

## Book Feature

### Boekbeskouing

**L. Kriel, *The “Malaboch” books: Kgaluši in the “civilization of the written word”* (Missionsgeschichtliches Archiv 13. Studien der Berliner Gessellschaft für Missionsgeschichte)  
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#### An Interesting and Fresh Excursion into Intellectual History

In 1894, as part of a comprehensive strategy to subjugate African polities in the South African Republic (Transvaal), the military forces of President Paul Kruger’s government conducted a campaign against the Hananwa of Kgaluši Mmalebôhò, an African ruler in the Blouberg region of the north-western Soutpansberg District. It was not the most spectacular of campaigns. The wars against the enigmatic rain queen Modjadje of the Lobedu (later in 1894), the Tlou of Makgoba (1895) and the Venda under Mphephu (1898) were more “impressive” in terms of the mainstream of the region’s history. However, the Blouberg campaign was an important breakthrough. It opened up the way for more efficient communication routes between the Transvaal and the new territory of the Chartered Company in what was subsequently to become known as Southern Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. Perhaps of greater importance was that the Blouberg campaign, much the same as those to follow, gave impetus to the destabilisation of traditional African communities in the northern parts of the Transvaal – an area where the *de facto* authority of white rule had not yet been established thoroughly. The gradual, but partial, collapse in the 1890s of local indigenous cultural enclaves, paved the way for ever-increasing numbers of African males from the northern parts of the Soutpansberg region to be absorbed into the migrant labour system of the rapidly developing gold-mining industrial urban centres along the Witwatersrand, as well as the coalfields of the southern and eastern Transvaal.

Perhaps as a result of its apparent “insignificance” in the more dominant metadiscourse of republican power politics and the imminent transition to British control at the turn of the century, the Hananwa campaign never enjoyed substantive historiographical attention in the history of the South African Republic (1852-1902). With the publication of *The “Malaboch” books Kgaluši in the “civilization of the written word”*, the University of Pretoria-based historian, Lize Kriel, has made an impressive contribution towards setting things right. The study, which can justifiably be considered to be perhaps one of the better examples of a new wave of South African historical writing, deserves praise for its originality, its systematic methodological work(wo)manship, as well as its constructive contribution towards shedding new light on nineteenth century Transvaal historiography.

Classifying the author and the book is complex. The author may, or may not, be a transitional postmodernist or an intellectual historian in the disguise of a South Africanist. The book most certainly represents a smattering of postmodernist historical writing – a trend that made inroads into philosophical discourses between

the 1970s and 1990s. Methodologically it links up with the linguistic turn and relies on certain influences of the cultural turn, a strong force in American historiography of the 1990s. There are also traces of Anglo-American historiographical trends of the 1990s, in which the Comaroffs and their analysis of missionary history reformatted a number of traditional assumptions about Christianity and its civilising role in Africa. Closer to home, there are indications of the work being influenced by some Western European theoretical and philosophical discourses introduced at the History Department of the University of Pretoria up to the mid-1980s, when the late Professor F.A. van Jaarsveld retired as head of this department at the University of Pretoria.

In its barest context, *The “Malaboch” books* is a dogfight between two books in terms of their implicit intellectual value. Kriel painstakingly analyses the works in detail. As the subtitle suggests, they are representative of a civilisation in which the written word cast a long and lasting shadow of dominance over African memories of the past. The author conducts an incisive and masterful historical and literary analysis of the two books. Looked at from this perspective, the title of the study could well have been “The Sonntags versus Rae in the battle for the understanding of the Blauberger/Blouberger events of 1894”. In the twenty-first century, the outright winner appears to be the meticulously edited diary of the German pastor, Christoph Sonntag, who worked for several years as a missionary of the Berliner Missionsgesellschaft (BMS) in the “Blauberger”. His diaries were reworked by his son, Konrad. The history of “Malaboch” was published separately in an English translation in 1983.

