

REVIEWS

Laura J. Mitchell, *Belongings: Property, Family, and Identity in Colonial South Africa (An Exploration of Frontiers, 1725-c. 1830)* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009 and Gutenberg-e online history series), 232 pp., \$60.00 Cloth, ISBN 978-0-231-14252-6.

Belongings is a study of a group of inter-related colonial families who farmed in the general vicinity of the Olifants River in the south-western Cape during the eighteenth century. For Mitchell this region is the Cedarberg even though the shaping environmental presence of her study is the river itself and not its mountainous backdrop. The Cedarberg proper, that is the mountain range that bares this name, are a muted presence in Mitchell's book, seldom intruding with their presence and hardly shaping the activities of the human protagonists. She does not tell us why the mountains are called the Cedarberg, nor what names the Khoikhoi gave to its various parts. Apart from one fleeting reference we do not learn the heights or characteristics of any of their peaks, nor the length and breadth of the range. We do not learn what the principal passes are, nor where they lead. We are not told about the mountain's various sub-regions, nor its secret valleys and hidden plateaus. We are not told in any meaningful detail about the migration strategies adopted by people and animals as they moved from one side of the mountain to the other. Whilst we are told that there is variety in the vegetation and water resources of the region we are not told exactly what or where. This is a book almost devoid of Cedarberg place names. The Tanqua Karoo, the Onder Bokkeveld, the Katbakkies, Sneeuberg, Tafelberg, Karoo Poort, etc., do not feature. Instead, Mitchell tells us that the best watered part of the region is the Olifants River, that this, therefore, was where the focal point of human habitat and conflict was, and that this, therefore, is the focal point of her study. There is nothing wrong with this approach. Indeed, a modern study of the colonial settlement of the Olifants River is to be welcomed. But readers should be alerted to the fact that *Belongings* is not, as its acknowledgements advertise it to be, about the Cedarberg.

In fact, many of the farms and families that Mitchell describes were not situated along the river at all. A good many of those farms listed in her inventory of the 'First Five Years of Cedarberg Loan Farm Claims' were in what we would now call the West Coast Sandveld, the Verloren Vlei or the Agter Piketberg district, to the south or west of the Olifants River, the Olifants Rivierberge and the Piekeniers Pass. These are not, by any stretch of the imagination, in the Cedarberg. This uncertainty about location is not helped by the absence of any maps in the book. A vital part of Mitchell's argument centres on the spatial positioning of farms and families in the environment, but without maps the reader has no way of situating the places referred to. The book's frontispiece advises that:

This work is a partial representation of *Belongings* by Laura J. Mitchell, a multimedia work of scholarship published in the Gutenberg-e online history series. As such, this print edition does not include the images, maps

or the index contained in the online edition ... We encourage reviewers and readers to also consult the complete work online at the free access site: <http://www.gutenberg-e.org> or through ACLS Humanities E-Book (HEB) at: http://www.humanitiesebook.org/series_GUTE.html ... The intellectual content of this work is designed to be read and evaluated in its electronic form. This text is not a substitute for or facsimile of the online version of this work.

Although I spent several hours trying to access the electronic version of the book at these sites I was, ultimately, unsuccessful as I could not open the book's electronic portal. I have to confess, therefore, that I am only reviewing a 'partial representation' of the work. I also confess, however, that I am forced to question the wisdom of leaving the maps out of the print version of this book. How much more expensive would it have made a \$60 book to include the maps?

Even without any maps it would have been a good idea if the author had attempted some sort of written description of the major farms in her study in order to impart more *genius loci* to her narrative. In a highly diverse and expansive environment, where farms named range from the Sandveld to the Pakhuis Pass, and from the Doorn River to the Berg River, each farm occupied a unique setting. Detailed observation of the local particularity of landscape is lacking in this account even though the familial networks that linked the farms together are very well traced.

There is, indeed, a lot to applaud Mitchell for in *Belongings* for she has attempted to write a history of the entrenchment of colonialism in the Cape frontier region by emphasizing the growing strength of colonial families within this region. Family strength, in her argument, increased through judicious marriages and family alliances. The early settler families of the Cape's frontier zone tended to favour endogamous marriages where cousin married cousin, or where siblings from one family would marry an equal number of siblings from another family. The end result would be a closely entwined network of familial relationships and obligations which encouraged the circulation of wealth within family structures and preserved and consolidated land holdings, over the generations, in particular families. Over time such strategies led to the accumulation of material possessions that served to differentiate the possessors from less successful accumulators. *Belongings* created a sense of belonging as settler identity in the frontier zone cohered around inclusive or potential membership in families who could demonstrate ownership of, or access to, property. Such families, over time, became increasingly colour conscious.

