bring to life the experiences of "ordinary" people enmeshed in terrible conflicts. Africana Publishers of Cape Town also deserve credit for publishing this noteworthy manuscript, 110 years after the end of the Anglo-Boer War. The publication includes a map and 24 apt photographs and other illustrations, including a group photograph of Schrøder-Nielson and six fellow POWs on Burtt's Island, Bermuda (p 194).

Anyone interested in the history of the old Zuid-AfrikaanscheRepubliek (ZAR) on the eve of the Anglo-Boer War, as well as in the conflict of 1899 to 1902, and – especially – in the experiences of the ordinary person during this period, cannot afford not to read this fascinating account. The book deserves to be read by a wide audience, and should also be part of any worthwhile Africana collection.

André Wessels
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Striking collection provides worm's eye view of imperial war

Edward Spiers (ed.), *Letters from Ladysmith: Eyewitness Accounts from the South African War*
Pen & Sword Books, Barnsley, 2010
192 pp
ISBN 978-1-84832-594-4
£19.99

Edward Spiers, a leading historian of Britain's Victorian army and Professor of Strategic Studies at the University of Leeds, provided a taste of *Letters from Ladysmith* in this self-same journal not too long ago. In issue 1 of volume 55 (2010), his "The Learning Curve in the South African War: Soldiers' Perspectives", focused on providing, among other useful things, a worm's-eye view of the conditions and costs of General Sir Redvers Buller's blundering Natal campaign against invading Boer republican forces. As common Victorian colonial campaigns went – straightforward conquest or the swift repelling of upstart insurgents – the Natal theatre was altogether another case, anything but what Rudyard Kipling was fond of calling "a scrimmage". A mess which exposed its army's serious shortcomings, this disputed colonial territory seriously tested imperial Britain's military power. Whatever the difficulties of Zululand at the end of the 1870s or the Sudan in the 1880s and again in the 1890s, the stresses of these previous campaigns now paled by comparison. Indeed, for one disgruntled infantry veteran of British wars of "pacification", when compared to the relief of Ladysmith, the

recent engagement at Omdurman had been a picnic, leaving aside the bloodied Sudanese warriors lying beyond the blankets.

What Edward Spiers provides us with in this collection of soldiers' letters is considerably more than a collection of individual testimonies of campaigning on the eastern front of the South African War. For its value is twofold. The first is what *Letters from Ladysmith* represents – the documentation of a transitional phase in the character and identity of the British army or, to put it more plainly, the creation of a more digestible image of the ordinary soldier, a transformation from the Duke of Wellington's derisory depiction of the "scum of the earth" to Kipling's portrayal of a salt of the earth Tommy Atkins. A crucial part of this shift in popular awareness was the impact of the growth of mass literacy in the later Victorian era. By the end of the 1890s, virtually all British soldiers possessed decent basic literacy skills and had become accustomed to communicating their experiences in letters home to their families.

These accounts were also being disseminated more widely for public consumption through the national and local press, factory and trades journals, and school magazines. Simultaneously, the ranks of the standing army were augmented by waves of volunteers from the lower middle and middle classes, a phenomenon of particular significance for the war in South Africa. This gave the army – and its voices – for a time at least, a demographic gloss roughly more representative of its host society. Then, for those who aired their voices by writing home, there was the extraordinary range of Britain's local or provincial press – Professor Spiers lists about 80 newspapers from which his letters are drawn, from the *Armagh Guardian* to the *Yorkshire Post*. As an outlet for wartime testimony, the local press mattered because of its civic culture. During the conflict, provincial newspapers distinguished themselves from the national press by championing local volunteerism, local pride, patriotism and civic effort, and by keeping up interest in imperial campaigns in which there was a local investment, however drawn-out and dreary they may have turned out to be. Thus, unlike, say, *The Times,* by 1901 the *Rotherham Advertiser* was less likely to be distracted from a wartime South Africa by the Chinese Boxer Rebellion. South Yorkshire editors kept an unflagging eye on South Yorkshiremen serving in khaki. And an obvious way of reflecting that local connection was the printing of letters from soldiers at war with local roots or ties.

The lion's share of this meticulously edited collection of around 250 eyewitness letters is drawn from these minor British papers. Almost all by soldiers in the field – there are a few from civilians – they present a matter-of-fact, first-hand testimony to the ways in which the early months of Anglo-Boer warfare were viewed and felt by those shipped out to wage it. The second valuable thing about this commentary is what it does for views of that quintessential Victorian imperial epic, the Siege of Ladysmith, with its dark colonial days for British arms along with a besieged Mafeking and Kimberley. In a somewhat paradoxical way, the sharply personal perspectives provided by this compilation reduce the scale of an overblown

siege epic, while simultaneously adding an enormous crop of minute and vivid particulars to the sum, expanding understanding of how ordinary British forces reacted and responded to the Natal invasion crisis.

Take Private Edward Lightfoot's family letter of December 1899, printed in the *Liverpool Courier* in the following month. Despairing of Buller's ineffectual flailing, he concluded: "we are all heartily sick of this. We don't have much to do, and that is one good thing, for we are not strong enough to do it if we had" (p 69). These accounts are, then, unlike the self-censored or carefully-crafted reports of war correspondents. Nor were they composed with a conscious eye on posterity. Even less are they flavoured with the often posturing hindsight of the traditional war memoir. Instead, what we have is the immediacy of letter-writers who spoke in many different British voices, yet were bound by those pounding elements inescapably common to the experience of war – the immediacies of fear, rage, grief, solace, hatred, compassion and other stark emotional feelings.

In another sense, these pages depict an almost anthropological kind of khaki micro-society, with its own rhythms, dictates, compulsions, habits and vocabularies of revulsion, as when turned by hunger into "brutes" or virtual "cannibals", men swallowed their squeamishness and consumed their own horses (p 162). At the same time*, Letters from Ladysmith* is richly revealing of morally inventive ways of living and letting live. At one level, this could consist of honourable tacit truces or negotiated armistices in order to enable enemies to deal with their respective dead and to attend to the wounded. At another, it could be expressed as mild self-recrimination at stripping Boer corpses of valuables. Although recognised as improper wartime conduct, it was still, after all, "a sin to bury all the money and those watches" (p 137). Typically, there is little mincing of words among the dozens of fragmentary voices and snatches of individual personalities to be encountered in these pages.

Informatively annotated, clustered carefully into themes and topped and tailed with a crisp introduction to Ladysmith and surrounding events, and a concluding retrospective commentary on the significance of these letters, this is a striking collection. While, as the editor himself notes, the Siege of Ladysmith "is hardly a neglected topic of historical inquiry" (p 168), coverage from the British side has for long tended to focus on the blundering generals and the overall shortcomings of high command. By tilting the angle downwards, *Letters from Ladysmith* gives us a valuable worm's eye view of an imperial war that had become constipated. "This great war is going to last a lot longer than they thought" (p 180) was the sobering conclusion of one young regimental bugler early in 1900.

