

Besprekingsartikels

Review Articles

The Life of a Uniformed Technocrat turned Securocrat

Magnus Malan, *My life with the SA Defence Force*

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This work is not a conventional autobiography or memoir. Even after more than 500 pages, General Magnus Malan's private life remains a closed book. His childhood, marriage and fatherhood appear almost incidental to what is essentially the story of a professional career. It reads like an institutional history of the South African Defence Force (SADF), wherein the subject inserts his own life story. As the author himself puts it, "42 years of my life were inextricably entwined with the Defence Force" (p 432). Malan's very identity is bound up in the SADF; it is the SADF that defines who Malan is and gives his life story meaning. This much is implied in the book's Afrikaans title: "*My lewe saam met die SA Weermag*". The English title, however, does not suggest quite the same degree of intimacy. Still, this close association means that Malan embodied the SADF's ethos during the 1970s and 1980s, and that the technocrat turned securocrat left an indelible imprint on the institution.

Malan's writing offers surprisingly little insight into his personality or character. The story is related without emotion and does not allow any human qualities that might endear the subject to his readers to emerge. Malan appears dour and humourless, notwithstanding the smiling profile on the book's dust jacket. There are few clues as to what makes him tick and next to nothing that reveals much about what fuelled his driving ambition. He admits to only one error of judgment which he comes to regret: when he ran away from home at the age of 13 and tried (unsuccessfully) to enlist in the Union Defence Force. With this streak of irresponsibility beaten out of him by his father (p 24), he acquires the necessary self-discipline that allows him to realise his aspiration to become a soldier and, later, to follow in his father's footsteps and become a politician.

The book's 26 chapters follow the standard chronological sequence of life stories from birth to retirement. However, the narrative is interrupted every so often with homilies on military topics and the text is peppered with platitudes. For instance, Chapter 9 is called "Basic requirements for a successful Defence Force" and includes a section subtitled "The Winning Formula". The assumption is that Malan moulded the SADF into a model army that is worthy of emulation. These "lessons" read like a training manual on how to manage armed forces and win wars (as opposed to how to win friends and influence people). The laboured style and pedestrian pace is possibly a product of Malan's authoring documents according to military practice for almost forty years. Thus both structure and style make reading somewhat tedious. I do not believe that it is any better in the original Afrikaans in which Malan wrote. Whereas

nothing is lost in translation, better editing might have eliminated needless repetition. So the reader should not expect a literary masterpiece. The book is by no stretch of the imagination Malan's *magnus opus*, the crowning achievement of a long and distinguished military and political career. Nor is it a *mea culpa*. Whilst Malan feels compelled to devote considerable space to salvaging his own reputation and defending the integrity of the SADF, the book is entirely devoid of self-recrimination or remorse. Indeed, the author seems altogether convinced of his own rectitude.

Malan portrays himself as an exemplary professional soldier who epitomised the honest and hardworking SADF officer corps. He enjoyed a meteoric rise up the ranks of the SADF that has been ascribed by some to P.W. Botha's patronage.¹ He became (by my calculations) chief of the army at the age of 43 and chief of the defence force at 46, the youngest ever SADF leader. With every step up the chain of command, he introduced changes to existing structures and ways of doing things. He also set about modernising the army to meet the needs of autonomy and self-sufficiency, which involved expanding Armscor and applying the latest available technology to arms production. He was undoubtedly a capable administrator and manager. He placed an enormous emphasis on thorough planning and efficient execution of its tasks, but I am not convinced that he was an innovative or original thinker. Nor am I persuaded by David Williams' characterisation of Malan as a "self-conscious military intellectual".² He may well have seen himself as such, but the lack of imagination and intellectual rigour on display in this book suggests a somewhat sterile mind. In fact, many of Malan's ideas were borrowed and adapted to meet the needs of the SADF.³ Nor did Malan enjoy the unqualified respect of those in the know. General George Meiring notes that he did not have an operations background and was never involved as a commander in an actual combat situation.⁴ He attained the highest rank before the Border War began in earnest and never had occasion to lead men in battle. Although it has been dubbed a "corporals' and lieutenant's war" because junior ranks did most of the fighting, generals such as Constand Viljoen, Jannie Geldenhuys, Kat Liebenberg and Meiring himself did have operational experience. Malan, then, seems to have been regarded by some subordinates as a technocrat rather than a tried and tested military leader deserving of the highest office in the SADF.

Malan bore overall responsibility for the SADF's code of conduct during his terms as chief of the army (1973-1976) and then of the defence force (1976-1980). Obviously he was unable to monitor each and every aspect of a growing army that was primarily a citizen force. Accordingly, he emphasised the need for cost-effective utilisation of the military's limited manpower resources, but such directives were not necessarily implemented according to plan and the SADF's wasteful use of part-time soldiers' time and skills was appalling. Permanent force (PF) NCOs who were

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- 1 H Hamann, *Days of the Generals: The untold story of South Africa's apartheid-era military generals* (Zebra Press, Cape Town, 2001), p 53
 - 2 D Williams, *On the Border: The White South African Military Experience 1965-1990* (Tafelberg, Cape Town, 2008), p 20
 - 3 SADF military analysts were equally incapable of developing an original theory for the country's defence. For instance, the notion of "total strategy" which was routinised during Malan's tenure, was lifted from the work of the French military theorist Andre Beaufre. See: J Sanders, *Apartheid's Friends: The Rise and Fall of South Africa's Secret Service* (John Murray, London, 2006), p 146
 - 4 Hamann, *Days of the Generals*, p xiii

responsible for much of the SADF's core business of training conscripts and citizen force members were rarely respected for their professionalism. The motto "train tough to fight easy" touted by Malan meant that discipline became a pretext for *opfok*. It is for good reason that a stereotype of the PF instructor as someone who routinely abused his authority by literally pushing troops to their limit just for the sake of it, has become part of SADF lore.⁵ Whilst troops were expected to obey all – including unreasonable – orders, abuses by sadistic instructors seldom resulted in any disciplinary action against offenders. Some instructors were literally allowed to get away with murder. This was not the only type of abuse in the SADF. Malan makes no mention of the alarming number of attempted suicides and the bizarre pseudo-medical and -psychological experiments to "cure" homosexuality. Neither is there any reference to the extensive recreational use of dagga, as well as the abuse of alcohol and hard drugs by troops. Nor is there acknowledgment that little treatment was provided for soldiers who suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder. All this is not to suggest that many national servicemen (NSM) did not enjoy their experience of the military and the camaraderie that it fostered amongst the men in uniform. On the contrary, published stories, as well as those posted on internet sites, reveal a fair amount of nostalgia for military life amongst the national service generation,⁶ but when Malan fails to acknowledge abuses of the very soldiers whom he claims to have held in the highest regard, the hypocrisy is self-evident. From his position at the top of the military hierarchy, he seems unable to appreciate how the "ordinary" soldier experienced the SADF. Malan clearly chose to record very selective impressions of the SADF's institutional culture that was forged under his leadership.

Malan's discussion of the composition of the SADF is premised on the dubious claim that the SADF took the lead in eliminating racial and gender discrimination (pp 175-177). The SADF's record of fostering gender equality in a rabidly patriarchal environment was not surprisingly dismal. Malan might have bolstered his case for the erosion of racial discrimination by citing official figures that stated that by 1986, Africans, coloureds and Indians made up 12 per cent, 11 per cent and 1 per cent of the total full-time force, respectively.⁷ He maintains that racially integrated units like 32 Battalion in which black and white soldiers fought, ate and slept side by side undermined segregation and promoted goodwill, but he omits to mention that most of the blacks who volunteered to serve in the SADF and its auxiliary forces were induced to do so through a combination of financial incentives and coercion. Malan also fails to note that the SADF did not manage to develop a cohort of black officers during his spell in charge of the army, nor change the perception that it provided sheltered employment for many white Afrikaners. This is not to suggest that Malan necessarily favoured Afrikaans speakers above their English counterparts when it came to promotion. On the contrary, there is evidence to suggest that Malan was respected for his fairness by his colleagues, whatever their home language. However, the prevailing culture of the army, the branch of the SADF to which most of the 500 000 or so white male conscripts called up between 1967 and 1992 were deployed,

5 See stories published in: J Thompson, *An Unpopular War: Voices of South African National Servicemen* (Zebra Press, Cape Town, 2006), and those posted on many SADF veteran's websites

6 G Baines, "Coming to Terms with the Border War in post-Apartheid South Africa", National Arts Festival Winter School Lecture, Rhodes University, 1 July 2008, http://eprints.ru.ac.za/1023/01/Baines_borderwar.pdf

7 South Africa Department of Defence, *White Paper on Defence and Armaments Supply 1986* (Houses of Parliament, Cape Town, 1986), p 17

was predominately Afrikaans Calvinistic. Thus Annette Seegers' statement that the SADF mirrored "minority rule, through both racially exclusive conscription and white Afrikaans speakers' domination of the officer corps"⁸ is fairly accurate. The evidence also belies Malan's assertion that the SADF was at the cutting edge of social transformation in South Africa. In fact, the institutional memory of the old guard SADF arguably still prevails in the South African National Defence Force (SANDF), despite the incorporation of select cadres from the liberation armies into its ranks.⁹

As chief of the SADF, Malan was accountable to the Minister of Defence, but there was a degree of reciprocity in the relationship, because he clearly had Botha's ear. According to Bernard Magubane,¹⁰ Malan provided Botha with reading material about the experiences of revolutionary warfare of the French in Vietnam and Algeria, of the Americans in Vietnam, and of the British in Malaya and Ulster. Malan held that the key lesson to be drawn from these colonial contexts was that the government needed to win the "trust and faith" of the country's black population. He also insisted that the military did not have the means to maintain white power in South Africa. If this was the case and Botha heeded this advice, then both were possibly more flexible and pragmatic than their critics would allow. Both were convinced that state security trumped all other matters of national interest and adopted the "stick and carrot" approach in pursuit of this end. As far as they were concerned, reform and repression went hand in hand. Despite the occasional fallout, Malan was exceptionally loyal to Botha who entrusted him with his military and, later, political responsibilities. Theirs was a symbiotic relationship. There is little doubt that Botha solicited and often heeded the advice of his military clique in many matters while Minister of Defence, and that this trend continued when Botha assumed the office of Prime Minister and then State President. Moreover, Malan was Botha's chosen successor as Minister of Defence when he finally divested himself of the portfolio. Having been a close confidante of Botha, Malan was able to step into his shoes and ensure a high degree of continuity in the policies of the Department of Defence, and his management style was no less combative than his mentor, for like Botha he did not take kindly to being crossed.

Malan's draconian and authoritarian tendencies are especially evident in his handling of opposition to military service. He had nothing but contempt for those who sought to avoid such obligations. Employing objectionable sexist language that was commonplace in the SADF, he called conscientious objectors "mummy's little boys" and approved a smear campaign to discredit the End Conscription Campaign, before finally banning the organisation in 1988.¹¹ These were the actions of an intolerant and *verkrampte* politician who was not prepared to countenance what he regarded as the treacherous and unpatriotic conduct of disloyal young men. In fact, objectors made their stands in the face of enormous social pressure to conform to the hegemonic views on military service in white society. This required moral courage.

8 A Seegers, *The Military in the Making of Modern South Africa* (IB Tauris, London, 1996), p 239

9 This is the finding of much of the demobilisation, demilitarisation and reintegration (DDR) literature on the SANDF. See, for instance: D Everatt (ed), *Only Useful until Democracy? Reintegrating ex-combatants in post-apartheid South Africa (with Lessons from Kosovo and Zimbabwe)* (Atlantic Philanthropies, South Africa, 2007)

10 South African Democracy Education Trust (SADET), *The Road to Democracy II: the 1970s* (Zebra Press, Cape Town, 2006), p 95

11 M Drewett, "The Construction and Subversion of Gender Stereotypes in Popular Cultural Representations of the Border War", in G Baines and P Vale (eds), *Beyond the Border War: New Perspectives on Southern Africa's Late Cold War Conflicts* (Unisa Press, Pretoria, 2008), pp 104-105

Malan denigrates principled opposition to national service by maintaining that “the majority of these servicemen simply had political objections and used religion as a cover” (p 89). Even religious objectors and pacifists were regarded and treated as criminals and the amendments to the Defence Act passed during Malan’s term of office did not allow the courts much room for manoeuvre in terms of defining the grounds upon which objectors might be made exempt from national service. Such a prescriptive approach was completely at odds with Malan’s claim that he wished to accommodate those who preferred to render alternative forms of service.

Malan championed the “need to know” principle as essential to protect the security and interests of the South African state (p 304). To this end, he was not prepared to take the public into his confidence concerning the SADF’s involvement in an undeclared war waged (for the most part) on foreign and/or occupied soil. Even soldiers involved in operations were sometimes kept in the dark about details such as locality, enemy strength, objectives, and more. Likewise SADF spokesmen rarely disclosed the full picture about the number and nature of their casualties.¹² As Minister of Defence, Malan’s parliamentary statements in reply to opposition member’s queries were frequently evasive and partial. Nor was public confidence improved by the handling of secret negotiations (via intermediaries) with Cuba about the release of POWs – an issue to which Malan does not allude. Malan’s communications with the public were poor notwithstanding his claims to the contrary. He also treated the media with suspicion because of its apparent untrustworthiness. He would browbeat and intimidate newspaper editors and journalists into compliance when they were critical of the actions of the military, and tightened media controls (in other words censorship) established during Botha’s tenure. Editors and military correspondents accorded accreditation by the SADF were sometimes given access to privileged information on condition that they did not divulge the same to the public. However, even these embedded journalists were not always taken into his confidence by Malan. All in all, the resort to plausible denial only served to alienate segments of the public that were being asked to sacrifice their sons in a war whose very secretive nature belies its legitimacy. For someone who claims to have been committed to creating good communication channels with “opinion makers” (p 179) and to promoting the public image of the SADF (p 183), Malan was probably his own worst enemy. However, he still seems oblivious to such shortcomings.

Malan was not simply a professional soldier who happened to serve the government of the day. His appointment to political office shows that he was not above, but involved up to his neck in party politics. Rather than accept nomination as cabinet minister, he stood for and was elected as a Nationalist Party (NP) candidate for the Modderfontein constituency on the East Rand (p 247). Thus, his position as Member of Parliament (MP) and Minister of Defence meant that he represented the interests of the white electorate and the ruling NP. Malan portrays himself as a team player who used his cabinet portfolio to implement the directives and pursue policies of the (apartheid) government. For instance, he adopted with alacrity and readily implemented the government’s total (counter-revolutionary) strategy that Williams correctly describes as “a visceral anti-communism dressed up as strategy”.¹³ Malan may have sincerely believed that South Africa’s security was imperilled by a

12 G Baines, “Introduction: Challenging the Boundaries, Breaking the Silences”, in Baines & Vale (eds), *Beyond the Border War*, p 10

13 Williams, *On the Border*, p 20

“revolutionary onslaught”. It was the subject of many of his parliamentary speeches and is a recurrent trope in his reminiscences, but he adopts a somewhat simplistic and contradictory position with respect to the role of the SADF in politics. Malan uses the propagandists’ ploy of reiterating *ad nauseum* the line that the SADF was politically neutral perhaps in the mistaken belief that if repeated often enough it might come to be regarded as true. He insists that the SADF was the guardian of the constitution and not the upholder of apartheid. Is this an extraordinary claim or should we treat it seriously? Here it might be instructive to turn to the extant literature for the sake of perspective.

At the risk of oversimplification – and reifying binaries – there are two schools of thought about the nature of civil-military relations in South Africa during the 1970s and 1980s. On the one hand, we have a coterie of scholars who subscribe to the view that under P.W. Botha, the military captured the reins of power and created a garrison or security state.¹⁴ This amounted to a military coup by stealth, rather than a brazen takeover of the government. The consolidation of the so-called securocrats was affected by the streamlining of the State Security Councils into the fully-fledged National Security Management System (NSMS) that concentrated power in the hands of the Chief Executive and his inner circle, and was exercised by the President’s loyal line managers via regional security councils.¹⁵ These scholars stress the militarisation of white society that was reinforced by agencies such as families, churches and schools and, of course, the SADF itself.¹⁶ They hold that the “revolutionary onslaught” and the threat posed by the Soviet Union to South Africa’s independence were overstated in order to create fear and paranoia amongst white citizens. As a corollary, these like-minded scholars advance the destabilisation thesis, namely that the apartheid state used the security forces to sow a swathe of destruction in neighbouring states in order to create instability and warn off the frontline states from supporting or providing sanctuary to the armed wings of the African National Congress (ANC) and the South West Africa People’s Organisation (SWAPO).¹⁷

On the other hand, conservative think tanks such as the Institute for Strategic Studies (ISS)¹⁸ and right-wing scholars¹⁹ hold that the Soviet threat to South Africa

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- 14 Condemnation of Botha’s military state was virtually universal outside of the country and not confined to left-wing scholars who include: P Frankel, *Pretoria’s Praetorians: Civil-Military Relations in South Africa* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1984); R Leonard, *South Africa at War* (AD Donker, Craighall, 1985); G Cawthra, *Brutal Force: The Apartheid War Machine* (International Defence & Aid Fund for Southern Africa, London, 1986); K Grundy, *The Militarization of South African Politics* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988); R Jaster, *The Defence of White Power: South African Foreign Policy under Pressure* (MacMillan, Basingstoke, 1988)
 - 15 Seegers, *The Military in the Making of Modern South Africa*, p 306, holds that the NSMS was “not the military in disguise”, but there can be no gainsaying the fact that SADF and other security force members held strategically important positions at all its levels
 - 16 J Cock and L Nathan (eds), *War and Society: The Militarisation of South Africa* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1989); J Frederickse, *South Africa: A Different Kind of War* (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1986)
 - 17 J Hanlon, *Beggar Your Neighbours: Apartheid Power in Southern Africa* (Catholic Institute for International Relations, London, 1986); P Johnson and D Martin (eds), *Destructive Engagement: Southern Africa at War* (Zimbabwe Publishing House, Harare, 1986); V Brittain, *Hidden Lives, Hidden deaths: South Africa’s Crippling of a Continent* (Faber & Faber, London, 1988)
 - 18 Scholars at the ISS, affiliated to the University of Pretoria, have included Michael Hough, Deon Fourie, Deon Geldenhuys and Dirk Kunert. Founded in 1974, the ISS has since been scaled down to one full-time researcher

was real, that Cuba was nothing more than a Soviet proxy, and both backed terrorist organisations that sought the overthrow of a legitimate state and duly-elected government. Some consider Botha a genuine reformer who saw the need to convince the white electorate to shift its expectations in accordance with changing political realities and prepare for a democratically-elected (or even a black majority) government. They suggest that the SADF created a climate of security that facilitated the transfer of power by ensuring the necessary stability in the region. Their argument has been appropriated by retired generals – including Malan – who insist that the SADF was non-partisan and was committed to upholding the constitution, rather than a particular political party and its policies. This argument however is easily countered by noting that the SADF – like the SAP and the security forces at large – served as an arm of the apartheid state. Indeed, the SADF did not simply provide the SAP with support in maintaining law and order, but bolstered it in suppressing extra-parliamentary opposition and other forms of resistance. In other words, the SADF was being mobilised to deal with domestic security issues, rather than external threats. As such, the SADF became a repressive instrument of the state defending an unjust system of white power and privilege. Malan provides altogether unsatisfactory justifications for deploying the troops in the townships. It is not merely a blind spot, but a deliberate attempt to obfuscate the issues.

Malan believes that South Africa was not defeated militarily, but what for him was an unacceptable post-apartheid settlement, was the result of political blundering and incompetency by government negotiators. He blames F.W. de Klerk for this, because Botha's successor sidelined those with expertise in security matters. Notwithstanding his sanitised prose, Malan clearly harbours personal resentments against De Klerk. He was clearly chagrined when relieved of the defence portfolio and made Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry in 1991. He reckons that he went along with this demotion primarily to maintain a watching brief on security matters in the new cabinet, as his successor was uninformed. However, it seems that De Klerk's decision in late 1992 to sack 23 high-ranking SADF officers on suspicion of involvement in right-wing intrigue and/or third force activities, particularly riled Malan. He was prepared to vouch for their professional integrity. Consequently, he berates De Klerk for his inability to appreciate or understand the military culture and values to which these officers subscribed (p 355). This he essentialises as the view that the SADF "had been politically neutral, that is to say loyal to the Constitution and the Government of the day rather to a political party" (p 405). Whilst the officers in question might not have been plotting a coup and the SADF did not attempt to derail the transfer of political power to the ANC,²⁰ there is good reason to believe that their loyalty was to the NP for as long as it remained committed to white minority rule. Malan obviously feels himself betrayed by De Klerk, who by his reckoning capitulated when the military had secured victory over South Africa's enemies [sic].