In elaborating her thesis Mitchell undertook to trace births, deaths and marriages through the lines of descent of some of the most prolific of settler families. The families she chose to focus on were the Van der Merwes, the Burgers, the Lubbes and the Van Wyk/Campfers. Apart from the genealogical research she had to keep a sharp eye on the dispersal of material objects from auctions, following from the declaration of deceased estates, and record the names of the inheritors of her select group of loan farms over the generations. It is in this detailed, meticulous work that Mitchell excels and she succeeds in creating a nuanced account of the power of domestic units in – literally – domesticating the frontier. The role of women in creating these networks of domesticity was absolutely central and Mitchell's originality is to stress how this process was as important – or perhaps even more important – than violence in achieving colonial hegemony in the frontier zone. Likewise, Mitchell's discussion of

the role played by material objects (such as dishes and buttons, houses and wagons) in enhancing or creating identities in a contested region is excellent. She handles her material with humour and sympathy, never straying too far from the sometimes limited evidence at her disposal and yet creating a lively picture of the social life of her settler subjects.

Mitchell is a careful and generous reader of the secondary literature of the eighteenth century South African frontier and her account of the historiographical debates in this field is stimulating and creative. Her book opens with a discussion of frontier historiography and closes with a discussion on how best to bring her narrative to an appropriate, historically satisfying closure. In the process of considering a variety of alternative endings she raises some of the most interesting ideas in her book. They occur, oddly enough, in a section called the appendix, as though the arguments are somehow not central to her concerns or too diverse to be structured or shaped by her central argument. (Thankfully they were not relegated to an inaccessible compartment in e-book cyber space.) Here she toys with ideas that might well have received fuller treatment in her text but which she could not subject to the same sort of scrutiny as vendue rolls, loan farm records and genealogies. The most important issue, to my mind, is what happened to those who were made to feel they did not belong: the Khoisan, 'Bastaard', 'Bastaard-Hottentot' and fugitive slave population of the district? How, when and why were they excluded?

Mitchell does, of course, comment on these people and these processes as she constructs her account of belonging in the central part of the book, but they are peripheral to her main concern – the creation of dominant colonial farm owning families. She acknowledges that ownership of Khoikhoi land and labour were some of the possessions that made colonial rule possible. But she does not really attempt to recreate the lived experience of these belonging-less, marginalized people. Had she done so, she would have had to have gone into the place where they ended up – the mountains. Ironically, the real people of the Cedarberg were not the prosperous farmers of the Olifants River, but the *drosters*, vagrants, wood-cutters and mixed-race squatter-proprietors of the almost inaccessible mountain slope. Mitchell has a tantalizingly brief section on 'Khoisan and Mixed Race Landholders' whose loan farm applications, mostly after 1770, were captured in the eighteenth century Loan Farm Records (45), but she does not attempt to tell their story. Nor does she attempt to describe exactly where these farms were. They were, to put it simply, mostly on the wrong side of the mountain range and remote. In other words, the Cedarberg mountains often divided those who belonged from those who did not. Many white and coloured families were connected through kinship ties. But it was the white farmers who lived in the Olifants River Valley and the non-white farmers who lived in the rain shadow on the other side or tilled the rocky slopes of a handkerchief sized plot of land.

Mitchell could well have spent more attention on exploring the role that Christianity, baptism and church membership played in creating identities in this part of the world. By the end of the eighteenth century there was a Christian revival taking place amongst the 'Bastaards' and Khoisan of the Cedarberg. So intense was this revival that the recently arrived London Missionary Society (LMS) missionaries petitioned the new British government to establish a station in the mountains. When permission was refused the mixed race Christians of the Cedarberg started their own church before scores of them trekked to the LMS mission at the Sak River to hear the word

of God. Finally, only in the 1830s, was the Wupperthal Mission established, but in a position, arguably, guaranteed to continue the geographic marginalization of its adherents. In the quest for belonging how was it that the Koopmans of the Biedouw Valley come to be known as 'Gedoopte Bastaards', and even be entrusted with the raising of their own commando group, and yet remain excluded from mainstream settler society? Clearly, conversion to Christianity was not enough in itself to grant access to the upper echelons of frontier society and the religious culture of the frontier settlers might repay more extensive investigation. It is an intriguing feature of the Cedarberg (as Dawn Nell has shown) that so many mixed-race people managed to maintain access to land here deep into the nineteenth century. But it is worth reminding ourselves that it was marginal land for marginal people. Though the Olifants River Valley may be a good place to observe the colonial domestication of the landscape and the creation of powerful settler families the Cedarberg, in contrast, is not.

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Seventeen years into the democratic dispensation the state is still trying to define the place and role of so-called traditional leaders in South Africa. Indeed it has been an integral part of processes of decolonisation in Africa and elsewhere to attempt to find accommodation between democratic forms of governance with their executives, parliaments and judiciaries, and pre-colonial practices in which social, religious and judicial power was knotted into the figure of the king or chief. In South Africa and elsewhere, this fraught and incomplete accommodation between precolonial modes and those introduced by colonial processes, which were adopted and modified at independence, has often been read as incomplete or failed modernisation in formerly colonised societies.