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Historical parallels and convergences between India and South Africa

Isabel Hofmeyr and Michelle Williams (eds), *South Africa and India: Shaping the Global South*
Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 2011
328 pp
ISBN 978-1-86814-538-6
R240.00

The context of the volume of collected essays, *South Africa and India: Shaping the Global South*, is the increasing historiographical focus on the Indian Ocean and the migration of ideas and people across national boundaries. This falls within a growing recognition of the importance of the "Global South" in terms of its economic and political power. Two countries falling within this ambit are South Africa and India. Both countries share much in common historically – the movement of Indian indentured labour, the political activism of Gandhi and struggles for independence. In the present, too, they face common challenges, the most significant of which is the "deepening" of democracy. India – the largest democracy in the world – and South Africa – whose largely peaceful transition to democracy in 1994 has been much lauded – are still countries where economic power is held in the hands of the elites and most citizens are unable to participate effectively in the political power of the state that extends beyond the exercise of the franchise. The volume then is divided into two sections – one addressing the "Historical Connections" between South Africa and India and the other the "Socio-Political Comparisons".

Historically, the figure of M.K. Gandhi looms large as one who literally personifies the connections between the two. Isabel Hofmeyr's chapter uses Gandhi's printing press as a means of interrogating the print culture that connected the various port cities of the Indian Ocean, allowing for the formation of a "cosmopolitan" identity. Gandhi's newspaper *Indian Opinion* was the means by which he put into effect his political and social ideology. The newspaper advocated social reform and the labour involved in the actual printing of it which involved all at the Phoenix Settlement, regardless of social distinction, was a means of practicing social equality as well as inculcating the "discipline" of work (p 32). Gandhi also envisaged a cosmopolitan, invested reader and *Indian Opinion* printed articles dealing with both India and South Africa, advertised books published around the Indian Ocean and contained "travel writing" – the descriptions of various Indian Ocean ports by visiting luminaries (p 34). At the same time, Hofmeyr shows the limits of Gandhi's vision of cosmopolitanism – the work of the Zulu women involved in the press was never acknowledged.

The limits of Gandhi's vision of social and political equality are further explored in Pradip Datta's chapter on the Anglo-Boer War and its reception in India. Gandhi's participation in the war was designed to show his loyalty to Britain and marked the position of him – and South African Indians – as "imperial subjects" where they could claim a place of equality within the empire, if not the nation (pp 62–63). Gandhi's view of civilisation was one

where he accepted British "material" superiority – if not "moral" superiority – and a demonstration of "civilisation" was necessary to be accorded equality (p 69). The Anglo-Boer War provided that opportunity. Simultaneously, he held onto the prevailing racial and class hierarchies evident under British imperialism which prevented the forging of alliances across racial and national boundaries. His view was however not the sole perception, and he was not always in control of the way in which the war was received in India.

Communication technology and the level of newspaper reportage in the early twentieth century meant that the Anglo-Boer War made a large impact on the consciousness of Indians on the subcontinent, dividing them in their support of the British. Their view of the Boers was an indecisive one – on the one hand both shared the experience of British imperialism against which the Boers were fighting. The harsh actions of the British during the war, especially the internment of Boer women and children in concentration camps, enhanced this sentiment. Yet, Boer discriminatory actions against Indians in South Africa meant that they were not solely figures of identification. Datta shows however that, while Indians questioned the portrayal of the Boers by the British as "uncivilised", they did not do the same for derogatory stereotypes of Africans (p 80). The imperial subject then, while losing much of its impetus during the Anglo-Boer War, retains an insidious hold today in the perception of distinctions between nations considered to have varying degrees of "civilisation" despite the theoretical equality between them (p 81). This theme continues in Pamila Gupta's discussion of the migration of Goans to the Portuguese colony of Mozambique where, as members of a colonised underclass in Goa in relation to the white Portuguese colonisers, they became an elite in East Africa due to the racial hierarchies prevalent in the early twentieth century. Their uncertain position mirrored that of the Indian elite represented by Gandhi – they were colonised elites who were nonetheless excluded from the higher echelons of colonial power.

Gandhi's influence was not solely confined to the Indian elites however. Goolam Vahed's chapter on the influence of Gandhian philosophy on the South African Indian political activist, Monty Naicker, demonstrates this. The rise of Monty Naicker and Yusuf Dadoo to leadership positions within the South African Indian Congress marked a new radical phase in Indian nationalist politics in South Africa. Initial resistance by the NIC, the ANC and the CPSA in South Africa, evident in the passive resistance campaign and the Defiance Campaign of 1952, were marked by the principles of non-violence. Gandhian philosophy shaped Monty Naicker's political activism, despite their decreasing efficacy in mid-twentieth century South Africa leading to the move to the formation of MK and the use of violent resistance, considered to be a necessary evil, and a break with Gandhian protest politics.

According to Crain Soudien, however, Gandhi's political and social philosophy still remains a viable alternative in the present by offering an alternative vision of modernity to the dominant Western one. Gandhi's rejection of history "as teleological tale of progress" (p 134) and his

emphasis on “sacrifice and suffering” (p 133) in contrast to the aggressive nature of colonialism and thus, its resisters, offers a more ethical foundation for a modernity that recognises the complex relations between people and groups, one that is not simply based on force and violence but acknowledges alternative indigenous traditions and beliefs.

The post-colonial period in India and the post-apartheid period in South Africa which have so effectively embraced Enlightenment ideals are nevertheless faced with the challenge of creating full equality. Patrick Heller argues that in both countries, elites led the transition to democracy and retain their hold on political and economic power. While they enjoy popular support and have managed to forge a coherent nation from disparate groups, “effective democracy” has not been created (pp 158–159). Ordinary citizens, due to ineffective local government and a weakened civil society, have insufficient access to national government and political influence is largely exercised by those who hold power. Claire Benit-Gbaffou and Stephanie Tawa Lama-Rewal see a possible solution as coming from local government. Local government allows for the shift of power away from central authority and gives citizens a means of participating democratically that is deeper than simply voting for national government. Two different roles of local government are evident in India and South Africa – in India local government was a means of protecting minorities by reserving positions for women and the lower castes whereas in South Africa it was a means of transformation and representation of a previously disenfranchised majority. Yet there has been insufficient local participation due, in India, to a recalcitrant bureaucracy and, in South Africa, the perception of the role of local government as being merely agents of service delivery with ultimate authority stemming from the centralised national government. This lack of effective local government has meant that democratic participation has been confined to the elites.

Michelle Williams focuses on the efficacy of a strengthened civil society as advocated by the South African Communist Party and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) in the southern Indian state of Kerala. Both parties have evolved a vision of social democracy different from the monolithic authoritarian state envisaged under Communism and embodied in the USSR. Unsurprisingly, this re-thinking of socialism has come about as the result of the fall of the USSR. Both argue for the devolution of the power of central government in the form of a strengthened civil society and local government to allow for the effective participation of subordinate classes.

The similarities between India and South Africa are further expounded in Phil Bonner’s chapter on migrant labour with each providing lessons for the other. The system of migrant labour existed in both countries yet, in India, it did not involve state repression and the apparatus of coercion and control as was the case in South Africa. Moreover in India family structures remained largely intact. Thus, Bonner argues for a new historiography where Indian migrant literature can take into account the impact of migrant labour on the urban youth and the family as well as migrant culture. Simultaneously, South African literature needs to consider the possible pre-

colonial history of migrant labour, detribalisation "and the purported social conditions of labour migrancy" (p 242).

