

Book Reviews / Boekresensies

A neglected era in Cape history brought to light

Karel Schoeman, *Twee Kaapse Lewens: Henricus en Aletta Beck en die Samelewing van hul Tyd, 1702-1755*

Protea Book House, Pretoria, 2013

480 pp

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R350.00

This book is the sixth of an eight part series entitled *Kolonie aan die Kaap*, which according to the publisher will cover the entire history of the Cape settlement during the time it was ruled by the Dutch East India Company (VOC). This volume is about the first half of the eighteenth century. In his foreword, Schoeman notes that he had wanted to write a book about siblings Henricus and Aletta Beck for a long time, not because they were outstanding or important, but mainly because there is so much fragmentary information available about them that one is able to reconstruct their lives rather as one would a puzzle. Schoeman does this well and a good idea emerges of who the Becks were. It seems that Aletta was the more interesting of the two. She appears as an intelligent and strong woman; had she lived in a time when women were not as subordinate, she would probably have achieved more for herself. Brother Henricus took the easy route in life. He lived and travelled on his mother's pocket for a long time before deciding to study. And as a Dutch Reformed minister in the Cape settlement he was not known for his engaging sermons; nor was he eager to become involved with the members of his congregation.

Despite the title, this book is not a biography. Schoeman uses the lives of the Becks as a means to an end, namely to describe the Cape settlement, its society, and its place in the wider Dutch colonial world. He states that the life of each Cape resident can shed light on Cape society under the VOC, and that is the reason why a book like this contains so many excursions (p 457). Consequently a multitude of people and topics are discussed. Like most of Schoeman's historical studies, this book is a great source of reference and information for students and researchers. Yet sometimes Schoeman goes into too much detail and the excursions become digressions which are rather distracting and somewhat unnecessary.

Schoeman has chosen his subjects well. During their almost half century stay in the settlement the Becks moved about and were based in Drakenstein, Stellenbosch and Cape Town. This gives Schoeman the opportunity to describe the Cape settlement almost in its entirety and he uses large portions of the book to paint a picture of social, cultural, economic and political life in Table Valley and the outer districts. He points out that the colonial past must not be romanticised (p 200). The early eighteenth century was still a pioneering time and there were many of discomforts. Most of the houses were small and humble. The built environment was generally dirty and roads were poorly maintained. Throughout the book one gets a sense of the dangers of lawlessness and violence, of devastating fires, and also of disease. But Schoeman makes it clear that the Cape

was on the cusp of greater prosperity. He illustrates this repeatedly (perhaps a bit repetitively) on the basis of one major primary source of information he uses: the estate accounts and inventories. Despite the hardships it was possible to live in a stylish manner. That is of course if one was fortunate enough to belong to that group of Cape residents who are the focus of this book: “the well-established haute-bourgeoisie”, the upper layer of wealthy burghers and farmers as well as the higher Company officials (p 303).

To a large extent Schoeman’s historic studies form a bridge between works written by well-known historians like A.J. Böeseken, J.L.M. Franken, G. McCall Theal, and others, and that of historians of a more modern era like R. Ross, N. Worden, G. Groenewald and K. Ward. One of the main characteristics of the former group is that it is largely empiricist in nature and that there was little attention to interpretation, while later historians tend to do just that: interpret and theorise about the information obtained from primary materials. Schoeman’s work can be placed in the former tradition and in that sense, he may be one of a dying breed. However, his books do provide an enormous amount of information. Many historians (I for one) are assisted a great deal in their research by consulting his works and those of his predecessors.

This highlights a problem though. In his foreword Schoeman points out that the early eighteenth century is a period which does not receive a great deal of attention from researchers. Unfortunately one has to agree with this statement. Not only is there little attention paid to this period, but the number of historians who focus on the eighteenth-century Cape is limited and is hardly infused with fresh ideas and new blood. One of the main reasons for this is undoubtedly the language barrier because all the primary, archival material available to historians is written in Dutch. Many history students prefer to shift their attention to the nineteenth century and subsequent periods because this means they can read their documents in English. An additional stumbling block is that much of the work of earlier South African historians is written in Afrikaans. And even though one must respect the choice of Schoeman to write in his mother tongue, I have to say that it is a great pity that a study of this calibre will not be accessible to more students and researchers. One can only hope that the publisher will consider a translation in the future.

A good example of the “bridge function” of Schoeman’s book is illustrated by his point that Cape residents were continuously in close contact with friends, family and business connections in the Netherlands and the rest of the Dutch colonial empire in Asia. There was a lively correspondence between the various parts of the Dutch empire. People moved around in official positions and regularly received visitors. Schoeman also compares Cape society to that of the Netherlands and Batavia. This is all part of a current trend to emphasise that the people of the Cape were not isolated from the rest of the world as many still believe. By highlighting this he places the Cape settlement firmly in what Kerry Ward has labelled the “networks of empire”, although she refers to the forced migration of slaves and political exiles, while Schoeman focuses on the manner in which, for instance, VOC employees and their families travelled from the Netherlands to the East and back again, all the while building up their web of connections. It shows that from the lowest to the highest strata Cape residents

were part of a dynamic network, which again contributed to the exchange of ideas and commodities which ultimately shaped life at the Cape and made the settlement all the more complex and interesting. The history of the Cape settlement can only really be understood when it is placed in this larger framework.

This would have assisted Schoeman when his book refers to the conflict between status and race. In my opinion, it is here that he makes a serious mistake. Several times Schoeman mentions the importance of status to determine one's place in Cape society. He writes that residents kept a close watch on each other to ensure that each person was treated according to their rank or position, which sometimes led to situations which we would now regard as petty and unnecessary. However, Schoeman fails to mention that Cape society, like other communities in Dutch cities, was divided into status groups each with its own clearly defined political, judicial and economic rights and duties. There is a large body of research available in Dutch historiography about this. Accordingly, the Cape settlement during the VOC period was largely made up of the following status groups: VOC employees, burghers, free blacks, and slaves – each of course with its own stratification.

Schoeman explains that free blacks were freed slaves, but he labels their children and further descendants, because they were born in freedom, free coloureds (p 150). He then explains that he will use this term (*vrygekleurdes*) throughout his book to refer to this population group of free black descendants. However, children of free blacks became assimilated into the burgher group and were thus given the status of burghers. They did not form a separate group and definitely would not have been called 'coloureds' by the Company administration. Schoeman thus introduces an extra group and a term into the narrative of the eighteenth century which does not fit into that place, time or circumstances, but unfortunately has strong connotations with the ideologies and prejudice of a later time.

It is difficult to understand why Schoeman would do this, because in the same breath he acknowledges that there was a large measure of social mobility at the Cape and that members of one group could move onwards or upwards to become members of another. He furthermore discusses the fair number of mixed marriages of the time. Access into the burgher group was not determined by race, but by status. Many descendants of free blacks became burghers and secured positions in the local administration. It is therefore incorrect to state that in 1751 the Cape had "a total white population of 5 024 people" (p 428). Instead it should read that in 1751 the Cape had a total of 5 024 burghers including women and children without classifying them according to race.

Nevertheless, overall the value of Schoeman's work cannot easily be underestimated. And with this book he again proves to be a major source of knowledge and inspiration.

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Valuable as a history and a history teaching resource

Dan Sleight and Piet Westra, *The Taking of the Slaver Meermin*, 1766

Africana Publishers, Cape Town, 2013

159 pp

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R180.00

In *The Taking of the Slaver Meermin* Dan Sleight and Piet Westra, two leading scholars on Dutch settlement at the Cape, have delivered a detailed account of a surprisingly rare event in the history of Cape slavery: a slave revolt. Unlike the other two documented slave revolts which occurred in the Cape Colony – the first in the Swartland in 1808; the second in the Koue Bokkeveld in 1825 – the uprising that is explored in this text took place at sea.

On 18 February 1766, while on its return voyage from Madagascar to Table Bay, some of the *Meermin*'s male slaves, who made up a total human cargo of 140 slaves, mutinied and massacred most of the ship's officers, seriously wounding other members of the crew. The slave rebellion aboard the *Meermin* makes for a dramatic tale. Sleight and Westra present the first complete description of the events surrounding the mutiny having consulted all known historical documents. The authors have brought together sources from three different repositories: the Cape Archives; the National Archives, Den Haag; and Amsterdam's Maritime Museum, to produce a thorough telling of this remarkable event. However, the book does much more than lay bare the intricacies of the slave revolt aboard the ship. It also explores a variety of themes relating to the slave trade conducted by the *Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC), including the Cape's dealings with Madagascar (chapter 2) and other instances of slave revolt at sea (chapter 4). Of particular worth is the authors' recounting of the VOC's comprehensive regulations for the transportation of slaves by sea, many of which were ignored by the master of the *Meermin*.

The *Meermin* drifted at sea for a few days following the rebellion while the surviving crew members, who had taken refuge in the gunroom, plotted their response. Though they were unable to reclaim the ship, they used their access to the gunpowder stock as leverage, threatening to blow up the whole vessel. Unable to steer the ship themselves, the slaves demanded that the crew take them back to Madagascar. However, the slaves were outwitted by the crew who cunningly steered the ship towards the Cape while assuring the rebels that they were headed home. The *Meermin* eventually entered Struys Bay near Cape Agulhas three weeks later.

The narrative reads more like the script of an adventure film at times and would probably not be believed were it not true. This is especially so with regard to the letters of distress written by surviving crew members; these messages were thrown overboard in corked bottles. The bottles washed ashore alerting the local authorities to the circumstances aboard the stranded vessel.

The situation was an embarrassing and costly one for the VOC. Not only had it lost "an expensive and relatively new trading vessel", but 31 slaves and 24

Company personnel had also been killed (p 133). In light of this, an exhaustive investigation lasting six months was conducted by the Council of Justice. The court records, which include the testimonies of all the surviving officers, provide rich detail about the circumstances surrounding the revolt. Two of the leaders of the uprising, Massavana and Koetsaaij, were also interrogated. Though Koetsaaij's evidence has been lost, Massavana's testimony makes for riveting reading having been translated from the original Dutch and included in full in the book. When asked by the fiscal to describe his life in Tulear, Madagascar, before his enslavement, Massavana replied that he had been a "free man" who had made his living "by agriculture and stock farming" (p 124). The inclusion of Massavana's testimony is a highlight of the work, not least because it makes a rare slave "voice" accessible to a wider audience.

Massavana emerges from the court records as a strong-willed, capable individual. He must have made an impression upon the officials of the council, for contrary to Company practice at the time he was not sentenced to the sort of cruel punishment normally meted out to rebel slaves. Instead he was sent to Robben Island along with Koetsaaij for an indeterminate time. Massavana died on the island in December 1769, some three years later (p 132). In contrast, particularly harsh punishments, relative to their race and Company standing, were handed down to the master of the vessel and the third mate. Both were stripped of their rank and along with other punishments "pronounced unworthy of serving the Honourable Company again and banned for life from the Cape and its dependencies" (p 132). The sentencing of the two was clearly intended to send a strong message to other ships' crews that the Company's regulations were to be strictly adhered to at all times. Indeed, the surviving records not only bring to life in vivid detail the experiences of captives and crews aboard the VOC's slaving ships, they also reveal the Company's anxieties about the risks involved in carrying human cargo.

