

## Book Reviews

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## Boekresensies

“Alle drade in die weefsel raak mekaar ...”

### **Karel Schoeman, *Riviereland: Twee Besoeke aan Nederland***

Protea Boekhuis, Pretoria, 2011

381 pp

ISBN 978-1-86919-497-0

R250.00

Met die publikasie van *Riviereland: Twee Besoeke aan Nederland* word verskeie van die kenmerkendste aspekte van die Schoeman-oeuvre weer op merkwaardige wyse voorgestel: die ruimtelike fokus op Nederland, die unieke atmosfeer waarbinne daardie fokus vorm kry, die beskrywing van die besondere verband tussen die Nederlandse geskiedenis en dit wat sedert die middel van die sewentiende eeu in Suid-Afrika gebeur het, en veral die aangrypende wyse waarop intiem-persoonlike belewenisse met die groter historiese verloop verstrengel is. Die motto vooraf wat oorgeneem is van Siegfried Lenz lees daarom ook soos ’n samevatting nie net van hierdie boek nie, maar van Schoeman se skryfwerk in die algemeen: “dass alles Vergangene dauert” (p 5).

Deur Schoeman se literêre prosa het die leser hierdie aspekte reeds ontmoet in die vroeë romans en kortverhale soos *Die Noorderlig* (1975) en “In Ballingskap” (uit: *Veldslag*, 1965); binne sy baie omvangryke korpus dokumentêre en reistekste veral in die biografie van sy Nederlandse grootouers: *Merksteen: ’n Dubbelbiografie* (1998) en die reisbeskrywing *Stamland: ’n Reis deur Nederland* (1999). Maar ook, en soms juis, in die verhale omtrent Nederlanders wat hulle in Suid-Afrika bevind, word daardie verweefdheid van ver verwyderde tye en ruimtes baie eksplisiet ervaar, soos twee van sy bekendste romans, *’n Ander Land* (1984) en *Verkenning* (1996), dit so manjifiek verbeeld. Die

baie sterk indruk wat hierdie twee werke by my gelaat het, was dat die verlede deur die boekstaving daarvan in die verbeelding opgeroep kan word, maar nooit weer kan herleef nie; dit is en bly “’n ander land”. In *Riviereiland*, egter, word daardie indruk sinvol gerelativeer. Dit wat eens gebeur het, is ’n ander wêreld, maar dit is ook een wat vanuit die hede herontdek kan word, “waar [die hedendaagse waarnemer meemaak hoe] sleutel na sleutel in die slotte van die verlede draai en die een deur na die ander oopswaai” (p 100).

*Riviereiland* word gestruktureer as twee dele waarin tyd- en ruimtelike vlakke oor en inmeekaarskuif en wat oor en weer mekaar belig en betekenis gee. In die eerste en kortste deel word verslag gedoen van ’n besoek wat Schoeman aan Nederland gedurende 1999 gebring het. Die oorheersende toon is een van weemoed en selfs teleurstelling; teleurstelling in hierdie spesifieke reis, waarskynlik omdat die beplanning daarvoor oorhaastig en sonder ’n direkte doelstelling gedoen is; teleurstelling dat die voldoening van ’n vorige reis (in 1998) wat gelei het tot die publikasie van *Stamland* nie herleef kan word nie; misnoeë met ’n hedendaagse Nederland waarmee hy nie kan identifiseer nie en gevolglik die besluit om vroeër as wat beplan is, na Suid-Afrika terug te keer.

Terwyl die beskrywings van die reisiger se verblyf in en wandeling deur stede soos Amsterdam, Zwolle en Rotterdam in detail soos by dagboekinskrywings gedoen word, is dit die byna metaforiese, sterk literêre aard daarvan wat my opgeval het. Daar is ’n motief van afstand tussen reisiger en omgewing, ’n gevoel van vreemdheid en verganklikheid wat die perspektief bepaal. Die beelde van ’n herfstige Nederland word byna uitsluitlik deur kleure van bruin en grys geteken. Schoeman se kenmerkende aandag vir die ligval en die lug word, behalwe in een geval (wanneer hy die wonder van ’n onverwagte stralende hemel oor Delft beleef, p 45) beskryf as “grou”, “silwer”, “vaal”, “wit” en “skemeragtig”. Sy waarnemings vind, tipies Schoeman, ook resonansie in die visuele en woordkuns uit die ou Europese kultuurskatte. Die gedigte van Hadewijch, die skilderye van Vermeer, die uitstallings in die Frans Hals Museum – tereg verklaar die reisiger: “My persoonlike verwysingsveld dra ek

met my saam, en vir my het jaartalle hulle eie betekenis” (p 34). Maar, tenspyte van daardie stralende middag in Delft, die piëteitsbesoek aan sy grootvader se stadjie Meppel, die etes in deftige restourante en die observasie van die imposante argitektuur, is die slotsom: dis “’n fout om te probeer teruggaan, struikelend op die gevoel oor die puin en onkruid van die verlede” (p 47). En dis dan met verligting, byna blydskap dat hierdie deel afgesluit word met die aankoms in die dorre Vrystaat; “ek is weer by die huis” (p 67).