These similarities highlight the question of South African "exceptionalism" that is further expounded upon by Jonathan Hyslop's discussion on the steamship empire of the Indian Ocean world. Here, he draws parallels between the collective white identity of organised British sailors striving to protect their jobs against the incursions of African and Asian sailors and that of white miners in the South African gold mining industry. Yet Hyslop also highlights the agency of these black sailors which they were able to exercise despite the vast network of imperial domination within which they laboured.

South Africa and India: Shaping the Global South offers a fascinating look at the parallels between these two countries, drawing upon a vast array of examples, both historical and contemporary. The many convergences suggest the common contemporary challenges facing both countries. As such it is a volume that while highlighting historical ties, also offers a re-thinking of issues that are relevant today and a means of shaping the future. As Crain Soudien points out, the past is a construct which then leaves the future open to change.

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A shared language of ethnic identification

Caroline Jeannerat, Eric Morier-Genoud, Didier Péclard, *Embroiled: Swiss Churches, South Africa and Apartheid*
LIT Verlag, Zürich and Berlin, 2011
373 pp
ISBN 978-3-8258-9796-3
€29.90

Historians of Christian missions in South Africa have recently obtained a great deal of new reading. While some of it reflects the "seismic shift", as Isabel Hofmeyr calls it,[3] towards stressing the limits of missionaries' power, others go into great lengths to emphasise the lingering legacies of missionary institutions (religious and educational), and as Hofmeyr also illustrated elsewhere, their transnational reach.

Richard Elphick's *The Equality of Believers: Protestant Missionaries and the Racial Politics of South Africa* goes into some length to explain the divide between churches founded and controlled by institutions concerned for the "heritage" of their missionised, sceptical of Europeanisation (and equalisation), the "enemies of the Benevolent Empire" on the one hand, and

3. I. Hofmeyr, "Fetishising (and Defetishising) the Missionary Gaze", in: F. Rankin-Smith (ed.), *Figuring Faith: Images of Belief in South Africa* (Fourthwall Books, Johannesburg, 2011), p 195.

on the other, the "Anglo-Saxon" collective, the propagators of "universalism, enlightenment, development and progress".[4] The Swiss falls into the first of Elphick's categories, but as it goes with huge productions, they appear only thrice on Elphick's stage, in tables comparing the representation of various missionary societies at conferences in the first half of the twentieth century, and in a paragraph explaining their response to Bantu Education. For the full(er) story of the Swiss churches in South Africa and their links with Swiss churches in Switzerland, *Embroiled* has to be read.

Since this is a particular case looked into rather deeply, it is a long story. It took the researchers to public and private archives in Johannesburg, Pretoria, Elim, Giyani, Basle, Lausanne, Bern, Geneva and Fribourg. They incorporated the accounts of almost 50 interviewees, and referenced published and unpublished material in Afrikaans, English, German, French, and perhaps less than one would have anticipated, XiTsonga. The story is a complicated one which explains the authors' choice of the title "embroiled" – a word that may be interpreted by some as too euphemistic, absolving the guilty parties too lightly. I hope to explain my own appreciation for the title during the course of this review, beginning, with some of the other recent books and projects on missionary legacies.

Stephen Volz's book on Batswana Christian teachers/ evangelists in the nineteenth century appeared in the same year as *Embroiled*. Amongst other things, Volz emphasised how Christianity was politicised by African-European competition, and how, even in Anglo-Saxon missionary contexts, equality was more often idealised than realised, and that "Africans would ultimately continue to pursue the promise of equality offered by Christian teachings ... more as individuals than as intact African communities, surrendering their bodies to European rule while entrusting their souls to the care of God."[5] This is certainly a book that confirms the limits of missionaries' power, but also the pervasiveness of the colonial state. Volz's sketch of Sotho-Tswana leaders' changing interpretations of Christianity will form an interesting counterfoil to the early history of the Swiss and the making of a Tsonga church.

This brings us to another recently-published book that should also have an impact on the reading of *Embroiled* in as far as it radically historicises the ideas of ethnicity and tribalism in South Africa's present, and in as far the South African church that resulted from the work of the Swiss mission is irrevocably linked to notions of Tsonga identity. In *Popular Politics in the History of South Africa: 1400–1948,* Paul Landau reminds us that mass Christianity had to be preceded by the destruction of people's free access to land, that the "making" of "tribes" (by early twentieth-century ethnographers) was preceded by "a practical tradition of mobilisation, alliance and amalgamation" which then "persisted, mutated, and ... survived

4. R. Elphick, *The Equality of Believers: Protestant Missionaries and the Racial Politics of South Africa* (UKZN Press, Pietermaritzburg, 2012), p 178.
5. S.C. Volz, *African Teachers on the Colonial Frontier: Tswana Evangelists and their Communities during the Nineteenth Century* (Peter Lang, New York, 2011).

against odds in several forms, in tribalism, Christian assemblies, and other, seemingly hybrid movements; and it continues today."[6]

The making of knowledge about the people and places known as "Tsonga" today, and the role of Swiss missionaries in this process, had been illustrated by Patrick Harries in his meticulous and inventive book *Butterflies and Barbarians: Swiss Missionaries and Systems of Knowledge in South-East Africa* (Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 2007). It is not curious thus, that Harries wrote the introduction to *Embroiled.* What I found most insightful is that *Butterflies and Barbarians* was invoked at the onset of another research project that ran parallel to the one on the Swiss Churches in South Africa: the study process on the role of German Protestant Churches in colonial southern Africa, which was initiated by individual theologians in Germany and eventually sponsored by a range of German, southern-African German and former German-mission churches, representing, in themselves, those national and racial/ethnic divides that were the colonial project. The first volume resulting from this German study process was published in the same year as *Embroiled,* the second (which will cover the national socialist and apartheid years) is envisaged to be completed in 2014.

At the South African launch of the German study process in 2008, Tinyiko Maluleke suggested that the researchers should take hints from what Harries had done in *Butterflies and Barbarians*: a probe into Europeanness from the South, in order to understand European intervention in Africa. The European gaze inversed; in a sort of way, an ethnography of the European ethnographer. Significantly, when Sekibakiba Lekgoathi opened his assessment of *Embroiled* at its Johannesburg book launch in June 2012, where I sat between him and Prof. Maluleke, he referred to his current involvement in a similar project in the vein of the "provincialising of Europe".[7]

Embroiled offers a study of Swiss affairs in order to serve African terms, and in this respect it can be said that the three researchers exceeded their initial mandate by far. The project started its life as a subsection of a larger commission by the Swiss National Science Foundation, at the request of the

6. P. Landau, *Popular Politics in the History of South Africa, 1400–1948* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010), pp 246–250 and cover.
7. The volume on the German churches, completed in 2011/12, is in many respects still the (inevitable) prelude to such an achievement: it stops short of discussing the apartheid years, which are foremost in the current generation's social memory. Its greatest achievement was perhaps that various churches within the Lutheran fold started talking to each other about their divisive pasts, and that the sponsors stayed on board for the second stage (in fact, Afrikaans reformed churches also joined in), so that the process of facing the troubled twentieth century is now in full swing. See H. Lessing, J. Besten, T. Dedering, C. Hohmann and L. Kriel (eds), *Deutsche Evangelische Kircheim Kolonialen Südlichen Afrika: Die Rolle der Auslandsarbeit von den Anfängenbis in die 1920er Jahre* (Harrasowitz, Wiesbaden, 2011), published in English translation as *The German Protestant Church in Colonial Southern Africa: The Impact of Overseas Work from the Beginnings until the 1920s* (Cluster Publications, Pietermaritzburg, 2012).