Malan dismisses as demonstrably false the perception that the ANC's armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), had achieved victories over the SADF and that the unwinnable war had forced the South African government to the negotiating table.

19 J M Roherty, *State Security in South Africa: Civil-Military Relations under PW Botha* (M E Sharpe, New York, 1992)

20 Malan himself claims to have been approached by certain business leaders (captains of industry?) to organise a military coup against the GNU, but to have rejected these on principle because the SADF's tradition was loyalty to the government of the day See: Hamann, *Days of the Generals*, pp 212-213

He insists that the SADF had the military situation under control and that the government was not compelled by force of arms to negotiate with the ANC. He cites a declaration of 1997 by the then President Mandela to the effect that "... the military and paramilitary forces of apartheid remained undefeated when power passed to the ANC" (p 357) in support of his view. This is undoubtedly correct, but it is not the full story.²¹ Although "the SADF and MK never clashed operationally in any significant way",²¹ this was partly because MK did not develop the capacity to wage anything but a war of insurgency and chose its battles accordingly. The entire country was declared an "operational area" by the State Security Council in 1985 (p 322) which meant that the full might of the security forces could be mobilised against cadres who infiltrated its borders. Malan obviously does not subscribe to the adage that "one person's terrorist is another's freedom fighter". He expresses his moral repugnance for the ANC's tactical decision taken at the 1985 Kabwe conference to attack "soft" (civilian), as well as "hard" (military) targets. He speaks of "a lowering of the standards of the armed struggle" (p 328), but stops short of condemning it out of hand. Yet, SADF agencies were no less brutal and inclined to engage in egregious violence. For someone who fancied himself as a military commander, Malan's feigned ignorance of the activities of the Civil Cooperation Bureau (CCB), a secret SADF front organisation, has a hollow ring to it. Yet, whilst he is still not prepared to accept responsibility for the actions of the CCB, he is prepared to exonerate its operatives for illegal acts because of the context of the revolutionary climate (p 337). He condones "hit squads" and "dirty tricks" by arguing that the secret services of democratic states also engage in similar covert activities. Although Malan insists that the Military Intelligence Division was not involved in such operations, because it did not have the necessary capacity (p 333), the evidence suggests otherwise.²² Moreover, slush funds also made it possible to outsource clandestine activities. Malan's sanctimonious tone seems to suggest that he believes that he occupies the moral high ground in this particular debate, and it is precisely this self-righteousness that causes him to deny responsibility and culpability for acts that cannot be sanctioned, even during war.

Malan also attempts to justify his approval of Project Coast, South Africa's chemical and biological programme established in 1981 under the leadership of Doctor Wouter Basson. Although he acknowledges that there were no measures in place to ensure how the project's funding was used, nor any controls over its experiments, Malan was prepared to sanction such a project on grounds that Basson was a "reliable man of great integrity" (p 392). He would have us believe his assessment of the maverick scientist nicknamed "Doctor Death" was vindicated by the court judgments that returned a verdict of "not guilty" on charges against Basson related to violent, commercial and drug-related crimes, but even the writer Hilton Hamann who is sympathetic towards the retired SADF generals, admits that Project Coast was used for sinister purposes.²³ Nonetheless, Malan insists that the SADF was an ignorant latecomer to chemical warfare, that it produced protective clothing to counter the use of the same by the country's enemies, that the SADF only developed non-lethal or incapacitating types of weapons, and that he never authorised the offensive application of chemical weapons. He reckons that, by contrast, the track records of the Cubans and Soviet Union show that they were well versed in the use of such weapons. He cites an instance of the use of chemical gas by FAPLA/Cuban

21 W Steenkamp, *Freedom Park: Roots and Solutions* (Just Done Publications, Durban, 2007), p 4

22 Sanders, *Apartheid's Friends*, pp 145-173

23 Hamann, *Days of the Generals*, p 171

troops during the battle of the Lomba River in September 1987, but claims that a change of wind direction rendered it counter-productive (p 269). Radio Luanda accused UNITA of deploying the gas, but Malan dismisses this as propaganda. Interestingly, he notes that the Cubans/FAPLA sterilised areas contaminated by chemical weapons in south-east Angola with napalm and incendiary bombs (p 398). This begs the question of whether the SADF did likewise. Malan makes no mention of the SAAF's use of napalm, but the practice is confirmed by reports of assaults on SWAPO bases in Angola.²⁴ Although not a chemical weapon, the use of napalm does reveal the SADF's propensity for unleashing a trail of devastation in neighbouring states. Malan notes that the SADF was successful in waging a war that left no ruins on South African soil (p 12). This statement, of course, overlooks the enormous human damage caused by the conflict, including its toll of those caught in the crossfire. It is not acceptable to dismiss such casualties of war by the euphemism "collateral damage", for the region and its peoples were purposefully subjected to destabilisation by the SADF, which has left a legacy of physical destruction, social dislocation and psychological trauma.

Malan has an enormous stake in the myth of the SADF's invincibility; that it was the most effective and efficient fighting force on the African continent capable of defeating whatever forces FAPLA/Cuba and their Soviet advisors deployed against it.²⁵ For most commentators, the reputation of the SADF rests upon how the outcome of the crucial battles of Cuito Cuanavale is to be determined. The SADF's version is that it won a tactical victory and withdrew from Angola and Namibia on its own terms. This version was put forward by the then chief of the army, General Jannie Geldenhuys,²⁶ and is reiterated by Malan in a chapter headed "The greatest battlefield victory of the SA Defence Force". The three phases of the operation which went by the codenames Modular, Hooper and Packer, was a protracted affair that vacillated between intense large-scale conventional engagements and standoffs that lasted from September 1987 to July 1988. Malan describes the entire campaign as an unqualified success, but more nuanced accounts by Edgar Dosman and Piero Gleijeses (both of whom had access to Cuban archives) reveal that the fortunes and objectives of the warring parties changed frequently.²⁷ The South Africans certainly won a victory against enormous odds at the Lomba River, where the MPLA advance on UNITA's headquarters was stopped in its tracks, but the repulse of its subsequent frontal assaults on well-fortified positions in the Tumpo triangle proved a decisive setback in the SADF's bid to capture Cuito Cuanavale. Malan reiterates previous denials that it was never the SADF's intention to occupy Cuito, but this is

24 See, for instance, Department of Defence Documentation Centre, Minister of Defence archive, MV 77/1, Box 143, Operasies in SWA Volume 9, OPS/309/4 REKSTOK/SAFFRAAN, Special Sitrep, HSAW 3 to PM & MOD, 4 September 1979

25 This viewpoint has been perpetuated by the writings particular journalists and SADF reservists. See: W Steenkamp, *South Africa's Border War 1966-1989* (Ashanti, Gibraltar, 1989); H Römer, *South Africa's Armed Forces* (Ashanti, Gibraltar, 1988); H Römer, *War in Angola: The Final South African Phase* (Ashanti, Gibraltar, 1990)

26 J Geldenhuys, *Dié wat wen: 'n General se storie uit n era van oorlog en vrede* (JL van Schaik, Pretoria, 1993). The book has been published in English as *A General's Story* (Jonathan Ball, Johannesburg, 1995)

27 E Dosman, "Countdown to Cuito Cuanavale: Cuba's Angolan Campaign", in Baines & Vale, *Beyond the Border War*, pp 207-228; P Gleijeses, "Moscow's Proxy? Cuba and Africa 1975-1988", *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 8, 2, Spring 2006, pp 3-51; P Gleijeses, "Cuba and the Independence of Namibia", *Cold War History*, 7, 2, May 2007, pp 285-303

pure spin.²⁸ The loss of the SAAF's air superiority which Malan does admit to (p 273), meant that the ground forces had to withdraw or possibly have their escape routes cut off and face the likelihood of sustaining losses that would have been politically disastrous. Meanwhile, Cuban forces outflanked the SADF and advanced on the Namibian border while its Mig fighter planes bombed the Calueque dam, killing 10 NSM. Malan holds that the SADF then counter-attacked and inflicted heavy casualties on the Cuban/MPLA forces, but his claim that the Cubans suffered a broken back (p 291) is questionable. Nor can it be said that the battle ended in a stalemate, because the overall situation in southern Angola was suddenly far more fluid and gave the Cuban/MPLA forces the edge. It was the SADF whose teeth had been broken.²⁹ For the first time ever the Cubans threatened the Namibian border and the SADF appeared vulnerable. The announcement by Geldenhuys of a massive call-up in mid-1988 attests to this. It was the South Africans who sued for peace and brokered the negotiations that culminated in their withdrawal from Namibia and of Cuban forces from Angola.

Malan reproduces figures from Geldenhuys' account that tabulates the losses in material sustained by the SADF/SWATF/UNITA and Soviet/Cubans/FAPLA forces, respectively. These figures would appear to confirm a South African victory. However, the outcome of a battle cannot be measured by such ratios or head counts. Moreover, the casualty figures cited by Malan fail to mention the UNITA losses. UNITA and other black soldiers fighting in irregular units ensured that the casualties sustained by regular SADF units, particularly amongst white conscripts, were kept to a minimum. If we wish to gauge the result of Cuito Cuanavale, we should pay heed to Clausewitz's *dictum* that "war is an extension of politics by other means". In other words, war is a second-order instrument of politics. The SADF subscribed to the formula (attributed to one of its strategic thinkers Lieutenant-General "Pop" Fraser, although it clearly became Malan's mantra) that the war was 80 per cent political and 20 per cent military.³⁰ This formula recognised that victory could not be won on the battlefield alone, but could only be assured by defeating the enemy by means of diplomacy, propaganda and psychological warfare. The SADF and its proxies might have won many battles, but did not win the war, because the government surrendered white power and privilege when it negotiated the demise of apartheid and minority rule in South Africa and Namibia. The SADF's claims of victory (or even "peace with honour") in Angola/Namibia would be analogous to insisting that the US won the Vietnam War, or that Rhodesia won its "bush" war. This is patent nonsense because the US withdrew from south-east Asia and the Smith regime conceded a transfer of power to ZANU-PF.

28 R. Kasrils, "Historic Turning Point at Cuito Cuanavale", Address to Public Forum "Commemorating the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale", Rhodes University, Grahamstown, 28 May 2008

29 This description borrows from Castro's metaphor. See Dosman, "Countdown to Cuito Cuanavale", pp 219, 223. The boxing analogy suggests that the Cubans parried the SADF at Cuito with a left jab and then countered with a right thrust towards the Namibian border. Ironically, such a strategy amounts to a variation on a theme of Soviet conventional battle tactics of which Castro was highly critical.

30 Brigadier (later Lieutenant-General) C. A. Fraser was the author of the document *Lessons Learnt from Past Revolutionary Wars* that became staple reading for a generation of graduates at the Saldanha Military Academy. This was translated and revised as *Revolusionêre oorlogvoering: Grondbeginsels van opstandsbekamping* (SA Weermag, Pretoria, 1958), and used as a textbook for courses on the subject of counter-insurgency tactical thinking.

In his account of “the war for Africa”,³¹ Malan notes the appointment of a Soviet general named Constantin Shagonovich to command the combined Soviet/Cuban/FAPLA forces in December 1985. In keeping with previous accounts of the Angolan War, Shagonovich is identified as “an expert in counter-insurgency” and a “specialist in chemical warfare”.³² However, Vladimir Shubin of the Institute for African Studies at Moscow’s Academy of Sciences reckons that these writers have it wrong. He holds that the confusion arises from the fact that the position of Chief Military Advisor to Angola’s Minister of Defence between 1978 and 1980 was held Lieutenant-General Vassily Shakhnovich, and that one of his successors was known as “General Konstantin”, although his family name was actually Kurochkin and not Shagonovich. So Shakhnovich and Kurochkin have morphed into the imaginary Konstantin Shagonovich. The real Shagonovich only arrived in Angola after the offensive against Mavinga and Jamba had been beaten back by the SADF and its allies on the Lomba River. This Shagonovich was not a “chemical warfare expert” (as Malan holds), because prior to being stationed in Angola, he was the Deputy Commander of the Soviet Airborne Troops.³³ The error by the SADF in identifying the Soviet commander and his skills, was presumably due to flawed intelligence. This is somewhat ironic when it is remembered that Malan enjoined his men to “know your enemy”. The same inadequate intelligence was apparent when the SADF generals directing operations in Angola in 1987/1988 admitted that they regarded Fidel Castro as an unknown quantity after he effectively took charge of the Cuban forces from his war room and they were unable to predict his moves on the battlefield.

In spite of the setbacks in southern Angola, Malan and his generals took some comfort from making exaggerated connections between the course of events in southern Africa and those that played out on the global stage. Malan even goes so far as to claim that the losses inflicted on the Soviet Union in Angola following on the heels of Afghanistan caused the superpower to overreach itself. Accordingly, the SADF made a significant contribution to ending the Cold War (p 435). This claim follows the line of reasoning that holds that the Reagan administration made the cost of competing with the US’ military and nuclear programmes prohibitively expensive. It assumes that the Soviet Union’s support for the MPLA and Cuban adventurism – as opposed to internationalism – was a significant drain on its resources. This argument has not convinced Russian scholars who can claim some “inside” knowledge of the workings of the Soviet state and its military aims and capacity, nor has it been entertained by US “Sovietologists” who have analysed the causes of the end of the Cold War. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union and Communist bloc took *all* commentators by surprise. It would be according SADF generals far too much prescience to suggest that they were able to predict the demise of communism and thus decided to change tack from waging war against SWAPO and later the ANC (and their respective allies) to facilitating the transfer of political

31 F Bridgland, *The War for Africa: Twelve Months that Transformed a Continent* (Ashanti, Gibraltar, 1990)

32 See, for instance: W Steenkamp, *South Africa’s Border War 1966-1989* (Ashanti, Gibraltar, 1989), pp 148-150; F Bridgland, *The War for Africa: Twelve Months that Transformed a Continent* (Ashanti, Gibraltar, 1990), p 62; S Ellis and T Sechaba, *Comrades against Apartheid: the ANC and the South African Communist Party in Exile* (James Currey, London, 1992), p 183

33 V Shubin, “Historiography of the liberation struggle: conflicting views” Paper presented at the Workshop on Liberation Struggles in Southern Africa, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, September 2008

power. The timing of this breakthrough was clearly coincidental and fortuitous, rather than predictable, and all parties seized the moment. This serves to underscore the irony inherent in Malan's claim that the SADF made possible the peaceful transition to democracy (p 426).

It is apparent from his writings that Malan's retirement has not been easy for him. Especially trying have been the legal trials and quasi-legal proceedings of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission (TRC). He voluntarily testified before the TRC in May and October 1997 on behalf of the SADF, because he reckoned that his testimony would frame that of subordinates who might follow him and place such evidence in the "correct" context. He was also involved in making written submissions to the body. He insists that the TRC was intent on finding evidence to incriminate him and his SADF colleagues for atrocities and war crimes. He subsequently faced murder charges that stemmed from Operation Marion, specifically for the attack by SADF-trained IFP assassins on ANC supporters in KwaMakutha in 1985. Malan protested his ignorance and felt vindicated by the verdict of the KwaZulu-Natal Supreme Court that acquitted him and 19 other SADF generals of the charges. His subsequent "retrial" before the TRC on the same matter in December 1997 seemed to confirm his suspicion that the TRC had made up its (collective) mind about his guilt and was intent on asserting that, irrespective of the findings of the court. Malan attributes TRC bias to its councillors' preconceived view that the SADF – and not the ANC – were the transgressors in the conflict and the chief perpetrators of human rights abuses (p 417).

The number of TRC amnesty applications might, at first sight, suggest otherwise, as they were primarily from the ranks of the liberation armies or non-statutory forces. "Of the 256 members of the apartheid era security forces that applied for amnesty ... only 31 had served in the SADF. In contrast, there were close to 1 000 applications for amnesty from members of the various armed structures aligned to the ANC".³⁴ Malan offers the following reasons for so few SADF amnesty applications to the TRC:

- it had no jurisdiction to grant indemnity for alleged human rights abuses committed outside of the country which was primarily the SADF's field of operation;
- it took no cognisance of the fact that SADF members were appraised of the fact that carrying out legitimate orders was not a violation of human rights and that SADF chiefs accepted responsibility for these actions;
- it was biased and hostile towards SADF members; and
- it was not prepared to accept that SADF discipline was exemplary and that members committed only a handful of "irregularities" (p 424).

These reasons require some elaboration and qualification. There was actually a highly successful campaign led by General Dirk Marais, former Deputy Chief of the Army, and endorsed by Malan, to dissuade those who had served in the SADF from approaching the TRC for amnesty. A clique of retired officers formed a Contact Bureau that effectively served as a gatekeeper of SADF submissions to the TRC. This

34 D Foster, P Haupt and M de Beer, *The Theatre of Violence: Narratives of Protagonists in the South African Conflict* (Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, Cape Town, 2005), pp 15-16

ensured that full disclosures were not made and that admissions of culpability were not readily forthcoming. Conscripts who made such admissions were summarily dismissed as sympathy seekers or outright liars by the SADF generals and their apologists.³⁵ Malan implies that the ANC/SACP alliance's attempts to discredit the SADF created a political climate that instilled guilt in former soldiers on account of the role that they played in securing a legitimate state and protecting its citizens, but it is debatable how much guilt or remorse was felt by such soldiers – both in the ranks and amongst the officer class. If the unwillingness to testify or apply for amnesty is anything to go by, there has been little compunction to come forward and confess war crimes or human rights abuses, and amongst those who have, it is arguable that any sense of guilt was derived from searching their own consciences, rather than capitulating to the pressure of political correctness.

So is Malan's memoir an exercise in self deceit, or does the author sincerely believe his version of events? There can be little doubt that Malan is unable to bring himself to accept the cause or system he defended as anything but legitimate. It is quite understandable that he should cling to a belief in what he fought for, otherwise his lifelong purpose is negated, his *raison d'être* is no more. After all, Malan has a vested interest in preserving a version of the past that holds that apartheid was not a crime against humanity and that the SADF served to protect all of South Africa's citizens. This obviously flies in the face of the ANC's own triumphalist master narrative of the justness of the liberation struggle. In other words, Malan is still fighting a rearguard action against what he views as the winner's take on the past. He holds that: "The war may have ended but the political struggle continues" (p 431). He invokes – with a hint of irony – the slogan of the liberation movements in the former Portuguese colonies: "*a luta continua*!" For Malan the struggle continues to preserve his self-image intact. For the rest of the South African public, it continues in the sense of their having to engage with the politics of identity and memory.

This contestation over the meaning of the past is evident not only in the discourses of political commentators, scholars, and media analysts, but in the language and actions of ordinary citizens. For instance, it was apparent that the controversy occasioned by AfriForum's challenge to the decision of the Freedom Park Trust to omit the names of SADF soldiers from the wall of names raised issues concerned with who gets to define the nation in the making.³⁶ And if SADF veterans are persuaded by Malan's version of events, then unreconstructed views might receive a fillip amongst sectors of the white community. In fact, some of Malan's arguments are already being appropriated and disseminated via the media. The *Grensoorlog* series being screened by Kyknet provides something of an outlet for certain former SADF officers and soldiers to put their case. Privately-made and distributed films such as *Soldiers' Friend* celebrate the achievements of certain units in the Border War – especially the special forces and parabats – and propagate racism, and the disembodied voices of the SADF veterans that find expression in blogs on numerous websites frequently articulate some very conservative viewpoints. I am not suggesting

35 For instance the testimony of conscript Kevin Hall was carefully scrutinised and rebutted by the Contact Bureau's commentary on the TRC Report. This has been reproduced as Appendix A of Malan's text, pp 463-465, and in Hamann, *Days of the Generals*, pp 221-223

36 G Baines, "Site of Struggle: The Freedom Park Fracas and the Divisive legacy of South Africa's Border War/Liberation Struggle" Paper presented at the Workshop on Liberation Struggles in Southern Africa, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, September 2008

for a moment that such voices should be silenced or that they have no place in the marketplace of ideas, but I am concerned that opinions represented in Malan's book will resonate with those who wish to condone the apartheid regime and the illegal actions of its security forces, for Malan's views exemplify those of a significant segment of white South African society. It is precisely for this reason that they should not be summarily dismissed, but be subjected to close scrutiny and countered by the exposition of contrary perspectives – as I have attempted with this review.