It is this current negotiation in South Africa of the traditional within the modern as evident, for instance, in the South African constitution that Thomas McClendon seeks to illuminate in *White Chief: Black Lords: Shepstone and the Colonial State in Natal, South Africa – 1845-1878*. McClendon seeks to extend Mahmood Mamdani's theory in *Citizen and Subject* of a system of customary law and indirect rule that was forged by Theophilus Shepstone in Natal and then exported (almost whole) to other British colonies on the African continent. Shepstone's system has also been understood to have provided the blueprint for segregation and apartheid in South Africa. McClendon sees in analyses of indirect rule in Africa a significant gap that is also evident in the work of specialists on Natal – Jeff Guy and Carolyn Hamilton in particular – when it comes to the understanding of the Shepstone system. The system is often characterised in rather simple terms, the power and authority granted to Shepstone in shaping the system being close to absolute.

According to McClendon, this certainty imputed to Shepstone arises from an incomplete consideration of Shepstone's early life on the Cape frontier and the early part of his career in Natal: analyses focus almost exclusively on the later part of his career when the colony of Natal was firmly established and British, and hence Shepstone's authority secure. The book thus seeks to nuance our understanding of the formulation of the system by turning the spotlight on the contingent and improvisational nature of Shepstone's early attempts at establishing his and British colonial authority over the numerous small and dispersed polities in the region between the Kahlamba or Drakensberg in the west and the Indian ocean in the east, and between the Mzinyathi and Thukela rivers in the northeast and the Mzimkhulu river in the south.

It is a short book with a modest task. Over seven chapters McClendon demonstrates how the discourses and practices of the nascent colony, from its very first moments of existence after the annexation of the territory to the Cape Colony in 1842, were deeply bound up with those of the African peoples that were being brought under British authority. He first sketches Shepstone's early life on the Eastern Cape frontier where, as a child of missionaries, he came into contact with African modes of rule. From early in his life, Shepstone inherited belief in, and became committed

to, the civilising mission. His early career as an interpreter in the 1834-5 imperial war against Xhosa polities brought Shepstone into close contact with Colonel Harry Smith. Smith mentored Shepstone in the violent 'civilising' of the natives and in what became a defining characteristic of Shepstone's later career – the dramatic performance of one's authority and superiority. By the time Shepstone was deployed to Natal in 1845, he had had the experience of overseeing the relocation of Mfengu allies of the British to a new reserve in the Peddie district during the 1834-5 war against the Xhosa, remaining in the district until his transfer.

With this consideration of Shepstone's early life McClendon lays the ground for his elucidation of Shepstone's and the fledgling colony's uneasy implication in the discourses and practices that Africans were purportedly being civilised out of. First, in a Natal that was still a marginal appendage of the Cape Colony, Shepstone was involved in an attempt to establish locations into which to herd Africans in order to open up the land for white settlement. At that stage colonial officials were looking to represent inhabitants of colonised territories as 'useful and unthreatening imperial subjects, redeemable through wage labour and Christianity' (32). They cast Africans as savage and themselves as civilised, and were clamouring for methods of rule gradually to bring up the Africans from their debased state towards civilisation. As Diplomatic Agent to the Native Tribes with a reputation for understanding the native mind, Shepstone was influential in the governor of Natal's Locations Commission. The Commission recommended a mode of ruling Africans with a resident agent, an African police force led by a white officer, missions, schools and agricultural education. The recommendations were never fully implemented because of a change of governor.

Shepstone's second move in pursuit of his civilising goals and reform of native administration in the face of an imperial office reticent to spend money was to propose clearing the area between the Thukela and the Mzimkhulu rivers of Africans by removing them to a district between the Mzimkhulu and the Mtamvuna rivers where he would civilise them through schools and an industrial education. He would be a ruler along the lines of an African *inkosi* or lord. At the same time he would open up the whole of Natal to European settlers. McClendon sees Shepstone's manoeuvres as having been motivated by 'a private agenda that balanced a return to the life of the frontier with a large dose of adventure, speculation, and the possibility of becoming a man of substance as well as political power' (40). He hoped to develop copper mining in the territory to be known as KwaSomsewu after his Xhosa nickname. The imperial office stopped the scheme in its tracks, McClendon shown in the second chapter.

The rest of McClendon's book demonstrates how Shepstone's failure to establish direct rule resulted in his reliance on the collaboration of *amakhosi* and customary law in advancing his goals of taxing Africans while avoiding rebellion and 'civilising' Africans by pushing them into wage labour. Shepstone's power was limited. It forced all sorts of improvisation and accommodation. Making a conceptual departure from the notion of indirect rule, McClendon calls the form of rule that developed limited. Yet he seems to forget his own very useful term as the book progresses. I return to McClendon's use of terms shortly. What the rest of the book shows are four catastrophic moments in Shepstone's improvised attempts to rule Africans 'according to their customs'. Shepstone and the colonial state got embroiled in witchcraft disputes that pitted them against an *inkosi* in each case and combinations of various other entities: the church, various settler lobbies, and members or subsections of chiefdoms

that were affected by the administration's actions. In each case the sometimes willful and sometimes inevitable misrecognitions and misreadings of the actions of one side by the other (or others) led to Shepstone's deployment of military forces recruited from collaborating African polities against those who were asserting themselves against the colonial state.