Swiss government, to launch an historical inquest into Swiss involvement in apartheid. In the introduction, Harries explains that Jeannerat, Morier-Genoud and Péclard illustrate that: "the ties joining the two countries were by no means merely economic and commercial, that the involvement of the Swiss Mission in South Africa cannot be reduced to a function of capital or the production of a new cultural hegemony". The book also shows missionary societies to be global institutions that negotiated a pragmatic path between a wide and shifting spectrum of interests. And finally, this book demonstrates that "missionary activity in far-off Africa had important repercussions on cultural life in Switzerland, a country without colonies, a formal imperial past, or a population of African descent" (p vii).

Considering these words by Harries, *Embroiled* is not necessarily a mitigating concept, but rather emphasises how far responsibility and complicity reaches before it returns home. This is an important book to read here and now in light of the current spate of ethnicised thinking which the global economy seems to prey on, whether one approaches it like Landau in the already-mentioned *Popular Politics*, or like the Comaroffs in *Ethnicity Inc*. (Chicago University Press, Chicago, 2009): thinking of ethnicity as endemic to the structures, legacies, histories through/ to which we divert to access capital – whether social or financial.

The Swiss Mission was instrumental in founding and nurturing a Tsonga cultural heritage – by no coincidence did "the Tsonga" consider the book (*buku*) as symbol of the dawn of the Tsonga nation. And "the Swiss mission did not anticipate the effect that a focus on ethnic affiliation could have when enacted by the South African state. ...The Mission and the [South African] government used the shared language of ethnic identification" (pp 145–146). This explains why the Mission found it so hard to criticise apartheid openly: that would have jeopardised their primary task in South Africa – evangelising the ethnically defined community of "Tsonga". Thus, when the apartheid government threatened to confiscate Swiss Mission farms and forcibly remove the inhabitants, the Swiss Mission could claim that they needed the land for their work, and that providing education and health care was part of building a Tsonga nation – eventually in a Tsonga homeland, Gazankulu.

But accountability is not to be abstracted and restricted to the missionaries, the apartheid architects and the homeland officials, it has to be brought down to the practicalities of everyday life, the means of accessing capital, and the personal ties and structural matters facilitating it. This study has mapped these intricacies to such an elaborate extent that it is now possible to start imagining and asking, as Certeau has taught us, how "ordinary" individuals walked this labyrinth. The authors of *Embroiled* invoke Harries's research to illustrate how the homeland system "was beneficial both to the traditional chiefs who went along with it, and to a small emerging black elite which was in a position to reap the few fruits of South Africa's policies" (p 179). Parishioners of the church supported by the Swiss were civil servants in the Gazankulu administration, but in the "diasporic" congregations around Johannesburg and Pretoria, the parishioners of the

same church were also experiencing the woes of apartheid's townships. The radical minority in the church had to have been the ones who had left Gazankulu and criticised it from without (like at the Federal Theological Seminary in Alice and later Pietermartizburg; pp 185–186). In Switzerland, the Swiss congregations who had traditionally supported the Tsonga Church found themselves in a situation where an anti-apartheid stance would of necessity, in principle, also have made them anti-Tsonga. But even more embroiled were those Swiss parishioners who found themselves to be employees of Swiss banks that supported apartheid, and which the World Council of Churches and their fellow parishioners wished to them boycott. Few Europeans who casually or devotedly took a stance against apartheid found their own "ethnicity" and their access to financial capital to have been so embroiled.

It took apartheid and its violently divisive and exclusionist politics to make "the Tsonga" and "the Swiss" alike to rethink the a priori's of their long conversation as Christians, through the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. The majority of members of the interlinked faith communities in Switzerland, Gazankulu and Johannesburg remained carefully reconciliatory, not really required to act on their convictions in ways that would jeopardise their social stability and their access to financial capital, which makes those few individuals amongst all those who were embroiled, who did take that radical stance, so much the more exceptional. We do see in this study that the reconciliatory responses of the moderate parishioners were not without effect. Yet, it laid bare the limitations to the potential agency of churches to bring about social change.

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Returned to his rightful place

Peter Limb (ed.), *A.B. Xuma: Autobiography and Selected Works*
Van Riebeeck Society, Cape Town, 2012 [Second Series Volume 43]
402pp
ISBN 978-0-9814264-3-3
R150.00 (Members); R250.00 (Non-members)

Historians have been rather mixed in their attitudes to Alfred Bitini Xuma (1893–1962). He is widely credited with having refurbished the ANC's shambolic structures in the 1940s and having revised its constitution so that among other much-needed reforms, women were at last admitted to full membership. He is also credited with broadening the appeal and reach of Congress: witness the founding of the Youth League, whose young turks finally removed him from the presidency in 1949; or his role in taking the ANC into a broader Congress alliance, symbolised in the so-called Doctors' Pact. Yet he is also portrayed as an autocratic figure lacking the common touch and as a politically conservative in a radicalising era. He has even

been taken to task for his apparent arrogance in refusing to marry locally;[8] his first wife was Liberian and his second, African American.

Peter Limb's edited selection of Xuma's writings adds richly to the growing corpus of scholarship (including Limb's other prodigious contributions[9]) on the ANC's first half-century. Appearing as it does as a documentary source-book in the Van Riebeeck Society series, it also helps to redress the still-vast imbalance between published minority white/settler writings and those of the indigenous majority. The documents come largely from the Xuma papers, rescued from a dank Soweto garage after his death and surviving several other mishaps until their deposit in the Cullen Library at Wits in the 1970s. Yet until the 1990s, Xuma, along with virtually all the earlier generations of ANC leaders, occupied a deeply ambiguous position in relation to the liberation struggle being waged from exile: they may have been foundational, but they had also signally failed to dent white minority rule. Perhaps it is partly because the settlement ushering in majority rule in 1994 was so flawed and compromised that such figures have warranted our fresh attention since.

The selection is divided into three sections: autobiographical writings; correspondence; and essays, speeches and other prose. Xuma emerges from the material in the autobiographical section, the slimmest of the three, as someone revealing little of himself beyond outwardly observable phenomena, a sense reinforced by his somewhat prosaic, what-happened-next account. Perhaps he harboured suspicions against this mode of writing/revelation: Xuma's own preface to his biography of Charlotte Maxeke begins, "Biographers, in whose society and group, thank God, I do not belong, are usually great enthusiasts about their subjects" (p 245).[10]

The key document in this first section was penned in 1954; it is a Limb reconstruction, based partly on a typescript from which some pages have disappeared, and partly on a series of articles that appeared in *Drum,* for which the typescript was possibly prepared in the first place. Here we learn of his childhood and early schooling in Manzana in the Transkei in the 1890s; his years at Clarkebury Institution and his ambition to study abroad; his departure for the United States aged 20, with two friends, and their admission to Tuskegee; undergraduate study at the University of Minnesota and medical studies at Northwestern University. If anything emerges as a preoccupation, it is the desperate shortage of money, necessitating having to work in vacations and between courses at mostly menial jobs.