The authors are to be commended for delivering a work that is not only a valuable history of a captivating event. *The Taking of the Slaver Meermin* is equally valuable as a history teaching resource. The book is beautifully illustrated with maps and drawings of the ship, including its blueprints, as well as images of the original court documents. History teachers and lecturers alike will find the work beneficial for demonstrating how historians glean insights and craft arguments from archival documents. It is a pity that so many typographical errors crept into the final copy. Nonetheless, the collaborative mastery of Sleigh and Westra when it comes to the Dutch Cape is on ample display in this volume. Most importantly, a serious scholarly text has finally been published on the slave revolt aboard the *Meermin*.

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A gripping account although lacking in fresh insights

Julia C. Wells, *The Return of Makhanda: Exploring the Legend*

University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Scottsville, 2012

280 pp

ISBN 978-1-86914-238-4

US\$33.25

Many people who stand at the front gate of Rhodes University in Grahamstown notice the striking view of Makana's Kop on the other side of town. The hill is named after a Xhosa man, also known as Lynx, Nxele, and now Makhanda, who led an ambitious, but disastrous attack by some 10 000 Xhosa on Grahamstown in 1819. Although Makhanda was imprisoned on the infamous Robben Island shortly after the battle and drowned trying to escape, many Xhosa people believed for a long time that he would someday return to lead continued resistance against colonisation. By the late twentieth century this hope had turned to cynicism and it became popular among Xhosa people of the Eastern Cape to refer to something that is promised but will never happen as "when Nxele returns".

Julia Wells, an American-born Rhodes-based historian who served in the local Makana municipal government, has written a biography that attempts to revive the reputation of Makhanda as an anti-colonial hero. Wells' interest in Makhanda began in 2000 when she became a history consultant for the Egazini Outreach Project which mobilised 30 local artists to create images relevant to the 1819 Battle of Grahamstown for display at the city's National Arts Festival. While Wells noticed that many of the artists felt irritated with the different historical versions of Makhanda and his attack, she also saw that the excitement the project engendered revealed the potential for "opening up a whole new way of approaching the question of producing knowledge about the past" (p 4). The project raised ideas about popular history including that the story of Makhanda could be used to inspire people to overcome poverty and demoralisation, that knowledge about history should have tangible results such as creating jobs and that it was possible to empower local people by using their oral traditions to reconstruct the past. Wells' book represents "an attempt to reconcile both the popular and the written histories surrounding Makhanda and the battle of Grahamstown" (p 16).

The first chapter discusses the very few early nineteenth century eyewitness accounts by literate Europeans who encountered Makhanda. These were mostly written by several missionaries who met him after his imprisonment, such as James Read in 1816 and John Campbell in late 1819. Frontier settlers and soldiers such as Andries Stockenström and Charles Lennox Stretch were present at Makhanda's surrender to colonial forces in 1819 and recounted their observations years later. During the 1870s, George McCall Theal, a Canadian teaching at Lovedale Mission who went on to become the founder of written South African history, wrote down information about Makhanda told to him by elderly Xhosa people. Based on these and other sources, Wells explains that Makhanda was an ordinary man of Xhosa and Khoi origin, perhaps a labourer on a Boer farm in his early life, who had been exposed to some of the first Christian missionaries in the region and incorporated parts of their message into his traditional beliefs.

Gaining a reputation for predicting future events, Makhanda eventually became a spiritual specialist and an important advisor to the Rharhabe Xhosa leader Ndlambe. Around 1816 Makhanda was involved in a now famous incident at Gompo Rock near present-day East London where he promised an assembled crowd of Xhosa that their dead relatives would emerge from the water but when this failed to transpire he blamed the audience for spoiling the ritual by wading into the surf.

In her second chapter Wells maintains that a long line of historians, both black and white, demonised Makhanda as a deluded and superstitious witchdoctor. Given the ultimate victory of the Rharhabe leader Ngqika over his rival Ndlambe, Ngqika's spiritual advisor, Ntsikana, gained a positive reputation as the first Xhosa convert to Christianity and people from his faction accessed missionary education and literacy which enabled them to produce a version of history that portrayed Makhanda in a negative light. Ntsikana was seen as the advocate of peace and co-operation with the whites while Makhanda was a warrior-prophet who led his people to destruction. For Wells, these views were repeated by late twentieth century academics such as Janet Hodgson who worked on Xhosa religion and Jeff Peires who researched Xhosa history; and journalists Ben MacLennan and Noel Mostert who produced popular histories of the conquest period. Wells explains, unconvincingly for anyone who has read their work closely, that these writers neglected to pay enough attention to colonial dispossession of Xhosa land in motivating Makhanda to attack Grahamstown. However, with the exception of a few different interpretations, the subsequent history put forth by Wells is not very different from those written by these earlier writers, and is largely based on the same colonial accounts.

The third chapter offers a fairly standard overview of the conflict between Xhosa, Khoi and Boer over the Zuurveld at the end of the eighteenth century, and the arrival of the British in the early nineteenth century which resulted in the expulsion of Xhosa communities east of the Fish River and the founding of Grahamstown in 1812. Wells' next chapter explains the conflict between Rharhabe Xhosa leaders Ndlambe and Ngqika, which the British quickly exploited, not as a power struggle as previous historians have assumed, but as a series of disciplinary actions by the essentially unified Xhosa royals to pressure the young Ngqika into maintaining traditional codes of behaviour. This, according to Wells, was typical of Xhosa politics just as Ngqika's "own sons also followed the traditional pattern of co-operation, as the elder Maqoma nurtured his younger brother Sandile and then gracefully saw him installed as chief when he came of age" (p 103). Wells supports this claim with an erroneous citation to Peires' *House of Phalo* which actually states on page 130 that "all his life Maqoma despised Sandile".¹ Indeed, during the late 1830s Maqoma tried to put off Sandile's rise by delaying his initiation and in 1841 he tried to overthrow Sandile by having his mother accused of witchcraft. In both cases, the intervention of missionaries and colonial officials ensured Sandile's position.² Wells fails to explain a serious problem in Xhosa royal inheritance which meant that the ruler usually died before

1. J.B. Peires, *The House of Phalo: A History of the Xhosa People in the Days of their Independence* (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1987), p 130.

2. T.J. Stapleton, *Maqoma: Xhosa Resistance to Colonial Advance, 1798–1873* (Jonathan Ball, Johannesburg, 1994), pp 116–120 and 124.

his heir was old enough to take over and meant that older, but junior-ranked half-brothers often led break-away movements.

Surveying the much written about events of 1817 and 1818, the fifth chapter looks at Ngqika's acceptance of a "spoor law" which permitted colonial cattle raids against the Xhosa, the decisive defeat of Ngqika's army by the forces of Ndlambe and Hintsá at the Battle of Amalinde, and the destructive colonial Brereton Commando that intervened on behalf of Ngqika. The pivotal chapter is on Makhanda's ultimately failed attack on Grahamstown in 1819 which was the most ambitious undertaking in Xhosa military history aimed at eliminating the colonists from the area. While some historians have pointed out that the Xhosa would likely have overwhelmed Grahamstown had they attacked at night, Wells maintains that they conducted raids at night but the formalities of Xhosa warfare, including invoking the assistance of ancestors, demanded that such an important operation be mounted in daylight. It could be added that perhaps the Xhosa were aware of the difficulties of moving thousands of men into precise positions at night. For example, in January 1851 around 2 000 Xhosa and Khoi approached Fort Beaufort under cover of darkness but their planned dawn attack was aborted because part of the force became confused and assaulted prematurely.³

In the penultimate chapter Wells tells us that the colonial counter-attack into Xhosa territory that followed the Battle of Grahamstown "has been little appreciated by previous generations of historians" (p 184). While this may be a valid point, it is slightly overstated because MacLennan devotes at least 20 pages to the campaign.⁴ Wells offers a detailed account of continuing Xhosa resistance in the Fish River bush; the surrender of Makhanda; and the British clearance of land between the Fish and Keiskamma rivers which they forced Ngqika, now dependent upon colonial support, to cede them as a buffer. The next year would see the arrival of the "1820 settlers" from Britain to consolidate colonial control. The last and perhaps most original chapter looks with unprecedented detail at Makhanda's imprisonment on Robben Island and his death in a daring escape attempt. The conclusion stresses that Makhanda's main goal was Xhosa unity and that what he "stood for fully resonates with the spirit of the new democracy" (p 257). This is not substantially different from Mostert's assessment that "Nxele sought to bestow a new nationalistic stirring among the Xhosa through a military unity".⁵

Despite the hopes expressed in the early part of the book, Wells does not produce a history that is remarkably different from the many previous historians she sharply criticises. The basic historical narrative of the early nineteenth century Cape eastern frontier is the same; the sources are mostly the same colonial and missionary ones; and it appears current African oral tradition did not offer anything new. At times Makhanda almost disappears from the story given the paucity of primary sources directly related to him and his limited prominence of only three

3. Stapleton, *Maqoma*, p 154.

4. B. MacLennan, *A Proper Degree of Terror: John Graham and the Cape's Eastern Frontier* (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1986), pp 199–219.

5. N. Mostert, *Frontiers: The Epic of South Africa's Creation and the Tragedy of the Xhosa People* (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1992), p 492.

years. These issues aside, Wells has produced a gripping account that will likely renew interest in the Cape-Xhosa Wars.

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The last of the frontiersmen who lived between empire and kingdom

John Dunn, *Cetywayo and the Three Generals, 1861–1879*

Pen and Sword Publications, Barnsley, 2014

155 pp

ISBN 978-1-78346-324-4

£19.99

The French historian Marc Bloch (1886–1944) states in his book, *The Historian's Craft*, that:

The historian is, by definition, absolutely incapable of observing the facts which he examines. No Egyptologist has ever seen Ramses. No expert on the Napoleonic Wars has ever heard the sound of the cannon at Austerlitz. We can speak of earlier ages only through the accounts of eye-witnesses.⁶

John Dunn's autobiography forms part of a historiography that offers us a fascinating perspective of a witness to his times. His account is certainly not that of a bystander or spectator because he had a vested interest in the outcome of the events he writes about. It is entirely possible that on occasion, as a key player, he even had a hand in shaping some of these events. Therefore Dunn's treatise is best read together with the other evidence in our possession, made up of official documents; further witness reports; and the oral histories of the Zulu nation, in order to arrive closer to the historical "truth" via triangulation. When reading this autobiography one has to constantly keep in mind the self-serving nature of the work, which is in reality Dunn's attempt to legitimise his status as a civilising force on, and intermediary with, the Zulu nation.

The account of this white Scotsman, who became a close confidant of King Cetywayo and one of his Zulu chiefs, and who married 48 of the king's subjects, has great potential to be an interesting story. First published in 1886, this new publication of the autobiography was edited by historian Duncan Moodie. Dunn may have made an even greater contribution to Zulu history had his allegedly copious writings, recording 18 years of his interactions with Cetywayo and the Zulu people, survived. His manuscripts, together with his friendship with the Zulu king, were destroyed by vengeful *impis* who looked upon Dunn's siding with the British as the ultimate betrayal. His efforts to survive in a perilous world, often torn between the culture that adopted and nurtured him and the culture to which he was born, takes on the form, in parts, of a Shakespearean tragedy.