Broadly, the state intervened in several chiefdoms to mediate in the deployment of force against those accused of *ubuthakathi* or witchcraft, *ukudla* or the 'eating up' or confiscation of the property of those found guilty of engaging in attempts to bring harm to an *inkosi* or his family through *ubuthakathi*, and the exercise of an *inkosi*'s authority over subjects. Regarding witchcraft and confiscating property, essentially 'the government attempted to prevent *amakhosi* from inflicting capital punishment or property confiscation on accused *abathakathi* [or witches] while reserving such powers to itself' (61). Conflict arose when Africans, understanding the actions of the government through local modes of the exercise of power, saw, for instance, the state as supporting witchcraft by decreeing that those found guilty of being witches would be removed from the territory of the *inkosi* under whom they lived. Capital punishment would be applied by the state against those who might kill the accused and seize her or his property in line with accepted local norms of dealing with witches. For varying reasons, to do with this wresting of control of the symbols and exercise of authority from local rulers, Fodo on the southern border of Natal fell foul of the government in 1848, Sidoyi also on the southern boundary followed in 1857, as did Matshana of the Sithole in 1858. Progressively, Shepstone's system developed through these conflicts and improvisations. The British legal code with which the state operated had to adapt to local norms. Whether, as McClendon claims, the colonial mission thus became Africanized through these processes (5) is questionable.

McClendon's writing is crisp. He layers and weaves the detail of Shepstone's life and the machinations of the nascent colonial state into a riveting story. The book's even pace and surefooted interlocation with only a small selection of scholars – primarily Mamdani, Hamilton and Guy – make for quick and pleasurable reading. The surefootedness is evident in McClendon's careful working out of the meanings of the terms, most of which he then deploys throughout the book. As signalled above, early on he works through how indirect rule has been understood in the context of Africa and with Shepstone as a foundational figure. He arrives at the term 'limited rule' (7) as a liminal form between direct rule and the kind of indirect rule that was developed over Shepstone's early career. In elucidating local conceptions of power that the colonists encountered, he usefully works through terms like chief and *inkosi*. He argues that the colonial conception of a chief made an absolute ruler of the leader whereas an *inkosi* 'ruled with the advice of male elders and the consent of his or her community, for whose health, welfare, and fertility the *inkosi* was deemed politically and spiritually responsible through his connection to the community's ancestors' (18).

McClendon demonstrates how the colonial misconception of *amakhosi* as chiefs was responsible for Shepstone's most disastrous campaign against Langelibalele of the Hlubi. In the early 1870s when the authority of *amakhosi* and elders was gradually being made more tenuous by the prestige goods and status young men attained on the mines, the state was trying to make Langelibalele compel all firearm owners in his district to get them registered. The resistance of young men to injunctions to have their guns registered as well as Langelibalele's rainmaking activities put him on a collision course with the colonial state. The impasse quickly deteriorated into a brutal

effort to crush Langalibalele and the Hlubi led, like most others before, by John Shepstone, Theophilus's brother. The military destruction was followed by Langalibalele's imprisonment, a show trial in which Langalibalele's guilt was a given even before the proceedings began, and his imprisonment on Robben Island. Bishop John Colenso's campaign for a new trial was the beginning of the end of Shepstone's career as Secretary for Native Affairs. The position was soon unmoored from a single individual and bureaucratised in the form of the Native Affairs Department.

What is otherwise a fine exposition somewhat lets itself down when McClendon loses sight of a term or does not develop points fully enough. While '*inkosi*' carries throughout the book, 'limited rule' quickly falls out of view. It would have been useful for McClendon to carry this term as far as the point at which he understands limited rule to have given way to indirect rule. His use of Zulu-language terms such as *ubuthakathi* (witchcraft) is precise for the most part, but the verb '*lobola*' appears throughout the book in the place of the noun '*lobolo*' in the irksome way that such terms have often been muddled in their loaning into English. Moreover, when he discusses how the curtailing of the powers of *amakhosi* involved their being forced to apply to Shepstone as Secretary for Native Affairs for permission to hold their annual *umkhosi* (first fruits) to reaffirm the reciprocal connection between ruler and ruled, he gives an example of Shepstone's letter granting permission for an *inkosi* to hold the festival. Questions on which he could have shed some light, if of course the archive offered any usable evidence, include: What form did the application take? Were they submitted in writing or in another form? What language were these applications in? An engagement with any evidence on these applications might shed further light on the encounter between local and transplanted discursive modes in the colonial situation.

In the conclusion McClendon makes an astute point: today's African National Congress government is a twenty-first century democratic version of the nineteenth-century civilising mission stripped of racial oppression and obvious force. In a similar manner to Natal, the current state is forced to seek accommodation with traditional authority. To properly be able to think through the present incarnation of the negotiation of these different forms of rule, we need to be aware of precedents in their full complexity. To this end, McClendon's book performs two very important functions: it gives us a carefully worked out understanding of the development of indirect rule and it offers us a case study of the working out of forms of rule in a new political dispensation against which to read the efforts of the last seventeen years.