8. N. Erlank, "Gender and Masculinity in South African Nationalist Discourse, 1912–1950", *Feminist Studies*, 29, 3, 2003, pp 653–671, especially p 658.
9. See in particular P. Limb, *The ANC's Early Years: Nation, Class and Place in South Africa Before 1940* (UNISA Press, Pretoria, 2010); and P. Limb (ed.), *The People's Paper: A Centenary History and Anthology of* Abantu-Batho (Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 2012).
10. Gish begins his biography of Xuma with this same quote. See S. Gish, *Alfred B. Xuma: African American South African* (Macmillan, London, 2000), p 1. Limb does also point out that (citing Erlmann) Xuma's biography of Maxeke shows little of the restraint that he reserves for his treatment of himself (p xxii).

When he finally returns to South Africa in late 1927 after two more years of study in Europe, he has been away for 14 years. What this means in terms of his relation to South African society or his acculturation in America, for example, is hard to determine. He tells us only that he chooses to base himself in Johannesburg and to concentrate on building a medical practice, refusing invitations to become involved in political and labour organisation. Then in 1931, aged 38, "I decided to get married" to Amanda Priscilla Mason, whom he had met in the USA (this last item we are told in a footnote, not by Xuma). Tragically she dies in 1934 of complications resulting from the birth of their second child. A year later, he is finally pitched into politics, prompted by resistance to Hertzog's Native Bills. He is involved in the formation of the All-African Convention, and he offers valuable insights into its dealings with government and other organisations, such as the Institute of Race Relations.

No sooner has he cut his political teeth, however, than he is off abroad again, for three years of further study. On his return he marries Madie Hall, whom he had met on his recent trip (again, Limb tells us this, not Xuma) and who travels from the USA to join him after a long-distance courtship. He notes only her roles as wife and mother in his narrative; it has been left to a more recent scholar to highlight Madie Hall Xuma's importance as an organiser of the ANC Women's League and later the YWCA.[11] Xuma's account of his revival of Congress as its new president is surprisingly brief and deals with two themes: his countrywide tour in 1941, reorganising branches, expelling those he considered had acted improperly and identifying promising individuals to take over; and his attitude to the Natives Representative Council and the part he plays in its adjournment in 1946.

The autobiography serves to frame the two other sections, which date very largely from the 1930s onwards. The correspondence section, organised chronologically, contains letters both by and to him. There are a few from his pre-political years and his years of disengagement through the 1950s, but most date from his incumbency as ANC president in the 1940s. They reveal both the bustle and messiness of political activity, and evoke a sense of immediacy of the issues with which he had to deal: fighting off punitive actions of the state; urging women to support the Women's League; campaigning for drought relief; updating friends on his doings; chiding wayward provincial ANC officials; persuading men of influence to support his draft policies; and all the while juggling his diary to accommodate the many demands being made on his time. He is clearly a fluent, conscientious and effective letter-writer.

The last section is by far the fattest, consisting of over half the volume. Limb has arranged the various sources here thematically, an approach which allows Xuma to emerge as a highly complex thinker and activist, as well as a sharp analyst. His health-related writings and

11. I. Berger, "An African American 'Mother of the Nation': Madie Hall Xuma in South Africa, 1940–1963", *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 27, 3, 2001, pp 547–566.

testimonies are well represented and reveal an absolute insistence on the rights of Africans to fully-qualified health care, in the face of state attempts to provide cheap alternatives. His contributions on indigenous beliefs show sympathetic understanding rather than strident judgement. He strips bare the hypocrisy and venality of various state policies towards Africans, including beer halls, education and taxation. In several of the documents, he not only demolishes a set of arguments but also advances what he (or Congress) sees as solutions: raising wages, or reducing bus fares, or eliminating separate taxation, as the case may be. Throughout, he is consistent in his demands for total racial equality in all walks of life. Also included is his biography of Charlotte Maxeke (1930) which has rightly become a classic, not only because of the significance of its subject but because Xuma had the prescience to produce it: it is virtually alone for the time as a biography of a black woman leader.

Finally there are documents that address explicitly political issues. The 1930s contributions are concerned with race relations, while those from the 1940s give a flavour of the deputations, addresses and commission evidence undertaken on behalf of the ANC. Rounding off the volume are a number of his writings and speeches against apartheid policy; by this time he had become alienated from Congress, however, as a result of his opposition to its more militant stance.

Limb's introductory notes are immensely valuable in situating this volume in historiographical context – the nature of documentary narrative, the challenges of biography, and current understandings of race and class in studies of African nationalism. His many annotations provide useful background and help to contextualise individual documents and points within documents. He is also mindful of the fact that a documentary collection depends as much on choice as to what to include and exclude as any work of history (or biography). He provides some justification for his choices, such as highlighting previously neglected aspects of Xuma's work or including items not otherwise available in South Africa. This is a theme that probably could have been further developed. For example, we are told on several occasions that material included is "representative" – which may well be the case, but it is hard to judge without further explanation. Again, Limb explains that in deference to privacy, personal documents have been excluded. While he offers no further rationale, this decision should prompt discussion. The assumption that "the private" is either a central explanatory dimension or an essential source of detail is now so deeply held among life-writers of various kinds that it is no longer open to question. Limb's position at least flags this matter up for consideration.

Above all, Limb makes a convincing case that Xuma is a figure significant enough to merit greater attention than he has received in the past for his very many contributions to public life, both inside and beyond the ANC. This volume will go a long way to facilitate that attention.

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Erudite and accessible primary source of the 1950s

M.J. Daymond and C. Sandwith (eds), *Africa South: Viewpoints, 1956–1961*
UKZN Press, Pietermaritzburg, 2011
419 pp
ISBN 978-1-86914-195-0
R288.00

This admirable book is part of a growing trend to better capture, edit and (re)publish primary sources on the South African past. It is not that the historiography is bereft of such sources, for we have had the Van Riebeeck Society series since 1918 and the James Stuart Archive has been chugging along since 1976, to name two of those most widely used. Rather this recovery was, like South African society in general, lop-sided so it poorly served black history. This has been changing with, for example, the fine volumes of translations by literary scholars like Jeff Opland and Liz Gunner, collections of SADET interviews, and the forthcoming second edition of the notable Carter/ Karis/ Gerhart volumes.[12] But the gaps remain wide, and one can think of many a newspaper, magazine, or long-out-of-print book much in need of resuscitation in anthology.[13]

Africa South was the brainchild of young intellectual Ronald Segal, who moved from the National Union of South African Students to pursue the life of a literary critic overseas but, shocked by apartheid's ferocity, returned to South Africa in the mid-fifties and founded the journal-cum-magazine in 1956. His own ideological predilections blended left-liberalism with a twinge of socialism, but the journal embraced a much wider span of ideologies and vocations to bring on board popular and academic historians, literary and art critics, political scientists, journalists, poets, and especially political activists from African nationalists and liberals to communists, women organisers and trade unionists. In a 2007 interview with the editors before he died, Segal explained the need then for a strong, oppositional voice: "You should try and