Dunn mastered the Zulu language and culture as well as the skills of a hunter and horseman from an early age. These skills were acquired in the

6. M. Bloch, *The Historian's Craft* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1962), p 40.

comfortable surroundings of his father's home overlooking Durban Bay. His father's early demise, trampled by an elephant in 1847 when Dunn was a mere 13 years old, signalled a decline in John Dunn's fortunes. Early attempts to earn a living were frustrated by his tender age and he decided to discard a conventional way of life for the lure of being a big-game hunter across the Thukela River in the territory of the Zulus. He took up residence among the Zulus with his young wife and survived by hunting and bartering and living off the land. Dunn's two-year sojourn among the Zulus was cut short when he was retained by a British Army captain who saw to it that Dunn received a thorough education in the Western ways of life over the next six years. These dramatic events ensured that Dunn emerged from his formative years fully conversant with Zulu and Western culture in almost equal proportions. However, conversancy did not mean full acceptance into either one of the cultures and his demise followed shortly after the twilight zone he occupied disappeared when the British assumed full power over the Zulu nation in 1887.

When civil war broke out in Zululand in 1856, Dunn sided with Cetywayo's brother in his struggle for succession to the throne. This was an early instance, in a life filled with difficult choices, where Dunn's acumen for survival was tested. Cetywayo emerged victorious and in a gesture of magnanimity, or more likely possessing a keen political shrewdness, the new Zulu king embraced his erstwhile foe. Under Cetywayo's patronage, Dunn soon became one of the king's chiefs and thrived with land, cattle and many wives. His wealth and stature grew and he eventually ruled over some 6 000 subjects. Dunn played an important role in providing the Zulus with firearms and it is estimated that in the years between 1873 and 1878 some 15 000 weapons, both antiquated and modern, found their way via Dunn into Zulu hands. Further proof of his strong survival instinct is provided by Dunn's propensity to circumvent the law on occasion when acquiring firearms for the Zulus.

Dunn's white roots and his links with the Natal colonial government found use in King Cetywayo's court where he served as an advisor to the king, acting as his messenger and intermediary. Dunn's responsibilities grew with his status and he assumed the role of dealing with all the king's outgoing and incoming messages from the Natal government. At times he advised the king against military adventures such as the one against the Swazis. Mutual trust was further enhanced when Dunn, through quick thinking, managed to avert an assassination attempt on Cetywayo at the king's inauguration ceremony. However, when reading the autobiography one always has to keep in mind the self-serving nature of Dunn's account of his life and the sometimes apocryphal nature of some of the events.

His intimate knowledge of Zulu culture and his prominent role in the Zulu court also made Dunn very useful to the Natal colonial government. He firmly believed that he played a central role in both camps, but unwittingly he became a pawn of both imperial power and the Zulu kingdom. However, because of his linguistic ability and his familiarity with both white and Zulu customs he was able to dissipate a considerable amount of suspicion that arose on both sides. He could claim that his efforts went some way to facilitating a working relationship between

Sir Theophilus Shepstone, the secretary for native affairs of the Natal government, and King Cetwayo.

The Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 ended the many years of prosperity and influence that Dunn enjoyed under the auspices of Cetwayo. He went to great lengths to avoid this. His position as an indispensable intermediary was wholly dependent on a peaceful resolution of hostilities. The status quo was threatened by the British secretary of state for the colonies, Lord Carnarvon and his desire to expand the British Empire in southern Africa. Carnarvon sought to form a confederation of all British colonies that included the Boer republics and independent African groups such as the Zulus. Dunn's importance as a liaison inevitably waned because both sides gave over to heightened bellicosity. When war eventually broke out, he once again found himself in the unenviable position of having to choose sides in an armed conflict. His efforts at neutrality amounted to naught when Lord Chelmsford delivered an ultimatum to Dunn. He betrayed his erstwhile benefactor Cetwayo for the promise of eventual reinstatement to his former position in Zululand.

Dunn's subsequent service with the British colonial forces in subduing Cetwayo and his opinion of the three British generals he served under are, to a large degree, related by a man who was obviously disappointed to see his fiefdom disappear and many lofty promises broken. His judgement on the military abilities of the three generals: Chelmsford, Henry Hope Crealock and Sir Garnet Wolseley, who effected the final capture of an evasive and unsubmitive Cetwayo, are at times less than flattering. Dunn was offered one of the thirteen Zulu chieftainships, which he accepted on condition that Cetwayo would not be reinstated as the Zulu king. His wariness of Cetwayo's return was well founded for when the king was reinstated in 1884 Dunn and the other twelve chiefs were all stripped of their power.

Dunn was indeed a highly flamboyant man who led a colourful life on the periphery of the British Empire and Zulu Kingdom. He was witness to, and a participant in some of the most important historical events in that region of southern Africa. His autobiography naturally places himself in a central role amongst the giants of South African history, although he most probably played more of a supporting role in the bigger picture. Dunn, who enjoyed much financial benefit from acting as an intermediary, was in fact manipulated by both Zulu and British leaders who utilised his cultural and linguistic fluency and his resultant status in both camps, to further their own interests.

Dunn was often able to manipulate events to his benefit by association with both the imperial government and the Zulu Kingdom. He projected himself as a civilising force and at the same time harboured a paternalistic notion that he completely understood the Zulus and their customs and beliefs. Subsequent to his final betrayal of Cetwayo, Dunn found himself in an invidious position: he was neither fully trusted by his Zulu subjects nor was he fully accepted as an Englishman by his colonial superiors. His claims to be a true Zulu and at the same time an Englishman bringing the civilising influence of a white man were often mutually exclusive.

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An important contribution to the early history of the Transvaal Republic

O.J.O. Ferreira, *Serpa Pinto amongst Boer and Brit: His Travels through the Transvaal and Natal, 1879*

Tormentoso, Jeffrey's Bay, 2012

174 pp

ISBN 978-0-620-51814-4

R100.00

The First Transvaal War of Independence (1880–1881) and the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902) amazingly continue to ignite a steady stream of publications. It seems that the interest in the two wars in South Africa over the last two decades of the nineteenth century remains high. The interesting aspect is that there has also been an apparent shift from more detailed, comprehensive accounts of the two southern African wars to publications dealing with specific or individual aspects of these wars. Such individual experiences or accounts were oftentimes made by incidental observers on the periphery of the conflict and they offer intriguing, fresh perspectives on the events themselves or the developments leading up to the conflicts.

The observations articulated by Portuguese explorer, Alexandre Alberto da Rocha de Serpa Pinto (1846–1900) during his travels in southern Africa provide a typical example of incidental insight into contemporary political events in the Transvaal Republic. Pinto undertook a journey from Angola through the Transvaal Republic in the years from 1877 to 1879 and his final destination was the coastal town of Durban. The journey coincided with a very turbulent period in the local politics of the Transvaal Republic. The internal opposition against President Burgers was at its height and the domestic situation was delicately balanced between independence and the tip-over point back to British control and annexation. Pinto acted as an independent and objective observer of these events. In the process, his observations provide a valuable window into socio-political life in the Transvaal during the late 1870s. He also came across many misconceptions and some deliberate examples of propaganda against the Boers during this period.

O.J.O Ferreira has made a valuable contribution with the publication of Pinto's account and has also provided very informative footnotes throughout the text. Ferreira decided to publish Pinto's experiences to add to the prevailing literature on the period. He realised that in the many related publications dealing with the annexation of the Transvaal Republic there was one glaring omission: Serpa Pinto's account published earlier under the title, *How I crossed Africa*, which needed to be re-introduced.

Ferreira's stated purpose with this publication was to make Pinto's account more accessible and available to South African researchers. However, he has accomplished more than merely adding another source to the existing literature.

The end product is an interesting and intriguing account for the amateur historian and the general public alike. It is also a must-read for anyone who is interested in the early history of the Transvaal. Ferreira, who was ably aided by a team of collaborators, provides a comprehensive contextual account, accompanied by a large number of informative footnotes. The additional information on Pinto's experiences provides a comprehensive and nuanced insight into this remarkable explorer. The book is further enriched by 70 figures and four informative maps which not only contextualise his travels, but bring his adventures to life.

The lineage and early career of Pinto are outlined at the beginning, together with a thorough contextual account of the Portuguese explorers in southern and central Africa. Ferreira provides a detailed list of the explorers who played a prominent role in the period from the late eighteenth century up to the Anglo-Boer War. The majority of the explorations were undertaken from the coasts of Angola and Mozambique into the southern hinterland. Pinto's ancestry, training, military service and first experience of Africa are also discussed. This account is aided by figures that are conveniently provided throughout the text and make for informative reading.

Pinto's travels through the Transvaal and Natal during 1879 are then examined. This section also includes an explanation of how the text was edited in the compilation of the book. Ferreira explains that he has provided footnotes with the necessary source references but has also included explanatory footnotes. This method makes provision for correcting errors and oversights in the original text. The same applies to the spelling of personal and place names that were given incorrectly in Pinto's text. These are retained but with the correct spellings in the footnotes. This section also includes an informative map of Pinto's route from Shoshong north of the Limpopo through the northern section of the Transvaal via Pretoria and down to Durban. The introductory section of the book is followed by Pinto's original manuscript published in 1881 by R.W. Bliss & Company (p 15). The manuscript makes for fascinating reading and provides an interesting and remarkably fresh insight on the Boers whom Pinto encountered along the trail. It is obvious that he had a sharp eye for detail and observation.

Pinto's interaction with the *Dorsland* trekkers is also outlined (p 47). This encounter is a fascinating account of their daily lives and chores, but also their ignorance of certain matters. Although the Boers were just across the Marico River at this stage, Pinto relates that they had apparently lost touch with the course of events back home in the Transvaal. The isolation of these Boers in relation to their government provides interesting insight into their daily existence. Pinto then proceeded to the Pilanesberg region where he entered a well cultivated area (p 51). His account of the Boers' dwellings, especially the frescos on the walls of their homes, is an eye opener into their socio-cultural existence. Pinto clearly deviated from the conventional view of the dour Boers. He described in detail the artistic labour of the decoration of their dwellings, which in his opinion were superior to many homes in Lisbon at the time.

Pinto's journey to Pretoria is outlined in chapter nine. His account of his experiences in Pretoria is preceded by a brief view of the ancestry of the Boer *volk*, dating the Boer's national autonomy back to the period of Bartolomeu Diaz,

the Portuguese navigator. Pinto then outlined the early history of the Boer republics, including the dispute over the possession of the diamond-fields and how the loss of the lucrative diamond fields impacted negatively on the Transvaal, resulting in President Pretorius being deposed and the appointment of Thomas Burgers as his successor.

The way Pinto constructed his narrative account of the Boers has a freshness which this reader found captivating. He was in the proverbial front seat to provide an eye-witness account of the Boers' social and cultural life. Ferreira's informative footnotes provide additional insight and descriptions of Boer society at the time. Pinto describes the dominance of religion in their lives, their biblical beliefs, their patriarchal lifestyle and their strict adherence to what they saw as the "truth". He also provides some explanation on the reasons why, in his view, the Boers have been painted in such a poor light in many early accounts of the Transvaal. Pinto is very uncomplimentary of the "bad" missionaries and the reasons for their negative perspectives on the Boers. He clearly doubted the missionaries' intentions and motivations and was of the opinion that they acted in their own interests and in the process created a major stumbling block to progress in the region.

Chapter twelve contains a vivid description of the excitement in Pretoria after the installation of Sir Owen Lanyon as acting administrator of the Transvaal and the commencement of British rule. Pinto thereafter took his leave of Pretoria and travelled via Heidelberg to Durban. The final part of his account is then devoted to his journey back to Lisbon.