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Speaking of Spirits

David J. Lewis-Williams and David G. Pearce, *San Spirituality: Roots, Expressions and Social Consequences*

Juta & Co, Cape Town, 2004

267 pp

ISBN 1919930655

R220.00

Sarah C. Brett-Smith, *The Making of Bamana Sculpture: Creativity and Gender*

Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994

376 pp

ISBN 0521444845

R700.00 to R2 500.00

Within the almost infinite range of practices and beliefs that are available for cultural and historical analysis, those related to the “other world” remain the most elusive of all. Not that it has discouraged researchers from trying every possible theoretical angle, from Cultural History to post-postmodernism and from the most detached objectivism to total subjective submersion. In this review essay, I will compare two very similar, but also divergent attempts at capturing the essence of indigenous, African spiritual experience. The analysis of the authors of *San Spirituality* and *The Making of Bamana Sculpture* centres on the social category of the “artist-shaman”, from a perspective which they themselves label “interpretive”. Both texts provide great teaching material for a variety of classroom applications: material culture studies, sociology of knowledge, comparative religion, gender studies, heritage studies, the fieldwork paradigm, contemporary debates and more.

Two journeys to the other world

In the early eighties, Lewis-Williams and co-workers at the Rock Art Research Institute (University of the Witwatersrand) initiated an entirely novel understanding of Bushman/San visual art, based on the analysis of archival linguistic material, San ethno-history and ethnography, and studies of altered states of consciousness. They suggested that rock art was essentially shamanic and that many, if not most paintings, depicted the healers’ journey into the other world. Their interpretive window on visual art, at the time of its inception in the late 1970s, was considered radical for two reasons: in terms of the academic field of rock art studies it offered an exciting new beginning; in addition, it contributed to the wider cultural struggle against colonial ideology in Southern Africa. Lewis-Williams opposed the kind of prejudice that is aptly expressed by the nineteenth-century historian, George McCall Theal, who suggested that the San “were incapable of improvement, and as it was impossible for civilised men to live on the same soil with them, it was for the world’s good that they should make room for a higher race”.¹ Members of the Rock Art Research Institute earnestly confronted prejudice in academic and popular discourse by means of a perspective that celebrated hunter-gatherer expressive culture as one of the “great achievements of humankind ... an art of striking complexity, both intellectual and

1 J D Lewis-Williams and T Dowson, *Images of Power: Understanding Bushman Rock Art* (Southern Books, Johannesburg, 1989), p 4

aesthetic".² The Institute's activities over the past three decades have culminated in dozens of contributions, journal articles and a host of excellent monographs.

Each decade, I would like to suggest, roughly, coincides with a different phase in the development of the shamanic paradigm. The eighties was really a period of discovering and defining the shamanic hypothesis and of consolidating and refining the basic principles of analysis. This era was concluded with the publication of *Images of Power*: a comprehensive study, both in terms of a discussion of theoretical aims and of praxis. The iconographic analysis is almost encyclopaedic and covers an impressive spectre of images meticulously traced by team members in rock shelters nationwide. By the time *Images of Power* was published, the new school of thought had been established firmly. During the next decade, the paradigm was explored and expressed further by means of concrete data furnished by sites from all over the subcontinent. The institute secured international fame. Shamanic art became synonymous with rock art, and the interpretive paradigm tantamount to rock art studies. The publication of *The Mind in the Cave*³ introduced a third phase of the development of the paradigm, characterized by a search for new ground. By the end of the 1990s, the proponents of the shamanic hypothesis not only felt comfortable to expand their search for the traces of San spirituality outside the realm of visual art, they also turned their attention to the archaeology of the Old World. They easily found evidence for shamanic art in the major Palaeolithic rock art sites and successfully revolutionised age-old, well-established interpretations in Euro-Asian prehistory. In a sequel to *The Mind in the Cave*, entitled *Inside the Neolithic Mind*,⁴ the interpretive paradigm claimed a host of famous sites and artefacts of the Neolithic period.

San Spirituality, which was published in-between, is, to a certain extent, a re-edition of *Images of Power*. It is a basic textbook, presenting the shamanic hypothesis and its theoretical concepts, against the general background of San religion and ethno-history (Chapters 4, 10 and 11). Needless to say, the book has gained conceptually in depth and detail, when compared to its predecessor. In addition to familiar views, *San Spirituality* also includes novel applications of the paradigm, illustrating its expansion into new intellectual territories. This is evidenced by the inclusion of a wider discussion on San initiation rites (pp 154, 160-164); mythology (pp 52-53, 109, 164 and onwards) and *art mobilier* from a variety of sites, including the very recent engraved ochre pieces of the Blombos Cave. The first three chapters are the most innovative ones. Chapter 1 ("Mind, Stone, Spirit"), aims at resolving the so-called Howieson Poort anomaly. We find the authors concerned with Stone Age typology and technology, more specifically, with the mysterious appearance of modern types of artefacts in earlier, older levels of archaeological stratigraphy and chronology. The Howieson Poort site also produced artefacts in unusual materials like silcrete, translucent quartz, chalcedony, chert and hornfels. Stone tools found below and above the anomalous level, are most commonly made of quartzite. The authors, in their analysis, highlight the fact that the "new" materials glitter. With the help of "shiny stones" found in other places of the globe, the mysterious artefacts are subsequently explained as belonging to the shaman's out-of-body-journey toolkit.

2 Lewis-Williams & Dowson, *Images of Power*, Preface

3 J D Lewis-Williams, *The Mind in the Cave: Consciousness and the Origins of Art* (Thames and Hudson, London, 2002)

4 J D Lewis-Williams and D G Pearce, *Inside the Neolithic Mind: Consciousness, Cosmos, and the realm of the Gods* (Thames and Hudson, London, 2005)

Chapter 2 explores ideas on human consciousness and the evolution of cognition in the human species (which form the major focus of *The Mind in the Cave*) further. Chapter 3, “Cosmology, Graves and Transition”, investigates the links between San funerary rites and the shaman’s other worldly travels. The relationship, it is suggested, is simple: “the grave-hole was both the physical mechanism for placing the body underground and a symbolic entrance to the subterranean spirit realm” (p 59). The remaining chapters echo the same issues and concepts covered in *Images of Power*, be it in a more detailed and convincing way.

At the time when Lewis-Williams discovered the spiritual nature of San rock painting, Brett-Smith was involved in a similar project in Mali. During her fieldwork on the subject of sacred wood sculpture, Sarah Brett-Smith came across a genderised universe, similar to the one identified by Herbert in *Iron, Gender and Power*.⁵ Metallurgy, it was suggested by Herbert, can be (re-)defined in terms of its cosmological grounding, as a technology of transformation and as a power field by means of which humans attempt to control the social and natural worlds. Iron working is explained in terms of a “procreative paradigm”, as the ritual appropriation and replication of female powers of fertility. Brett-Smith defined wood carving from a similar perspective, only her approach was perhaps more militant and definitely less historical. Furthermore, the author of *The Making of Bamana Sculpture*, in terms of methodology, followed in the footsteps of McNaughton, who subjectively explored the universe of the Mande blacksmiths⁶ through an apprenticeship with a master. In doing so, they both managed to partially lift the veil of secrecy and mystery surrounding the profession of the blacksmith-carver. Brett-Smith introduced herself and her field-assistant to selected masters as students in need of instruction (pp 2, 8). However, whilst McNaughton admits to have learned only “what any beginning Mande apprentice might learn: the Mande principles of secrecy but not the secrets” (p xvi), Brett-Smith claimed to have elicited not just secrets, but the secret of secrets: namely, a feminised realm of production of ritual sculpture (p xix).

Spiritualising San painting

Lewis-Williams was not the first researcher to apply San religious concepts and beliefs to the analysis of rock art. In 1873 Joseph Millard Orpen, a magistrate in the Cape Colony, copied a number of paintings during a military expedition against a defiant indigenous ruler. Orpen obtained commentaries on the images from Qing, a young /Xam guide he had befriended during the campaign. A year later, the German linguist Wilhelm Bleek facilitated the publication of Orpen’s pioneering interpretive exercise. Bleek defined the spiritual nature of the paintings as creativity of “a higher character ... a truly artistic conception of the ideas which most deeply moved the Bushman mind, and filled it with religious feelings”.⁷ In doing so, Bleek provided the foundation for the decoding of San visual art. Together with his sister-in-law, he produced 12 000 pages on San language and culture. The manuscripts, recorded in the 1870s and housed in the Jagger Library of the University of Cape Town, contain fastidious interviews with /Xam convicts who lived with the Bleeks in Mowbray, Cape Town. When Lewis-Williams consulted the Bleek Archives

5 E W Herbert, *Iron, Gender and Power: Rituals of Transformation in African Societies* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1993)

6 P. McNaughton, *The Mande Blacksmiths: Knowledge, Power and Art in West Africa* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1988)

7 Lewis-Williams & Dowson, *Images of Power*, p 29

in the early 1970s, he decided to take up an intellectual endeavour initiated a century earlier. The timing was perfect. In the 1960s, rock art researchers in South Africa modelled themselves on the empiricist aspirations of prehistoric studies worldwide and in doing so aligned themselves with a new global academic fashion: the Science of the Artefact. By the mid-1970s, this paradigm had regressed into a dry and dull enterprise, often descriptive and statistical in nature. The scene was ripe for an alternative.

Lewis-Williams provided just that. He identified the trance dance, a shamanic healing ritual, as the single most important event in the religious practices of the San, and subsequently investigated its relevance to the study of their visual art. Healing rituals, he discovered, involved a musical performance in which all members of the group participated. Women sat around a central fire, surrounded by a circle of dancing men. The rhythmic clapping of hands and singing of women, combined with the sounds of dancing rattles and thudding steps of men, allowed the shamans to undertake an out-of-body journey into the dreaded world of spirits, where they replenished their healing powers. On their return, the potency was reactivated to fight illness and misfortune (pp 81-91).⁸

Other aspects of trance experience depicted in the rock paintings, could be identified and interpreted further with the help of a second data source: neuropsychological research. Indeed, studies of altered states of consciousness proved extremely useful in explaining two of the most common of images in San rock art: those enigmatic half beast-half men and the abstract or geometrical shapes (pp 166-175). The former, it was suggested, depicted “shapeshifting” – the metamorphosis of shamans on their journey to the spirit world. The geometric shapes, on the other hand, were accounted for as so-called entoptic designs – the images created inside the brain during the initial stage of hallucinating. All sorts of data relating to the somatic experience of trance – such as shivering, back and stomach aches, the sensation of flight, buzzing sounds and flickering vision – were used by members of the institute to explain those details of the images that went previously unnoticed or had remained unexplored. These include dots, flecks, lines, elongated or supine bodies, winged humans and many more (pp 32-33, 124-133). By the late 1980s, the Witwatersrand rock art team proposed a whole new conception of rock shelters as storehouses of potency that enabled contact with the spiritual realm, healing, rain making and animal control (pp 179-181).⁹

Feminising Bamana carving

Brett-Smith, on the other hand, derived inspiration from her own doctoral work on the symbolic meanings of geometric designs on girls’ circumcision clothing. The author of *The Making of Bamana Sculpture* set out for Mali in 1983 with a clear agenda in mind, namely to look for some symbolic connection between male sacred objects and female procreativity (p 48). Iron and wooden sculpture amongst the Bamana, she established, was created by blacksmith-sculptors (*numuw*), one of several endogamous artisan groups. Not every blacksmith created ritual sculpture. For those who desired to join the limited fraternity, a mere technological apprenticeship was not sufficient. Selected novices had to link up with a master and receive specialised training. They needed to learn the workings of *nyama*, how to protect themselves

8 See also: Lewis-Williams & Dowson, *Images of Power*, pp 30ff

9 See also: Lewis-Williams & Dowson, *Images of Power*, p 36

from it and how to harness it for the benefit of fellow humans. *Nyama*, she was told, was the potency or mysterious physical and spiritual energy that dominated life (p 52). Blacksmith-sculptors, like other “casted people”, were known as *nyamakalaw*: the handles-of-*nyama*, “human instruments for mastering this unpredictable energy” (p 38). More importantly, she established that the ritual carver had to enter into a spiritual contract (*sarati*) with a personal djinn, one of the capricious, unpredictable and often malevolent spirits from the forest. In return for the status and fame of master carver, she was told towards the end of her research, a djinn expected her partner to gradually abandon his masculinity, even sacrifice one of his beloved ones. Such was the price to be paid for receiving the best commissions, acquiring fame, attaining the highest levels of inspiration and infusing supernatural strength into carvings (pp 68-71, 112). The “feminisation” of the artist through *sarati* constitutes the central theme in Brett-Smith’s project. Within the narrative of *The Making of Bamana Sculpture*, the artist’s association with the Dark Side mediates the conclusion in the final chapter, namely that “The Foundation of the World is with Women” (the title of Chapter 7).

In the final analysis, I would say, the feminisation hypothesis rests on two conceptual equations by means of which the process of carving is compared to sexual intercourse and childbirth. Intercourse and childbirth are the crucial paradigms, the author suggests, that facilitate the understanding of the true nature of male creativity (p 235). The equations emerged from the analysis of interview data and are evidenced by strikingly similar ritual interdictions characteristic for the realms of both human and artistic creativity (pp 203, 229).

First equation: Carving = Intercourse. In carving, it is suggested, the artist appears to be performing an act that is comparable to having sex (p 204). Both sex and carving are enveloped in an aura of secrecy, privacy and respect, which are manifested in learned behaviours of avoidance, personal discretion and correct euphemistic speech (p 206). Sex and carving alike are perceived by the Bamana as *baara*, important, sacred and highly ritualised forms of work. As such they demand isolation and involve danger (p 207). They are also known as *gundow* (secrets).

Avoidance, silence and secrecy also characterise the second equation: Carving = Childbirth (p 224). Taboos relating to control over bodily functions (breathing, speaking, seeing, drinking, eating, urinating) dominate both types of creation. Transgression of these taboos by pregnant women and ritual carvers are believed to result in failure of the creative process (p 217). Because the two creative processes require the pursuit of *nyama* – life force (pp 219, 222, 223, 229) – they are considered to be ultimately unknowable and are pervaded with danger: “the tomb is open” for future mothers and for carvers alike. Both “go to battle” (pp 218-220). They also demand *laada* (customary food offerings) and the ritual washing of the body after completion (p 230). Of course, for those familiar with iron smelting studies, none of this comes much as a surprise. Herbert explored the realm of the smith extensively in terms of symbolism and the beliefs pertaining to human procreation. The same perspective, however, is entirely novel in the study of wood carving. However, the real source of originality (and controversy) in the work of Brett-Smith, derives not so much from her emphasis on the symbolical affinity between creativity and procreativity, but from the feminisation hypothesis it provides evidence for. The world of male carving and, by extension, of male authority, the author proposes, is modelled on the world of women. Here, Brett-Smith ventures well beyond Herbert. The sexual act is not just a

secret (*gundo*), she explains, it is the first secret. It is also the first law and the first form of human association. Having sex, it is proposed, is the paradigm for all ritual secrets; it is the primordial secret arrangement imitated by lawmakers in the councils and initiation lodges. It is a prototypical act from which all important kinds of union, uniting and assembling have followed (pp 212-214). The natural power of a woman is said to be far stronger than the “artificial” social laws instituted by men and the physical violence used to enforce them. The power of the female sex, it is concluded by the author, is inevitably greater than the power of ritual objects (p 215).

The story of Bamana sculpture is not yet over. The grand finale, the secret of secrets, is reserved for the final chapter. For this Brett-Smith depends on the main informant, Kojugu, and on Mara, her field-assistant, to whom it was revealed in the early hours of the morning (p 2). Forget what you have ever read on the subject of African woodcarving, and on the exclusion of women from the carving trade. In the not so distant past, the author claims, selected women could be secretly trained for the purpose of ritual carving, on condition that certain signs confirmed their inborn capacities to do so (p 239). Because the creative power of male carvers is merely a reflection of the essence of womanhood, the author reasons further, carvings made by women themselves must have been so much more powerful. Men spend years in the bush seeking out spiritual assistance, but female carvers are simply born with those powers. Men obtain spirits artificially; women have the innate ability to communicate with them (p 238). In short: the carvings of men are only bizarre replicas of an artificially created femininity (p 234). A woman’s *nyama* is bigger (p 220) and as a result, her authority becomes more terrifying. She can manipulate far more fearsome ritual objects than her male counterparts (p 241). Therefore, men depend on female carvers for their survival (p 251). Women are at the pinnacle of the hierarchy of producers of sacred objects and their ritual carvings provide the village with the ultimate weapons of defence. They are the real contenders for the mastery of the invisible world. They are the ultimate creators and destroyers, hence: the foundation of the world is with women (pp 252-253).

Domesticating spirituality

The major disappointment with Lewis-Williams’ otherwise most exciting journey, is that it somehow fails to reach its destination. Just as the reader is about to enter the other world, she is reminded that it is all mere hallucinations, and so the journey ends in an anti-climax. The actual vision quest of the healer has been spirited away or has been reduced to a mere attachment to the discussion, an interesting afterthought. These limits to the interpretative paradigm, in my opinion, are largely self-imposed. They are most obvious in those paintings that are said to contain “aquatic metaphors”, a class of icons of which the Linton Rock Art Panel is often mentioned as prime example (p 132). This magnificent ensemble – the largest panel on exhibition worldwide – was removed from a painted shelter in the Maclear district in 1917 and transported to the South African Museum in Cape Town. On the left-hand side of the panel appears a supine figure, surrounded by fish and eels. Based on a combination of data from the Bleek archives, San ethnography and neuropsychological studies, it is suggested after analysis, that it depicts a shaman entering the spiritual realm during a trance ritual. Lewis-Williams reached this conclusion as follows. He learned from Bleek’s *Xam* informants that shamans were able to enter a waterhole during trance rain-making rituals and that trancing healers are men who had “died and lived under water” (pp 171-172). Recent narratives from the Kalahari corroborated the journey

into the realm of water spirits as an important religious theme in San cosmology. Further, “death” is commonly used amongst the San to refer to the healer collapsing during trance dance. In order to solve the aquatic image puzzle, one more fact needed to be added, from another major data source: neuropsychology. Inhibited movement, affected vision and loss of awareness – commonly experienced by subjects in altered states of consciousness – have been described by those subjects as a kind of drowning. Conclusion: the icons of fish and eels, depicted in combination with the “dying” shaman, refer to the out-of-body journey of the healer into the underwater world of spirits. All pieces fall neatly into place. So far, so good.

What Lewis-Williams is implying here, but not saying in so many words, is that the bodily experience of trance actually shapes the shaman’s visions, which in turn “explain” the existence of beliefs in an underwater realm of spiritual forces and beings. Phrased differently: the real (but implicit) focus of the image analysis is the identification of features of induced altered states of consciousness (rather than the exploration of spiritual experience). Another set of paintings which reappears throughout the *oeuvre* of Lewis-Williams, the Ezeljagdspoor Panel (p 172), basically tells the same story, but ends in an interesting twist. It depicts a central figure, the body of which is represented by a long undulating line, surrounded by smaller fish-tailed humanlike beings. Bleek, inspired by a myth he had obtained in 1870 about a girl dragged into a dark pool by water-maidens, contemplated that images like this most probably illustrated San mythology. Initially, Lewis-Williams, inspired by Bleek, looked for a trance-based interpretation in the same spiritual under-water realm. Perhaps, he suggested, the fishlike figures (ichthyanthropes) could be healers diving into deep holes (as was the case in the Linton Panel). Later, his analysis took an unexpected turn. Through the mediation of similar images in nearby shelters, depicting human figures with forked tails and long arms placed backwards, parallel to their sides, he proposed that the fish-people were in fact swallow-people! Bird-men are indeed found in recent narratives from the Kalahari, describing ritual specialists who changed into swallows in order to face dangerous rain storms and protect their fellow human beings. Once more, with the help of data sourced from neuropsychological literature, Lewis-Williams concluded that these images depict the hallucinatory experience of flying, and so, a new kind of trance metaphor came into existence, known as the “flight metaphor” (pp 121-122).