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When I first heard about the coming of Terence Ranger's much heralded latest book, *Bulawayo Burning*, my Matabeleland birthmark and the Bulawayo sojourner in me were both engulfed with a sense of joy that although the city is currently experiencing saddening de-industrialisation and ostensible decline, a history book from the prolific author will certainly recapture aspects of its fading glories. At the same time, I was filled with a sense of apprehension that the title sounded decidedly ominous. However, having quickly recalled that, after all, in Ndebele popular language Bulawayo is affectionately known as *kontuthu ziyathunqa* (the place of rising smokes), and having closely read the book, that negative feeling completely dissipated mainly because the book is imaginatively built around the 'real historical burnings as well as the imaginative literary ones' (4) to tell a fascinating, half-a-century long history of Bulawayo city. Such an evocative title is also befitting of this book which is deliberately made to be 'like fiction, though without inventing anything' (5) and thoughtfully positioned as a sort of experimental empirical, historical response to the late novelist and Bulawayo citizen, Yvonne Vera's, historical novel *Butterfly Burning*, set in Bulawayo city, and dedicated to him. Using a unique but not entirely novel strategy, Ranger thus neatly organises his book around a range of dramatic scenes, key personalities and urban development that span the period from 1893 to 1960 and moulds them together into a distinct rendering of the colonial history of Bulawayo.

The book opens with a fitting prelude which commences with the colonial conquest of the pre-colonial Ndebele state, of which one of its enduring dramatic developments was the burning of the state's Bulawayo headquarters by King Lobengula who refused to be captured and elected to disappear mysteriously. From there Ranger gives some snapshots of the new, colonial Bulawayo which emerged from the ashes of its pre-colonial predecessor and which was from the onset 'very much a shared creation of whites and blacks' (25), deeply gendered and a melting pot. The main, representative characters encountered in the book are then introduced alongside a preview of the initial envisioning of a modern, colonial city, the contested rudiments of its emerging racial geography and control mechanisms, the initial expressions of white citizens' economic desires, and the Africans' own very early, robust claims to the new cityscape. This necessary scene-setting is extended to the first chapter where Ranger takes us through the emergence in the early twentieth century of conflicting notions and imaginaries of the city's mental and built landscapes in which most of the historical action began to take place as whites sought to assert control and blacks re-invented themselves through protean identities. This part of the book successfully produced a sense of suspense and expectation, with the reader left pondering what would become of the diverging imaginaries between the two races. In view of the emergence of new forms of cultural politics, would there be another African uprising like the one that engulfed the city in 1896? Or would there be a new form of labour militancy orchestrated by emerging organisations such as the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) founded in 1924?

Chapter Two ushers us into the perplexing 1929 African ethnic violence or 'faction fights' which pitted a loose alliance of Ndebele-led residents against the Shona of, mainly, Manyika origin. In this chapter, Ranger rehearses and escalates the epic southern African historical debate between the political economy scholars represented by Charles van Onselen, Ian Phimister and Stephen Thornton and the recently named moral economy school of thought long represented by himself (and William Beinart) and recently joined by Enocent Msindo. In his interpretation of the violence which saw many Shona immigrants losing their belongings through arson and being hounded out of Bulawayo by their irate opponents, Ranger says the incident was an exercise in moral economy: the Ndebele and their allies were irritated by the elegantly modernising Shona of Manyika stock who were increasingly beginning to arrogate to themselves the responsibility of determining the cultural texture of the city, or 'style Bulawayo' as he puts it (101). Marshalling a combined arsenal of old documentary and new oral evidence, Ranger strongly disputes the views espoused by van Onselen *et al* that the violence was a form of class struggle caused by late-1920s economic crisis, increased labour immigration and ethnic competition over jobs.

While his approach certainly brings out relevant perspectives that earlier scholars might have overlooked or misinterpreted, one is not certain whether it was advisable to re-draw the lines between 'political economy' and 'moral economy'. I am saying this because at times Ranger seems to suggest that sentiment, rumours and myth rather than hard economic crisis of the Great Depression era are sufficient explanations for this curiously timed violence. While the violence may not have embodied a classic class struggle, the question that Ranger's interpretation raises is: why did these Manyika seem to be doing so well during an economic crisis that brought many privileged whites to the brink of ruin? Also, taking aim at the overarching idea of political economy seems to suggest, rather misleadingly, that Ranger is trying to distance himself from the political economy context when he, in fact, personally admits in his introduction that political economy questions 'persist' in the book (1). Indeed, these issues occupy Ranger in his third chapter which deals with the policy 'fireworks' as opposed to the 1929 'bonfires of the vanities'. In this chapter, Ranger details the clashes between the Godfrey Huggins-led Southern Rhodesian national government and the Donald Macintyre-marshalled Bulawayo city over appropriate urban African policy. Informed by segregationist and pragmatic ideas, the former wanted Council to accept a permanent African labour force living in townships with facilities funded by local government; while the latter resolutely opposed such policy, preferring that Africans be treated as temporary sojourners.