In the closing section of the book Ferreira provides an overview of Pinto's career during his last years. He refers to Pinto's instant notoriety after his travels and the three-hour long public lecture he delivered on his experiences in Africa (p 134). In his summary, Ferreira provides an evaluation of the significance of Pinto's journey and deals with the accusations he faced in response to his views of the missionaries and what he perceived as their overt racism. Pinto's death and commemoration are also dealt with. His fame and notoriety has survived and Ferreira mentions that there are many streets and public squares in Portuguese towns that have been named after him.

All in all, the real value of the book is Pinto's vivid description of the Boers' character and their lifestyle, situated within the time capsule of the mid to late nineteenth century. Through his eyes the political and more especially the socio-cultural life of the Boers in the old Transvaal has been colourfully resurrected. Pinto provides us with a fresh window into the past and one which differs substantially from the one-sided, more well-known accounts written by Dutch and English visitors and explorers into southern Africa in the same period. Although Ferreira's initial intention was to make the book accessible for the researcher he has achieved far more than this modest aim. He has made the wonderful narrative of Pinto as a Portuguese explorer available to the wider public. The book is very well edited and the multiple figures and maps are conveniently placed in the text for quick reference. I came across only one insignificant oversight in Figure 42 which makes reference to 1970 instead of 1870. However, in a final analysis, the

book is highly recommended to those who have an interest in the early history of the Transvaal Republic.

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A complex study of the history and politics of the Transkei

Timothy Gibbs, *Mandela's Kinsmen: Nationalist Elites and Apartheid's First Bantustan*

Jacana, Johannesburg, 2014

208 pp

ISBN 978-1-4314-1065-1

R225.00

This new study of the history and politics of the Transkei is a fascinating and complex one. Its contribution is not only to our understanding of the sometimes obscure political dynamics of elites in South Africa's "first Bantustan", but to the broader fields of development history and political economy. While at one level this is a revisionist history of the story of the inclusive nationalism of the liberation movement versus the divide-and-rule history of the apartheid Bantustan strategy, at another level it provides a subtle exploration of development politics and the development (or underdevelopment) of one of South Africa's poorest rural areas.

From 1976, when Kaiser Matanzima accepted the "independence" of the Transkei from the apartheid government, activists in South Africa derided him as a sell-out. One popular song, sung by tens of thousands at mass rallies and funerals in the Eastern Cape for the decade to follow, accused Matanzima of literally selling his people: *Wena Matanzima, uthengisa abantwana, abantwana base Afrika* ("You, Matanzima, you have sold the children of Africa"). At the time of Kaiser Matanzima's death in 2003, and in current political discourse, there is a much muted criticism of his role expressed in South African history. His death saw him respected rather than reviled; and today there are mutterings in some circles that his illegitimate regime saw various "good developments" which have now fallen into disrepair. Gibbs offers us an understanding of the contradictory nature of the Transkei of the Matanzimas and the complex patterns of collaboration and resistance within this Bantustan state.

I must admit to an initial hesitancy in reading a book with the title "Mandela's Kinsmen", because I imagined long paragraphs of Madiba clan genealogy, the web of relationships between the Madikizelas the Matanzimas and the Mandelas, and general name-dropping of the "who's who" in Transkei politics. However, this study does not fall into that trap – and where individuals are mentioned, the narrative is usually accompanied by a riveting story of local power relations. Prominent teachers, development workers, security force officials and clergymen are situated in their respective social and political contexts. Far from an over-focus on Nelson Mandela, there are many extraordinary personalities who are featured in the sometimes bizarre story of the Transkei. One of the many well-written accounts is the story of the late – and now well-known – King Sabata Dalindyebo, after whom one of the district municipalities of the Eastern Cape has

been named. Gibbs adds to the dramatic story of King Sabata's exile, return and reburial with a bizarre account of how Matanzima's genealogical claims to paramount chieftaincy led to him "snatching back a manuscript stored in the archives of Rhodes University, entitled 'Who are the Thembu and where do they come from?'" (p 98).

The other well-known story is that of Bantu Holomisa, a Transkei Defence Force general who took power at the end of 1987, a few months after George Matanzima had been ousted and replaced with Stella Sigcau; and then how Holomisa's regime was in turn threatened by an apartheid security-force backed coup attempt led by Colonel Craig Duli. Holomisa's decision to allow Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) to operate after 1990, and his playing of the "apartheid endgame" in the transition period of 1990 to 1994, are also covered, making the important point that in contrast to KwaZulu-Natal, the Transkei transition did not descend into civil war – thankfully and perhaps remarkably, given the influx of trained guerrillas and a flood of weapons. The dramatic events of this period are recounted not as descriptive journalism, but situated within an analysis of the complex relationships between the security forces, the Transkei elite and the apartheid state.

There are stories of "non-state actors" as well: the students, nurses and Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) organisers who tried to build alternatives to the Transkei state. There is the story of the Anglican Reverend Mcebisi Xundu, for one, who played a significant role in initiating resistance to the Matanzima regime in 1977. He died on 21 January 2015 and was given an official funeral by the Eastern Cape provincial government. There are also stories of the older generation of activists, among them "Oom Gov", the communist and intellectual Govan Mbeki, who ran a co-operative trading store in the Transkei in the pre-Bantustan days. Mbeki, who wrote the first significant analysis of the Transkei in 1960, is trenchantly assessed by Gibbs as follows: "Recent research tends to support Mbeki's observations, not his doctrines" (p 178). Govan Mbeki must surely qualify as one of the foremost intellectual products of the Transkei, along with Wycliffe Tsotsi. Others of the older generation were released from Robben Island and banished to remote villages of the Transkei under Matanzima's rule. These stories of banishment have recently been retold in a seminal work by Saleem Badat, and in an exhibition by Omar Badsha with the same title, *The Forgotten People: Political Banishment under Apartheid*.

One of the delightful things about *Mandela's Kinsmen* is how some other, non-Mandela family histories are woven throughout the narrative of the Transkei; one such is the story of Zoleka Langa. She is one of the younger generation of activists who were in the liberation movement. Langa, a female ANC underground operative who went on to become mayor of the OR Tambo District Municipality, was by all accounts a remarkable survivor. Other stories of that generation are of Lungisile and Dumisa Ntsebeza and Matthew Goniwe. Goniwe was assassinated by apartheid security forces in 1985 (there is a minor error in the book's account of the killing of the Cradock Four, in that their bodies were discovered soon after the killing, and they were not classified as "disappeared"). Lungisile is now professor of African Studies at UCT, following in Oom Gov's footsteps as another of the fine intellectuals to come out of the Transkei. Another prominent academic, Wiseman Nkhulu, has his controversial role as vice-chancellor of the University of Transkei

in the late 1980s and early 1990s also outlined in the context of dramatic contestation with students. This is to mention just a few of the well-known and lesser-known people whose stories are deftly woven into the chapters of the book, which deal both thematically and chronologically with the history of the Transkei.

The often tragic tales of the MK guerrillas and ANC underground operatives are told with sympathy, although only briefly, which is a pity – when the “brutal intimacy of insurgency” involves not attacks on anonymous civilians, but armed insurgents and security force members often coming from the same community or college. The conflicts over schooling and the fraught history of the colleges and University of Transkei are dealt with in some more depth. Of most interest, though, to a development scholar or practitioner, are the reflections on the developmental role of the Bantustan state apparatus; the way in which resource access by local elites was used to bolster their position, and the parallel way in which grassroots elements linked to the liberation movement attempted to do the same thing. On the one hand, they showcase agricultural projects and irrigation schemes of the Transkei government; on the other, the community development projects, co-operatives and health programmes initiated by radical activists “on the ground”. Gibbs argues that “communitarian ideology was often as important as insurgent protest” (p 161). The efforts of the latter do not seem to have had much lasting impact, however; sadly there are few indications of a lasting radical tradition of solidarity economy, co-operatives and communitarian projects. Gibbs refers to Chris Tapscott’s important contemporary critique of the Transkei development state, linking it to James Ferguson’s analysis of technocratic and depoliticised “development” in Lesotho (p 54).⁷ The discussion of the Transkei state is not merely of historical interest; it has important resonance with current discourses of the ANC government in relation to the “developmental state”.

In his conclusion on the political economy of state-building in South Africa, Gibbs notes that “a left-wing critique of the ANC government argues that welfare transfers have not overturned the structural inequalities inherited from apartheid; that neo-liberal policies have failed to bring broad-based economic growth” – a critique with which I would certainly agree, but which is not Gibbs’ own position (p 183). His more interesting observation is that “Intriguingly, most local forms of political protest prevalent in South Africa today ... do not demand autonomy but rather incorporation” (p 184). The politics of identity and diversity are not as important as the “politics of recognition” whereby “impoverished localities make claims on central government in the name of their community” (p 184). It is easy to conclude that there is a continuity of dependency from apartheid to the democratic “developmental state” – as the real and noted improvements in infrastructure and welfare access over the past decade have not resulted in any significant economic development in the former homelands. The tensions of democracy and traditional leadership, cultures of patronage and resource access which can easily slip into corruption, are dealt with sensitively by Gibbs and situated within the historical and social contexts of the power and social statuses of local elites.

Gibbs writes elegantly and concisely, and although it is not light entertainment, the book is a pleasure to read. One minor quibble is the strange

7. J. Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: “Development”, Depoliticisation and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1990).

repetition of the adjective 'swingeing' (as in "swingeing poverty" (p 100)) – a term maybe in use in academic circles in the United Kingdom, but certainly not in common usage in South Africa. The book is meticulously researched and the richness of the study lies in its use of multiple sources, many of them previously little-researched archival sources such as the Umtata High Court archive, which Gibbs notes is "in disarray" (p 186).

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A rollicking tale of bravado and derring-do

Jan Breytenbach, *Forged in Battle: The Birth and Growth of 32 Battalion from former Enemies and Terrorists into Decorated Soldiers*

Protea Book House, Pretoria, 2014

207 pp

ISBN 978-1-4853-0044-1

R250.00

Colonel (retired) Jan Breytenbach is the author of a number of books about his role in the Border War. *Forged in Battle* is an account of how (the then commandant) Breytenbach transformed a motley crew of erstwhile MPLA – and subsequently FNLA – combatants into a disciplined fighting unit known as Bravo Company. In the process these soldiers switched their allegiance from Daniel Chipenda to Breytenbach and his fellow white South African Defence Force officers who trained and led them through a series of battles against FAPLA and Cuban forces from August to December 1975. This is the story of Battalion 32 before the unit adopted the symbol of the Buffalo and the motto "forged in battle". The metaphor of the blacksmith's forge might refer to the fashioning of Bravo Company's fighting prowess, but it could equally refer to its transition from bandits with shifting allegiances to soldiers loyal to the unit and its commanding officers.

The South African invasion of Angola commenced in August 1975 with a deliberate decoy action. Zulu Group – which comprised Breytenbach's Bravo Coy and Lindford's Alpha Coy – followed a circuitous route to take Pereira de Eca to create the impression that the attack had been launched from the north. This ruse was supposed to allow for plausible deniability should questions be raised about the identity of white men in rag-tag uniforms flying the FNLA colours. Masquerading as mercenaries, they lived off the land "liberating" provisions from captured areas while reliant on the SADF to provide ammunition and fuel. A convoy comprising an odd assortment of army issue, purchased and captured vehicles was reinforced by Eland armoured cars for the advance on Sá de Bandiera. Bravo Group's defining moment was the intense fighting for the town of Catengue where it first encountered stiff resistance from FAPLA, reinforced by Cubans (p 111). Zulu Group captured a series of towns in Angola's south-west provinces and was welcomed as "liberators" in Benguela, Lobito and Novo Redondo. Hereafter they linked up with Foxbat Group in an attempt to capture Cela. But Bravo Group was extricated from the frontline before the battle of Bridge 14 and the SADF was ordered to withdraw from Angola.