In terms of basic methodology and conceptual framework, there is very little change between *San Spirituality* and its fifteen years-older predecessor, *Images of Power*. In fact, it almost seems as if his position has become more explicitly rationalist. Never before has he been more direct about his “materialist position”:

Religion is not so much an attempt to explain the natural world, its regularities and catastrophes, and to cope with death, as a way of coming to terms with the electrochemical functioning of the brain (p xxiv)

The deciphering of rock art imagery, on the whole, I feel, does not venture much beyond the matching of particular icons, shapes and forms, with details furnished by the studies of altered states of consciousness. This kind of analysis comes over as a little too convenient and mechanical for its own good, in addition to being reductionist. It certainly provides the analyst with a false sense of control over the interpretive process. Also, the concept “metaphor” remains a central feature in the analysis of both monographs, and the term “metaphorical model” is used as synonymous with “interpretive approach”. “Metaphor”, incidentally, is used rather

loosely. In some contexts it refers to San figures of speech, which, we are told, are sourced from their keen observation of animal behaviour. On other occasions, metaphors must be understood with reference to the dichotomy “non-real or visionary” versus “real”. In this context they are references to religious experience or ways of explaining to fellow hunters and gatherers the “bizarre world” beyond the realm of the living. Elsewhere, again, metaphors refer to a principle underlying the art and to an analytical tool for its analysis and for the decoding of images. Metaphors, it is proposed, can be perceived as building blocks which have been joined by the artists in the more complex panels and can be similarly joined or plumbed by the interpreter. Some metaphors are said to be universal (Pan San), whilst others are more limited in distribution. Some, it is admitted, may be purely idiosyncratic and express the hallucinatory experiences of individual painters/shamans. Metaphors, seemingly, are quite a number of different things ...

Over the past few decades, the shamanic hypothesis has assumed the position of ruling paradigm within the realm of rock art studies. Its proponents have, largely, “footnoted away”, or simply ignored criticism from a variety of backgrounds, such as prehistorians, art historians and anthropologists. *San Spirituality* continues this tendency to sideline constructive commentaries, which address such critical weaknesses as the a-historical and isolationist features of the interpretative paradigm (pp 209-10). Dowson, in a highly original essay entitled *Reading art, writing history*,¹⁰ accepts that the general context of rock art production was indeed shamanistic rituals (p 333). This comes little as a surprise, Dowson being the co-author of *Images of Power*. However, he also warns against the concept of an oversimplified, static San culture. Instead, he emphasises, shamans and their art reflected changing social circumstances. The images in the rock shelters, he concludes from a case study in “Nomansland”, evidence “diverse struggles and change, not stability” (p 30). A second critical study, by Jolly (*Symbiotic interaction between Black farmers and South-Eastern San*),¹¹ seems equally supportive of the suggestion that the history of the San was inextricably tied to the history of its immediate neighbours. Jolly indicates, with the help of the very same sites mentioned in *San Spirituality*, that some of the San rock art imagery may well depict religious concepts borrowed from Nguni and Sotho farmers. In doing so, he provides support for the notion of “hybrid or creole cultures”, a generally neglected concept in Southern African anthropology.

10 T D Dowson, “Reading art, writing history: rock art and social change in southern Africa”, *World Archaeology*, 25, 3, 1994, pp 332-342

11 P Jolly, “Symbiotic interaction between Black farmers and South-eastern San Implications for Southern African rock art studies, ethnographic analogy, and hunter-gatherer cultural identity”, *Current Anthropology*, 37, 2, 1996, pp 377-388

Genderizing spirituality

The analysis of Brett-Smith and the feminisation hypothesis seem equally forceful. In terms of fieldwork methodology, *The Carving of Bamana Sculpture* is bound to raise some eyebrows. The entire study is, essentially, based on interviews with one female mud-cloth artist and three male sculptors. Two of the carvers approached the author during the drought of 1983, soliciting trade secrets in exchange for assistance. "I know what you are looking for, and I can tell you what you want to know!" (p 3), is not how one expects an impartial research participant to introduce herself. Moreover, Brett-Smith employed a third party to carry out her interviews with the master carvers. She also depended on one single master, Kojugu (a pseudonym) for almost three quarters of the entire study. Interviews with Kojugu came to an end when he started to demand large sums of money and "seemed either unable or unwilling to recall the details of ritual practices he had once expounded with such startling clarity" (p 4). Nyamaton, a second carver, was released, mainly on account of "his taste for self-glorification" (p 3). Basi, the oldest of the three, had ceased carving ritual sculpture thirty years earlier and made his "fervent opposition" to the project obvious from the start (p 4). In a nutshell: for her initiation into the secret and sacred realm of ritual carving, the author had to rely on an over-willing, a suddenly unwilling and a half-willing, out-of-practice informant.

How has this deserving project gone wrong? I would like to suggest that, in the final analysis, it is not really the data itself, or the way in which it was collected that should worry the reader most, but rather the way in which the feminising narrative was, generally, "forced" upon the data, either by simply misreading it, or by ignoring alternative readings. The worst instance of data misreading (if not mis-reasoning) appears in the discussion of *dariya* (ritual openness) and can be summarised as follows: healers are open, women are open, therefore healers are feminine (p 75)! Far more numerous are the occasions where the author fails to read data in a manner that could undermine the central thesis. To start with: "demasculation" and "feminisation" cannot be used interchangeably, as the author does. Excessive love-making weakens a man, Kojugu explains to Brett-Smith. Carving ritual sculpture leaves the artist weak "like a woman", the master adds. A carver of ritual sculpture, the author concludes from this, gradually loses his virility and turns into a woman (pp 75, 203). The production of ritual flutes, we are told, requires the presence of women. Is this indicative of the spiritual power of women or does it underline the principle of cosmic unity of the sexes? Or should it simply be read as the appropriation of female powers by the male carver and the *komo* society for whom the flutes are carved (p 210)?

More disturbing, some of the observations, which supposedly define the feminisation hypothesis, are encountered in other contexts too – an important fact which is conveniently overlooked by the author. This certainly weakens their rhetorical value. For instance, "the tomb is open", it is said, for women in childbirth *and* for ritual carvers. This, supposedly, illustrates the feminisation of the carvers. However, this metaphor applies equally well to other dangerous enterprises, for example, battle, hunting, and distant journeys, where the feminisation hypothesis does not apply. Similarly, *baara* and *laada* are part and parcel of a host of dangerous ritual endeavours (not just giving birth or carving), and discretion, avoidance and euphemistic speech, of course, are not only characteristic of carving or sex (p 206). *Nyama* features in many other contexts than a discussion of the female sex organ. In

fact, it is a generic category encountered in discussions of illness, healing and misfortune. The same goes for taboos involving bodily functions (like breathing, spitting and defecating) and ritual bathing and cooking, which are encountered in a wide variety of sacred and secret contexts (pp 228-230). In short, the supportive evidence for the conceptual equations which Brett-Smith has proposed, is found in many other contexts than the realms of carving, sex and childbirth. This makes the edifice of feminisation so much less convincing. Finally, the study, supposedly, addresses Bamana carving in general, but actually limits itself to a very particular type of ritual carving, namely the one that assists a master (or his client) in reaching the highest forms of fame. These instances, most probably, are tolerated exceptions, rather than accepted norm and, in any case, belong to the realm of *sorcellerie* rather than religion (pp 83, 207).

Experiencing the spiritual

I cannot, of course, suggest a different ending to these narratives of San rock art and Bamana sculpture. The authors of both journeys to the other world set out on a rationalist or reductionist course of their own choice, and by doing so, determined their destination. What I would like to sketch, however, in the final section of this essay, are some notes on an alternative course. For the construction of a "more interpretive" window on spirituality, one can find inspiration in the ongoing debate surrounding the ethnography of the Griaule-Dieterlen School. Brett-Smith, incidentally, is aware of this debate (pp xviii-xix) and aligns herself with one of its major proponents, James Clifford (p 7), at least as far as his suggestions on the initiatory and hierarchical nature of research and of indigenous knowledge are concerned. I will make use of two diametrically opposed evaluations of Griaule's fieldwork by Van Beek¹² and Clifford¹³ to sketch the controversy.

The critique of Griaule is one of those never-ending stories in African studies. Just when everybody presumes that the battleaxe has finally been buried, somebody decides to unearth it once more. In an essay entitled *Dogon restudied*, Van Beek qualified, if not criticised, Griaule's work as a kind of "revelation" of an African cosmological system and philosophy. He was surprised, more particularly, by its astonishing completeness and sophistication, which he described as "unparalleled in any other ethnography" (p 139). During his own restudy of the Dogon, on the other hand, Van Beek traced very little of Griaule's construct of a society pervaded by religion. The concept of a supernatural world was found to be vague and diverse and the creation myth ill-defined. Symbolism seemed fragmented and the core concept of *nyama/force vitale* appeared of little relevance to the Dogon (p 148).

Van Beek explains these discrepancies in terms of fieldwork methodology, with reference to the concept of "double mediation". He suggests that all ethnography is by definition "a tale of two cultures", as well as "a tale about tales". Ethnographic writing is shaped almost as much by the ideas, values and preconceptions of the researcher, as by the "mental baggage" of the informants (pp 139, 152). The author of *Dogon restudied* identifies the following factors as important in shaping Griaule's

12 W E A van Beek, "Dogon restudied: a field evaluation of the work of Marcel Griaule", *Current Anthropology*, 32, 2, 1991, pp 139-167

13 J Clifford, "Power and dialogue in ethnography: Marcel Griaule's initiation", in J Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1988)

work: an ambitious personal nature; a fascination with the great explorers; his training under Mauss; a cryptological view of culture; an acute interest in semiology; and a firm belief in the civilising mission (*mission civilatrice*) of the anthropologist. Furthermore, the informants were keen to confirm, affirm and oblige Griaule's interpretations because of their cultural orientation towards courtesy, overt harmony and hierarchical structure. In the final analysis, Van Beek concludes, Griaule's work is the outcome of his personal preconceptions and enthusiasm, combined with the blessings and collaborative support of a few selected informants (pp 152-155).

Clifford, in contrast, has praised Griaule's research as "one of the classic achievements of twentieth-century ethnography" and his methodology as "one of the few elaborated alternatives to the Anglo-American model of intensive participant observation" (pp 58, 60). Critics of Griaule, Clifford explains, have failed to distinguish between the early and later stages of his field encounters at Sanga, and therefore did not appreciate his shift from a documentary to an initiatory conception of fieldwork. The early work, in which a calculated struggle for control governed the field encounter, was dominated by collection and observation. It was here that Griaule applied battlefield tactics (mapping, all sorts of visual information, including aerial photography and interrogation) and encouraged members of his team to act as detectives or magistrates (pp 65, 67, 72, 73). However, by the 1950s, he had changed methodological course and decided to focus on a very limited number of *collaborateurs indigènes* (p 72). Here appeared a very different Griaule, open to the authority of selected informants and ready to accept the insights of these learned interlocutors. The anthropologist became a transcriber, translator, exegete and commentator, whose main task it was to produce a kind of second level ethnography (pp 83, 85). Clifford also presents an alternative reading of Griaule's intrusion into Dogon society. He suggests that his active and aggressive posture should not be taken at face value. Rather, Griaule's ethnography-as-battle-and-interrogation should be understood as a mix of metaphor and irony. In Clifford's understanding, the conception of fieldwork as role playing and as a theatrical undertaking has a valid analytical function (pp 68, 73, 75, 79, 84). Griaule, Clifford concludes, was not in favour of a methodology of participation, friendship or ethnography as an educational experience. Clearly, he preferred to act the stranger's role, but that did not prevent him from establishing close collaboration based on mutual respect, as well as "complicity in a productive balance of power" (p 76). In fact, it is precisely because of his insistence and determination that such a marvellous and penetrating ethnography could be produced.

In the final analysis, Griaule's work must be understood as a kind of fiction or ethnographic cultural invention, nothing more, nothing less. Any debate about whether the texts are produced by a Dogonised Griaule or by Griaulised Dogon (p 60); whether they are "true" or "false" (pp 60, 80); whether they reflect personal originality or cultural typicality (p 85); whether they are individual speculation or cultural knowledge (p 82), somehow misses the point (p 75). To sum up: the deep knowledge or *sagesse* presented by Griaule in his texts blends his understanding of Dogon cosmology with that of the main indigenous research participants – such as Ogotommeli – in an almost organic way. The course Clifford suggests, here, is simply a kind of "literary anthropology".

San Spirituality, I have indicated earlier on, essentially reduces the shaman's vision quest to a set of "illusions" or "hallucinations", and classifies the underlying beliefs as "non-realistic" and even "bizarre". Throughout the analysis, the reader is reminded of the otherness of San culture, rather than of the spiritual world. The historian Roy Willis presents quite a different approach in *Some Spirits Heal, Others Only Dance*.¹⁴ At first, a great deal of the book appears fairly conventional. It contains a fair deal of "straight" descriptive ethnography; a discussion of a census of 208 healers; a search for the historical origins of local healing practices and for the etymological roots of healing concepts. On the other hand, the text is original, in that it also records in great detail, Willis' personal journey of spiritual experience, subjective understanding and feeling. This is not just another book on spirit healing. It is an open-minded attempt to explore the powers of the healer and, more generally, of "human selfhood expanding beyond established knowledge and experience".

A final note on emotional understanding and feeling, two key elements in the interpretive analysis. I have yet to come across a better text to introduce "affective understanding" than Renato Rosaldo's first chapter of *Culture and Truth*,¹⁵ in which he introduces the reader to a post-modern critique of objectivity, detachment, neutrality and impartiality. For more than a decade, Rosaldo had refused to accept (or perhaps had failed to understand) the indigenous explanation of Ilongot headhunting as an act of rage and a means to cope with grief caused by death in the immediate family. It was only after the tragic death of his wife in 1981 and his personal experience of anger-in-grief that followed, that he came to realise the importance and intensity of the emotional dimension of culture and of cultural analysis. Rosaldo can be explored further in *The Anthropology of Experience*.¹⁶

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14 R Willis, *Some spirits heal, others only dance* (Berg, Oxford, 1999)

15 R Rosaldo, *Culture and truth. The remaking of social analysis* (Routledge, London, 1989)

16 E M Bruner, *The anthropology of experience* (University of Illinois Press, Illinois, 1986)

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Boekresensies

Explicating and understanding the genius of evil

Charles van Onselen, *The Fox and the Flies: The world of Joseph Silver, racketeer and psychopath*

Jonathan Cape, London, 2007

645 pp

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R339.95

Out of the cover of Charles van Onselen's newest *magnum opus* – a striking cover, the colour of dried blood and darkness, glossy embossed flies hovering – the man stares with eyes that gleam with an unnatural glassiness. This photographed figure reminds me of Charles Dickens' portrayal of Blandois, an ugly insinuating presence in his novel *Little Dorrit*, "with his moustache going up and his nose coming down in that most evil of smiles, and with his surface eyes looking as if they belonged to his dyed hair, and had had their natural power of reflecting light stopped" by some unnerving natural process. However, Dickens insists, Nature "is never to blame in any such instance".¹

Both Dickens and Van Onselen are nevertheless confronted with that old dilemma: how to explicate and understand the genius of evil. Like Blandois, Van Onselen's focal character, "Joseph Silver", was European Jewish (though Polish rather than French), an elusive traveller, superficially charming, but manipulative, congenitally deceitful, protean, a subtle thief, an alleged murderer utterly without conscience, and an occasional inhabitant of the underworld of nineteenth-century London. In one marked aspect they are different: Silver made his primary living pimping, trading globally in the enslavement of white women into the prostitution business.

Dickens wrote somewhat reticently about prostitution, though it was as rampant in his time (with some 80 000 prostitutes in London in 1857) as it was fifty years later in Silver's, and he knew all about "fallen women". What as a novelist he *could* do, is imagine the minutiae of criminal persuasion: the menacing idiosyncracies of body language, the second-by-second real-time progression of conversation. Van Onselen can assert that Silver exerted "the customary mixture of charm and blackmail" (p 286), but just *how* that charm worked, is lost to us in the generalisation of "customary". Van Onselen does not – as does Dickens – try to imagine himself into his evil character's own mind, except, oddly but safely, on a couple of occasions when he envisages Silver approaching a new destination, seeing for instance Antwerp harbour from Silver's point of view. As if recognising the limitations of his method, Van Onselen also heads his chapters with epigraphs taken from novels, mostly Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*. These novelistic touches apart, Silver's nefarious activities are related, as an historian must, through more summative, indirect narration.

1 C Dickens, *Little Dorrit* [1857] (Penguin, London, 2008), p 461

Van Onselen further employs a couple of other a-chronological fiction-like structural techniques. Unlike the victimised, but indomitably saintly Little Dorrit, but more like Little Emily in *David Copperfield*, who also sought refuge overseas, Van Onselen's central female character is an unmitigated victim: one Rachel Laskin (not her original name, any more than is "Joseph Silver" her tormentor's). Laskin was "intercepted, raped and corrupted" (p xxii) by him, and eventually left by him to rot in Valkenberg mental asylum in Cape Town. In 1945, twenty-seven years after Silver himself died, she was found dead in her bed in Witrand Hospital in Potchefstroom, where she had been confined since 1924. No sweet solution in marriage to a Mister Clennam for her. Van Onselen opens his account with an imagined, which is to say fictionalised, account of that discovery, and the portrayal of a life utterly ruined by Silver's predatory intervention.

A second structural feature of *The Fox and the Flies*: amongst his numerous other sojourns amongst the city slumlands of the Atlantic world, Silver disappears almost undocumented into the warrens of east London in the years 1885-1888. Though Van Onselen confidently places him there, we know little of his detailed activities. What *was* indubitably going on at the time, was the infamous "Jack the Ripper" murders of a string of prostitutes, in a grisly, quasi-ritualistic manner symptomatic of serial killers. As we all know, Jack the Ripper has never been securely identified. In his early chapter on Silver's London sojourn, Van Onselen mentions the murders, but coyly avoids connecting Silver to them, instead – conscious that this has to be both the most speculative and most spectacular part of the story – holding over until the final chapter of the book a detailed argument that the Ripper was in fact ... Joseph Silver.

So Van Onselen frames the ghastly tale, and trail, of Joseph Silver, with scenarios involving his most tragic and gruesome female victims. Victimising females was his life, his *métier*, his economic base: "pathological misogyny and the need to control, exploit and humiliate white slaves never left [Silver] as he cruised the Atlantic searching out micro-climates capable of sustaining his frightening physical and psychological needs" (p 11). How and why those desires and needs arose in him, Van Onselen makes an effort at explaining, but in the end can really only offer us a series of assertions that they existed: it is simply self-evident from his actions. To assert that "he answered only to the demons in his mind" (p 366), as Van Onselen regularly does, is to explain nothing at all. Throughout, too, Van Onselen reminds the reader that Silver was "neurosyphilitic", sometimes at entirely irrelevant points; medically coherent links between this disease and behaviour are only approached late in the book, so that this aspect of Van Onselen's argument seems somewhat ramshackle. His uncertainty in this area emerges in his regular resort to colourful metaphors and similes. Some are interesting: "The contents of [the letter] passed through his mind like the current in a new-fangled street lamp, lighting up dim understandings" (p 371). Others seem meretricious and distracting, colourful but of little explanatory value. In the end, as Van Onselen says, this is a "sketch" (a 600-page sketch, mind) of an unfolding personality which, at different moments, assumed the role of arsonist, bank robber, barber, bigamist, brothel-owner, burglar, confidence-trickster, detective's agent, gangster, horse trader, hotelier, informer, jewel thief, merchant, pickpocket, pimp, policeman, rapist, restaurateur, safe-cracker, smuggler, sodomist, special agent, spy, store-keeper, trader, thief, widower, wig-maker and white slave trafficker (p 11).

Born Joseph Lis in the small town of Kielce, Poland, in 1868, he hardly had a chance: born into an already inveterately criminal family, Lis (who assumed any number of pseudonyms which playfully punned in Yiddish style, but who became best known as Joseph Silver) became a sometimes hapless, sometimes tyrannically dominant bit-player in the vast network of criminality that spanned the cities bordering the Atlantic, and even beyond. The book's chapter headings tell their own story: London 1885-1889; New York 1889-1893; Pittsburgh 1893-1894; back to London between 1895 and 1898; Johannesburg 1898 and 1899; Cape Town, Kimberley and Bloemfontein between 1900 and 1905; Swakopmund and Windhoek 1905-1906; Neumünster and Paris 1908-1909; Antwerp, Brussels, Liège and Aachen 1909-1910; Buenos Aires 1910; Santiago and Valparaíso 1910-1913; back and forth between London, New York and Rio 1914-1916; until he finally disappears in war-torn Poland, probably shot as a spy in 1918, not too far from where he was born.

There can be few less savoury biographical subjects in all of historical scholarship, and Van Onselen's astonishing unpacking of the extent, depth and intricacy of Silver's criminal *milieux* makes for seriously depressing reading. He has done a remarkable job of unearthing newspaper accounts and court records illuminating fragments of Silver's career across the globe, a paper trail covering decades and involving chance encounters with assiduous researchers in a dozen different languages (all of this rather charmingly and self-deprecatingly set out in a closing chapter). The details are embedded in compact and incisive overviews of the political and economic climates of the countries and regions Silver found himself in, such that *The Fox and the Flies* amounts almost to a massive (though not totalising) history of the Atlantic world and its underbelly over five decades. Wherever war and sex-hungry soldiers gathered, wherever unexpected economic windfalls like Johannesburg's gold attracted swarms of riff-raff, the pedlars of women such as Silver insinuated themselves (not excluding the oft-romanticised District Six). The same characters pop up everywhere, forming loose associations known colourfully as "Peruvians", or the "Max Hochstim Association", or "Caftans", family members supporting each other, ethnic connections remaining important over global peregrinations. So many characters, in fact, living under strings of pseudonyms, that Van Onselen finds it useful to include a six-page *dramatis personae*.