The Reverend Colin Rae, author of the book that appeared before the turn of the twentieth century, comes over as a somewhat opportunistic, hard-drinking theologian. He came to South Africa, presumably to seek his fame and fortune on the Kimberley diamond fields, before becoming a man of the cloth. His literary contribution to our understanding of the Blouberger campaign is the loser in the battle of the books. The work was published in the aftermath of the Jameson Raid of 1895-1896. It was perhaps originally intended to be more of a propaganda piece, with the matter-of-fact intention of convincing the British book-reading public why it was necessary for Britain to go to war against the South African Republic in 1899. Its intended value as a record of the 1894 republican campaign against the Hananwa, would then have been myopic. Discursively it was intended to shed light on some of the blundering goings-on in the military life of the Boer republic. The underlying discourse was supposed to create a platform for understanding why leading and “respected” members of the *Uitlander* population on the Rand wanted a change of rule. However, even in this respect, by an ironic twist of fate, Rae’s book appears to have been somewhat of a failure. So, in the “battle of the books”, it literally would not stand a chance.

Kriel’s overt objective has been to systematically evaluate the observations of two spiritual leaders on the republican frontier in a time of war. The essential problem that the reader is then guided into, is to live with a state of comparative imbalance. On the one hand there is a contemporary history publication and on the other a history book published well after the fact of war. It is an imbalance that subconsciously remains alive for the duration of the reading experience. On the micro level it makes sense, but on the macro level there are some unconvincing explorative excursions – especially in Chapter 3. For example, the author gives attention to the phenomenon of the European scramble for colonies in Africa and the colonial wars at

the time of the Blouberg campaign. We are specifically informed about the British actions in West Africa and how strikingly it resembled what was going on in the Transvaal. The mindsets of the officials and the military leaders were so similar. Their objectives were also strikingly alike – leaving alive a Spenglerian sense of cunning *Schicksal* and the imminent fall of the West. Also there are references to the Chartered Territory to the north of the Limpopo River in the Southern African context. But, other than that, the theme remains under-explored. This is a sense of unevenness in comparative analysis that leaves the reader uninformed about a state of *differance* in the subcontinent at the time. Another under-explored comparative plane of understanding is the relevance of memory. The sense of loss, articulated in the often referred to study of Tlou Makhura on the Hananwa, together with the sense of Afrikaner memory in the early twentieth century, and the recollections of the German missionaries operating in the region, could have provided a deeper understanding of cultural constructions of the remembered past. For example, a detailed evaluation of the Mmalebôhò praise poem recorded by J. van Schalkwyk and S.M. Moifatswane, along with the discussion on Ranger's views of the Hehe in Tanzania in the 1890s, could have enriched our understanding of the post-colonial condition and our present awareness of memory constructions.

However, the project of the author is a micro study of two books whose authors shared a common profession. The one had the intention of publishing his recollections. The other's recollections came to the attention of the reading public by a twist of fate, sparked off in the field of family history. Here we are however also confronted with intrinsic problems of time and space. As Koselleck explains:

Nähe und Distanz, die einen Raum verschieden gestaffelt umgrenzen, sind nur erfahrbar durch die Zeit, kraft derer unmittelbare Nähe oder vermittelte Distanz jeweils erschlossen oder überbrückt werden können<sup>1</sup>

When the comparisons of time and space are neutralised as formative elements in the production process of writing, it paves the way for biographical description in historical studies. That is when historical writing becomes an extension of creative literary writing. It presents many opportunities for the historian, if sufficient autobiographical disclosures are available as primary source material. The available data then randomly sets itself up for advanced internal and external criticism. The hermeneutics of the other turns into an understanding of self-criticism and self-absorption in the subject of focus. Understanding Christoph Sonntag is simple. His pedigree suggests a typical Eastern Prussian rural background where, as was the case in South Africa in the nineteenth century, pioneering settlement trends on new farmlands was at the order of the day.<sup>2</sup> As a trained teacher and theologian of the Berlin Society that had built up an impressive track record in the Transvaal, Sonntag comes over as a thorough type of person. He was precise in his actions. Focused on the task at hand – turning African “heathens” on the frontier into fine “upright” Christians, who would be equipped with the knowledge of the (good) Book to enter, as migrant labourers, the world of (modern) industry and commerce in the burgeoning mining centres of the country.