In typical literary style, the chapter builds up expectation and tactfully ends in suspense with the reader only told about the outcome of the duet between the two political heavyweights after an interlude of two full chapters. It is in chapter 6 that Ranger concludes the Huggins-Macintyre duet by re-enacting the transformation of Bulawayo from being a bastion of conservative Labour Party officials, such as Macintyre who in the 1930s and 1940s gained notoriety for derailing the advancement of African urban life, to a haven of progressive technocrats such as Hugh Ashton, the head of the city's Native Affairs Department who started to make an impact on the city's history in the 1950s. Ashton's enduring legacy was the development of a mixed-model type of African residential housing which included bachelor hostels, lease-hold and site and service schemes that created reasonable conditions for family life. But in telling this story of transformation from a 'conservative' to a 'progressive'

Bulawayo, Ranger does not suggest that it was only an outcome of the changing outlook of the white men involved.

Instead, the two in-between chapters that separate a reactionary and progressive Bulawayo rightfully illustrate that the city was indeed a shared 'creation' between the white and black citizens. In these two chapters the author shows that the African strike action of the late 1940s brought into sharp relief some of the long-felt needs for urban African policy reform. African aspirations and frustrations are both vividly captured in these chapters that illuminate the broader social, cultural and labour issues through the personal biography of the carefully-selected 'Mr Black Bulawayo' – the jack-of-all-trades Siphambaniso Manyoba Khumalo, and the group biographies of African township women. The 1950s witnessed the emergence and increasing dominance of a female urban culture and vibe which were embodied in contemporary press photography, dances and women's associations among other things. These two chapters are the closest to Vera's literary work and are in constant conversation with her through, for instance, the historical construction of an almost larger-than-life character, Manyoba Khumalo who was simultaneously involved in multiple, seemingly incompatible occupations, with incredible success. Only Manyoba Khumalo could be a great sportsman, a detective, a trade unionist, a welfare officer and cultural leader, all at once! Although many of these 'Mr Bulawayos' emerge again in the book's 'transformation' chapter 6, it is mainly here that the author fully demonstrated that while literary writers have the ability of creating such characters, historians certainly do encounter them in records and oral memory.

In the 1950s Bulawayo was transforming not only in terms of its brick and mortar landscape as exemplified by the building of new townships, but also in terms of African political consciousness and culture. The last section of Ranger's book deals with the slow, fractured, but nonetheless palpable metamorphosis of trade union and urban cultural politics into nationalist politics. Building his narrative around leading characters such as the quintessential African pressman, Charlton Ngcebetsha and the 'Father Zimbabwe'-in-waiting, Joshua Nkomo, among others, Ranger shows the indeterminacy of colonial urban life and administrative trajectories. Just when the long-standing calls for better urban housing and a corps of sympathetic officials seemed to be answered, the city continued to throw up new, perplexing challenges to all its citizens. A combination of the rising tide of African political aspirations and surging urban unemployment created a combustible atmosphere that exploded into flames when the African *Zhii* riots of 1960 deteriorated into wanton looting, the destruction and burning of mainly African property by African rioters who were provoked by colonial officials. State security agents concentrated on protecting 'white Bulawayo' and watched while 'black Bulawayo' was burning. Having started with the fires of the 1890s, the book ends with these tragic scenes of violence and property set ablaze.

The book is indeed a welcome addition to the growing corpus of literally-inspired southern African urban histories. Certainly more than just 'mere prose for poetry', as Ranger memorably says in his dedication to Vera, *Bulawayo Burning* vividly captures the aspirations and frustrations that were embodied in a typical colonial city and cultural mosaic like Bulawayo, and which occasionally expressed themselves through both intermittent violence and bursts of progressive, albeit contested cultural and developmental projects. It also corrects previous distortions, including nationalist Edison Zvobgo's revisionist and triumphalist claim that the *Zhii* riots were orches-

trated by the National Democratic Party (NDP). Although Ranger admits that the riots started as a result of the banning of an NDP rally, he thinks that the riots were spontaneous, and suggests that Zvobgo's view that they were orchestrated was meant to discredit Nkomo during the 1980s uncertainties and to elevate the perceived radicalism and organisational abilities of NDP officials, Michael Mawema and Sketchley Samkange.

However, what some readers may find a bit disconcerting about this elegantly written book is that Ranger's befitting narrative style sometimes tended to be too ornate, and perhaps deliberately so. While a book of this nature required a lot of scene-setting and detailed character delineation, at times there was too much minutiae which inevitably led to repetition and unnecessarily slower movement of the story. For instance, in the beginning of page 34 the author says 'The town [Bulawayo] was the stronghold of white trade unionism and the Rhodesian Labour Party because it was the centre of the railway system', and at the end of the same page he repeats that 'Labour was stronger in Bulawayo than anywhere else'. Also, on page 55 the phrase '... wrote Eric Nobbs in the first guide to the Matopos' appears twice. These are, however, minor issues that do not detract from the overall strength of the book.