The elusive pervasiveness of these appalling people is one thing; even more gloomy is the concomitant corruption riddling virtually every law-enforcement agency with which Silver came into contact. Initially a bungling petty thief, he was able to buy various policemen off, spy for them, play them off against one another, almost everywhere he went. Anyone who thinks that the Selebi-Agliotti relationship, or the content of the recent film about a corrupt 1960s NYPD, *Pride & Glory*, are either unusual or exaggerated, will be obliged to think again. At the head of Chapter 17, Van Onselen quotes St Augustine: "For what are states but large bandit bands, and what are bandit bands but small states?" (p 285).

Interestingly, Van Onselen further suggests that the ways in which these criminals operated, were integral to the makings of the law itself:

Morals legislation in the Cape Colony, Natal, the Orange River Colony and the Transvaal in 1902-3 bear the imprimatur [is 'imprint' intended?] of organised crime fashioned on the Atlantic periphery by marginalised East Europeans, lawless refugees hardened in the cauldron of Russian oppression and clerical hatred ... Within that, much broader, context Silver had clearly played a crucial role (p 232)

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So detailed and multilayered is this book, that it is in a way unfortunate that Van Onselen chooses to end it with a dogged, but finally too tenuous argument that Joseph Silver *was* the eternally elusive Jack the Ripper. He does not, in my view, clinch the case – but then neither does anyone else, as far as I can gather. If the Ripper was not Silver, it was someone very like him. Though Van Onselen does not quite attain again the magisterial heights of his earlier tome, *The Seed is Mine*² (who could?), *The Fox and the Flies* is another astonishing marathon of research into another, albeit less uplifting sector of society that might otherwise be entirely lost to view.

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J.E.H. Grobler (ed), *The war diary of Johanna Brandt*

Protea Book House, Pretoria, 2008

472 pp

ISBN 978-1-86919-164-1

R180.00

The war diary of Johanna Brandt beskryf die aktiwiteite van Johanna van Warmelo en haar moeder tydens die Anglo-Boereoorlog. Die oorspronklike handgeskrewe dagboeke behels agt dele, waarvan sewe in die Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerkargief bewaar word. Dit is in boekvorm saamgevat en geredigeer deur Jackie Grobler, verbonde aan die Departement Historiese en Erfenisstudies aan die Universiteit van Pretoria. Die publikasie is van 'n waardevolle naamindeks voorsien, wat die dagboek toeganklik maak, sodat navorsers dit ten volle kan ontgin. Dit word ryklik toegelig met foto's van plekke, gebeure en persoonlikhede uit die tydperk, 1899-1902.

'n Biografiese oorsig vorm ook deel van die publikasie en skets die familie-agtergrond van die Van Warmelo's. Dit stel die leser in staat om die kultuur-historiese konteks waarin die dagboekskrywer haar bevind het, te verstaan. Uit dié oorsig blyk dit dat Johanna 'n fyn opvoeding gehad het. As dogter van Nicolaas Jacobus van Warmelo, leraar in die Hervormde Kerk, verbonde aan die Soutpansbergse en Heidelbergse gemeentes, het sy die voorreg van 'n goeie skoolopleiding geniet. Sy het aan die Good Hope Seminary for Young Ladies in Kaapstad skoolgegaan en later by die Doornfonteinkollege in Johannesburg onderrig ontvang. Die onderrigmedium in beide instansies was Engels en sy was Engels goed magtig. Dit verklaar waarskynlik waarom sy dit verkies het om in Engels te skryf en dit was dan ook die taal van haar dagboek.

Johanna is in 1876 gebore. Alhoewel sy vyftien jaar oud was met haar vader se dood in 1892, was die indrukke wat hy op haar gelaat het, blywend van aard. N.J. van Warmelo is gebore uit 'n goeie Hollandse predikantsfamilie. Sy humanitêre neigings en patriotisme het as inspirasie vir Johanna gedien toe sy betrokke geraak het by hulpverlening aan die Boerevroue en -kinders in die konsentrasiekampe en by Boerespioenasienetwerke tydens die Anglo-Boereoorlog. Maria Maré, haar moeder, was 'n afstammeling van die Maré-Voortrekkerfamilie en ook vurig patrioties.

2 C van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine* (Jonathan Ball, Johannesburg, 1996)

Op 13 Mei 1897 het Johanna en haar moeder van Pretoria op reis na Europa vertrek om onder meer haar broers wat in Nederland gestudeer het, te gaan besoek. Tydens haar besoek het sy 'n jong predikant, Louis Brandt, ontmoet. Daarna het Johanna en Louis sporadies gekorrespondeer en uiteindelik het hulle per brief verloof geraak. Hulle is op 28 Augustus 1902 in Nederland getroud. Op haar Europese toer het Johanna begin met 'n reisjoernaal en is dieselfde boek weer gebruik om oor haar eerste waarnemings van gebeure tydens die Anglo-Boereoorlog verslag te doen.

Die Anglo-Boereoorlog het alle segmente van die gemeenskap geraak, maar slegs 'n handjievol burgers, krygsgevangenes en konsentrasiekampbewoners het oorlogsdagboeke bygehou. Juis daarom is die publikasie van Johanna se dagboek belangrik. Dit getuig ook van intrinsieke literêre waarde. Dagboeke as literêre skryfvorm kan aan die hand van elemente soos doel, betroubaarheid, akkuraatheid, inhoud, struktuur, stemming, aanbieding en styl beoordeel word. Daarbenewens kan sekere temas in die dagboek geïdentifiseer word.

Die doel van 'n dagboek is nie soseer om inligting oor te dra nie, maar om die verhaal van die skrywer se gedagtes en belewenisse oor te vertel. Dit is dus 'n persoonlike weergawe van gebeurtenisse. Johanna het met die dagboek begin op 30 September 1899, pas voordat oorlog op 11 Oktober 1899 verklaar is. Sy het besef dat oorlog onafwendbaar was en was bewus daarvan dat dit 'n omwenteling in haar lewe sou bring:

I have no intimate friend, dear diary, to whom I can speak freely and I fear you will have to put up with fearful and wonderful confessions, but you must be patient and remember that I am passing through a never-to-be-forgotten stage of my existence (p 65)

Dagboeke word selde geskryf met die doel om dit te openbaar, alhoewel dit in sommige gevalle wel so kan wees. Kagle is van mening dat "... *there is no such thing as a totally private diary. I am inclined to believe that almost all diarists envision an audience for their entries*".³ Aanvanklik was Johanna se beoogde gehoor haar nageslag, wat moontlik in haar doen en late gedurende die oorlog sou belangstel, maar met verloop van tyd het sy besef dat haar aantekeninge 'n belangrike bron vir latere publikasies sou word. Na die oorlog het sy haar dagboek gebruik as inligtingsbron om oor die daglike toestande in die Irene-kamp in *Het konsentrasiekamp van Irene* en oor haar deelname aan die spioenasienetwerk in Pretoria in *Die Kappiekommando* te skryf.

Namate die dagboekskrywer die skryfgewoonte vasgelê het, ontwikkel die dagboek 'n lewe van sy eie. In die geval van 'n dagboek, wat in so 'n mate ontwikkel het dat 'n eie identiteit geskep is, kan hierdie persoonlikheid 'n vriend vir die skrywer word. Johanna skryf in Januarie 1901:

You are going to be a good and true friend I see and I feel glad of the happy thought that inspired me to cultivate your acquaintance (p 65)

Die inligting in dagboeke is nie altyd betroubaar nie, want dagboekskrywers skryf soms oor gebeure waaroor hulle net ongegronde gerugte gehoor het. Baie van Johanna se inligting het op mondelinge oorvertelling berus, soos dié van haar oom, Paul Maré, wat op kommando in Natal was en weens swak gesondheid teruggekeer het. Sy het ook dikwels nie geweet watter van die verwarrende berigte die waarheid was nie. Al die datums en inligting oor veldslae, getalle gesneuweldes en gewondes

3 S E Kagle, *Early 19th century American diary literature* (Twayne Publishers, Boston, 1986), p 5

stem nie noodwendig ooreen met historiese feite nie, maar Johanna erken dat sy en ander burgerlikes nie kon peil trek op die betroubaarheid van die gerugte wat hulle gehoor het nie en sy wys daarop dat gerugte altyd rondgaan oorlogstye.

Volgens Grobler vernietig hierdie gebrek aan betroubaarheid egter nie die waarde van dagboeke as historiese bronne nie.⁴ As redakteur het hy gesorg vir 'n akkurate reproduksie van die drie dagboeke. Uitgebreide navorsing is gedoen om die publikasie van 835 voetnotas te voorsien wat die korrektheid al dan nie van Johanna se berigging oor gebeurtenisse verduidelik. Dit is daarom vir die historikus 'n belangrike bron van inligting oor die Britse besettingstydperk in Pretoria.

Wat die ordening van die inhoud betref, het die redakteur 'n reuse taak verrig. *The War Diary* bestaan uit drie dagboeke, die gewone, die geheime en die liefdesdagboeke. Die dagboeke is al drie as eenheid saamgevat en al die inskrywings word in chronologiese volgorde in vyf afdelings aangebied.

Johanna se gewone dagboek beskryf die verloop van die oorlog, die lotgevalle van gewonde burgers wat sy by die Volkshospitaal en die hospitaal in die Staatsmeisieskool verpleeg het, die Britse besettingstydperk in Pretoria, die Van Warmelo's se sosiale en huislike lewe, die wel en weë van haar suster en broers (Deliana, Dietlof, Willem en Fritz), en die toestande in die konsentrasiekamp by Irene. Die laaste inskrywing is 30 April 1902 gedateer.

'n Tweede dagboek, wat sy haar geheime dagboek genoem het, beskryf haar betrokkenheid by die Boere se spioenasienetwerk nadat sy uit die konsentrasiekamp by Irene teruggekeer het. Sy het die inskrywings daarin in suurlemoensap gemaak wat onleesbaar is totdat dit met 'n strykyster verhit word. In 'n derde dagboek, naamlik haar liefdesdagboek, het Johanna haar hart oor Louis Brandt uitgestort.

Die stemming in haar dagboek weerspieël Johanna se veranderlike emosies. Dagboeke is 'n hoogs subjektiewe vaslegging van 'n persoon se mees private gevoelens en gedagtes. Die vertroulikheid en intensiteit van dagboekskryfery verhoog die trefkrag van die geskrewe woord. Die dagboekskrywer kan eerlik en openlik oor persoonlike gevoelens skryf sonder vrees vir kritiek. Dagboekskryfery in die Victoriaanse tydperk was 'n manier om gedagtes en gevoelens in woorde uit te druk sonder sosiale gevolge.

Die aanbieding in Johanna se dagboek is soms dramaties, aangrypend, hardvogtig en aggressief, maar sy het ook 'n waardering van die humor in sekere situasies geopenbaar. Sy was gemaklik met haar eie emosies en haar verhouding met haar dagboek. Sy kon nie altyd afgetrokke en in beheer bly nie, maar het haar soms aan selfbejammering en sentimentaliteit oorgegee. Johanna het 'n uitlaatklep in die neerpen van haar gevoelens gevind. Op 11 Februarie 1901 skryf sy:

You must really not mind, dear diary if I "let fly" to you occasionally – it does me a world of good (pp 91-92)

Die dagboek weerspieël die ontwikkeling van Johanna se gemaklike, maar boeiende skryfstyl. Volgens Van der Merwe word die dagboek soms vertroebel wanneer haar persoonlike emosies na vore tree, maar haar skryfstyl word gekenmerk

4 J Grobler, "Johanna (van Warmelo) Brandt se oorlogsdagboek" Ongepubliseerde voordrag gelewer by 'n byeenkoms van die Africana Vereniging, Pretoria, 4 April 2008

deur 'n besondere joernalistieke helderheid.⁵ Deur gebeure te beskryf wat wys hoe sy beheer oor haar eie lewe neem, kon Johanna vir haarself 'n meer aktiewe selfgeldende rol toeëien.

Hierdie nuwe rol en die ontwikkeling van Johanna se persoonlikheid kan as een van die temas in haar dagboek geïdentifiseer word. Van die eerste tekens dat sy in 'n selfstandige volwasse vrou sou ontwikkel, sien ons in haar skrywe op 24 April 1901:

Yesterday I was asked whether I would go to Irene for a month to nurse our invalids
That is what I have wanted all along – an opportunity of coming into close contact with
the real victims of the war ... (p 168)

Sy wou teen haar moeder se wense tot aksie oorgaan en nie meer die passiewe rol van 'n Victoriaanse jong vrou speel nie.

Verdere tekens van Johanna se ontwikkelende dinamiese persoonlikheid het binne enkele dae na haar aankoms in die Irene-kamp na vore gekom. Sy het nie die haglike toestande gelate aanvaar nie, maar dadelik na 'n oplossing begin soek deur die een brief na die ander aan haar moeder te skryf, waarin sy klerasie, voedsel en medisyne aangevra het. Mevrouw Van Warmelo het 'n brief aan die Portugese konsul, Cinatti, voorgelê, wat uiteindelik daartoe gelei het dat vele verbeterings in die kampe aangebring is.

Johanna het ook vir generaal Maxwell, militêre goewerneur van Pretoria, oor die ellende in die kamp ingelig in die hoop dat hy iets aan die toestande sou doen. Later is hulle vriendskaplike verstandhouding egter vertroebel as gevolg van haar spioenasie-aktiwiteite. Ten spyte van die feit dat *Harmony*, die Van Warmelo-landgoed, naby die Britse militêre woongebiede in Sunnyside geleë was, het dit 'n skuilplek vir Boerespioene geword.

Die dagboek werp ook lig op ander temas in die lewe van die dagboekskrywer, soos haar humanitêre gesindheid, haar belewing van die konsentrasiekamp by Irene en haar patriotisme.

Johanna se simpatieke geaardheid is opvallend. Haar deernis jeens minderbevoorregtes het selfs die gewone "Tommies" omvou. Soos Grobler tereg opmerk, het Johanna, soos ander Boerevrouens, 'n sterk afkeur teenoor die swart bevolking geopenbaar, maar haar verhouding met die Van Warmelo-bediendes is deur 'n opregte geneentheid gekenmerk.⁶ Trouens, sy het 'n sterk band met Paulus en "Gentleman Jim" opgebou terwyl sy vir hulle leeslesse aangebied het. Sy het ook hartroerend oor die dood van een van hulle huishulpe, Kleinbooi, op 24 Julie 1900 aan nierontsteking, geskryf:

We were so nervous and wretched that night that I for one hardly closed my eyes ...
(p 55)

As vrywillige verpleegster in die Irene konsentrasiekamp vanaf 12 Mei 1901 tot 7 Junie 1901 het Johanna daaglikse gebeure waargeneem en aangeteken, terwyl sy persoonlike kontak met die inwoners gehad het. Johanna het die lyding, swaarkry en

5 R van der Merwe, *Johanna Brandt en die kritieke jare in die Transvaal, 1899-1908* (Protea Boekhuis, Pretoria, 2004), p 8

6 Grobler, "Johanna (van Warmelo) Brandt se oorlogsdagboek"

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ontberings van die Boerevroue en -kinders in die kamp intens beleef en het breedvoerig in haar dagboek daaroor verslag gedoen.

Johanna se patriotiese gevoelens gaan hand aan hand met haar anti-Britse sentimente en haar haat vir verraaiers van die republikeinse saak. Johanna skryf oor hoe hartseer sy was toe die Britse vlag op Kerkplein gehys is. Sy het die geleentheid bygewoon en sekergemaak dat almal weet waar haar simpatie lê deur 'n Transvaalse Vierkleur-lint om haar hoed te bind. Haar nasionalistiese volksgevoel het op 5 Oktober 1901 in 'n visioen tot uiting gekom:

Last night I had a vision I called my mother to see the strange apparition – the form
of an angel-woman robed in white ... bearing in one hand a scroll of manuscript,
waving aloft in the other our flag, our Vierkleur ... (p 366)

Die publikasie van die dagboek stel hierdie verfrissende blik oor die Anglo-Boereoorlogtydperk, geskryf uit die perspektief van 'n patriotiese jong vrou, aan 'n wyer leserspubliek beskikbaar.

Jackie Fourie

A.E. Duffey, *Anton van Wouw: The smaller works*

Protea Book House, Pretoria, 2008

236 pp

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R400.00

Anton van Wouw the smaller works is, as its title implies, concerned with the generally lesser-known smaller works of Dutch-born sculptor, Anton van Wouw. Using the measure of “half life-size and smaller” as a guideline, author Alexander Duffey provides a comprehensive and well-illustrated overview of the many full-length small sculptures, busts, relief panels and maquettes produced by Van Wouw between 1881 (nine years prior to his arrival in South Africa at the age of 28) and 1940. Naturalistically sculpted and generally cast in bronze, these smaller works are wide-ranging in their subject matter, depicting innocuous, commonplace scenes alongside aspects of Afrikaner history, representations of Boer and British leaders, and so-called “native studies” (p 11).

The monumental works for which Van Wouw are perhaps better known (including the Kruger Monument on Church Square, Pretoria, and the National Women’s Memorial in Bloemfontein) are listed, but not discussed at length, except by way of their maquettes. Also listed are Van Wouw’s thirty-two larger busts: although these fall outside of the scope of the publication due to their scale, they are nevertheless illustrated without commentary in a fourteen-page section entitled “Gallery of Van Wouw’s larger busts” (pp 138-151). Despite its focus, *Anton van Wouw the smaller works* is thus also a catalogue of Van Wouw’s general oeuvre, containing quality black-and-white reproductions of the works discussed, as

7 References: R S Nelson and R Shiff (eds), *Critical terms for art history* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1996); L Nochlin, *Realism and tradition in art 1848-1900: Sources and documents* (Prentice-Hall, New Jersey, 1966); C Rosen and H Zerner, *Romanticism and realism: The mythology of nineteenth century art* (Faber and Faber, London, 1984)

well as interesting historical photographs of Van Wouw's studio and of various works in progress.

On the inside cover of this 236-page book, Duffey – whose previous publications include *Anton van Wouw 1862-1945 en die Van Wouwhuis* (Butterworth, 1981) – is described as “the most prominent expert on the work of Anton van Wouw”. *Anton van Wouw the smaller works* also demonstrates Duffey's expertise in conducting in-depth primary research: his insights are gleaned from various published sources on the artist (including local newspapers and periodicals that reported frequently on Van Wouw's latest works), as well as Duffey's personal handling of many of the sculptures (including “rogue” castings produced illegitimately after Van Wouw's death) and contact with people who knew the artist. In considering his sources, one of Duffey's motives has been to accurately date and authenticate the many bonze castings of Van Wouw's smaller works – especially when details about the production and/or castings of the works are ambiguous or scarce.

As a piece of “good detective work” (p 13) aimed at providing a pedigree for each sculpture discussed, *Anton van Wouw the smaller works* is thus of primary benefit to the existing or aspirant collector, who is looking to buy a quality casting, rather than a “pig in a poke” (p 13). The concluding chapter on “Criteria for evaluating the small sculptures of Van Wouw” (pp 210-215), which offers guidelines for the potential collector, effectively bears this out. Understandably, Duffey's focus in this respect is on the “value” of one casting over another (and of Van Wouw's artistry in general) in terms of predominantly formal and/or aesthetic qualities like type of bronze, finish, size, complexity, identification marks and so forth. Questions of ideology and meaning have little place in discussions of this sort, and on this “safe” ground. Duffey writes comfortably and confidently.

To his own detriment, however, Duffey also wishes to address an additional – and somewhat trickier – aspect of Van Wouw's artistic production: as stated in the “Introduction”, he hopes to “reinterpret him [Van Wouw] in the light of his time” (p 9) and to consider how the smaller works “throw a completely new light on Van Wouw and the colonial context within which he worked” (p 10). These aspirations are both welcome and necessary, especially with regard to Van Wouw's “native studies” (p 11) which clearly “frame” their subjects in accordance with prevailing colonial stereotypes about the exotic “other”. Unfortunately, and despite Duffey's admirable intentions, his exposé of Van Wouw's “colonial context”, never really gets off the ground, and the “completely new light” that he hopes to shed on Van Wouw's smaller works, remains more of an occasional glimmer.