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1 R Koselleck, *Zeitschichten: Studien zur Historik* (Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2000), p 90

2 D Blackburn, *The conquest of nature: water landscape, and the making of modern Germany* (W W Norton & Co, New York, 2006), pp 52-53

Rae, on the other hand, was the son of an artist. Orphaned at the age of four, he studied (presumably academically) to become a minister of religion and finished up in 1890 in the Diocese of Bloemfontein of the Church of the Province of South Africa, “still far from qualified as a priest” (p 105). Unlike Sonntag, Rae seems to have pursued certain things with greater passion than others. For example, we are told that he longed in Africa for the life of London. He also appears to have had a drinking problem, and when he died in 1911 in Britain – after having been literally kicked out of his parish in the Eastern Transvaal – it was somewhat out of step with what his Letherhead parishioners would have expected of their spiritual leader. Somehow his shameful death, according to Kriel, was airbrushed in shades of sympathy for a “beloved” priest (pp 125-131). Although the author does not outline it, Rae comes across as a typical product of the late nineteenth century Britain in which the prevalent culture of industrial development and the driving force of imperial expansion provided adventure-orientated individuals with an opportunity to travel and prove their worth in the rough-and-ready world of the colonial frontier.

Reading the text against the grain there are traces of the anti-hero. Perhaps the reader might even find the cricket-loving, secretive homosexual under some of the layers of narrative. Why is it then that a James Dean-type comes over, with the only real difference being him dying on a bicycle and not behind the steering-wheel of a sports car? Add to that the contemplation of an illustration on page 168 with the sporty Fred Kelly (a resident of the Soutpansberg) on a (racing) bicycle, to transport mail.

Unlike Rae, Sonntag’s life was so typical of the dedicated BMS missionary in the Transvaal. Losing members of his family to disease was part of life in Africa. Even when he died in 1919, at the time of the worldwide influenza epidemic, presumably of a weakened constitution brought about by malaria, it was firmly in the typical framework of the missionary tradition.

Comparatively speaking, in biographical terms, Sonntag was the better man for the job of reporting on the Blouberg campaign of 1894, but then comparisons are only possible when bipolar factual evidence is presented. In a vast variety of contexts, Kriel systematically outlines the facts and comes to the not surprising conclusion that Sonntag’s narrative is more reliable. Rae, a man disgraced by his own people, was unable to even construct a cohesive narrative of his own on a military campaign that is today interpreted in a distinctly different light from way back in the nineteenth century. Moreover, Rae’s work is a document notable for the fact that he plagiarised reports that the journalist, A.C. Jenkins, wrote for *The Press*, a pro-government newspaper of the day. As an observer, Rae was hopeless, according to Kriel. Even more, he could only speak English properly, while the German missionary could read and speak German, English, Dutch, and the Sotho language.

The author indulges in a variety of methodological strategies to explain the manner in which the texts can be understood. By far her most comprehensive exposition is based on Hayden White’s theoretical understanding of the nineteenth century historical imagination in Europe. Kriel effectively uses his classificatory model to locate irony as the dominant trope in Sonntag’s writing. Metaphor and synecdoche is the notable feature in Rae’s work. However, given the extensive layers of narrative, light-shedding, biographical details on the authors of the Blouberg

campaign, the reader is again tempted to read against the grain and contemplate the psychological forces that shaped their perceptions of space and time, African colonial frontier landscapes, changing perceptions of space before and after conflict, as well as the existential sense of meaningful action – employment (Chapter 9). All of this fits into what Hacking calls the “dynamic nominalism” of making up people – a tendency to classify types of people which had its origins in the development of mainstream psychology in the late nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Kriel’s objective is not to understand, apart from the ever-present revisionist perspectives of post-colonial discourse and the indigenisation of our contemporary understanding of the African past, what role the trauma of military action played in shaping the lives of Sonntag and Rae. Principled actions, such as ringing the mission bell to let the Hananwa know that they were in imminent danger of attack, or the cultural pursuit of contemplating picnicking time, reminds the reader of a colonial mind frame, where manliness on the frontier was linked to the reaffirmation of an ideology of white rule.

The author, in the closing section, explains that the book was not supposed to have been about Sonntag and Rae. It was supposed to have been about the Hananwa, and more specifically Mmalebôhô. She also admits, in a reflective mode of self-criticism, that she was biased in her comparative focus. This inversion unfolds the human side of authorship. It understates the intersubjectivity that becomes the essential debris when we try to understand the past in a variety of contexts. It makes us aware of creative lacunae, open to exploration, if and when we go to the trouble of trying to understand the mimetic powers of historical narrative and basic human imagination.