The objectives of Operation Savannah were never clear to the commanders on the ground who were hamstrung by the indecisiveness of their superiors who, in turn, were not privy to the political decision making of the Vorster government. But the resulting confusion is obvious from Breytenbach's account of the campaign. As the invading columns advanced north rapidly it appeared that the authorities contemplated pushing on to Luanda and expelling FAPLA from the capital city before the official handover of authority by the withdrawing of Portuguese colonial forces (scheduled for 11 November 1975). When it became clear that this goal could not be achieved without escalating the commitment in manpower and material, the SADF was ordered to cut its losses and withdraw from Angola. The unclear strategic objectives were thus a concomitant of confused political objectives. It was never clear to Breytenbach which Angolan faction they were supposed to be supporting. His superiors sent mixed signals: sometimes UNITA and at other times the FNLA was the ally of choice. Nor was it readily apparent whether Bravo Coy was furthering the SADF's own agenda or that of the Angolan guerrilla movements. Breytenbach sarcastically refers to Chipenda as "the boss" and had repeated "run ins" with UNITA leaders, coming close to executing one who crossed him (p 149).

Breytenbach tells a rollicking tale of bravado and derring-do. The pace does not let up until chapter 11 when he pauses to reflect upon the nature of courage and cowardice. This follows an incident in which a paratrooper left the scene of a fire fight after a protracted engagement with FAPLA. The paratrooper approaches Breytenbach and candidly admits to being unable to cope with his mounting fear. This appears to be a clear-cut case of cowardice in the face of heavy enemy fire. Breytenbach, however, is forgiving and compassionate. What appears as indulgent philosophising is actually a self-justification for not disciplining the paratrooper for dereliction of duty. He ends his aside by expressing his conviction that physical and moral courage stems from divine assistance (p 123). One can only conclude that the deity deserted the paratrooper in his hour of need.

For the most part, Breytenbach does not indulge the shortcomings of those who served under or over him. He is equally critical of the FNLA and UNITA leaderships. He regards them as opportunists who were more concerned with establishing their own fiefdoms than in looking after the welfare of their followers. Chipenda is depicted as a coward who is not prepared to lead his men in battle but is quick to claim the victories of those fighting under the FNLA flag. His unflattering characterisation of Chipenda is typical of Breytenbach's propensity to take no prisoners; to spare no one his criticism when he believed it was warranted. Breytenbach did not kowtow to his superiors, who relished the prospect of an "independent command". He was a maverick with a keen sense of (mis)adventure, and it was precisely these qualities rather than his leadership skills that prevented him from being promoted higher in the ranks of the SADF. Still, Breytenbach is something of a cult figure in certain circles of SADF veterans. The telling and retelling of his exploits during Operation Savannah and later Operation Reindeer (the 1978 attack on Cassinga) about which he has also written, have turned him into one of most legendary figures of the Border War.

Breytenbach's status has been purposefully cultivated by a string of publications. The process commenced with the 1986 edition of *Forged in Battle*.

Although capable of admitting his errors of judgment and self-deprecation (with a tinge of humour), Breytenbach is undoubtedly the hero of his own story. The other dramatis personae are called by their first or nicknames – an incomplete list of names inserted at the end of the book identifies them by full name and rank. The list comprises the names of only officers and non-commissioned officers. While certain of these characters appear larger than life, B Coy's foot soldiers feature as anonymous figures in Breytenbach's story.

It was precisely their anonymity that made B Coy (and, later, 32 Battalion)'s troops expendable. After being decommissioned, the soldiers of 32 Battalion were granted 15-year tenure to an abandoned asbestos mine at Pomfret in the arid and inaccessible northern Cape. Here they established a rudimentary settlement and were expected to subsist on a nominal army pension without access to transport and health care. This was regarded as a betrayal by certain SADF officers who had served in 32 Battalion. Indeed, a number staged a symbolic demonstration where they presented F.W. de Klerk with 32 silver coins. Rather surprisingly, Breytenbach has not updated his Epilogue and made mention of these developments. He apparently felt very strongly about how his former charges were treated by the outgoing National Party government. And he recognised that the value of these black Angolans lay not in their own accomplishments on the battlefield but in their ability to prevent the loss of lives of white conscripts. In short, they were cannon fodder for the apartheid state. And yet, Breytenbach, like many other retired SADF officers, is an apologist for the self-same state. Such contradictions are part and parcel of the Breytenbach legend.

The decision of the publishers to print a second edition of *Forged in Battle* suggests that the demand for Border War books has not eased off. The number of titles devoted to 32 Battalion alone attests to this. Breytenbach himself has authored another, more expansive text called *The Buffalo Soldiers: The Story of South Africa's 32 Battalion, 1975–1993* (Galago, 2002). Piet Nortjie has published two books that amount to an attempt to write the definitive unit history. These are *32 Battalion: The inside Story of South Africa's Elite Fighting Unit* (Zebra Press, 2004) and *The Terrible Ones: The Complete History of 32 Battalion*, 2 volumes, (Random House, Struik, 2012), respectively. These are complemented by Louis Bothma's *Buffalo Battalion: South Africa's 32 Battalion – A Tale of Sacrifice* (Self-published, 2008). Then there are two narrative accounts that provide personal perspectives, namely: Nico van der Walt's *To the Bush and Back* (Self-published, 2008) and Marius Scheepers' *Striking inside Angola with 32 Battalion* (30° South Publishers, 2012). All of these books add to our knowledge of 32 Battalion, but *Forged in Battle* remains the publication that newcomers to this corpus of work are likely to read first.

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A dialogue opened up between past, present and future

Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, *491 Days: Prisoner Number 1323/69*

Picador Africa, Johannesburg, 2013

249 pp

ISBN 978-1-77010-330-6

R185.00

She is one of South Africa's most controversial public figures, often leaving observers at odds as to the merits of her struggle credentials and legacy. Now, new light has been cast on Winnie Madikizela-Mandela's experiences as a prisoner under the apartheid state during the 1960s:

I said I was not going to bask in his shadow and be known as "Mandela's wife"; they were going to know me as Zanyiwe Madikizela. I fought for that. I said, "I will not even bask in his politics." I am going to form my own identity because I never did bask in his ideas. I had my own mind (p 237).

While serving in prison, Madikizela-Mandela was encouraged by advocate David Soggot to keep a record detailing some of her experiences in the form of a journal. Over four decades later, Greta Soggot, wife of the late David, returned the journal, and it has subsequently been published as *491 days: Prisoner Number 1323/69*. The journal can be said to form just under half of the publication, while the bulk of the text consists of letters, most of these written by Nelson Mandela to Winnie while on Robben Island. Added to these are some materials as found in Madikizela-Mandela's file at the National Archives of South Africa.

To state that Madikizela-Mandela's journal is a disturbing one, is an understatement. The journal highlights her emotional trauma due to the long periods of solitary confinement and the inhumane treatment of prisoners, as well as her struggles with numerous health issues, many of which probably stemmed from her psychological state of mind at the time, and her endless battles to fulfil her duties as a parent, despite being unjustly incarcerated. Apart from the obvious pressures, in practical terms, of being a single parent most of the time, Nelson Mandela's jail sentence seems to have served as more of an inspiration to Madikizela-Mandela than a curse. These and other insights, come to the fore in especially in the numerous letters passed between them, many of which never arrived due to the unfair treatment of prison officials. The journal and the accompanying letters highlight Madikizela-Mandela's influence as a political role-player in her own right. This is, for obvious reasons, often understated in the related historiography, given the magnitude of her late former husband's global recognition and influence.

Yet to neglect her significance in the politics of South Africa is to miss completely her mammoth role in the fight for a democratic dispensation, and it is clear from the text exactly why Madikizela-Mandela continues to remain a hero and an inspiration for so many ordinary South Africans, despite all the controversies that have haunted her over the years. This is perhaps best exemplified in one of her letters to Nelson Mandela where she notes:

... any man who leads a normal life in an abnormal society is himself abnormal ... I chose the life of insults, hardships, and tears which have long dried up – with the full knowledge that it was for the better or for the worst for my people" (p 213).

In terms of the letters, which constitute more than half of this publication, the many letters written by Nelson Mandela are a welcome addition. Amongst his numerous skills which have made him one of the most famous men to ever have lived, Nelson Mandela was a gifted writer who has left a treasure of wisdom in his scribbling. In a letter addressed to Winnie in 1969, Mandela observed:

Neither the moral standards of modern civilization, the teachings of the Christian faith, the universal idea of the common brotherhood of men, nor pure sense of honour will deter the privileged circles from applying the multitudinous pressures at their disposal on those who fight for human dignity (p 140).

This observation is as applicable to South Africa in 2015 as it was in 1969.

In the same vein, it should be noted, are Madikizela-Mandela's observations as part of her epilogue to *491 Days: Prisoner Number 1323/69*. In this piece, there is a sobering stance taken towards post-apartheid South Africa – the South Africa for which she and so many other struggle stalwarts had to endure many painful sacrifices. Her comments, written in November 2012, just a number of months after the tragic events at Marikana, speak volumes when she notes:

Right now, people like myself who come from that era [apartheid] become petrified when we see us sliding and becoming more and more like our oppressive masters. To me, that is exactly what is happening and that is what scares me (p 293).

The publication of *491 Days: Prisoner Number 1323/69* is a welcome addition to the literature on South Africa's troubled past. The work succeeds in giving us nuanced rendition of the role and the character of one of South Africa's most fascinating politicians. Not only does it serve as a wonderful record, detailing just a small portion of the injustices endured by a member of a much marginalised group in South Africa, namely black women, but the work is also utterly intriguing in the way that a dialogue between past, present and future is opened up – a trait which should, in my view be compulsory in all history writing.

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Exploring the African home in KwaZulu-Natal

Meghan Healy-Clancy and Jason Hickel (eds), *Ekhaya: The Politics of Home in KwaZulu-Natal*

University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Scottsville, 2014

278 pp

ISBN 978 1 86914 254 4

R295.00

This book includes contributions by some of the finest academics in the field. The expertise of each author is reflected in the individual essays, each of which tells a

story of paramount importance within the context of KwaZulu-Natal. The use of photographic evidence and narratives increases the value of this work for both academics and students alike. Aptly entitled *Ekhaya*, the book's highly rated contributors make an important and empirically sound contribution to furthering our understanding of the African home as a key site of struggle and its role in the making of contemporary KwaZulu-Natal. The authors systematically unpack the unique nature and composition of the province and the remnants of colonialism that exist therein.

The work presents an important aspect of South African history with a specific focus on the province of KwaZulu-Natal. The reader is taken on a historical journey from rural to urban KwaZulu-Natal; from the pre-colonial era to the current presidency of Jacob Zuma; with the recurrent emphasis on the affective and ideological dimensions of *ekhaya*. The familial home in South Africa has been socialised into becoming a site of struggle and activism for generations. South Africans have had decades of practice in this regard; change is born in *ekhaya*. It is the embodiment of both the old and the new; a melting pot of change which makes it difficult to let go of the sentimental past and reconcile it with the contemporary aspirations of individuals, communities and society at large. The home has always been and remains the site of political activism. However, such activism has become more widespread as a result of popular discontent and the re-politicisation of the country's youth.