Works such as *The Dagga Smoker* (1907), for example, are undoubtedly far from neutral or innocent in their depiction of “the local natives” as a “romantic peculiarity” (p 206). Duffey describes this sculpture as “a figure of an almost nude, black man who crouches forward to smoke from a reed in the ground” (p 61). The figure's near-nakedness, combined with his subservient, kneeling pose, render him vulnerable as an object of colonial mastery and/or scrutiny. There is ample “evidence” here of Van Wouw's ideological predisposition, and one would think that Duffey might seize the opportunity to “reinterpret” Van Wouw's *Dagga Smoker* accordingly.

Alas, Duffey's reading of *The Dagga Smoker* makes no mention of its incriminating ideology, preferring to discuss the work in terms of noncommittal

“aesthetics”. So, for Duffey, the figure’s nakedness amounts to little more than a “contrast between the smooth skin texture of the figure and the coarse hair on his head, as well as the roughness of the ground on which he bends” (p 61); the subservient pose means only that “Van Wouw has played with the triangle” – in fact, claims Duffey, the sculpture “can be simplified to total abstraction” (p 61).

Similarly, Duffey’s account of Van Wouw’s *Hunter Drinking* (1907) – which depicts another near-naked “African (not a Bushman [sic]) bending forward on a rocky incline, near the water’s edge” and drinking “like a wild animal” (p 68) – seems impervious to the sculpture’s blatantly colonialist orientation. In this work, Van Wouw’s less-than-innocent conflation of black African people and wild animals seems hard to ignore: the hunter is literally portrayed as crouching on “all fours”, his mouth directly to the surface of the pool, but Duffey’s description refuses to see this as problematic. Instead the tone of his writing tends towards the same, compromising romanticism that renders the sculpture’s subject matter questionable to begin with.

Albeit for different reasons, Van Wouw’s depictions of Afrikaner or British “heroes” are also highly indicative of his “colonial context” (p 10) and incriminating in their ideological bias. Like the “native studies”, these portraits seem to offer rich grounds for the kinds of reinterpretation that Duffey ostensibly aspires to, and yet here too, the potential for a *critical* reappraisal of Van Wouw is left unrealised. Duffey’s discussion of *Kruger in Exile* (1907) is a case in point. Produced at about the same time as *The Dagga Smoker* and *Hunter Drinking*, the sculpture shows a “dejected President Kruger” (p 50) – fully clothed, of course, and seated in a large easy chair. Tellingly, this work is *not* discussed in terms of “textures” and “triangles”. Rather, Duffey asserts: “With this small sculpture Van Wouw gives us a glimpse into the soul of the lonely old President, far from his homeland, sad and alone with his bible on his lap”.

The suggestion that Van Wouw’s portraits of prominent individuals disclose the very essence of their souls, recurs throughout Duffey’s text. So one reads, for example, that Van Wouw communicated “the personality” of Jan F. Celliers, editor of *De Volkstem* (p 28), the “strong willpower” of President Kruger (p 118), the “patriarchal dignity” of General Koos de la Rey (p 121), the “inner strength and pride” of General C.R. de Wet (p 125), and the radiating “wisdom” of President M.T. Steyn (p 132). A critical apprehension of these works might be inclined to suggest that Van Wouw’s “heroes” have been deliberately idealised in accordance with his own ideological leanings; yet Duffey seems adamant that the portraits are no more or less than an “innocent” reflection of the sitters’ essential qualities – Van Wouw has merely revealed through his artistry what had already been there.

In these and other instances, Duffey’s assertion that “few works of art are devoid of an ideological statement” (p 49) rings hollow. “Van Wouw was not only making art, he was also making meaning!”, declares an indignant Duffey (p 49), and yet the possible “meaning” behind Van Wouw’s artistic decisions is either categorically avoided or taken at face-value as ideologically “innocent”. This is not only with respect to Van Wouw’s questionable portrayal of other “races” as “romantic peculiarities”, but also with respect to his equally suspect idealisation of prominent white men as uncompromising heroes. In both cases – and, indeed, throughout this publication – one gets the sense that Duffey is struggling with an awkward and taxing dilemma. On the one hand, he wishes to pay homage to an artist he greatly admires, and to celebrate, in the works he discusses, the “heights of sculptural expression”

(p 9) attained by Van Wouw. On the other hand, he recognises that Van Wouw's colonialist perspective cannot be condoned uncritically.

Evidence of Duffey's dilemma is rife. On page 209, for example, he concedes that Van Wouw "was a colonial artist who saw the African through European eyes, conditioned by Dutch values and prejudices", but the blow is softened immediately by Duffey's insistence, in the very next sentence, on Van Wouw's ostensibly "deep understanding of the psychology of the people he portrayed" (p 209). Exploitation is thus balanced with empathy, and the reader is left with the impression that Van Wouw really meant no harm, despite his inherent prejudice.

In Duffey's description of *The Basuto Witness* (1907) – which has also gone by such names as *The Accused* and the highly derogatory *Kaffergetuigte* (p 66) – he similarly insists on Van Wouw's genuine empathy with his subject, referring to the work as nothing short of a "study in compassion" (p 66). Completely overlooked is the fact that the work implicitly trades on an odious but popular binary: "civilisation" – represented here by the system of Western law – is set against its opposite – the "Basuto mineworker" in a "baglike vest" who has "landed in a Western court as a witness or even an accused", and even though the mineworker is portrayed in a compromising fashion – "one can read the incomprehension on his face. He has no idea what is going on around him" (p 66) – Duffey nonetheless optimistically asserts that the work is a triumph of "his pride, courage and dignity" (p 66).

Arguably, Duffey's suggestion that Van Wouw depicted his subject with "compassion" is meant to dilute the colonial prejudice implicit in the work. In contrast, Jeanne Hugo's 1938 description of *The Basuto Witness* highlights the mineworker's incomprehension and contains none of Duffey's optimism about "pride, courage and dignity". In an endnote (p 219, note 15), Duffey castigates Hugo for what he perceives as her "insensitive colonial view of the stupidity of the African", and goes on to quote from the offending description which he translates as follows: "'the Accused' represents for us all the pathos of the primitive mentality who is confronted with the incomprehensibility of the white man's civilised system of law without understanding anything about it" (pp 219-229, note 15). Interestingly, Duffey's indignant disapproval of Hugo's words would seem to imply that the problem lies with crass and insensitive descriptions of the work, rather than with the work itself: colonialist prejudice is in the eye of the beholder, and if one chooses not to see it, then it simply is not there.

Duffey further "chooses not to see" the ideological underpinnings at play here by reading Van Wouw's work through the forgiving lens of "realism", according to which Van Wouw simply and unwittingly portrayed things "as they were". Throughout the publication, Duffey maintains that "Van Wouw was above all a realist" (p 12), whose work "is simple, direct, sober and always true to nature" (p 206). In effect, this is also a means of limiting Van Wouw's accountability: if his works are seen as bearing witness to the "truth" of people and situations, then they are "guilty", at best, of a certain naïve attachment to nature (and not to ideology).

Consequently, Van Wouw's eccentric predilection for naked or near-naked black bodies, for instance, can be sanctioned under the auspices of his "realist approach" (p 185): "his excellent knowledge of anatomy (realism)" and his fondness for "texture detail" (p 61). The fact that his "native" models were "mainly black men who worked for him in the garden" (p 206) is politely disregarded, as is the fact that

Van Wouw literally stripped and recast these men in a number of elaborately romanticised and *unreal* “dramas” – as an accused mineworker, a kneeling dagga smoker, a hunter drinking like an animal, a “bushman” with bow in hand, “a black man sleeping like a log” (p 207). In his portrayal of the “other”, Van Wouw’s apparent “truth to nature” is quite deliberately manipulated and staged.

In this instance, at least, one might conclude that the label of “realist” seems far from accurate, if only because “Realism” – as a nineteenth-century reaction to the idealistic tendencies of Romanticism – is premised on the detached “acceptance of trivial, banal material and the refusal to ennoble it, idealize it, or even make it picturesque”.⁸ For Rosen and Zerner, the picturesque, contra realism, “emphasizes aspects of life that are exotic, quaint, outlandish”; it claims that ordinary life must be “romantically transfigured in order to be made worthy of art”; and it “manipulates reality before the act of painting [or sculpting] begins”.⁹ Like romanticism, and unlike realism, the picturesque “dresses life”.¹⁰

If Van Wouw’s monuments and portraits of colonial and Afrikaner “heroes” tend towards idealisation by their very nature, then the “native studies”, along with many of his other works, may be seen as inclined towards the picturesque. In “dressing life”, they involuntarily take up a position in relation to it – they forfeit their designation as “realist”, and with it the assumption of a detached, unbiased neutrality. In this sense, Van Wouw’s smaller works do not simply or solely provide us “with a visual record the people of President Kruger’s Pretoria, the magnates and workers of the mining world of early twentieth-century Johannesburg and the pivotal figures in the rise of Afrikaner nationalism during and after the First World War” (p 12), as Duffey claims is the case. Despite their naturalistic rendering, they are far more than objective “visual records” or detached, impersonal documents.

Unfortunately, what Duffey appears to miss, is the extent to which Van Wouw’s works are an active and imaginative interpretation (rather than a passive record) of Van Wouw’s colonial context. Ironically, this “small” detail is pivotal. In spite of the many sound observations made by Duffey throughout his text, and regardless of his unquestionable expertise, his interpretation of Van Wouw’s works falls short primarily, because he seems too readily convinced by their realist veneer: he takes the meaning of the works at face value, because he assumes that the works themselves are “simple, direct, sober and always true to nature” (p 206). Had he started with a different premise – namely that the works, despite appearances, are complex, indirect, driven by desire and fascination, and true to the picturesque impetus to “dress life” – his *Anton van Wouw the smaller works* might have shed an altogether different light on the life and work of this historically important artist.

Maureen de Jager
Rhodes University

8 Rosen & Zerner, *Romanticism and realism*, p 148

9 Rosen & Zerner, *Romanticism and realism*, p 167

10 Rosen & Zerner, *Romanticism and realism*, p 167

German colonialism

Ulrich van der Heyden and Joachim Zeller (eds), *Kolonialmetropole Berlin. Eine Spurensuche*

Berlin Edition, Berlin, 2002

319 pp

ISBN 3-8148-0092-3

\$113.12

Ulrich van der Heyden and Joachim Zeller (eds), *“Macht und Anteil an der Weltherrschaft”. Berlin und der deutsche Kolonialismus*

UNRAST, Münster, 2005

288 pp

ISBN 3-89771-024-2

\$42.30

It may come as a surprise to readers of this South African journal that post-colonial studies are a comparatively new field of study in the Humanities, especially in literature studies, in Germany.¹¹ Of course historians have been dealing with Germany's colonial heritage for decades, yet there were few approaches trying to integrate the account of historical occurrences into the context of a Westernised philosophical concept until the late 1980s. Van der Heyden and Zeller's books aim at dealing with colonialism as a cultural phenomenon, touching on “how colonial discourses influenced the mental and cultural self-image of the former colonial powers and how these discourses contributed to their nation building and their national image” (Van der Heyden & Zeller [2005] from p 8 – reviewer's translation). Both volumes offer fascinating insights for readers of all backgrounds into better and often lesser known aspects of German colonialism; and while Berlin as the geographical locus is the focus of both works, the various contributions transcend this spatial limitation.

Kolonialmetropole Berlin (2002) brings back to mind that Germany's role as a colonial power has often been marginalised, as it “only” lasted roughly thirty years, yet it was in Berlin where in 1884/1885, the infamous “Congo Conference” took place, dividing Africa up between the European powers. While most Germans nowadays certainly do not often remember that their country was once a major colonial power, those three decades of colonialism still strongly inform present-day attitudes towards the African continent and its inhabitants.¹² *Kolonialmetropole Berlin* is grouped into “Early Attempts at Colonising West Africa”, “In the Headquarters of the ‘World Power’”, “Supporters of the Protectorates”, “Economical Aspects”, “German Colonial Research and Researchers”, “Colonial Productions”, “Colonial Culture”, “African Migrants in the Imperial Capital”, “Colonialism without Colonies” and “Colonial Heritage in Berlin Museums” (reviewer's translations). Especially the section “Supporters of the Protectorates”, focusing on the more practical aspects of colonisation, and the section “Colonial Productions”, highlighting the fascination with the “exoticism” of Wilhelmine Germany, reveal the daily manifestations of stereotyping the racial other.

11 M Moustapha Diallo and D Götsche (eds), *Interkulturelle Texturen. Afrika und Deutschland im Reflexionsmedium der Literatur* (Aisthesis, Bielefeld, 2003), p 16; P M Lützel (ed), *Schriftsteller und “Dritte Welt”. Studien zum postkolonialen Blick* (Stauffenburg, Yübingen, 1998), p 16

12 S Arndt (ed), *AfrikaBilder. Studien zu Rassismus in Deutschland* (UNRAST, Münster, 2001), p 9

As can be seen from its sections (“Colonial Policy”, “Colonial Commerce”, “Institutions in Berlin and Colonial Research”, “Researchers and Technology”, “Scenes of Colonial Culture”, “China and the South Sea”, “White Berlin? The Black Presence in the Imperial Capital”, “The Anti-Colonial Metropolis”), *Berlin und der deutsche Kolonialismus* (2005) is a continuation of *Kolonialmetropole Berlin*, and although the contributions are as informative and well-researched, the book as such, published by a different company, is of a lesser quality. Petty as the point may be, but the quality of paper and typesetting, as well as the optical presentation are lacking in comparison with the first volume, and editorial carelessness, manifesting itself in glaring typing errors and erratic punctuation, deflects from the contents.

Highlights of the two works

Harald Sippel’s contribution “Kolonialverwaltung ohne Kolonien – Das Kolonialpolitische Amt der NSDAP und das geplante Reichskolonialministerium” in *Kolonialmetropole Berlin* (pp 256-261) and Holger Stoecker’s “Koloniale Großforschung im ‘Dritten Reich’. Die Kolonialwissenschaftliche Abteilung des Reichsforschungsrates” in *Berlin und der deutsche Kolonialismus* (pp 124-130) focus on one of the most fascinating aspects of these volumes, which is of great interest not only for historians: how the Nazi regime kept alive the idea of rising again to a colonial super-power and what plans were made by the “Colonial Policy Office”.

Lesser-known German colonies are discussed in Van der Heyden’s “Die Wüsteninsel Arguin” (*Berlin und der deutsche Kolonialismus*, pp 55-62) and Mechthild Leutner’s “Kiautschou – Deutsche ‘Musterkolonie’ in China?” (*Berlin und der deutsche Kolonialismus*, pp 203-207). Of special interest for readers of an African journal are Joachim Zeller’s “Friedrich Maharero – Ein Herero in Berlin” (*Kolonialmetropole Berlin*, pp 206-211) and Robbie Aitken and Eve Rosenhaft’s “Politik und Performance: Deutsch-Kameruner in der Anti-Kolonialbewegung” (*Berlin und der deutsche Kolonialismus*, pp 270-276).

The two volumes are informative and although some academics might consider a few of the contributions rather short, they are well-researched and (not always a given in books of this nature) extremely readable.

Undine S. Weber
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Exceptionally skilful use of biographical sketches

Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed, *Inside Indenture: A South African Story, 1860-1914*

Madiba Publishers, Durban, 2007

472 pp

ISBN 1-874945-23-3

R200.00

This appropriately titled and beautifully written book explores the lives of 152 266 indentured labourers that came from India to work on the sugar plantations of Natal over the period 1860 to the end of indenture in July 1911. They were part of approximately 1,3-million indentured Indians that went to fourteen British colonies over the period 1838-1916.

The authors state that they drew inspiration from the works of Brij Lal on Fiji and Marina Carter on Mauritius and the British Empire in the writing of this book. They also note that this study differs from invaluable and pioneering works such as that of Surendra Bhana, *Indentured Indian emigrants to Natal 1860-1902 A study based on ships lists* (Promilla, 1991). This is because they go beyond the numbers who emigrated, the employers, rules and regulations, and have given a “voice” to the indentured in reconstructing the social history and biographies of individuals. A discerning point throughout this book is that this journey of contestation between the British Raj, the white employers, and the indentured was one of collaboration, resistance and confrontation. They were not only made by history, but also makers of history.

To cite an example, the founder of the M.L. Sultan Technikon, Sultan Pillai Kanny Muluk Mahomed, indentured number 43374, completed his indenture in 1895, renamed himself as M.L. Sultan, went into business and established the M.L. Sultan Charitable and Educational Trust in 1949 to promote cultural, educational, spiritual and economic activities among Indians irrespective of creed, caste or religion. He clearly had a vibrant life of his own!

Countering the argument that studies of this nature have little relevance for present-day South Africa, by digging into the rich and varied lives of the indentured, the text clearly shows how they have influenced the present and future. The authors bring the history of Sam China, of the Sam China Football Cup fame, to life. He was indentured number 1856, abandoned his right to a free return passage to India and opened a business in the diamond fields of Kimberley. His life is covered in the chapter “The many faces of leisure and pleasure: from China to Ganja”, that explores the indentured spending their leisure activities in football, boxing, cricket, drama and song, and the Lawrence sisters embracing classical European music. The authors argue that these leisure activities helped forge “Indianness” and also exposed the emergence and formation of class differences amongst the indentured, with middle-class Indians in 1918 persuading the magistrate of Durban to prohibit the supply of liquor to women in public bars.

The study consists of 21 chapters based on primary sources housed at the KwaZulu-Natal Archives in Pietermaritzburg, Durban and Pretoria, and the Killie Campbell Library. Chapters 2 to 4 examine the migratory chain of these indentured, starting with the first ship – the *Truro* – arriving in Durban in November 1860. Included in the discussion are the agents of recruitment (such as Emigration Agents in Madras and Calcutta), and the reasons for migration (such as the British re-organisation of the Indian economy, compounded by a famine-struck India). Diaries are skilfully used to illustrate that there was little room for caste or custom on the journey, and to capture scenes of life aboard the ships. It is also revealed that, through migration, women broke the bonds of traditional Indian patriarchy and subordination. This is particularly clearly revealed in the case of the “troublesome” Votti V. Somayya, who was held down by no man economically, socially or sexually (pp 18-22). This section of the work also discusses the dispersal of the indentured to various parts of Natal, their allocation to British settlers, and their ill-treatment, leading to the Coolie Commission of 1872 (which made light of these abuses).

The indentured realised that the rule of law was the law of white colonists and was geared to protecting the employers. This is aptly described in Chapter 5, “The

interpreters of indenture". This chapter examines the role of the dispensers of justice from magistrates, interpreters, supreme court judges and protectors – the latter compiling 196 volumes of reports. We read of Aboobaker Amod, the first Indian trader in Natal, telling the Wragg Commission (1885-1887) that the Indian interpreters were not educated and accepted bribes. Dabee Bramdaw (1881-1935) was an interpreter and public servant from 1913-1929. He used his education and position to get involved in community affairs and pursue business interests, whilst successfully confronting the legal system that he served. His community involvement included his being the founding member of the Arya Samaj in South Africa, his involvement in soccer, and his being the first Indian to pass the referees examination. An often cited Protector in this study is J.A. Polkinghorne (1903-1911). Although the effectiveness of these Protectors was frequently compromised by the political alliance of the Governor and the planters, Polkinghorne challenged the power of planters in the case of the investigation of working conditions at the plantation *Esperanza*, covered in Chapter 7. Polkinghorne realised that, although he had massive evidence against the Reynolds brothers Thomas and Lewis, the 1906 Reynolds Commission was loath to take action fearing halting of the supply of labour. He prevailed in 1908 when the government indicated that indentured labourers would not be allowed at *Esperanza* until Charlie Reynolds, who was in charge of indentured labour, was removed.

Caste and family matters amongst the indentured are covered in Chapters 9 to 10. Here, the life of Charlie Nulliah is used as an example of differing identities impacting on the indentured. In his case, these competing identities included caste, class, religion and ethnicity. Nulliah policed the boundaries of Telegu/Tamil identity, sought to build a broader Hindu identity as trustee of the Hindu Temple, attempted to unite Indians under the banner of the NIC, and still found time to have an altercation with the troublesome Votti cited above. Illustrating how different aspects of the same character and social history recur in this book, Nulliah is again focussed on as a successful indenture owner and businessman in Chapter 17 (pp 333-335).