On the whole *The “Malaboeh” books* is an interesting and fresh excursion into intellectual history that deserves a readership that extends across the boundaries of history as discipline.

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### **Book History or Source Analysis?**

The past does not exist. All too often professional historians forget that all that remains of the past are material artefacts. Archaeologists are of course intensely aware of the materiality of their subject matter, but mainstream historians mostly seem oblivious to the fact that written records are first and foremost historical artefacts which have survived into the present (either in its original or in some transcribed or altered state). Fortunately, of late, some historians have started to pay attention to the very materiality and textuality of historical records. How did the texts on which historians rely for their interpretations of the past come into being – both as intellectual objects and as physical ones? This important book by Lize Kriel which addresses issues such as these, is the first of its kind for South African history.

The subject of *The “Malaboeh” books* is not the Hananwa-Boer War of 1894, but two texts which owe their existence to this event: the Anglican priest Colin Rae’s

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3 I Hacking, *Historical ontology* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge – Massachusetts, 2004), pp 99-114

*Malaboch, or Notes from my Diary on the Boer Campaign of 1894 against the Chief Malaboch of Blaauwberg...* (1898) and the diary of the German missionary Christoph Sonntag, which was only published in 1983 (an English translation by his son, Konrad) under the title *My Friend Malaboch Chief of the Blue Mountains*. Kriel defines her aim with this study as “a ‘comparative deconstruction’ of the two diaries as historical texts and literary artefacts” (p 13). In order to do so, she utilises the conceptual tools developed by post-structuralist literary theory, as well as the work of historical philosophers such as Hayden White. The theoretical approaches which inform the study are discussed at length in the opening chapter of the book.

The rest of the book is divided into three parts. Chapters 2 to 4 study what Kriel calls the “extratext” or what most historians would call the “context” which would help us come to a better understanding of texts by Rae and Sonntag. Chapter 2 sketches the history of the Blouberg region, including the development of the Hananwa polity, the settlement of Europeans and the eventual subjugation of the black communities of the region by the colonial forces. Kriel has a penchant for using theoretical language and jargon, which is sometimes useful and adds to a reader’s understanding, but her use of Braudelian terms in this chapter struck me as rather forced, although her suggestion that “conjunctural determinants were guided ... by culture” (p 59) strikes me as an idea worth pursuing in this regard. The following chapter compares the Hananwa conflict with similar conflicts in West Africa during the same period. This short chapter is the most disappointing of the book and although suggestive in some regards, its superficiality really detracts from the overall study, so that one feels that the argument of the book does not gain by this digression.

The real meat of the book starts with Chapter 4, which introduces Colin Rae and Christoph Sonntag to the reader. This chapter still forms part of the “extratext”, which is meant to help us understand the texts better. Kriel’s careful research into the biographies of, especially, Rae (who is the more obscure of the two authors) and Sonntag, does much to further a greater understanding of their texts. Kriel has done much to recreate the biography of Rae as a struggling Anglican deacon and later chaplain, although it strikes this reader that she is rather harsh in her judgment of this under-educated alcoholic whom she variously describes as “just a very ordinary bloke” and a “thoughtless, rather unfortunate fool” (both quotes from p 130). In fact, one gets the impression that Kriel may have gone too far in her opposition of the near-saintly Sonntag with the unfortunate and weak Rae, a tendency which she subjects to searching self-criticism in her conclusion (pp 341-342).

One of the most interesting aspects, at least to a book historian such as myself, which came to the fore in this book, is the way in which Sonntag kept his diary. Keeping a diary was incumbent on missionaries (not just those of the Berlin Missionary Society). These diaries did not only serve as repositories of knowledge, but also as a form of self-policing in that the diaries were sent to the missionary authorities who used them to judge the performance of each missionary in question. In Chapter 4, Kriel cites a case of Sonntag adding marginalia in the forms of question and exclamation marks in a newspaper clipping about the supposed transgressions of the Hananwa. This fascinating case reveals to Kriel (quite correctly, in my opinion) that behind Sonntag’s official façade of complying to Boer policy towards the local populace, he had his own converse opinions and doubts (pp 123-124). This is a good example of how close attention to issues of textuality, even to something as ephemeral

as marginal annotations not meant for anybody's eyes, can reveal much about the inner feelings of a reader or writer to which the historian would not otherwise have had access.<sup>4</sup> It is therefore most unfortunate that Kriel has let the opportunity slip to expand this line of research into the different copies which exist of Sonntag's diaries: as she herself tells us, there are not only his own versions with significant scratching out and additions, but also a neater version with the marginal comments and annotations of his supervisor (p 29). An analysis of the tensions between these texts may have revealed much about what was going on in Sonntag's mind.<sup>5</sup>