12. Van Riebeeck Society for the Publication of South African Historical Documents (VRS), Cape Town, from 1918; C. de B. Webb and J.B. Wright (eds), *The James Stuart Archive of Recorded Oral Evidence Relating to the History of the Zulu and Neighbouring Peoples* (University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1976); J. Opland (ed.), *S.E.K. Mqhayi, Abantu Besizwe: Historical and Biographical Writings, 1902–44* (Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 2009); L. Gunner (ed.), *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God: Isaiah Shembe and the Nazareth Church* (UKZN Press, Scottsville, 2004); SADET, *The Road to Democracy: South Africans Telling their Stories* (Mutloatse Arts Heritage Trust, Houghton, 2008); T. Karis and G.M. Carter (eds), *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa,* 6 vols. (Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, 1972).
13. The former category has recently been addressed in one case by the anthology section of P. Limb (ed.), *The People's Paper*: *A Centenary History and Anthology of* Abantu-Batho (Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 2012), but one would hope, for instance, for a new edited version of T.D. Mweli Skota's classic, *African Yearly Register* (1930, 1931, 1966), and the complete works of say, Mandela, Biko, and an anthology of *Drum*.

propagate your views that things should change … How can you best do it? Do it through the one thing you know, which is writing. How do you do it? … through some sort of magazine" (p 16). The interview, which reveals Segal's motives and aims, as well as some of his editorial decisions (such as the forced move when banned after the 1960 Sharpeville massacre to Britain where it became *Africa South in Exile*), adds greatly to the value of the book as an historical source to better explain the intellectual history of this influential period of deep crisis.

Editors Margaret Daymond and Corinne Sandwith, experienced literary scholars, have chronologically arranged 57 of the 460 original articles spanning the entire life of the journal from 1956 to 1961. It is a fine, representative sample focusing on prose rather than the fiction and poetry that Segal also included. In their Introduction, they point to some omissions typical of the period, such as neglect of gender as an analytical tool, even if a good number of women writers are incorporated. They make clear that page limits obliged them to omit some important authors but those wanting to consult the whole kit and caboodle can turn to the online complete works at DISA.[14]

Selection, editing and production are all superb and a credit to editors and publishers. A few facsimiles of original illustrations (such as cartoons) may have further enhanced the volume. In the same vein, the historian in me hungers for more contextual footnotes, though we receive good compensation with the succinct and informative introductions to the essays. Whilst all the essays and their authors are very well introduced, this is often more in terms of the latter and some readers unfamiliar, say, with wider African history might desire greater context. In this regard, some South African presses seem to have caught the American allergy to such erudite apparatus in a misplaced assumption that footnotes scare readers away. Perhaps it is up to historians to step forward and make sure we endow published primary sources in this respect. Nevertheless, the articles, originally written for the general reader, still read well.

The journal encompassed all regions of the continent. It drew on not just political activists and academics but also popular writers such as Basil Davidson, who wrote on the broad sweep of African civilisation. On West Africa, inclusion of reports from Thomas Hodgkin, a leading contemporary scholar, and Sabura Biobaku, of the first generation of Nigerian professional historians, epitomises the Pan-African scope of Segal's editorialising. There were incursions into the fine arts and archaeology in analyses of Swahili Coast cultures and West African woodcarving. Breaking stories on political crises, as in the Congo, or reflective pieces on nationalism in Cameroon and Ghana on the eve of independence, or on Libya, Kenya, and Nigeria (by rising writer Cyprian Ekwensi) added to the breadth. Here Rosalynde Ainslie, who penned reports from South, East, and Central Africa and became the magazine's British correspondent, played a major role. All this was in marked distinction from other contemporary periodicals such as

14. Available at www.disa.ukzn.ac.za

Anthony Sampson's *Drum*, which often mirrored the willy-nilly adoption of Western tropes, as did the captive, white-owned, black-edited press such as *Bantu World*.

The eminence and political centrality of many of the South African writers included in the collection show just how significant this journal was, and how useful it can be to historians, who are lately revisiting this period. These include Ruth First, Brian Bunting, and Michael Harmel from the communist left, Helen Joseph, Alan Paton, Leo Kuper, and Julius Lewin from the liberal opposition to apartheid, and Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and Z.K. Matthews from the ANC. There is both breadth and depth in the South African coverage. Apartheid and its draconian laws and repression is of course centre-stage, with its impact on, for example, human rights, the press, labour control, religion, universities, and families, and with reports on the Treason Trial, women's resistance to passes, and the National Party. Coverage ranges across the country from the Transvaal and Durban to Pondoland, the Transkei and Sekhukhuneland. Neither was the Southern African region neglected, with stories filed from Windhoek by Brian Bunting, from Salisbury by Enoch Dumbutshena, and from Mozambique by Chikomuami Mahala.

Despite this regional breadth, the sharpest insights we can glimpse from the volume are into South African political debates and actions. Essays by Mandela and Sisulu on anti-apartheid tactics are complemented by more theoretical works such as those by Lionel Forman in his classic analysis of the roots of African nationalism, or reports on the formation of the Pan Africanist Congress. There were penetrating exchanges on burning issues of the day, one of the most interesting and longest-running being on the immediacy of revolution. Fabian socialist Julius Lewin kicked off the debate in late 1958 with a pessimistic prediction of continued repression. Communist Michael Harmel was certain of eventual victory over apartheid, whereas ex-communist Eddie Roux mused that intensified repression would ultimately breed compromise. Joe Matthews and Segal both felt revolution in the air, whereas the venerable scholar of British social democracy, G.D.H. Cole, tended to agree with Lewin on the need for reform. Rather appropriately, as things turned out, the debate closes with Mandela, underground in 1961, pointing to the proliferation of global revolutions.

This very useful collection that deftly recaptures the spirit of the times now sits proudly beside my equally treasured original copies of a journal that was a lodestone for progressive South Africans of a wide range of political viewpoints, and which historians (and the general reading public) can now plumb with greater ease and accessibility.

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A nuanced history of a liberation army

Janet Cherry, *Umkhonto we Sizwe: A Jacana Pocket History*
Jacana Media, Auckland Park, 2011
155 pp
ISBN 978-1-77009-961-6
R99.95

This pocket book by scholar-activist Janet Cherry published in the Jacana history series provides a brief introduction to the history of the ANC's armed wing, *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK), "arguably the last of the great liberation armies of the twentieth century" (p 10). The book does not really cover new ground in the study of MK. Rather its strength lies in the sensitive interweaving of political and strategic analyses of MK's trajectory with personal testimonies by former MK cadres (drawn from the massive oral history archive of the South African Democracy Education Trust, the records of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and autobiographical accounts). Through these sources, the author paints a nuanced story of "paradox and contradiction, successes and failures" (p 9).

Between the introduction and the concluding chapter are five chronologically arranged chapters, each dealing with a strategic phase in MK's history from its formation in 1961 to the end of the armed struggle in the early 1990s. A select list of readings and an index are also included at the end, although there are no references for the quotations in the text itself – something which academic historians may find irritating, but is also understandable given the much wider readership this book aims to reach. The narrative touches on all major events in the history of MK from its formation to its eventual demise in the early 1990s, while sketching some of the historiographical controversies which surround the topic.