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South African cinema has experienced a small renaissance since 1994. Or to put it differently, it has been possible to speak of a South African cinema since 1994. Prior to 1994 cinema in South Africa was either white (English- and Afrikaans-language productions) or black (films in African languages), categories defined by the two subsidy schemes the National Party government introduced in 1956 and 1972-3 respectively. This post-1994 renaissance has been evident both in film production and in film scholarship with a flood of six books since 2003 devoted to what is at best an embryonic national cinema. Lucia Saks' *Cinema in a Democratic South Africa: The Race for Representation* is the latest scholarly work on South African film.

Saks' title is clever, but misleading to some degree. She uses 'race' in two distinct ways. In the first instance she uses the word to describe the search and chase for the construction of a 'new' national cinema out of the detritus of a fragmented and racialised past. At this level, the book is a study of how films produced after 1994 have responded to 'the dream of creating a unified nation' (7). However, she also flags the use of the word race to indicate South Africa's apartheid past. Ambiguity and misconception come in at this point. Her second use of the word signals to the reader a scholarly attempt to engage with cinematic representations of race and South Africa's apartheid, racial past. This is, however, not entirely the case. Saks' scholarly engagement with the issue of cinematic race (her second use of the word) comes in the last chapter wherein she examines two key films focused on issues of race and nation from ideologically opposing perspectives.

The greater portion of this book is devoted to race as a chase for a South African cinema. It is in this first use of the word race that Saks' book makes a noteworthy contribution to post-apartheid cinema studies. She has very ably charted, in broad strokes, both state and industry attempts to forge a viable film industry, and examined how this industry has responded to specific key moments and issues in post-1994 South Africa.

Chapter One focuses on state interventions in the film industry. These interventions have taken the form of various policies, white papers, funding strategies and the establishment of organisations such as the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF) as well as Sithengi, largely defunct now for the past few years. Saks locates this state support and intervention within the twin discourses of nation-building and African Renaissance – a recovery and celebration of African civilisational history and culture as well as bringing the continent together in a cinematic culture. However, the chapter fails to examine in any systematic form what she herself calls an 'avalanche of documents, acts, reports, inquiries and the like' (49). It presents a cursory overview of these within the context of post-apartheid South Africa and the economic and developmental imperatives of the ANC government. It then digresses into a generalised discussion of the broader media industry with television, radio and advertising joining the race for representation and the forging of a 'rainbow nation', and seeming to succeed where film does not.

What is clearly evident from this chapter is the extent of continuity between

South Africa's cinematic past and its post-1994 present. This continuity is both in the degree of state intervention and in the envisioning of cinema's role in forging national identities. Pre-1994 South Africa witnessed the introduction of two state subsidies for film production. The 1956 subsidy was deliberately aimed at developing a national cinema (and since only whites constituted the South African 'nation', a 'national' cinema was essentially a white cinema) within the broader context of the National Party's early and tenuous hold on electoral politics. Two key imperatives in the mid-1950s were consolidating Afrikaner nationhood and power and resisting foreign (particularly British) domination. The apartheid state's intervention in film production through the state subsidy was on one level an attempt to use the power of the medium to build a 'nation', particularly an Afrikaner nation. The second subsidy, the B-Scheme subsidy, introduced in 1972-73 was specifically for the production of 'black films' in African languages. The 'black film industry' that emerged from this B-Scheme subsidy was thus a parallel industry to the 'national' film industry which comprised mainly Afrikaans-, but also English-language films.

The post-1994 South African government has continued this dual tradition of state intervention in film production and the envisioning of film's unique role in forging a national identity. The crucial difference is that a post-1994 national identity is inclusive of all South Africans. The implications of state intervention, especially post-1994, for the development, or more crucially the lack thereof, of a national film industry are not given much attention by Saks. Or, to put it differently, continuing state intervention in the film industry is not conceived as a significant factor stunting the development of a South African cinema. State intervention in film production in both pre- and post-1994 South Africa has been fragmented, inconsistent and weighted with ideological expectations, not an ideal environment for a fledgling industry to grow.

Chapter Two examines how the state and private sector have implemented and delivered on the plans outlined in policy documents and reports. Saks' conclusions are that the private sector has been marginally more successful than the state. Private sector initiatives, such as the South African Screenwriters Lab (SCRAWL), M-Net's New Directions, or the Film Resource Unit's distribution and marketing initiatives, have achieved positive results in promoting and building a national cinema. Comparatively, state initiatives, in particular the NFVF, have had limited success.