The next part of the book, Chapters 5 to 6, deal with what Kriel calls the "editorial deconstruction" (or what in the old days would have been known as "external criticism") of the two texts. The first of these chapters discusses the narrators in the texts. Through careful textual analysis, Kriel shows how Konrad Sonntag, who translated and published his father's diary in 1983, was actually much more than that: through omitting, inserting and changing all sorts of detail in the text, he in effect became a "hidden narrator". In doing so, he made the "message" of the text much stronger. Even more revealing – and original – is Kriel's discovery of the hitherto unnoticed fact that 65 per cent of Rae's book (which had often in the past been used as a historical source for studies of the Hananwa-Boer conflict) is actually derived *verbatim* from the pages of the Pretoria newspaper, *The Press*. Kriel carefully compared the pages of Rae with those of the newspaper and found that he had a marked preference (for personal and ideological reasons) for one of the two journalists who accompanied the Boer forces to Blouberg.

In the opinion of this reviewer, the most interesting chapter is Chapter 6: "Reception of the Rae and Sonntag Texts". Regarding Sonntag's original diary, Kriel shows that the chief impetus for keeping his diary was to account for his actions. Although his superiors would read it, and some parts of it could have been published in the Mission Society's newsletters, Sonntag's diary still remained first and foremost a personal affair. The implicit readers of the published version however are a different matter: here it is clear that Konrad Sonntag had in mind his own (liberal) contemporaries, which is the reason why he altered the contents of the diary. Kriel also includes an intriguing section on how the published Sonntag diary was received by the press in 1983, showing how "current affairs coloured the horizon of expectation" (p 193) of South African readers of the period. This is to prove her point, made in the opening chapter, that a text is reconstituted every time it is read under new circumstances.

Unlike Sonntag's text, that of Rae was published shortly after the event. Kriel provides a good discussion of who the readers of *The Press* (from whose pages Rae stole much of his book) were, and how events of the day, such as the *Uitlander* question, influenced their expectations. She also briefly discusses the reception of the book by reviewers (who were mostly rather negative). This section has much to excite the book historian, but overall I get the impression that here the author (who has made some fine contributions to the burgeoning field of book history) has missed

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4 For a superb demonstration of the possibilities of this kind of research, see H J Jackson, *Marginalia: Readers Writing in Books* (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2001)

5 Kriel is not unaware of the possibilities of this line of research, as is revealed by her use of marginalia on page 191 to reveal something about the reception history of Rae's text

a fine opportunity. Kriel does briefly indicate how Rae's book fits into a wider genre of campaign memoirs and other books aimed at the British public who were eager during the 1890s to have their suspicions about the Boers confirmed (pp 184-185). She briefly suggests that "Rae could even have found a reading public for his book in Britain" (p 186). But did he? As William St. Clair has shown so masterfully for nineteenth-century Britain, a study of the publication process can reveal much about the intentions of the author, as well as the intended audience.<sup>6</sup> So, knowing about the format and the price of the book can reveal at which market it was aimed. One wonders who the publisher of Rae's book was (local or metropolitan?); whether or not it formed part of a series; and how (and as what) it was marketed. By analysing its sales figures, a greater measure of the book's impact could have been gained than merely from the reactions of reviewers. These questions-in-search-of-answers are even more significant when we consider Kriel's claim that the parts of Rae's book which he did write himself, clearly contained aspects aimed to please a wider British audience (p 189).