This work is a compilation of eight essays. Each essay draws on the complex historical journey and fractured political structures that contribute to current scholarship on forms of family life in KwaZulu-Natal. The introductory chapter, "On Politics of the Home" does an excellent job of discussing domestic space as normative and formative, and is the foundation for the essays that follow. The interrelatedness between the home, state, politics, resources and a series of other factors is synthesised for easy reading in the introduction. The essays that follow continue to build on the theoretical foundation presented at the outset.

The notion of patriarchy is interrogated in detail in relation to *ekhaya*. The chapter titled: "The Colonial Transformation and the Home" also interrogates the destruction of the African home in pursuit of capital and the intensity of nostalgia for the lost home. "The Authority and the Life of a Female Chief" is clearly delivered in chapter two. The reference to governments' attempts to manipulate racial and gender categories, traced back to the 1820s, is central to understanding and contextualising the politics of home in KwaZulu-Natal.

"Bounding Chiefly Authority in Colonial Natal" focuses on important discussions and decisions regarding the division of wards and chiefs exercising power over people other than their own. This was one of the contributing factors to the prevailing economic conditions in the colony. The depletion of resources and the increasing population propelled the movement of people. "Gender, Violence and Home in the Nazareth Baptist Church" explores the tensions that emerged after the death of Isaiah Shembe which and became rife among the church's male members. Women capitalised on this opportunity to re-establish their position of strength and influence in the church community and they also encouraged developing a home in the township as opposed to leaving.

In "Engineering the Township Home" the role of draconian apartheid rule and the isolation of people according to race in separate communities are discussed in relation to political mobilisation. The engineering of the township in itself is critical to understanding the changing shape and form of the home and the family in post-apartheid society. "House and Home" analyses the evolving economy in South Africa and the impact that it has on housing for the youth, with reference to young women living in Mpophomeni. "Parting Homes in KwaZulu Natal" focuses on the Zulu home and is narrated from the lived perspectives of those who have left the home and those who have experienced the loss. The essay entitled "Beneath the Zunami: Jacob Zuma and the Gendered Politics of Social Reproduction" offers fresh insights into the victory of Jacob Zuma, as president of the ANC, in the general election in 2009, among other critical and urgent items that require attention within South Africa. The author of the chapter argues that the rise of Zuma is an example of how political processes in South Africa unfold in relation to recent seismic changes to the home, in particular as a result of the decline in rates of marriage.

Ekhaya makes an invaluable contribution to important areas of research in the broader social sciences. Scholars would do well to develop and further capitalise on the foundation that the contributors to this volume have established in a very methodical and comprehensive manner. The important areas of the home, family, discontent and political activism in KwaZulu-Natal must be given further attention in the years to come. The use of narratives and case studies in this book make it a valuable source of information for scholars. The authors provide information on important lived experiences that embody the experiences of people in KwaZulu-Natal. It is a must read for all academics in the social sciences.

Mariam Seedat Khan
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Spotlighting young activists in South Africa's liberation struggle

Pamela Reynolds, *War in Worcester: Youth and the Apartheid State*

University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 2014

254 pp

ISBN 978-1-86914-276-6

R240.00

Pamela Reynolds describes her book *War in Worcester* as being about:

... youth fighting for freedom and a state's retaliation ... the young not consenting to the kind of adulthood on offer ... the character of revolt under ... tight surveillance ... negative forms of governance of children ... the violence of the state ... government sanctioned cruelty ... the labor of youth in the work of war ... [and] their reach for ethics despite experiences of pain and betrayal (p i).

In it she relates the stories of 14 men from a township an hour outside of Cape Town who were young leaders and activists in the struggle against apartheid in the 1980s and who are now in their forties and fifties. At the time the youngest

activist was 13, the oldest 24. Most were detained and tortured, some were shot, eight were betrayed. In the intervening time few completed formal or further education, some lost homes, relationships, jobs. Others raised families, built careers and contended with depression and anger. Over the course of the study four died. She met these men during the Truth and Reconciliation hearings in 1996 and met with them over three years formally and informally over a further eleven years.

The resulting book, however, is more than a collection of narratives. Instead it offers a deep and reflective "analysis of what the children did against a system of governance they did not like and how isolated they were in the certainty of confrontation with authority" (p 16). *War in Worcester* is a master class in anthropological method – politically critical, self-reflexive and characterised by exceptional, evocative, even lyrical writing. Reynolds weaves her account between "the [Truth and Reconciliation] Commission, the activist, and the State", and does so with "restraint ... [and] a style of bareness" that is both heartbreaking and eye-opening (p 18).

In her focus on *the activist*, she aims to fill gaps in our knowledge about the role of youth in the war against the apartheid state. She does so by working with these men to map sites of activism in the township, to mark places of torture, arrest and shootings in the nearby town, and to identify places where members of the apartheid security police lived or worshipped (or still do) and reflect over meals and football games on the violence experienced and the sense made of it then and now. This lengthy engagement results in rich data on their political induction, the nature of their activism, their torture, ill treatment, and suffering at the hands of the apartheid state, along with the complicated relationships they endured with family and loved ones. Most striking is these men's reflection of the morality of their actions. The choices made to protect loved ones by keeping their actions secret so family members would "not have anything to say to the police" (p 112); the strong propensity to forgiveness and empathy even when confronted with compatriots who through coercion or weakness betrayed them ("He didn't think properly ... he couldn't stand the pain. He was still too young" (p 123) and the dilemma of conflict with elders for young men brought up in a culture of age-related respect (p 110).

To illustrate this moral consciousness, Reynolds relates a story of two young activists. When accused by a group of mothers whose children had been arrested, of leading their children into danger while avoiding arrest themselves, they responded by walking "into a police station and gave themselves up" (p 144). But she also tells of the young men's reflections on how "we used our status to have access to their hearts and their bodies" (p 153) referring to their sexual conquests at the time.

The violence of *the apartheid state* is thrown into stark relief not only in the heinous accounts of torture, cruelty and callousness but through the ways it was achieved: "a hierarchy of dominance, control, and limitations over the majority of the population" (p 13). Reynolds painstakingly shows how the state "gave the young who joined the struggle inside the country no quarter; indeed, they targeted them" (p 11) and "how the governance of children in one country was separated out" (p 14) with black children being treated "as remainders, rejects, undesirables,

servants, labourers” (p 160). She shows how the state harmed senses of hearing, smell and touch resulting in “limbs lost, hearing diminished, sight gone, concentration shattered” (p 104). She documents the mechanism of harm and evil – in small local actions of low level members of the security police, for example, with devastating consequences. She speaks with quiet understatement of the “terrifying predicament” of being terrorised by authority figures “while their parents and other adults who held them in their care were unable to protect them” (p 88) and where “some school principals and teachers protected ... some encouraged them in their revolt ... some collaborated with police in identifying activists (p 89).

The two stories that splinter the mind are of a young activist regaining consciousness in the hospital after being shot “to find that though he was paralysed, his wrists were chained to the hospital bed” (p 146). And another being told by a policeman not to worry about having his leg amputated as a result of being shot since it would grow back again. Reynolds shows how the state targeted youth because they were young and black, not necessarily because of evidence of activism and the multiple ways in which the state sowed mistrust by cultivating informers and encouraging vigilantism.

She also provides careful work on the figures of youth killings, abductions and torture from multiple sources – from the official TRC report through to various estimates compiled by NGOs. She shows how almost half of all those killed, tortured or abducted were young people under 24 with nearly a third under 18 years of age. Reynolds points out that the TRC’s record is therefore only “a scrap of cloth” compared to the vast story of youth activism and harm that remains undocumented, with implications for the current neglect of youth who were not regarded as warriors and agent but as victims.

Her criticisms of the TRC include its *modus operandi*: how it operated; the platform it offered those who participated as victim rather than activist; the ways in which it exerted further violence on participants through bureaucracy. For example, needless and repetitive form filling, arbitrary cut-off dates and ages to qualify for reparations (claimants had to be 35 or older in 1996 to be eligible for reparations); and non-systematic information gathering. She also highlights the TRC’s inane questions such as: “Did gross human rights violations hurt your feelings?” (p 99). Included in this critique are ways in which children under 18 who were harmed during the struggle are collapsed within the broader category of youth aged under 24, despite special protection being afforded to children under 18 by international treaties the world over.

War in Worcester is divided into nine sections – an introduction, five chapters, two largely narrative chapters which Reynolds calls “Interludes” and seven brief but important appendices. The introduction sets up her key empirical questions and describes her methods. In chapter one she tells of these young activists’ induction into politics – a struggle for which they volunteered while still at school and for which they received very little support or direction. It describes involvement through student organisations, through initial participation in mass action, through encouragement by teachers or older siblings, or merely coming to awareness that “a black person is not a member of the public” when trying to visit a public library (p 52).

In chapter two Reynolds focuses on how and why pain and suffering should be portrayed and reported on. In chapter three she offers a deep analysis of betrayal “as a major tactic of war by the South African government” (p 143), and how “the spread of mistrust helped to break or fracture social ties, to strain bonds and obligations, and to disturb structures of care” (p 130). In chapter four Reynolds picks up the theme of “how the child comes to a political and ethical understanding” (p 15). In chapter five she offers a thorough critique of the TRC having referred to various elements of it throughout the book.

The appendices situate the town of Worcester and the TRC within its geographical and historical context. They précis the findings of the TRC in relation to violence in the Western Cape, the numbers of children and youth killed, tortured, ill-treated or abducted, along with the commission’s findings on children and youth and its recommendations in relation to this group.

The book does not (how can it?) do justice to 15 years of collected data. Reynolds has a rich vein of primary sources, of oral history, to which we are not sufficiently exposed. Historians are likely to be left somewhat dissatisfied. At times her consciously literary turns of phrase may be too much and some will notice the absence of African theorists in her analysis. While Arendt, Sebald, Foucault and Levinas are all important contributors to theories of responsibility, power, violence and moral restraint, so too are Mamdani, Mbembe, Fanon and Nyamnjoh – who are absent in Reynold’s consideration. But these are small criticisms of a book that provides a compelling analysis of children in war – of “how difficult it must have been for them ... in relation to their brief lives thus far” (p 16). *War in Worcester* offers deep insight into the lives of young activists in the South African struggle for democracy, a severe critique of the shortcomings of the TRC’s method of obtaining testimony, adjudicating harm, rendering youth invisible as warriors rather than victims, and offers a scathing indictment of the apartheid state’s disregard for the lives of children. This is a critically important book.

Sharlene Swartz
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An excellent anthology with a measure of quirkiness

Clifton Crais and Thomas McClendon (eds), *The South Africa Reader: History, Culture, Politics*

Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2013

624 pp

ISBN 978-0-822355-298

\$22.47

A populist cover emblazoned with an image of Bafana Bafana supporters blowing vuvuzelas and the quirky inclusion of recipes for biltong and bobotie (accredited to one of the editors) might inspire a certain cynicism, but this is an excellent anthology. Most likely aimed at an undergraduate audience in the United States, the editors emphasise “ordinary voices” rather than scholarship, with the work of

professional academics very much in the minority, though each excerpted text is succinctly contextualised by the editors and there is a guide to further (more scholarly) reading at the back of the volume. The variety of material across the more than six hundred pages is quite remarkable: hymns; mine-worker songs; the transcript of a political funeral at the height of apartheid; struggle songs; journalistic reportage; historical fiction and a photo essay (by Patricia Hayes, on Santu Mofekeng) all feature.