Chapters 11 to 14 explore how religion and its religious leaders (Hindu, Christian and Muslim) gave the indentured a sense of being and comfort, cushioning them from the most terrible aspects of indenture. As they moved into businesses, the indentured played an active role in establishing temples, churches and mosques. Prominent and outstanding religious figures profiled in this section include the Reverend Bernard Sigamoney, with his multiple identities in religion, cricket, trade unions and politics. We read also of the reformist Hindu Professor Bhai Parmanand, who contested Hinduism based on rituals and "superstition", and the Muslim spiritual leaders, such as Badshah Pir and Soofie Saheb, who concentrated on building Islamic institutions.

Chapters 17 to 19 trace the economic strength of Indians – free and passenger – and the action taken against them by whites to curb this. The passenger Indians were mainly Muslims. They paid their own passage and mainly arrived between 1880-1910. The indentured could return to India at their own expense after five years, or remain in the colony for a further five years to claim a free passage home. Until 1891, they could forego this free passage in return for a plot of land. The settlers were reluctant to give this as they feared Indian economic competition and settlement, and valued them only for their labour. Once again, Charlie Nulliah appears as a prominent businessman. We also encounter the Bodasings on the North Coast as landowners,

and Verulam as a hub of farming activity. These landowners are also revealed to have been a great support base for Mahatma Gandhi.

Whites acted against what they saw as the growing threat posed by Indian businesspeople by the passing of legislation restricting the entry of Indians, resulting in 5 500 Indians being refused entry into Natal between 1897 and 1901. Dealers' licences were denied, and the most effective measure was that Indians who did not re-indenture, had to pay an annual £3 tax under the Indian Immigration Law of 1895 (which came into effect in 1901). This was a way of forcing them to return to India. A total of 1 853 migrants returned to India in the five years from 1896 to 1900; 7 720 returned during the five years after the tax came into effect (1901-1905); and 18 913 time-expired Indians returned between 1906 and 1910 (p 339). Whites felt threatened by the numbers game, as in 1901 the Indian population was composed of 47 599 free, 9 000 passenger and 25 366 indentured Indians (p 338). Quoting various sources, the authors argue that this tax ensured a continued labour supply, limited the number of free Indians, and was both a reindenturing and repatriation device (p 395). Indians attempted to escape the oppression of this tax by opting to work on the Benguela Railway in Lobito Bay in Angola in 1907. Meeting harsh conditions in Angola, they returned to Natal in March 1908. The government insisted that they had forfeited their right to remain in Natal and had to return to India. Indenture was terminated from 1 July 1911. After this, employers sent agents (Sirdars) to India to recruit workers, and also looked at alternative forms of labour in Africans.

Desai and Vahed shed new light on the 1913 strike against the imposition of the £3 tax and demonstrate that the strike was not entirely dominated by Gandhi and his non-violent resistance. In doing so, they explain the widespread support for the 1913 strike as a case of rebel consciousness, and make the case that these rebels should be recognised as having their own history. Relying mainly on *The Natal Advertiser*, the authors outline worker rebellion against the tax. This spread to plantations on the southern and northern coasts of Natal during the peak harvesting season of September to December 1913, and mobilised significant protests in Durban and Pietermaritzburg. In Pietermaritzburg, there were divisions along class lines, with the colonial-born favouring striking and the older merchant class opposing it. The authors note that these strikers lacked centralised leadership, and acted on their own accord, drawing from past histories of collective and individual resistance to power and authority. Thus, Desai and Vahed argue, their contributions should not be minimised in exploring the passing of the Indian Relief Act of 1914, that abolished the tax and other discriminatory measures against Indians.

The book has a lovely set of photographs and an extensive bibliography. Hopefully an index will be included in the next edition. Sociologist Ashwin Desai and historian Goolam Vahed are to be commended for putting together this class-based analysis of indenture, which will raise the consciousness of those of the opinion that the "Indian" intelligentsia, men of religion, business people, and worker resistance came from "middle-class" backgrounds in South Africa. Having grounded their work in the social history of the times, and with the biographical sketches that they have reconstructed, they have presented both the specialist and the more general reader with a gem of a book.

Abdul Samed Bemath
Johannesburg

Useful bilingual source publications

Part T. Mgadla and Stephen C. Volz (translators and editors), *Words of Batswana. Letters to Mahoko a Becwana, 1833-1896*
Van Riebeeck Society II-37, Cape Town, 2006
ISBN 0-9585134-1-4
R180.00

Jeff Opland and Abner Nyamende (translators and editors), *Isaac Williams Wauchope. Selected writings, 1874-1916*
Van Riebeeck Society II-39, Cape Town, 2008
ISBN 0-9585134-9-X
R180.00

With their Volumes 37 and 39 (Second Series), the Van Riebeeck Society for the Publication of Southern African Historical Documents (VRS Hereafter) are not only continuing their tradition of producing high quality source publications, they are also breaking new ground – and hopefully setting a new trend. For a long time now this society's publications have proven the value of approaching the collection, selection and presentation of source material as a collaborative effort between two or more scholars who could either supplement one another's different skills, or focus their similar capabilities on one and the same subject, thus multiplying the veracity of the outcome. The VRS' patronage has long since also included the translation of documents into English, the unofficial *lingua franca* in Southern African historical writing. What is new about these latest two books, *Words of Batswana* and *Isaac Williams Wauchope*, is that they are the result of collaborative work in multi-language publishing: in these books documentation of historical and literary value written a century ago in two African languages (Setswana and isiXhosa respectively) were rescued, in the words of VRS Chairperson Howard Phillips, "from the crumbling pages of long-forgotten newspapers" (Wauchope, p xiv). Each transcription from the newspapers is accompanied with a complete translation into English. True to VRS style, the collections are contextualised with comprehensive and insightful introductions and annotations.

As far as the presentation of the publications is concerned, Mgadla and Volz went further than Opland and Nyamende and even wrote the introduction in both languages. In the book, *Words of Batswana*, all the equal numbered pages are written in Setswana, while the unequal numbered pages offer the equivalent in English. Even for an ignoramus like myself, who can recognise only certain Setswana words on paper, this proved to be a worthwhile strategy, constantly alerting one to the fact that translation in itself is an act of interpretation – as the irregularity of the blank spaces at the bottom of each page suggests: sometimes more words were required to say in English what substantially less had accomplished in Setswana, and sometimes the English translation could convey in a few lines what the Motswana writing a century earlier had needed several more words for.

In its scope, *Words of Batswana, letters to Mahoko a Becwana, 1833-1896* is a contribution to southern African cultural history and a reminder that the South African-Botswana border is a fairly recent and arbitrary thing. It is indeed also the product of transcontinental collaboration. Part Themba Mgadla is from the Department of History at the University of Botswana and Stephen Volz, who holds a doctorate from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, is Professor of History at

Kenyon College in Ohio. His involvement in this project tacitly comments on our South African callousness towards the formal study of African languages (note the dismally low student numbers), compared to the assumption amongst Africanists in the United States that one should learn the language of the people whose history one intends to write.

The letters in Setswana selected for this volume are all from the *Mahoko a Becwana*, a montly paper edited by the missionaries of the London Missionary Society and printed on their press at Kuruman. Mgadla and Volz go to great lengths to consider the varying strengths of the successive editors' censoring hand. They grant the possibility that there may have been occasions where that which this volume aims to represent, may have been the very type of writings the missionaries would not consider fit for publication: "those addressed to fellow Africans, dealing with issues that may have been of little interest to Europeans then, but which were of great importance within African communities" (p xiii). Besides content, there was also the obstacle of style, which prompted one of the early editors to reprimand writers for sending in letters failing to "say something". Then again, a disclaimer included by a later editor that the letters "have been printed simply as they were written", provides for the possibility that a wider range of styles and issues could have been reflected in the newspapers under this missionary's editorship. As with all source publications, this collection, and the individual contributions, should also be read for what they are *not* saying. The readers of this collection are nevertheless more fortunate than most, thanks to Mgadla and Volz's openness about their selection process and their alertness to difference:

The main indication that the letters were indeed "words of Batswana" is the frequent disagreement that appeared between writers and editors. It is true that the majority of the published writings expressed views largely in accord with those of missionaries, indicating a possible bias on the part of the editors, but the editors also published a significant number of letters whose views clearly differed from those of the missionaries and from one another. Rather than ignore such contrary viewpoints, the editors took it as an opportunity to express their own opinions ... in addition to publishing the responses of Batswana whose views approximated to their own (Mgadla & Volz, p xxxv)

The selection of letters, which comprise 40 per cent of the total number published in the newspaper during its existence from 1883 to 1896, were divided into four chapters, dealing with the standardisation of written Setswana; mission work; cultural change; and government respectively. The chapter on writing in Setswana is divided into two sections, one on language issues raised at the start of the newspaper in 1883-1884 and one on the issues raised at the restart of the paper in 1889. Batswana's own comments on the orthography give remarkable insight into issues around the ownership of the language, recognition of the complexity of capturing the spoken word in letters, and a need for pragmatism. The following letter was written by Bannani Diphafe on 17 October 1889 and appeared in the paper of January 1890:

... in the future we might find ourselves speaking the one language only used in books, which would not be our original language but the language of those who find it difficult to speak Setswana. Please understand me well, my teacher. I am saying that this Setswana is comprehensible, but we seem to be returning to a state of confusion. Those people who pronounce "Modimo" as "Morimo" are not speaking well; they are confused. These are my words. I will keep on trying to explain myself even though I don't know how to write.
I am,
Bannani
(Mgadla & Volz, p 35)

The chapter on mission work is divided into the following sections: "Schools and literacy"; "Reports from Tswana evangelists"; "Behaviour of church members and Biblical interpretation: Bible versus European science". Under Chapter 3, "Cultural Change", the letters have been arranged under the following sub-headings: "General challenges of European culture"; "Bridewealth, Beer and other alcoholic beverages"; and "Other beliefs and traditions". This last section opens with a discussion on witchcraft, but also includes contributions on stories, music and proverbs, as well as debates on funeral practices and initiation. Lastly, under "Government", the letters in Chapter 4 are divided into categories for "Church-State relations"; "Tswana politics and history"; and "African-European relations".

Who were the letter writers? A list of the missionary editors and the Tswana correspondents appears at the back of the book, with a brief biographical sketch on many of them. However, just as many remain unidentified. The fact that they are representative of the whole range of opinions held by the Batswana mission educated elite who participated in newspaper correspondence at the time, seems to outweigh the need to link a particular opinion with a particular correspondent. Herein, of course, lies the major difference between the approach in this publication and that of Opland and Nyamende. The binding factor in their compilation of newspaper-published material, is the fact that it all originates from one particular individual.

Jeff Opland and Abner Nyamende's work constitutes a biographical source publication of congregational minister, political activist, historian and poet: Isaac Williams Wauchope – a single member of a different African elite, that of the Eastern Cape. Opland (SOAS & University of South Africa) and Nyamende (University of Cape Town) reconstructed the oeuvre of Wauchope from the following newspapers: *Isigidimi samaXosa*; *Imvo zabantsundu*; and *The Christian Express*. Unlike the Tswana men whose writings were compiled by Mgadla and Volz, Wauchope also wrote in English, and when he did, his intention was also to speak out, to address and educate English-speaking audiences. This is clear from his 1908 Lovedale publication, *The natives and their missionaries*, included in its entirety in the book. By the way, the decision of the editors of the Wauchope edition not to translate his English writings into Xhosa, is a clear clue as to their anticipation of who the readers of their book might be: a reader like myself, who is grateful that something I would neither have been able to access nor to understand, has been passed on to me in Times New Roman English. However, is there in this assumption that those who can read Xhosa, will be able to deal with the English texts as well, an underlying concession that Xhosa will eventually no longer be read in future? I cannot help but think that Mgadla and Volz's commitment to producing the publication bilingually as completely as possible was a forceful confirmation of the existence of a community of Setswana readers out there – and an affirmation of their entitlement to reading material in this language. The difference between the Setswana/English and the English/Xhosa publications might have had a lot to do with the fact that the Setswana language (with the independent state of Botswana as its guardian) had a different history in the twentieth century than South Africa's "Bantu languages" (in "Bantu education").

It is not up to historical source publications to reverse the current trend of aversion to a study of the mother tongues of South Africa, but if, with books like these, we are reminded what a rich tool of self-expression they had offered previous generations of Africans, then at least their past role had not been obliterated. To those

who do take up the study of the languages of Southern Africa here and now, and acquire the skill to translate them into English, the wisdom of the decision is apparent in the richness of the material and the possibilities it offers for altogether fresh understandings of a cultural historical landscape far more dense than former monolingual research could have anticipated. In Wauchope's letters, reports, poetry, travelogues, lectures, obituaries, histories and folklores unfolds not only one man's extraordinary life. His writings offer "launch pads" from where a wide range of topics and other individuals can be encountered. Opland and Nyamende used similar organising principles as Mgadla and Volz. The six chapters of Wauchope's writings cover "Religion and mission work"; "History and biography"; "Politics and social affairs"; "Lore and language"; "Poetry"; and lastly, "Biographical articles on Wauchope and his family".

It is useful that the editors of both volumes account for the scattered whereabouts of the original papers from which the selections for the two publications had been made. However, with the dense offering in the two publications so carefully and richly contextualised, these are indeed two examples of primary material in printed form that deserve excavation in their own right. What we need most are more readers who can read the Setswana and Xhosa texts in their new easily accessible form, and engage with the translators' interpretations – comment on whether they concur with the particular choice of words in the translations, and perhaps even offer alternative or complementary possibilities. Honours and MA students can be encouraged to delve amongst the pages: they will acquire vast quantities of new knowledge in unexpected nuances, their interpretative tools will be sharpened in the process, and they will definitely come up with unanticipated insights. After all, who can be left uninspired by the "urgent voices" of men like Wauchope? Standing on the deck of the sinking *Mende* in 1917 he had proven that with words one can exact dignity, and *will* a world that endures beyond the self.

Lize Kriel

University of Pretoria

The “secret” relations of the GDR with the apartheid regime

Ulrich van der Heyden, *Zwischen Solidarität und Wirtschaftsinteressen. Die “geheimen” Beziehungen der DDR zum südafrikanischen Apartheidsregime*

Lit Verlag, Münster, 2005

184 pp

ISBN 9783825887964

\$88.10

With the film *Goodbye Lenin*, audiences the world over were enchanted by the humoristic depiction of citizens of the former German Democratic Republic entering the post-Cold War world. With a more recent production, *The lives of others*, many filmgoers were left with an impression of East Germany as a starkly sinister place. With his book *Zwischen Solidarität und Wirtschaftsinteressen*, Ulrich van der Heyden offers South Africans a thoroughly alternative way to reflect upon the German Democratic Republic (hereafter GDR) past: by looking into the way the people and the government of their own country interacted with the GDR throughout its existence in the last half of the twentieth century, he illustrates the tug-of-war between

principles and economic realities for two states which upheld highly conflicting ideologies, but, ironically, due to the weight of those very ideologies, shared a culture of centralised control, censorship and public surveillance. The title of the book translates as follows: "Between solidarity and economic interests: The 'secret' relations of the GDR with the South African apartheid regime".

Van der Heyden is a prolific writer, editor and publisher of historical topics affecting Europe and Africa, particularly Germany and South Africa, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The book under discussion is the seventh volume in a series on the GDR and the Third World. In the introduction to this volume, Van der Heyden explains that this probe into the GDR's dealings with the apartheid government is indeed a by-product of a much larger investigation into the GDR's engagement in development politics. It is thus an initiating rather than a concluding text – partially also because some crucial sources are not yet accessible for historians' scrutiny. He explains that, while working on his actual project, it was hard to ignore the reproach that appeared every now and then, particularly in the popular media, that – despite their public rhetoric to the contrary – the GDR had circumvented the United Nations' sanctions against South Africa during the apartheid years. He considers his study a part of the history of the GDR, as well as a chapter in the history of German-South African relations. South African readers would agree that it should also be approached as a topic that is part of apartheid studies.

The chapter following the introduction begins with an exposition of probably the most provocative and shocking of the accusations alluding to trading links between the GDR and South Africa's National Party government: although it remains to be proven, during the course of 2001 and 2002, a number of German journalists claimed that the apartheid government's "Doctor Death", Wouter Basson, had conducted his experiments in chemical and biological warfare in a laboratory he had bought in the East German city of Leipzig.

In the subsequent chapters, Van der Heyden sketches the reasons why the possibility of secret economic relations between the GDR and the apartheid government seems highly unlikely – and thereby also confirms why accusations in that direction have been received with so much dismay. He looks into the GDR's policy of solidarity with the Third World and explains the substantial effort it had been for the GDR to take a leading role in the United Nations' decade of resistance against racism and racial discrimination. He also sketches the continuing appreciation of ANC cadres who had been hosted and assisted by the GDR, for the generosity and sincerity of their East German patrons. Other aspects that are mentioned, are the role of the West German anti-apartheid movement, and objections to the German Federal Republic for its eager economic exchange with apartheid South Africa.

In the final chapter, Van der Heyden summarises the relations between the GDR and South Africa in four stages:

- the initiation of trade relations until the end of the 1950s and early 1960s;
- an official announcement of participation in the boycott against South Africa in the first half of the 1960s (after which certain existing contracts ran their course before they were terminated and certain direct trade relations apparently continued to exist);

- almost complete silence in the relations between the GDR and South Africa from the middle of the 1960s until the beginning of the 1980s. Contact, if at all, took place via the ANC or the SACP;
- attempts, from the South African side, to resume trade links with the GDR as from the late 1980s, coinciding with the general thaw in the world political climate at the time.

The author concludes that, in the absence of damning evidence, the stance of the ANC and the SACP towards the GDR provides most important measurement of whether the GDR had colluded with South Africa's apartheid government or not, and there is solid evidence that the ANC had appreciated the GDR's solidarity with their struggle until the end of its existence.

In *Zwischen Solidarität und Wirtschaftsinteressen* Van der Heyden responds to alarmist and perhaps even sensational journalism. He casts his net wide and hauls deeply to provide a historical context and thereby sets up more accountable parameters for what could have been possible in the relations between the GDR and South Africa during the Cold War/apartheid years. With some evidence still outstanding, the verdict is pending, but he has certainly provided his readers – even those who remain more sceptical than Van der Heyden – with the information that will enable them to debate the issue more intelligibly.

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An outstanding contribution to the study of land restitution

Cherryl Walker, *Landmarked: Land Claims and Land Restitution in South Africa*

Jacana Press, Johannesburg, 2008

288 pp

ISBN 978-0-8214-1870-3

R165.00

Cherryl Walker's insightful and authoritative monograph, in part a reworking of material published over the course of the last eight years, explores and assesses the work of South Africa's land restitution programme since its formal inception in the early 1990s. A central project ties together a range of well-informed and superbly articulated critiques of restitution, that is, the "unstable authority" and meaning of land in national politics and local contexts.

One of the central pillars of the democratic compromise, the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights, arose out of a broad-based movement for land that emerged in the context of struggles in the countryside during the 1980s and early 1990s. At the fore of this movement were land-rights NGOs, within which the author herself was a prominent figure. The distinctive insights gained from Walker's experiences, first as a land activist with the Association for Rural Advancement (AFRA) and the Surplus People Project (SPP), and later as the Regional Land Claims Commissioner for KwaZulu-Natal from 1995 to 2000, infuse this account with a unique combination of local detail, institutional understanding and academic perspective.

A central proposition to which Walker repeatedly returns, is the “master narrative” of loss and restoration. This commonly underpins the story told of South Africa’s historical and inherited “land question”, appearing in official and unofficial projects of memorialisation, government-speak, policy discourses and academic literature. It is a narrative, writes Walker, that has two central themes, “the trauma of deep, dislocating loss of land in the past, and the promise of restorative justice through the return of that land in the future” (p 34). Drawing on a particularly problematic rendition of history, the “master narrative” resonates as a “political fable” called on at times to legitimate government policies, and simultaneously gives shape to individual and group narratives of dispossession that are a central feature of the tapestry of social memory and meaning in South Africa. Whilst certainly not untruthful, the “master narrative” obscures, simplifies and excludes. The book examines how this is so, and with what consequences.

The features and implications of the “master narrative” are laid out in the opening two chapters of the book, which provide a theoretical and contextual basis for a selection of case studies and testimonial interludes. The latter part of Chapter 2 sets out the political terrain on which the restitution architecture was founded in the 1990s, both in recognition of its inadequacies and as a prelude to explorations of the programme’s trajectories in local contexts and at national level. Contrasting cases (Chapters 3 to 5) illuminate some of the crucial departures from the “narrative of loss and restoration” and the local complexities of restitution: convolutions of class, gender, locality and moment. Corresponding excerpts from testimonies by individuals involved in the restitution process are suggestive of the intensity of personal experiences of dispossession, of diverse emotional and social meanings attached to place and locality, and of the rich, dynamic and mediated nature of the memories on which the restitution process rests so heavily. The effect of this layering is a careful balance between academic distance and sensitive engagement, no easy feat in the discussion of an issue as emotive and politically-charged as land in South Africa. This balance is one of *Landmarked*’s most striking achievements.