The last part of Kriel's book (Chapters 7 to 9) deal with how the narratives were constructed, and how the narrators constructed meaning in their texts. Chapter 7 shows that Sonntag's position and background made him a much better and more truthful observer than Rae. A large part of this chapter is devoted to an analysis, *à la* Hayden White, of the narrative elements and the use of tropes by these writers. While one admires Kriel's clear exposition of the theory and her skill in applying it to her texts, I really did wonder what the reader gained by learning that Sonntag's text is a "tragic satire" (p 231) which uses a contextualist mode of argument and reveals the liberalist ideological position of the author(s). Or, indeed, that Rae's text veers between metaphor and synecdoche as predominant tropes. Chapter 8 is a discussion of the different ways in which Sonntag and Rae account for the origins of the Hananwa-Boer War. Kriel shows that Rae's reasons (or rather *reason*) are more revealing about the coloniser's mentality, than serving as an adequate explanation for the conflict. The original diary of Sonntag was much more ambivalent, placing the blame to some extent on the Boers. This ambivalence was however removed by the "translator" (acting more as an editor) whose changes to the text made the Hananwa appear as mere hapless victims with little agency. The final chapter is a long discourse on how time and space (including issues such as "natural beauty" and the "desecration of space") are experienced and employed in the texts of Rae and Sonntag.

Before I had read this book, I assumed (perhaps somewhat naïvely) that it would be a contribution to the developing field of South African Book History, along the lines of the fine studies of Isabel Hofmeyr on the circulation and adaptation of *The Pilgrim's Progress* to missionary aims in Africa; and Andrew van der Vlies on the creation of an English "South African" literature through the publication, promotion and reception of key nineteenth and twentieth-century novelists.<sup>7</sup> However, Lize Kriel's work turned out to be a rather different book. Although it touches upon issues relating to the history of reading and the book, and certainly makes important

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6 W St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004)

7 I Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan: A Transnational History of The Pilgrim's Progress* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2004); A van der Vlies, *South African Textual Cultures: White, Black, Read All Over* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2007)

contributions to this field, it is as much a literary analysis of two (relatively little-known) primary historical sources, each with its own problems and challenges. It is a wide-ranging, closely-argued (even difficult at times) book which may not be popular among all practitioners of our discipline, but, as a case study of how to apply the insights historians have derived from the “literary turn” in their discipline, *The “Malaboeh” books* is important. As such it can be used with profit in courses on new developments in historiography, especially given its clear exposition of theoretical material which would be more accessible to senior students than the original theoretical texts. In this regard, Lize Kriel has done us all a great service.<sup>8</sup>

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### History is all about Context

In the winter of 1894, the government of the South African Republic mounted a campaign against the Hananwa, a group under the leadership of Kgaluši Mmalebôhò living in the Blouberg in today’s Limpopo Province. This marked the first of four campaigns in the region which, with the defeat of the Vhavenda in 1898, would bring the last independent groups in South Africa under colonial domination.

Historians writing about this period of history have used two “diaries” as primary sources. The first of these is that of the Anglican military chaplain, Colin Rae, rather clumsily entitled *Maleboeh, or notes from my diary on the Boer campaign of 1894 against the chief Maleboeh of Blaauwberg, District Zoutpansberg, South African Republic* (published in Cape Town in 1898). The second is that of the Berlin Mission Society missionary in the area, Christoph Sonntag, entitled *My friend Maleboeh, chief of the Blue Mountains* (edited by Konrad Sonntag and published in Pretoria in 1983). Kriel’s intriguing study represents “a ‘comparative deconstruction’ of the two diaries as historical texts and literary artefacts” (p 13).

As is the case with many works of this nature, the study began its life as a PhD dissertation, accepted in the Department of Historical and Heritage Studies at the University of Pretoria in 2002. While reworked for publication, traces of this remain in the rather dense opening chapter (“The Diary as historical Document and literary Artefact”, pp 17-50), in the discussion of “Structures in which the information was presented” (pp 227-232) and in “Tropes” (pp 232-245). One was tempted to skim over these slightly and get back to engaging with what I found to be a highly-readable, appealing and well-argued text (as a dutiful reviewer, I nevertheless hasten to add that I did not succumb to this temptation!).