Historians will certainly recognise a number of the texts included here from more conventional primary-source anthologies. The same doubtless applies to literary scholars. The real value of the anthology lies in the fact that it brings together such a variety of important texts – the rich, discordant tapestry of South African intellectual history – under a single roof for the first time. Readers unfamiliar with the details of the post-apartheid era to date also benefit from the inclusion of material covering Thabo Mbeki's AIDS denialism, xenophobia, LGBTI struggles and Jacob Zuma's rape trial; even Julius Malema makes an appearance. The volume is handsomely illustrated and will prove invaluable for school and university teaching.

Stephen Sparks
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A commendable collection delivered by a diverse team of scholars

Fransjohan Pretorius (ed.), *A History of South Africa: From the Distant Past to the Present Day*

Protea Book House, Pretoria, 2014

704 pp

ISBN 978-1-86919-908-1

R285.00

Fransjohan Pretorius is professor of history and an experienced author and editor of eight books about the South African War. He has come together with a diverse team of twenty seasoned historians to write South Africa's history from the pre-colonial era to the present day. The book contains evidence, case studies, statistics and historic facts in an attempt to write a more balanced history of the country.

The themes encompassed in this book include social, political, religious and environmental issues, and covers aspects that show change over time in South Africa – physically, socially and economically. The original publication was an Afrikaans version entitled *Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika: Van Voortye tot Vandag*. The book is suitable for a large audience from the tertiary history student to history educators and their pupils and is a significant addition to existing work on South Africa's history.

The collection of chapters discuss and analyse the history of South Africa starting from the emergence of human life in East and southern Africa 7 to 12 million years ago and explains in detail the geographic formation of the earth after

the Big Bang that eventually led to the formation of continents, giving way to the early environmental history of South Africa. Johan de Villiers introduces the earliest Portuguese navigators Bartholomew Dias (1488) and Vasco da Gama (1498) who first made contact with the local inhabitants and paved the way for other foreign nationals to arrive at the Cape in the course of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Eventually the *Vereerigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC) established a settlement at the Cape in 1652. The VOC played a huge role in the population increase and economic development of the Cape when slaves from Angola and Guinea, Madagascar and Asia were brought to work in the agricultural sector and as tradesmen and domestic workers. Not only did the Dutch settlers contribute to the economy of the Cape, they were also responsible for the dwindling number of the Khoekhoen and Bushmen as a result of conflict over land and livestock that left many indigenous people dead. Many Khoekhoen also died from the smallpox epidemics of 1713, 1755 and 1767.

However, the situation in the Cape soon changed when the British occupied the territory in January 1806 and this brought a new dimension to the composition and nature of the population in the colony. In chapter four, De Villiers continues to provide an account of the Cape under British rule. The British were particularly interested in the Cape Colony because it was a strategic location on the sea-route between Europe and the trading posts in Asia. By the 1820s, the number of British settlers in the Cape Colony had grown from about 4 000 to 46 000. In 1834 the British government abolished slavery and labelled it as “evil ... [it] had to be eradicated because it violated the dignity, personal freedom and responsibility of the people involved” and this brought tension between the Dutch-Afrikaans speakers who were not amenable to the growing British influence and the Cape colonial government (p 92).

Jan Visagie explores the emigration of Voortrekkers into the interior, a theme that cannot be ignored in the history of South Africa because of its significance in the spread of white influence throughout the entire region of the country. Also known as the Great Trek, the trek was motivated by protests against British rule and British reforms that attempted to introduce the legal equality of white and black people. The Afrikaners were exposed to political and social changes which threatened their status and security and limited their freedom. The Afrikaners regarded moving out of the Cape Colony as their only solution. Between 1835 and 1845 more than 2 500 heads of white families migrated to the northern and north-eastern parts of South Africa and each white family was accompanied by at least two or more black employees. Altogether, the Great Trek gave Afrikaners a stronger feeling of solidarity and identity despite the great deal of hardship and grief that was endured during their trek to the interior.

Hermann Giliomee provides five chapters in which he writes about Afrikaner nationalism and the concept of apartheid. After the Great Trek, the Afrikaners began to form a clearly identifiable group based on their origin, language and religion. By 1875, the group had gradually accepted the name Afrikaners. The Orange Free State became the model Afrikaner republic and had the most efficient administration. Paul Kruger prioritised Transvaal interests; he used the language of a nationalist and urged all Afrikaners to support the Orange Free

State, the Transvaal Republic and the Afrikaners in the Cape Colony against British imperialism.

The book discusses why the South African War of 1899–1902 is very significant in South African history and why it birthed a revival of Afrikaner nationalism. Although this war was as a consequence of tension between the Boers and the British, it closely involved the black population groups in the country, having the black and the coloureds serving in non-combatant roles. After the war and until 1948, Afrikaner nationalism was at its peak when the Afrikaner nationalists wanted South Africa to be as independent from Britain as possible. Thus, the National Party was formed in Bloemfontein in January 1914.

David Scher provides an astute analysis of the consolidation of the apartheid state from 1948 when the National Party won the elections and after it formed an alliance with the Afrikaner Party with the slogan “South Africa belongs to the Afrikaners” (p 311). Furthermore, apartheid implemented separateness and encouraged other racial groups to develop along their lines. Kobus du Pisani adds to Scher’s argument and discusses the policy of apartheid under B.J. Vorster and the implementation of the homeland policy that was initiated by Verwoerd. This policy deemed that black ethnic groups in South Africa should have their own homelands and become independent states and promote self-governance.

Unquestionably, segregation and apartheid did not remain unchallenged. Black political awakening has its roots in the eastern districts of the Cape Colony from 1875. In the early twentieth century those black people who had received education at mission institutes led black politics. The South African Native National Congress was then formed in 1912 in Bloemfontein to unite all black South Africans politically and to become the mouthpiece for black people. Black resistance against apartheid continued to grow in the 1950s through to the 1980s.

Grietjie Verhoef provides two chapters about South Africa’s economic history from the nineteenth century to the present. Initially, South Africa’s economy depended exclusively on agriculture. This changed with the discovery of diamonds in the Kimberley area and gold on the Witwatersrand in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The emergence of early industries during the mineral revolution resulted in the formation of trade unions; their primary aim being to unite all white workers. Black workers had no trade union representation until 1917 when the Industrial Workers of Africa union was formed with the assistance of left-wing white revolutionary socialists.

Towards the end of the book, there are interesting accounts about the respective social standing of three of South Africa’s racial groups during the apartheid era: the coloured people, Indians and English-speaking South Africans. During apartheid, most coloureds were loyal to the Afrikaners because of language, religion and culture. Although coloured people lived relatively better than Africans, the majority of them suffered due to colonialism, segregation, apartheid and exploitation. Similarly, many Indians suffered emotionally, psychologically and materially as over 140 000 faced forced removals from their homes in Durban to Chatsworth and Phoenix. Even so, some Indians benefited from the establishment of their own institutions and the period from the mid-1960s

to the 1990s witnessed economic mobility. The English-speaking South Africans are regarded as being 'uncertain of their identity' (p 588). The history of the English-speaking group began with the British occupations of the Cape Colony in 1795 and 1806. While the English speakers retained their group and religious identity, many Jews were integrated into the group's life, as were other whites who were adopting English as a home language. Eventually, English-speaking South Africans became more than a British community.

Elize van Eeden closes the book with a chapter on environmental history, a field that still needs endeavour in the history of South Africa. She gives an interesting overview of South Africa's geography and the relationship between humankind and nature and stresses the importance of environmental education in schools to advance environmental conservation.

A History of South Africa from the Distant Past to the Present Day has delivered what it promises in the title. The history of South Africa is written from the primeval past right up to 2013. Although this book is an important contribution to South African historiography, informative and educational to anyone interested in the history of the country, political and Afrikaner history dominates. Themes on apartheid, resistance and Afrikaner nationalism from the South African War until the 1970s overwhelm the text and the main figures of these events are portrayed as super and heroic. The book should have also considered themes on gender and childhood for a more balanced narrative on South African history.

Charmaine Hlongwane
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A significant new work on the intellectual history of South Africa

Corinne Sandwith, *World of Letters: Reading Communities and Cultural Debates in Early Apartheid South Africa*

University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 2014

309 pp

ISBN 978-1-86914-262-9

R345.00

Internationally, much scholarship has been undertaken in recent years on the producers and material makers of periodicals and little magazines. In South Africa, only a start has been made in this field. That is why this new book by Corinne Sandwith, emerging to fill the gap in our knowledge and understanding, should be hailed as a significant new work of intellectual history in South Africa. As so little has been studied in detail, Sandwith repeatedly characterises her work as a project of historical "recovery" or "retrieval". In examining the literary and cultural debates in a range of South African publications – including the *SA Opinion*, *Trek*, and *The Voice* – she aims to reveal "the existence of a vigorous, non-academic and, above all, public discussion of literature and culture in pre- and early apartheid South Africa" (p 3). Importantly, her aim is not limited to cultural debates, but to the constant articulation of political debates through the medium of the cultural, or "the way that cultural discourse doubles as a form of political

expression" (p 175). This is an investigation of literary magazines as a form of social history, which draws in the role of writers and readers, as well as editors and printers, and the wider social context. Sandwith sees this context as one of both vigorous debate and a shrinking public sphere; an era when political discussion was becoming more constrained and circumscribed. And, as she points out, while the story of censorship during the apartheid era is familiar, the "threat to free public discussion in South Africa in the 1940s came not only from the state, but also from big business" (p 81).

Thus, while describing the debates between contending cultural positions, Sandwith deftly traces the developing and often contradictory political positions that also emerged in these magazines. In the pages of *SA Opinion* and *Trek*, contesting notions of the social function of literature were fiercely debated. In contrast, *The Voice* was a black-run publication espousing a much more combative brand of African nationalism (p 222). Throughout, the study describes the roles played by and the opinions emanating from key intellectuals, like Herman Charles Bosman, Jacques Malan and Es'kia Mphahlele – whose "postcolonial appropriations of revered English texts" and political arguments articulated in the language and idiom of Western classics enlivened the pages of *The Voice* (pp 228 – 233).

The close reading of these magazines is supplemented by more detailed case studies of the writings of individuals, and in particular Jack Cope and Dora Taylor. Cope's role as a radical and an "independent revolutionary" is emphasised, rather than his more familiar role as editor of *Contrast* and as an author (p 198). And Taylor is seen as particularly important because hers was the "first sustained attempt in South Africa to apply a Marxist perspective to the analysis of literary-cultural texts" (p 86). Sandwith goes on to emphasise that, "While Taylor's place as a radical historian has been partially accepted, her significance as a literary critic has yet to be recognised" (p 98). Taylor's techniques were based on Marxist historiography, but also a kind of sociology of literature, acknowledging the material basis and social contexts of literature: "An imaginative piece of writing is not created out of a vacuum" (p 100). The case study is given added depth through an examination of Taylor's political and intellectual antecedents, and especially her indebtedness to Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution*. But Taylor is only one example of such a Marxist scholar, and indeed a recurring theme in *World of Letters* is "the ways in which Soviet cultural discourses were reiterated, appropriated and reformulated in the new aesthetico-political contexts of late segregation and early apartheid South Africa" (p 175). It is striking to what extent the non-academic left-wing discourse described is similar to that which emerged, as if for the first time, around thirty years later in History and Literature departments in South Africa.