As Cherry argues in chapter two, the turn to the armed struggle in the aftermath of the Sharpeville massacre and the banning of the ANC and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) in 1960 was a complex and difficult process, rather than an unavoidable outcome. It was the subject of much debate within the leadership of the ANC and between the ANC and its allies, notably the underground South African Communist Party (SACP), which partly explains why it was only at the end of 1962 that MK was publicly linked to the ANC for the first time (p 18).

The heroic sacrifice made by those MK combatants who fought (and died) in the Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns of 1967–1968 (a generation of cadres known as the Luthuli Detachment) is analysed by the author both in terms of the development of MK's strategy and tactics (as "the first engagement in 'conventional' guerrilla warfare as distinct from symbolic sabotage" (pp 41–42) which had characterised MK's formative years) and of the hardship and growing frustration of MK cadres in Kongwa camp in Tanzania after their return from military training. Their discontent was captured in the 1968 "Hani memorandum" – which is incorrectly dated in 1966, i.e. before, instead of after, the Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns. The

memorandum was partly the product of the failure of these military attempts at infiltrating South Africa via Zimbabwe (then Southern Rhodesia) and became one of the main catalysts behind the call for a consultative conference in Morogoro in 1969, which resulted in a further shift in MK's strategy from the Cuban-inspired theory of *foco* to protracted rural guerrilla warfare.

Only from the mid to late 1970s, after the collapse of the Portuguese empire in 1975, was MK able to resume operations inside South Africa, although the resurgence of "popular unrest and civil revolt within South Africa came about largely independently of the ANC's or MK's actions" (p 59). The 1976 generation injected new life into MK as many youths skipped the country and were drafted into what became known as the June 16 Detachment. Tragically, however, most of these young recruits were never deployed in combat and spent long years in the Angolan camps, where they endured extreme hardships and growing frustration. The book briefly touches on the many difficulties experienced by MK in this period – not least the sustained offensive by the apartheid regime, both directly with cross border military attacks on MK bases in the frontline states, and indirectly with the infiltration of spies within the movement. This led to "what was probably one of its worst crises in all the years of exile" (p 68). The crisis came into the open through a series of mutinies in the camps in Angola and the subsequent imprisonment, torture and death of a number of cadres by the Department of Intelligence and Security, or Mbokondo, in what became known as Quatro detention camp.

Some of the grievances which had fuelled the Angolan mutinies were addressed by the Kabwe conference in 1985. At Kabwe, the ANC's commitment to a "people's war" (a strategy originally developed in the "green book" after an influential visit to Vietnam in 1978) was also reaffirmed. Arguing against some of the revisionist scholarship which has emerged in recent years, notably the work of Anthea Jeffery, Cherry demonstrates how the policies of the ANC and MK, including that of "people's war", were characterised by high levels of restraint, rather than the indiscriminate use of violence, by using as an example the controversial landmine campaign of 1985–1987 (pp 75–84).

The growth of the mass democratic movement in South Africa, especially after the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983 and the beginning of the township insurrection in 1984, created new opportunities for the development of a "people's war". Although the ANC influenced these developments, it was ultimately "ordinary people, through their own actions and tactics" (for instance the *amabutho* in the Eastern Cape, pp 90–94), rather than MK cadres deployed inside the country, that put into practice the call to "render the country ungovernable" (p 87). This paradox illuminates the continued difficulty of the ANC in exile to establish permanent bases inside the country and effective communication between the internal and exiled movement and was one of the main drivers behind Operation Vula, launched in 1987.

The late 1980s were characterised by another paradox: while the ANC leadership called for an escalation of the armed struggle (which reached a peak in this period), they had secretly entered into negotiations with Pretoria. Hence the unbanning of the ANC, the release of political prisoners and the subsequent decision to suspend the armed struggle in August 1990 came as a surprise to many rank and file cadres. Cherry also touches upon the difficult process of integration of MK and other so called non-statutory forces with the SADF and bantustan armies and on the grave problems of "social integration, povery and unemployement" (p 128) which former MK cadres faced as they returned to South Africa and were reabsorbed into civilian society.

In her concluding chapter, Cherry evaluates the relative success and failure of the MK and the armed struggle. First off, she notes that the human costs of the armed struggle were remarkably low. This was primarly thanks to the political leadership which the ANC provided and under which MK fell at all times, as well as partly due to the particular nature of the apartheid state. Although from a strictly military point of view the armed struggle may be viewed as a failure, from a symbolic and ideological point of view it carried enormous importance. Ultimately the overthrow of apartheid was the result of a combination of factors, of which MK was an integral part.

Throughout this very accessible and well written introductory account of the history of MK, Cherry never loses sight of the human dimension of the armed struggle, which is indispensable to understanding what continues to be a very sensitive topic.

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Important book on the antecedents of current popular protest

William Beinart and Marcelle C. Dawson (eds), *Popular Politics and Resistance Movements in South Africa*
Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 2010
368 pp
ISBN 978-1-86814-518-8
R220.00

The product of workshops conducted at the Universities of Oxford and Johannesburg in 2006 and 2007 respectively, this collection of essays explores a range of themes that centre on popular politics and resistance in South Africa. These include:

> continuities and change in popular politics; the strategies, scale and influence of popular activism; the role of leadership; ideological shifts; patterns of violence across time and space; the changing relationship between state and protesters; different sites, symbols and modes of protest; newer issues such as AIDS activism; and the use of media (p 3).

Contributors base their analyses on African history, social history, leftist critiques of the transition in South Africa, and social movement theory. In so doing they seek to transcend nationalist discourses and historiographies that appropriate and conflate all forms of protest and resistance under the "struggle" rubric. A shared interest in the potential of popular protest and alternative political traditions independent of the ANC in power is the golden thread that ties the volume together.

In the wake of the recent "Marikana massacre", a series of events that grabbed the popular imagination (both locally and internationally) and that may forever change the South African economic and political landscape, some chapters are particularly important if we are to develop thorough understandings of the antecedents to the situation in the country at present.

Julian Brown's chapter on the Durban strikes of 1973, for instance, analyses the complex relationship between protest and violence and the roles of the state and company managers respectively in the containment (or lack thereof) of protest. Tracy Carson's, in turn, shows how unions with limited legal recognition, subject to state repression and employer hostility, have been able to successfully forge alliances with community groups and as a result further not only the narrow economic interests of their own members but also have a significant impact on national politics. Kelly Rosenthal's chapter focuses on the relationship between the nature of the state and the ideology of resistance. By comparing pre- and post-apartheid protest movements in Soweto, Rosenthal shows how different forms of oppression engender different forms of resistance. In drawing the attention to key discontinuities between popular movements of the 1980s and early 2000s, Rosenthal complicates the notion that grassroots organisations were uniformly socialist (indeed, many accommodated capitalist aspirations) and that the ANC government has thus betrayed the "struggle".

The essays in this volume explicitly make no comparisons with other African countries. Yet they will appeal to a wide readership. Drawing on the work of the Nobel Prize-winning economist Arthur Lewis, the anthropologist Keith Hart argues convincingly that an "apartheid principle … is to be found everywhere in local systems of discrimination".[15] It follows that insights that result from analyses of South African forms of protest and resistance may be successfully applied to a variety of contexts the world over. The central themes of this volume will therefore resonate with scholars interested in inequality and the potential of the different forms of protest that this engenders; the Occupy Movement being the most obvious example.