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8 Although Kriel’s style is generally engaging, the origins of the book as a thesis is revealed in the very formal structure (is it really necessary to have twelve subheadings – none more than a page – under “9 2 2 Rae and Sonntag at Blouberg”?) I also found the potted biographies of scholars and historians, provided in footnotes at the first mention of their names, rather bizarre (though both of these aspects may have been done at the insistence of the publisher) – one would hope South African historians would know by now who Foucault and Said are! The book also contains quite a number of spelling and other errors which will hopefully be rectified in a future edition

For this reader anyway, the great strength of Kriel's work lies in her meticulous attention to providing a detailed context within, and against which to read the two "diaries", and her extremely "close reading", or a "reading against the grain", (pp 24 and 49) of these problematic colonial texts. Thus, in Chapters 2 and 3, Kriel presents "an impression of the 'structural' and 'conjunctural' contexts within which the 1894 conflict between the Boers and the Hananwa took place" (p 27). Following the lead of Fernand Braudel, she begins with the *longue durée* – geography "as a cultural category" against which to contextualise the events which gave rise to the "diaries" (pp 54-59). This leads into discussion of "the development of the Hananwa polity" (pp 60-65), the settlement of whites in the Soutpansberg District (pp 65-71), and "the conquest of black communities" in the wider area (pp 72-82). Enlarging the scope of the context significantly, she concludes this section with an examination of the Hananwa case in the context of the "scramble for Africa" (pp 84-99) and an interesting exploration of "memory as a context" (pp 99-103).

Continuing her engagement with extratextual factors as context, in Chapter 4 the author discusses the biographies of the two copyright holders (why they are not described as authors will become clear soon) of the two published "diaries" (pp 105-138). Moving from extratext to a consideration of the components of author and reader, in Chapters 5 and 6, Kriel explores "the narrators in the Rae and Sonntag texts" (pp 139-175) and the "reception" of the two texts (pp 177-203). Here she meticulously blows the concept of Rae and Sonntag as sole authors out of the water. Rae is revealed as a dipsomaniac plagiarist, who lifted 65 per cent of his text from the columns of the contemporary newspaper, *The Press*, sometimes without even noticing that delayed reports did not fit with his purported chronology. In the case of Sonntag, his son and translator, Konrad, is painstakingly revealed to be a hidden co-narrator of the text. Rae wrote for a macho nineteenth-century audience steeped in the Victorian tradition of adventure. Christoph Sonntag wrote for his superiors in Berlin and a wider audience of supporters of the mission society. His son adapted the text to meet the interests and needs of white English-speakers during the 1980s. In doing so, he freely made use of Rae's work. Whatever their intended readership, both texts have since been used, largely uncritically, by academic historians writing about the Boer-Hananwa War.

Kriel's deconstruction of the texts thus leaves us with two flawed sources which are not the "diaries" – the primary sources – which historians have, thus far, treated them as. This raises the issue of the ways in which they are still worthy of historical investigation, a question which she tackles in the remainder of the book.

Thus, in Chapter 7 (pp 205-247), Kriel compares the content of the Rae and Sonntag texts, exploring the ability of the two copyright-holders "to observe and reproduce information", the "use of press reports", and the "structures in which the information was presented". Chapter 8 (pp 249-288) compares the accounts of the causes of the war presented in the two texts "with specific focus on the witnesses introduced by the two narrators", paying "careful attention to the way Rae and Sonntag incorporated these testimonies – intertexts – into their respective texts and commented on them" (p 38). This chapter also explores the ways in which Rae's text serves as an intertext in Konrad Sonntag's translated version of his father's work. In doing so, Kriel utilises government documents, diaries, memoirs and the works of other historians as further intertexts to assist in comparing the two accounts. Chapter 9 (pp 289-337) engages "the course and outcome of the Boer-Hananwa War",

utilising “space and time experienced by narrators Rae and Sonntag as the point of departure” (p 40).

In the self-reflective concluding chapter (pp 339-345), the author reflects on commentary received from Konrad Sonntag while she was in the process of writing, contending that this reinforces her argument that he served as a co-narrator of the work. In dismissing Rae’s “collage of a book” as having “received far too much undeserved attention over the past hundred years” (p 340), she also admits her bias in favour of Sonntag, stating that she was “reluctant to let the callous, inconsiderate and ignorant Colin Rae off the hook while the conscientious, dedicated and earnest missionary Sonntag was blamed for the war” (p 341). Responding to criticisms of her original thesis by Professor O.J.O. Ferreira that he wondered if she, as “a child of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, wasn’t expecting” Rae, Sonntag and the Boers, “children of the nineteenth century, to think then like you do today”, Kriel states that she toned down some of her comments in the final published version (p 341).