The chapter then continues to explore various factors that have seriously limited the development of the film industry. Saks quite correctly points out that film production in South Africa is an encompassing category for film, television and advertising. This totalising label comes from the state and is evident in the NFVF Act of 1997 which conflates film and television. Saks argues that this is due to the 'thinness of cinema culture' in South Africa (54). The chapter attempts to engage with some of the historical, structural and economic factors that have contributed not only to this 'thinness', but also to rendering cinema in South Africa an afterthought of the arts. Television, for Saks, is the major culprit for this state of affairs. Despite the fact that television came late to South Africa, in 1975 only, it has successfully encroached on cinema's territory. This encroachment has been both at the level of production and audience numbers. At the same time television has done little to promote cinema. Film distribution in South Africa, and the virtual monopoly Ster Kinekor and Nu Metro enjoy over distribution and exhibition is another factor she identifies as negatively impacting on the development of a film culture. While these are significant in-

hibitors, they are not the only ones, nor, one can argue, are they the most important. The apartheid state's obsession with governing public morality, suppressing any cultural product that even hinted at subversion, and trying to ensure white supremacy has played a much more important role in shaping and stunting a cinema culture. The enforcement of strict censorship laws curtailed not only the kinds of films black audiences were allowed to watch, but also the kinds of films white audiences were permitted. Censorship laws even curtailed the proliferation of private film clubs which attempted to provide an alternative cinema-going experience. A more complex historical analysis is largely missing from this book.

The chapter concludes with brief discussions of a lack of film training and skills among black South Africans, an 'incomplete transformation' as an impediment to more black people acquiring these necessary skills and thus being unable to participate more fully in the industry, attempts to market South African cinema globally and regionally, and finally, a discussion on locating South African cinema within the context of African cinema. There are many interesting and significant points the author raises, but these remain far too succinct and sketchy and this reinforces the impression that this book provides an overview rather than a substantial engagement. The first two chapters focusing on the nuts and bolts of the South African film industry are followed by two more which focus on the industry's response to two significant issues post-1994: the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the HIV/AIDS pandemic respectively. The TRC was an attempt to engage and reconcile with the worst excesses of apartheid brutality. It was also a public and media spectacle and thus made for film. But film and South African film in particular (excluding the documentary tradition) was relatively slow to react. As Saks points out, television, the broadcast and print media got there first and were able to disseminate each day's events as the day concluded. Years later, South African film has still to catch up with the TRC.

The documentary films excepting, fiction films which have focused on the TRC have by and large been foreign productions or co-productions with South Africa a minority partner, raising the question of whether these qualify as South African cinema, the subject matter notwithstanding. This is not an issue Saks engages with. Nor does the author engage with the implication of the large number of foreign and co-productions which occur in South Africa. One crucial implication is that the service sector of the film industry receives an inordinate amount of international attention and finance, thus highlighting a potentially debilitating imbalance in the local industry.

The documentary tradition is arguably stronger than fiction film in South African cinema. This is clearly evident in Chapter Four which deals with cinematic representations of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Here Saks successfully engages with the broader context, the implications of former president Thabo Mbeki's disastrous stance on HIV/AIDS, South African filmmakers' response to the Aids pandemic through film production, and the role of community media in advocacy and activism around the pandemic. The author provides incisive analyses of both individual productions as well as films produced as part of the STEPS for the Future project. Clearly evident in her analyses is her own belief in the potential of film to inspire and empower and thus lead to some degree of transformation and change, as has indeed been the case with HIV/AIDS.

Chapter Five is an interesting exposition of a fledgling counter-cinema tradition

in South Africa. The author situates the artist, William Kentridge's films within the tradition of Third Cinema or Counter-Cinema, an oppositional filmmaking that is conceptually and stylistically revolutionary and subversive of hegemonic narrative and stylistic forms. While South African cinema has not had a strong tradition of oppositional filmmaking, the films that have been identified as oppositional have made a significant, if limited, impact. The limited impact of many of these films has been due largely to limited distribution. Films such as *My Country My Hat* (David Bensusan 1983) or *Jobman* (Darrel Roodt 1990) may not be radically revolutionary in terms of cinematic techniques, but have been serious attempts to subvert and critique aspects of apartheid ideology. Kentridge's films are more fully located within the Counter-Cinema tradition, not only because they are politically engaged but also because of his cinematic techniques.

It is in the last chapter that the author seriously begins to engage with cinema, race and national identity. She has selected two films made 81 years apart, from two very different periods of South African history. What is common about these distinct moments is the focus on nation-building and reconciliation. The South African epic *De Voortrekkers* (Harold Shaw 1916) and *Come See The Bioscope* (Lance Gewer 1997) are two films Saks identifies as exemplars of cinematic representations of national identity and reconciliation. The author's analysis of both films locate the films in their respective contexts of production and examines how these different contexts have impacted on each film's representations of national identity and reconciliation. More pertinent is her cogent argument for the continuity that links both pre- and post-apartheid cinema, as evident in these two films, and not only at the level of state intervention.

This is not an easy book to read. The six chapters are structured as three discrete units of two which disrupts the reading experience. This rupture, however, can be positive in that it demands a more engaged reading, a textual equivalent of Third Cinema, participatory and radical.

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