The choice of Dora Taylor as a case study is also noteworthy, because Sandwith makes a particular point of highlighting the role of women in this history. She remarks approvingly on "the confidence with which women (as writers and speakers) took up public discourse in a context overwhelmingly dominated by men" (p 167), contrasting this with more patriarchal editorial situations at the same time. This is a relatively small aspect of the study, but an interesting one.

Sandwith's study owes a clear debt to the methods and interests of Book History, and this may be seen most clearly in her examination of the magazines and their audiences as the site for a particular reading community. Her intention is to illuminate the "lesser known practices of reading, interpretation and cultural critique" (p 3) as well as the "movement of texts and ideas" (p 4) or what is also referred to as the "travelling text" (p 175). This is particularly well done in her examination of the publications linked to the Non-European Unity Movement – *The Torch*, *The Educational Journal* and so on – and groups like the New Era Fellowship and Left Book Club, which describes the growth and beliefs of a group of people (largely a black and coloured intelligentsia) through their writings in these journals. "Key to this radical cultural project," she argues, "was the reading and discussion of literature" (p 158), or in other words a politicised reading strategy which has also been examined in other contexts by scholars like Archie Dick and Ashwin Desai. Rejecting the "fiction of the ideologically neutral text" (p 165), Sandwith shows how, "in this particular community of reading, literary texts become a site for vigorous, public political argumentation and critique, in marked contrast to the solitary reading practices of the academic mainstream" (p 161). The book is more closely related to studies of reading practice than the more material aspects of Book History, like paper, print and publisher (In this regard, one might mention that the book has been beautifully produced by UKZN Press, well packaged and well edited.)

A question that emerged during my reading was to what extent Sandwith shares the ideologies of her subjects. Surely she does what she claims the writers she examines do – she offers "an analysis of the role of culture in the implementation of late colonialism and early apartheid" and draws attention to "the ideological function and material situatedness of various forms of intellectual production and the race and class exclusions upon which they are based" (p 166). But she goes beyond their limited viewpoints to the degree that she manages to maintain a highly nuanced and complex account, combining appreciation and scepticism (as Dora Taylor does with Roy Campbell's poetry). This is achieved by retaining a keen awareness of the potential tensions and contradictions of the positions (described in various places as "an unstable amalgam", for instance of liberal, Leavisite and Stalinist positions, "all of which find common cause in the uses of literary-cultural texts as a means of effecting social change" (p 197).

This work has clear significance for South African literary history, but its broader aims mean that it is also of relevance to social and intellectual historians. Because of its insistence on both cultural and political aspects, and especially the impossibility of divorcing the two, the book will be of interest to both historians and literary scholars, and to those working in the broad field of the history of the book. This hybrid nature is reflected in the extensive bibliography and meticulous footnotes to the work, drawing on a wide disciplinary variety of sources.

Elizabeth le Roux
University of Pretoria

Pioneering work on literary and historical representations of Botswana

Mary S. Lederer, *Novels of Botswana in English, 1930-2006*

African Heritage Press, New York, Lagos and London, 2014

185 pp

ISBN 978-1-940729-15-2

R246.00

In this pioneering and informative book, Mary Lederer, an American literary scholar and former lecturer at the University of Botswana, provides a survey of novels written by foreigners and Batswana about the country. In an earlier chapter Lederer examines novels whose writers reflect the strengths and weaknesses of the changing national character of Botswana. A classic novel that Lederer uses extensively to compare and contrast with later novels by Batswana writers is South African statesman Sol Plaatje's *Mhudi*, published in 1917.

The starting point is Andrew Sesinyi's *Love on the Rocks* which appeared in 1981 as part of Macmillan's Pacesetter series focusing on popular romance. This novel, which Lederer credits as likely "the first major, post-independence piece of literature written in English by a Motswana", and like Sesinyi's other novels, is concerned with the moral decay of the society owing to migrant labour and crime mainly originating from neighbouring South Africa. In terms of the gender dimension in Sesinyi's other novel *Carjack* (1999) in comparison to *Mhudi*, Lederer observes that "In *Mhudi*, the three most brave, sensible, and intelligent people are women ... In *Carjack*, the two most powerful and evil gangsters are women" (p 40). Comparative assessment is also done between Galesiti Baruti's novel *Mr Heartbreaker* (1993) and Sesinyi's works, and the conclusion is that longing for old morality is a common feature of the two authors. The irony Lederer sees is that the two novelists set their novels in Gaborone, a new post-colonial urban settlement which can hardly be associated with traditional morality as evidenced by growing debauchery. Focusing on the nation's capital makes Sesinyi and Baruti's approach a more nationalist project, says Lederer (p 15). She sees later Batswana women writers in the form of Unity Dow, Mositi Torontle and Bessie Head as doing a better job than Sesinyi in their critical observation of traditional values in the contemporary society. Lederer also sees parallels between Torontle's *The Victims* (1993) and Sol Plaatje's *Mhudi*. She also argues that the nationalist approach of Sesinyi and Baruti is challenged by Head and Dow whose novels demonstrate how international boundaries are a hindrance to clan, tribe and family links in traditional villages such as Serowe and Mochudi.

In assessing novels by non-Batswana writers with regard to the extent to which their literature reinforces Botswana's own image of itself, Lederer is uncompromisingly critical. With the notable exception of Naomi Mitchison's 1965 publication *When we Became Men*, which sympathetically reflects on life in Mochudi, almost all other foreigners writing on Botswana during much of the twentieth century were primarily interested in either the Kalahari Desert or Okavango Delta. The people featured marginally in these works, Lederer observes.

In Botswana, in order to get the self-knowledge that is the presumed destiny of every white person who comes to Africa, one must conquer – or at least survive – the

desert. These novels illustrate the classic 'man versus nature' plot and conflict, in which the test of the self is played out against a harsh environment".

She further posits that: "The fact that other people live in the same environment and "conquer" it regularly is irrelevant to the central quest" (p 52). She concludes that: "What is written about Botswana by people with apparently limited experience of the place, without their own acknowledgement of their limitations, strikes me as dishonest" (p 90).

Another genre she examines by non-Batswana writers is the adventure or hunting literature which in southern Africa is traceable to the nineteenth century. Negative Western stereotypes about Africa also abound in this form of literature when it comes to writing about Botswana. She notes that a lot of adventure novels on Botswana appear to be motivated by the country's peaceful and democratic climate even though it is perceived as "wobbly" despite having been operating for decades without any military threat to it or civil strife (p 113). In particular Lederer is disturbed by Nicholas Monsarrat's novels among which is *The Tribe that Lost its Head* (1956), inspired by the well documented political crisis among the Bangwato tribe following the heir apparent to their chieftaincy, Seretse Khama's controversial marriage to an English woman in 1948. "Monsarrat unashamedly reiterates the mythology of the nobility of the colonial enterprise, in which men from England suffer countless hardships and 'servitude' in order to bring order to chaotic primitive life in other parts of the world" (p 96). Moreover, Monsarrat is accused of having an extremely negative vision of post-colonial Botswana and Africa generally whereby "well-meaning" colonial officials are persecuted, and chaos reigns supreme in independent Africa. To Lederer this portrayal is deplorable because Monsarrat had previously published well acclaimed novels.

An example of another novel that practically leaves the people out is K.R. Butler's *A Desert of Salt* (p 964). Lederer concludes that: "Even the most unyielding and unforgiving landscape can become a haven of love and peace if the people of the land are respected and loved, as they are for example in Bessie Head's *When Rain Clouds Gather*" (p 113). She further notes that "Botswana is a physically beautiful – and physically harsh – place, but it is Bo-Tswana; the place of the Tswana". While her annoyance with the adventure novelists' representations of Botswana is understandable, perhaps here Lederer ignores the highly controversial debate that counters the official portrayal of the country as having only one tribe: Tswana speakers.

Another genre discussed in Lederer's book is the detective novels of Alexander McCall Smith's series emanating from the hugely popular *The No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency* (1998), and Lauri Kubuitsile's *The Fatal Payout* (2005). McCall Smith's protagonist Precious Ramotswe, also called Mma Ramotswe, just like in novels by Sesinyi, Baruti, Torontle, Head and Dow, is also concerned with morality. But according to Lederer, Mma Ramotswe knows that return to traditional morality would not have allowed a woman like her to operate her own detective agency, and she would have also been subjected to an undesirable marriage (p 14).

According to Lederer, the massive popularity enjoyed by McCall Smith's novels in the Western world presents serious problems. As she puts it:

McCall Smith's novels started to be read as representative of African literature. His nostalgic, romanticised view of the country and people of Botswana is read, not surprisingly, as typical of the paternalistic approach that characterises much of the West's interaction with the people and societies of Africa. Africa is often understood in the West to be a place of disease, war, poverty, starvation, and death (p 118).

She also observes that McCall Smith's experiences of people in Botswana was during his stay in the country in 1981, but the old morality of then has since given way to strong materialism with its obvious consequences. Perhaps it can be said that in a way McCall Smith's *The No.1 Ladies Detective Agency* provides a historical portrayal of Botswana of the early 1980s!

Comparing McCall Smith's work to Lauri Kubuitsile's *The Fatal Payout*, Lederer says that:

If Mma Ramotswe shows us the good possibilities of real life, then Lauri Kubuitsile's novels show the nasty possibilities of real life, in a more conventional crime/thriller style. Kubuitsile writes with the deliberate attempt to provide escape ... [*The Fatal Payout*] is a short novel, but contains references to many of the issues that confront Botswana at the start of the twenty-first century: rising crime, the belief in the tradition of rags-to-riches, rampant materialism, sexual abuse in the workplace, HIV/AIDS, extramarital affairs, expatriate (often South African) perceptions that Botswana is 'easy pickings', the rise of so-called passion killings, promiscuity, and so forth (pp 131–132).

To Lederer, McCall Smith and Kubuitsile's novels are not necessarily torch-bearers of African literature, but they can be appreciated and recognised by the Western world as "people centred" as opposed to the "desert and delta centred" works noted above. Literally in a footnote (12) Lederer observes that Abacus publishers falls back to animal stereotypes through animal drawings on the covers of many of McCall Smith's novels. Perhaps Lederer should not have reduced this critical and key point to a footnote (p 133).

In the final chapter of the book Lederer discusses works by Head and Dow and observes that the two female authors are the country's first novelists to attain international fame. According to Lederer the two authors write about the society from the viewpoint of the underdog and make a case for social justice. Dow boldly makes her underdog a woman while for Head the underdog is any individual at the receiving end of another person wielding more power (p 135). Early on in the book Lederer writes that "The sad irony is that Bessie Head is probably better known in the rest of the world than she is here in the country where she chose to make her home" (p 18). Surprisingly, she does not hazard an explanation for this state of affairs even though the answer could possibly be the society's notoriety for poor reading culture or "book famine".

All in all, this volume is a welcome development and refreshing read. Hopefully in the second edition of the book Lederer will include novels published beyond 2006, a period that has seen an "explosion" of numerous literary works mainly by Botswana from all walks of life.

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