As the author herself argues, the work is nevertheless far more than an attempt “to critically assess Colin Rae and Christoph Sonntag and Konrad Sonntag and ultimately to appoint the one with the ‘best’ account as the ‘winner’” (p 341). Her “encounters with Rae and Sonntag say something about the possibility of reading historical texts in a broader sense, also in very different contexts” (p 343).

On the one hand, the obvious criticism of the work is that it foregrounds the voices of Rae, the Sonntags, and the two texts. Despite the author’s reading “against the grain”, one does not always get a clear sense of Hananwa voices. However, on the other hand, in order to say something meaningful about Mmalebôhô and the Hananwa at this time, we first have to figure out a great deal about the context of the colonial and indigenous sources available to us. Kriel’s work is a crucial step in this regard. It forcibly reminds us of the lesson we all supposedly learned in Honours courses on Historiography – and have tended to forget about in the practice of writing deconstructionist works – that is, that history is all about context.

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### **Reading Missionary Sources**

In *The “Malaboch” books*, Lize Kriel addresses the issue of reading missionary sources. She presents a study which “dives into the realm of textuality and studies the way two diaries, one by an Anglican preacher and one by a German missionary, came to play an extraordinary role in the way Mmalebôhô and his people would be represented on paper” (p 13). Her aim is a “comparative deconstruction” of two texts which cover more or less the same event, namely the 1894 conflict between the Boers and the Hananwa of the Blouberg, and whose authors, young men rather than matured patriarchs, engaged in making a history of the confrontation.

Kriel touches upon an important and methodologically all too often neglected issue in the use of missionary material. Even though missionaries wrote assiduously about the history and the contemporary dynamics of those African societies among which they worked, it has proven to be enormously difficult to use their texts. The

texts written by the missionaries do not provide “information” in a straightforward way as the (German) missionaries’ accounts were not only couched in pietistic semantics, but geared towards the legitimisation of the missionary effort, and towards raising funds back home. Extended accounts of missionary experiences and African conversion were often written by ageing missionaries who wanted to create a kind of monument for themselves; or who reflected on important turning points in their lives. Frequently these missionaries wrote about Africans and claimed not just to edit their words of mouth, but to speak in their stead. This makes the reading of such accounts enormously complicated. While the current debate regarding the experience of colonialism and modernity, however, revolves around ideas of co-authored identities, historical entanglements and connections, Kriel’s interest is to disentangle views and voices.

In her ambition to unravel the voices which have merged in the texts, she takes up, to some degree, the endeavour of the original German missionaries. They were eager to distil, protect and keep apart the assumedly original undistorted character of the people whom they wished to convert. To dissect the texts, Kriel adopts an author-centred approach. She puts forward the assumption that the “reliability” (p 208 and elsewhere) of the texts fundamentally rests with the trustworthiness and integrity of their authors, editors and translators. In this regard she identifies the Anglican preacher’s account as bluntly ideological (Chapter 8) and written from a distanced, rather uninformed perspective, while in the German missionary’s account, she detects the sensitive observations of a caring man who lived among the Hananwa. The complexity of meaning of this text, so she argues, was only reduced in the course of the translation and editing process in the 1980s. By and large, however, the German missionary’s book is more “useful” (p 202) than the Anglican preacher’s text. Relying substantially on literary theory in order to engage with the texts, Kriel largely avoids placing her study in the context of South African (mission) historiography, which has dealt extensively with issues of colonial subjugation, and more particularly with issues of tax, land and labour conflicts.

Kriel also avoids a regional approach to an analysis of the economic and political structures that shaped the Hananwa and the missionaries’ experiences of conquest and colonisation in the late nineteenth century. Instead, she engages critically with *The Bagananwa polity in the North Western Transvaal and the South African Republic, circa 1836-1896*, a MA dissertation by Tlou Makhura, whose arguments and methods she takes to task. Kriel sees Makhura’s MA as a flawed reading of the missionary sources and an ideological assessment of the missionaries’ involvement in the conflict. The way she contrasts her interpretation with Makhura’s, corresponds with the way she compares the Anglican preacher’s diary with the German missionary’s account. In the end, her text advances the idea that whereas, in the course of conquest and colonisation, in 1894 the Boers and the Hananwa engaged in conflict over land and labour, more recently Kriel and Makhura have entered a debate about an appropriate historical interpretation of these events that have been historiographically neglected.

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