The first case study (Chapter 3) relates to the restitution of land at Cremin, one of the many “black spots” condemned to removal from “white” Natal in the years after 1960. This case was a symbolic milestone; the first case of land restoration in KwaZulu-Natal, and one of the cases of removal that became prominent in the land struggles of the early 1990s, from which foment the restitution agenda emerged. Central to the Cremin case, are issues of class and uneven land rights. The historical subtext of its successful claim – a united cohort of claimants, and their relatively preferential access to political networks and educational opportunities – is not unique, sharing a set of circumstances with some of the other so-called “black spot” removal cases under threat in Natal and elsewhere in the same period, yet the history of tenancy which predominated in the decades before removal from Cremin in 1978, and which drew hostility from farmers and the state, has played out in a crucially ambiguous fashion in the reconstruction of Cremin. The particular path pursued in the Cremin case with regard to tenancy has differed in comparison to similar cases elsewhere in South Africa. Whereas in some cases of restoration, tenants have joined landowners on the restored land,¹³ in Cremin the leadership has opposed the reintroduction of tenancy relationships. Changing constructions of community and

13 See, for example, D James, *Gaining Ground? : “rights” and “property” in South African land reform* (Routledge-Cavendish, Abingdon, 2007), pp 105-129

identity, and particularly the dynamics of the fissures between landowners and tenants in the process of this claim for land, are examined in this chapter.

Continuing within a theme of constructing community, Chapter 4 takes up a very different case. This is the claim to land on the Eastern Shores of Lake St Lucia, an area of former “reserve” land, by the Bhangazi people in the 1980s and 1990s. Over a period of 30 years, some 1 200 households were removed from the area to make way for commercial forestry, a military base, and in the name of conservation. From the late 1970s to the late 1990s, shifting discourses of conservation and conceptions of the “public interest”, and the changing political environment, shaped (and in turn was shaped by) the ways in which, and by whom, the Bhangazi claim was composed and articulated. This chapter traces the history of competing claims on land in the area – which later came to include mining interests – over this period and in the years of the Commission since 1994. It follows the difficult job of the Commission in defining a group of claimants who had been removed from their homes and land, the fraught environment within which this took place, and the settlement compromise – one more complex and limited than restoration, but far from a failure. In this chapter particularly, Walker’s receptivity to perceptions of locality, the sensory experience of place, and the significance of personal attachment to land is conveyed.

Walker employs the third and final case study, above and beyond its particular dynamics, to explore the crucial issue of urban claims to land that have, despite the rural origins of the agenda, dominated the restitution process. Developments since the forced removal of the residents of Cato Manor/Umkhumbane in the 1960s engendered multiple claims made upon that land in the period of restitution; since the land invasions of the late 1980s, shack dwellers have joined former landowners and tenants in staking claims to a place in the city. In the face of the competing visions of claimants and local development schemes, the Commission resorted to “restitution in default”. According to Walker “the programme suffered from the insularity behind its original conceptualisation” (p 169), by which she means that in dealing with a claim that was neither monolithic nor rural, the programme proved unable to adapt and deal creatively with the particularities of the urban situation. The political marginalisation of land claimants as a result of this process, as claimants were to make do with financial compensation, has aggravated ethnic divisions in the city.

Chapter 7 skilfully treads a path through the complex web of official statistics on land reform and restitution to argue for a more measured assessment of the achievements and failures of, and limitations upon, the restitution programme. A crucial critique raised in this closing section is the consistent underestimation of urban issues in discourses and debates on land reform. For Walker, this is “misplaced agrarianisation”, a preoccupation with the redistribution of white farmland as a national project, obscuring South Africa’s historical system of reserves, or Bantustans, which are at the heart of its enduring post-apartheid legacy. Joining other recent critiques,¹⁴ Walker calls for renewed attention to the urban aspects of the “land issue” and the structural constraints on land reform, invoking influential contributions by Colin Murray which grounded processes of dispossession firmly in the context of the apartheid state’s attempts to deal with economic and agrarian change by “displacing”

14 For instance, contributions by Henry Bernstein and Ben Cousins in L. Ntsebeza and R. Hall (eds), *The Land Question in South Africa : the challenge of transformation and redistribution* (HSRC Press, Cape Town, 2007)

urbanization to “resettlement” sites in the Bantustans.¹⁵ These dimensions to South Africa’s “land issue” have been overshadowed in recent decades by the localised emphasis of land restitution cases, and the overtly political removals from “black spots” that were so prevalent in the 1980s. Despite astute observation of these issues, outside the discussion specific to the urban case study of Cato Manor/Umkhumbane they are, regrettably, not significantly developed. This is perhaps a minor grievance.

The inclusion of an authorial testimonial, which sits amongst other accounts by land claimants and mediators, explores the sensory experience of landscape in another dimension. The short autobiographical chapter, “A personal journey” (Chapter 6), explores memories of childhood and personal life course to invoke a sense of human attachment to place that is complex and unstable but, nevertheless, shapes and orders the past and present. This enriches the narrative of the book in ways unusual for an academic study. It places academic analysis itself in a location of personal time and place, to communicate in a sophisticated way a grounded empathy with the author’s subjects of study.

Drawing on a career of academic research, activism and government office, and integrating her own and others’ personal reflections, Cheryl Walker has written an outstanding book. Incisive and rigorous, eloquent and sensitive, *Landmarked* is a work of major accomplishment.

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Allison Drew, *Between Empire and the Revolution. A Life of Sidney Bunting, 1873-1936*

Pickering and Chatto, London, 2007

294 pp

ISBN 9781851968930

Price unknown

Sidney Bunting – a founder member of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) and a leading South African communist of the 1920s – was an extraordinary person who lived an extraordinary life. It was, indeed, so full of surprise and drama, that it might have merited a novel, not just an academic biography.

To begin with, Sidney Bunting seemed to be ill-suited for a career of a communist leader. Bunting was born in 1873 to a family of successful and well-off Wesleyan liberals. His father, Percy Bunting, was a lawyer, journalist and politician, and an admirer of Gladstone with whom he became close. From his early childhood, Sidney was exposed to the debates and pursuits of London's leading liberal intellectuals for whom his parents' home was a centre. Sidney studied History, Classics and Latin at St Paul's school, where he became an exemplary student. He also played music – a passion that remained with him until the end of his life. He went on to read Classics at Magdalen, Oxford, where he again was a star student. His

15 C Murray, "Displaced Urbanization: South Africa's Rural Slums", *African Affairs*, 86, 344, 1987; C Murray, "Structural Unemployment, Small Towns and Agrarian Change in South Africa", *African Affairs*, 94, 374, 1995

world was that of Homer, Virgil, Demosthenes and Cicero, as well as of Mendelssohn, Schumann, Haydn, Mozart, Brahms and Beethoven. He won multiple prestigious university prizes and awards, but narrowly failed to be elected to a fellowship at the college. He ended up working as a solicitor for a firm in the City, became a founder-member of the Oxford University Musical Union and joined the Fabian Society.

However successful and intellectually and aesthetically charged, Sidney's life seemed uneventful and predictable until 1900, when he volunteered to fight for the Empire against the Boers. Both of his parents were proponents of empire, and so was Sidney, who thought that Britain would use its power for the benefit of any country which it occupied. However, emotions were most probably also involved: he did not rush to the front until it became clear that he could not marry his cousin, Cornelia Bonté Amos, one of the few female medical students in the country. Bonté graduated in May 1900 and was sent to Egypt, Sidney sailed for South Africa in June. It was to be 16 years later that he eventually married.

With the war behind him, he returned to the life of a perfect English gentleman, though this time in Johannesburg: legal work, the Rand Club, the Johannesburg Musical Society. He however was mixing in Labour Party circles and by 1910 was caught up in politics. The very first strike that he observed as a politician on the left – the 1913 white miners' strike – shook his world profoundly, both because of the outspoken racism of the strikers and the cruelty with which the strike was suppressed.

In 1915, together with a handful of colleagues who had split away from South Africa's Labour Party, Bunting founded the International Socialist League, whose programme, slogans and policy were close to those of the Russian Bolsheviks, and which greeted the Bolshevik revolution with utmost delight. In July 1921, together with a number of comrades, Bunting founded the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) and became its first treasurer. The same year, the party joined the Communist International (Comintern) – an international communist organisation centred in Moscow – formally becoming its branch and pledging to accept and implement all its political decisions, resolutions and directives. Bunting was one of the most energetic protagonists of this move.

One has to pause here to take in the scale and the improbability of this move. In 1921 Sidney was 48. By then he was a married man with two children and a prospect of a decent career either in politics or in business. By becoming a communist, he forfeited any chance of such a career. Moreover, until then his views were pretty much those of a liberal, allowing for a diversity of freely expressed opinions, a multiplicity of approaches and freedom of political action: this was the tradition that he imbibed with his mother's milk and seemed to follow, and at 48 his political vision must have been fully formed. Yet at that age and against the whole weight of his background, he undertook to subject himself to the strict discipline of the Comintern – and he fulfilled this pledge, toeing the line without deviation for the rest of his life. True, he attempted to reason with the Comintern, but once the line was defined, he was not the one to cross it.

More often than not, relocation to colonies had the effect of moving politicians' (and ordinary citizens') views to the right, not the other way round, so Bunting was pretty unusual. One of the achievements of Drew's book, is her way of showing how unusual he really was. Biographies of communist leaders typically describe their communist activities – but little else. Drew has recreated the lives and careers of some of Bunting's relatives and friends, which allowed her to show how he could have lived – but chose not to. Of particular importance here is the life of Sidney's cousin, Jack Lidgett, two years his senior. Sidney and Jack found themselves looking for opportunities in Johannesburg at about the same time, and undertook to manage the old and non-productive family business – a farm in Natal. Jack was to become the manager *in situ*, Sidney was to provide legal advice and to visit the farm regularly for discussions and consultations. And so it was. Jack busied himself with the practicalities of growing wattle – labour, production, harvesting, marketing, construction, and so on. Sidney did the paperwork. Through all ups and downs – and Drew presents a detailed information on the development of the farm, year in, year out – Jack's part of the business grew, and Sidney's shrank. Their politics diverged further and further, until they found themselves at the opposite ends of the political spectrum, and so did their fortunes: Jack ended up as a prosperous farmer, and Sidney as a pauper who could not support his family. Jack's was a typical life of a young white man in the colonies. Sidney's was definitely not.

What was it in his character or in his earlier life that could explain this? Or could it be the influence of his wife, Rebecca – a Jewish émigré from Lithuania, a prominent communist and a founder member of the CPSA in her own right? Or was it the magnitude of the Russian revolution that drew Bunting into its orbit, as happened to so many other socialists and liberals? Or could it be that he simply had not fully understood what he was taking upon himself? Unfortunately, Drew gives no explanation for this most important development in Sidney's entire life.

Bunting occupied several leading positions in the ISL and the CPSA, and for many years edited the CPSA's newspaper, working tirelessly and selflessly often at the expense of his own health and his family's well-being. In order to give all his time to the party, he gave up his income, leaving his legal practice and later resigning as a manager of the farm.

Uniquely amongst his comrades, Bunting saw the importance, for the future of his then predominantly white party, of attracting Africans into its ranks. Long before the Comintern, in 1927, mandated the slogan of an "independent native republic" as the CPSA's programme for South Africa, Bunting made African membership and the relations between black and white party members a big issue within the CPSA. The problem of solidarity – or the lack of it – between white and black labour remained his anguish and his main preoccupation until the end of his political career. One cannot say that he created a growing African following for the party single-handed, but he was the first to start this process and he contributed all his passion and talent to it.

In 1922 Sidney and Rebecca represented the CPSA at the fourth Comintern congress in Moscow, but in the late 1920s, Sidney fell out of favour with the organisation. The wisdom of a "native republic" as opposed to a "proletarian republic", escaped him, and he attempted to defend his view, but then bowed to the Comintern's authority and preached the "native republic". However, the very fact that he had

attempted to argue against the Comintern's instructions, left him damaged, tainted in the eyes of some of his colleagues, and they were not to forget such mistakes.

Bunting's greatest achievement was his 1929 election campaign in Thembuland – an area which was then part of the Cape Province, later became part of the Transkei, and is now part of the Eastern Cape province. For most of his compatriots and contemporaries, it was still "darkest Africa", but some of the Cape's black inhabitants still had a vote from pre-Union days and could elect their (white) representative to the Cape parliament. Sidney, now 56, Rebecca, and Gana Makabeni, one of the first black communists, set off to preach communism – the "native republic", to be more precise – to rural people, mostly illiterate and certainly without a knowledge of English. They travelled in a caravan from early March till late July 1929, in an area where it gets really cold in those winter months, speaking to large and small gatherings (Sidney spoke, Gana translated), suffering from harassment by the authorities and local whites, and fighting the banning orders laid on them by the government. Sidney lost the election, but his campaign made a huge impact: thereafter the CPSA was known as "Bunting's party" in this area and among broader circles of the African population.

Taking into consideration all the unfavourable circumstances it was also remarkable that he did not lose badly – he got 12,5 per cent of the vote and kept his deposit. The pressure on him had been so strong that such a defeat could be seen by his colleagues as a victory, but if so, it was a Pyrrhic victory. In the wake of this campaign, Sidney organised the League of African Rights in order to fight against a new set of discriminatory laws then being enacted. The League was not a communist organisation, for Sidney's idea was to unite Africans of every shade of opinion and faith in legal opposition to the new legislation. This was a successful tactic. The idea did not get universal support, but Communists worked with the African National Congress and the Industrial and Commercial Union – a huge African trade union organisation – and succeeded in convening the conference of the League in December 1929 which called for united action against the new laws. The Comintern did not approve: Moscow wanted the African masses to fight not by petitions but by radical revolutionary action under its own banners – and thought that they were ready for it. It was also at that time that the Comintern was beginning to "bolshevisise" its member parties, bringing to power a new, Stalinist generation of leaders who were prepared to toe the line even more slavishly than before. This was accompanied by the campaign against "Trotskyism" – which, in the Soviet Union, led to the physical extermination of the communist "old guard", and in communist parties throughout the world to a witch-hunt for Trotskyites and to the expulsion and often death of scapegoats.

Bunting became such a scapegoat in the South African party. Late in 1930, Douglas Wolton, Bunting's – and the Party's – nemesis, arrived from Moscow. Wolton, a British and South African communist, had, like Bunting, campaigned in the 1929 election, and lost by a far greater margin in a much more conventional coloured area. He had left for England, but now returned, bringing with him the torch of bolshevisation. Bunting was accused of white chauvinism and of promoting a right-wing agenda. This unleashed an anti-Bunting frenzy among the party leadership and, although a large group of African supporters tried to fight for him, in 1931 he was expelled from the party and then from all the party front organisations, such as the Friends of the Soviet Union. The accusations against him were nonsensical (using reformist and social democratic measures and factional activities against the Party

line) and the campaign against him truly ugly. The behaviour of his former comrades towards their fallen leader bordered on insanity: more than once he found a woman comrade and former friend showing her posterior to him with her skirt pulled up – once in the presence of his son.

The CPSA left the League of African Rights which immediately collapsed. The squabbles in the Party, with accusations and counter-accusations and factions expelling one another, continued into the late 1930s. Wolton and his wife Molly, who led the bolshevisation campaign, returned to England in 1933, leaving the Party to its own devices. By the late 1930s, the Party was on the verge of complete collapse.

The expulsion shattered Sidney. The Party was his life, and he firmly believed that he – or any other communist – neither should, nor could act without it. His last years were terrible. His comrades turned away from him, and those who did not, suffered the same fate as he did. The Party expelled even his black followers, which must have been particularly painful for him. His reputation as a “native lover” and a political freak made his relations with his relatives in London and South Africa increasingly difficult. He was also left without any means of existence. It was too late to restart his legal career from scratch: in 1931 he was 58. He ended up playing the viola in an orchestra to support his family. Even this proved too hard – the job involved a lot of travelling, so the family had to survive on Rebecca’s sewing.

Bunting lived to see the change in the Comintern’s line: at its seventh congress in 1935, the Comintern made a U-turn to promote exactly the same policy that Bunting was trying to introduce in 1929-1930. Some other expelled members were invited back to the Party, but Bunting was never rehabilitated: neither then, nor later. A partial redemption came only after his death in 1936: his supporters, mostly black, organised a massive “red” funeral for him, at which the left of all persuasions gathered to pay their last respects.

Allison Drew has written an amazingly detailed chronicle of Bunting’s life. We learn where his father’s family spent its every holiday, what marks Sidney got at school, what disputes he participated at and with what result. We discover the background of his school teachers and university lecturers, and what the rooms he occupied in Magdalen looked like. We learn every turn of Sidney’s prolonged involvement in the family business in Natal. Then there are his writings, his speeches and his letters to his wife and sons, as well as detailed accounts of Party meetings. Drew’s list of notes takes 40 pages and contains every possible relevant archival collection and book. It is an engaging account of a life of an outstanding personality.

Yet, the book is not without fault. There are printing errors and the sources of some references are not clear. There are gaps too, even besides the key question of why Sidney became a communist. Despite the detail, Bunting as a person remains outside the scope of this book. The same is even truer of Rebecca. She was a powerful personality and a formidable politician who was not just a support for Sidney, but a major influence in his life. Drew provides a lot of detail about her – even of her illnesses – yet Rebecca’s persona remains even more mysterious than Sydney’s. Drew does not offer explanations or guesses to the reader: she offers facts, but not interpretations. This is a pity.

Boekresensies

Bunting may seem a somewhat strange figure among South African communists, but there is no doubting his great talents or his utmost dedication to the cause of the downtrodden. There is also no doubting his vision and role in shaping South Africa's future the way it is now.

Irina Filatova

Flip van der Watt, *Tukkies Oorskou sy Eerste Honderd Jaar 1908 – 2008*

University of Pretoria, Pretoria, 2008

202 pp

ISBN 978-0-620-40825-7

R250.00

On 10 February 2008, the University of Pretoria (UP) celebrated its centenary. As part of the celebrations, Professor Van der Watt, a retired senior academic and the editor of the fourth volume (1993-2000) of the *Ad Destinatum* series on the history of the university, as well as the author of *Rectores Magnifici* (2003), the history of the first eleven university principals, was commissioned to write a history of the institution. He was supported in this endeavour by Professor Karin Harris, director of the UP archive and her efficient staff of archivists.

Tukkies Oorskou sy Eerste Honderd Jaar is a coffee-table book with magnificent photographs, accompanied by short, but informative essays, relating to the history, events and architecture of UP. Although the purpose of the publication is to celebrate the achievements of the university, Van der Watt follows Oliver Cromwell's advice to paint a "warts-and-all" portrait. He succeeds admirably in conveying the turbulent history of the university, especially the struggle to turn it into an Afrikaner institution. Despite including a large portion of Afrikaans-speaking students, the university, then called the Transvaal University College, was initially an English-medium institution. With the growth of Afrikaner nationalism, the demand for lectures in Afrikaans became stronger. The result was a protracted and bitter struggle on the campus between Afrikaner and English academics and students. The Lamont case of 1932 finally led to the complete Afrikanerisation of the university. H.P. Lamont, the head of UP's French department, under the pseudonym Wilfred Saint-Mandé, wrote a book entitled *War, Wine and Women*, in which he made derogatory remarks about Afrikaners. This led to an outcry amongst Afrikaners when it was rumoured that Mandé was a lecturer at the university. On 23 May 1932, four young Afrikaners decided to take matters into their hands to defend the honour of the Afrikaner. Even though they lacked direct proof that he was Mandé, they abducted Lamont and tarred and feathered him. Fortunately the UP adapted with less turbulence to the new South Africa after 1994, and is deservedly seen as one of South Africa's leading tertiary institutions.

Tukkies Oorskou sy Eerste Honderd Jaar is a beautiful, informative and highly readable book, especially the essays on the various university principals. They are a joy to read – see for example the one on A.E. du Toit, "Omstrede kampvegter vir 'n Afrikaanse Universiteit", which can serve as an example of how a short biographical essay should be written. The book furthermore maintains a healthy balance between historical investigation and the celebration of the university's achievements. For any

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former UP student wanting to go down memory lane, this is a must buy. The book can be ordered by email from eeufees.winkel@up.ac.za or telephonically (+27-12-4202278). The centenary shop can be visited in the Ou Lettere Building, Room 1.16, Hatfield Campus.

FA Mouton

University of South Africa