Rebecca Hodes' chapter on the struggle for HIV and AIDS treatment on South African television examines the role of mass media in the growth of social movements and is of particular interest here. In showing how the treatment access movement in South Africa was inspired by the radicalism of American AIDS activism, Hodes gives clues as to how local and global

15. C. Hann and K. Hart, *Economic Anthropology: History, Ethnography, Critique* (Polity, Cambridge, 2011), pp 104–105.

forms of struggle might influence, shape and pattern one another. Marcelle Dawson's chapter shows how local struggles over the provision of services have been located within the context of the spread of global multinationals and aligned to similar movements in the global south that have as their aim to alleviate debt burdens. In an analysis of the ways in which the image of Nelson Mandela was employed to attract international support for the anti-apartheid campaign, Genevieve Klein's contribution demonstrates how symbols can be created and used to garner international support for and solidarity with what otherwise might have remained relatively parochial concerns.

The book will also appeal to a readership interested in continuity and change in the ideologies of resistance movements. Rosenthal and Dawson's chapters have already been mentioned. Simonne Horwitz's chapter illustrates continuities and differences in black nurses' strikes at Baragwanath Hospital in Soweto between 1984 and 2007. Horwitz highlights the complex contradictions faced by nurses and how they negotiated power and identity in the context of broader political issues when deciding whether and how to embark in protest action and/or strikes. Nurses, the chapter argues, became more militant and more organised as workers during the period under consideration despite these contradictions.

An overtly and exclusively modernist slant may be the book's only weakness. By consciously ignoring factors such as witchcraft, neo-patrimonialism and ethnic violence, contributors run the risk of eliding and/or obfuscating "tradition" and "culture" as a metaphor for making sense of misfortune, as a rallying point for resistance against inequality and oppression, as a way of formulating alternative moral economies, and as a platform for the discussion of civic virtue. Some arguments might therefore at times, as John Lonsdale puts it, represent "Western transubstantiations that have squeezed African responses to colonial rule [and, one might argue, other forms of oppression and inequality] into the prefabricated, imported, moulds of nationhood and class formation."[16] One blind-spot notwithstanding, this is a very important book.

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Leaders who made history under difficult circumstances

Paul Maylam, *Enlightened Rule: Portraits of Six Exceptional Twentieth Century Premiers*
Peter Lang, Oxford, 2011
316 pp
ISBN 978-3-0343-0271-5
SFr 62.00

16. J. Lonsdale and B. Berman, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa* (James Currey, Oxford, 1992), p 317.

The purpose of this book, according to the author, is to give recognition to six twentieth-century exceptional, transformative and progressive heads of government. They were gifted leaders in their respective states and in some cases, on the world stage. Moreover, in the majority of instances, these "premiers"[17] assumed office under precarious political contexts. What Maylam presents in this book are six politicians "who can be greatly admired" (p vii). With his progressivist orientation, it is clear that conservative "premiers" such as Churchill, Thatcher and De Gaulle; and liberals like Lloyd George or Woodrow Wilson would not be considered. F.D. Roosevelt, J.F. Kennedy and Pierre Trudeau are not included, nor the great Labourite and state interventionist, Clem Attlee. But, the author confesses on p 23, the decision to include some and exclude others was ultimately an arbitrary one, and highly personal, I would guess. Be that as it may.

So who is included in this admirer's list? All bar one were leaders in under-developed and poor states. What were the criteria for selection, excluding the author's own subjective preferences? In Maylam's view all six adhered firmly to key and fundamental values, such as the innate worth, dignity and equality of all humans, an unwavering commitment to democracy and human rights. Their view of the state was socialist or democratic socialist in the sense that the state should provide for services such as national education, health, social security and to boot, should intervene in the economy to assure a fair distribution of resources, inter alia by progressive taxation and redistribution of material resources. Not all of them could fully execute these ideals while in office, and had to make pragmatic compromises with the ruling classes. But all of them were admired by their followers for their moral authority and personal integrity.

Maylam's list includes the following personalities: José Batlle y Ordóñez of Uruguay (1903–1907; 1911–1915); Lázaro Cárdenas of Mexico (1934–1940); Juan José Arévalo of Guatemala (1945–1951); Jawaharlal Nehru of India (1947–1964); Olof Palme of Sweden (1969–1976 and 1982–1986); and Nelson Mandela of South Africa (1994–1999). It is clear that Maylam chose a slate of admirable leaders that literally spans the whole of the twentieth century. This is a relatively short work for such a wide historical canvas, each premier is accorded between 35 to around 50 pages in the book – therefore of necessity it is a "portrait" of each, rather than a detailed biography. The style of the author is systematic. He provides the reader with a brief intellectual reading of leadership in an age of catastrophe (the twentieth century and its violence need no introduction here). In the introduction Maylam already provides the reader with a glimpse of the leaders he intends to "paint" in the book. His conclusion in the introduction is that he does not subscribe to the great man (sic) theory of history, nor does he accept the overly determinist structuralism of the late twentieth century: playing down the role of individual agency. He agrees (and so do I) with the Marxian aphorism: "it is men (sic) who make history, but not in circumstances of their own choosing". Of course, this goes a long way to

17. The author uses the term premier generically for head of state, which in four cases were actually presidents. Only two were prime ministers or premiers.

explain why all of the exceptional premiers had to make pragmatic concessions to the real world in their attempt to realise their progressivist dreams – and were quite often roundly criticised for it.

Each premier and his term of office, his major achievements, disappointments and an evaluation are presented in dedicated chapters. The author keeps his subjects reasonably at an emotional distance, in other words Maylam is not blind to the faults and shortcomings of each of the leaders he paints. Not quite warts and all, but certainly not only the accolades and venerations of an ingénue. Here are couple of interesting human frailties of the men. While Batlle was a philosopher by training, he also fought in duels, in one instance killing a rival. Cárdenas engaged in revolutionary wars in his early career. Mandela was at the forefront of the ANC's decision to wage an armed struggle against the National Party government in 1960–1961. Arévalle was suspected in the assassination of a rival. Nehru waged war against China and was thought of having cuckolded Lord Louis Mountbatten while he was the last viceroy of India. Palme was suspected of having been involved in a corrupt scheme to sell Bofors guns to India. But these human frailties do not detract from the leadership and contribution the men made to their respective states.

The book concludes with a chapter on legacies and lessons. The author identifies a number of lessons drawn from his study. These include that a political leader must exude some kind of moral authority. Second, those who seek power with a driving ambition may not be the best suited to hold office. In Maylam's view, none of the six men sought power for its own sake. Third, a head of government should be guided by a fundamental set of progressive goals and values: especially respect for human life, egalitarianism and a striving for international peace. Lastly, a disdain for narrow sectarianism, national interest at any cost, and the notion of the minimal state. Each of the men studied in the book displayed most if not all of these characteristics.

Having considered this work one is immediately struck by the thought: what about a book about exceptional women who acted as political leaders in the last 100 years? There aren't many, and not all of them were progressives. Women like Indira Ghandi, Margaret Thatcher, Gro Harlem Brundtlant, Mary Robinson, Ms Banderanaika, Golda Meir and Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands (constitutional monarch and all). How would their contributions measure up against Maylam's standards?

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