Die tweede deel, getitel “Nederland 2003”, vorm klaarblyklik die kern van die teks en hoewel die aanvangsparagrafe die seisoen (herfs) en die ruimte (die grys aankoms op van Schiphol) soos in deel 1 herhaal, oorheers ’n heeltomal kontrasterende toonaard nou. Die aanleiding tot hierdie reis is duidelik omskryf: om agtergrondstudie te doen vir navorsing oor die teenwoordigheid van die VOC aan die Kaap en spesifiek die familie Beck (is dit die gebrek aan so ’n doelgerigtheid wat die mineurtoon van die eerste deel verklaar?) Die Gelderlandse besoek, anders as konvensionele toeristiese belewenisse in die Randstad, Amsterdam en die tulpevelde, bied vir Schoeman ’n opwindende ontdekkingstog in die vreemde (p 74). In dertien hoofstukke en in ’n deeglik gedokumenteerde styl word die geskiedenis van Gelderland en spesifiek die stede Nijmegen en Arnhem, en die naburige Utrecht, en die reisiger se eie waarnemings en beleving van hierdie gebied met sy eiesoortige ekologie, leefwyse en tradisies, weergegee. Gelderland: die provinsie wat deurkruis word deur die Ryn, die Waal, die Maas en die Ijssel en daarom ook die titel van hierdie boek regverdig. Dis die provinsie wat onder die Romeinse besetting sy beslag gekry het, die land van bosse, heide en kastele, en wat in die stadsname, die oorgeblewe ruïnes en spore van handelspaaië die bakens van daardie Romeinse verlede en deur die Katolieke sfeer die latere pre-reformatoriese status steeds blootlê. Schoeman beskryf meesleurend en evokatief hierdie wêreld met sy eie gespesialiseerde woordeskat (pp 80 en verder), veral ten opsigte van water, fauna en flora. ’n Wêreld “afsydig” van die meer bekende Hollandse pragmatisme; ’n gebied eerder gekeer na die Europese suide; die klassieke tempelkomplekse van die Romeinse beskawing net “vlak onder die vertroude oppervlak van die daaglikse lewe” (p 105). Maar

soos die goue draad deur 'n weefwerk loop ook die verwysings na die onverwagte dog onmiskenbare bande met die Suid-Afrikaanse milieu. In *Germanicus* plaas Van Wyk Louw in 'n kamp by die Nederlandse grens een van die soldate wat kla oor hoe hulle “Vég deur die blink rivierland” (p 102); die name van stadjes en die burgers wat daar geleef het, kom voor in die Kaapse boedelinventaris uit die agtiende eeu; die agtiende-eeuse piëteitsbewegings het op verskillende vlakke noue kontak gehad met geloofskringe aan die Kaap; meerdere hoë Kompanjie-amptenare het na eervolle of oneervolle diensverlating hulle op imposante landgoedere in hierdie rivierland kom vestig. Deur sy uitgebreide en kundige weergawe van en verwysings na die lewens van hierdie individue, van die boere, soldate en goewerneurs en hulle gesinne, maak Schoeman die uitspraak van die Britse historikus Bromley waar: “Dutch history [maar dit geld seker geskiedenis in die algemeen], more than any other, is the sum of local histories” (p 92).

Soos in deel 1 word die gedetailleerde beskrywings en inligting met die wêreld van die woord- en skilderkuns verbind. Sy eerste indruk van Gelderland roep die herinnering op aan 'n sewentiende-eeuse jagskildery van Jan Hackaert en 'n gedig van Constantijn Huygens waar in beide die effek van lig wat deur 'n digte blarekroon val soos 'n groen skaduwee, voorgestel word. Die hele deel 2 benadruk die groen weelde van hierdie land: die bosagtige dele, die bloemryke graslande en die pragtige parke van die Betuwe, die Veluwe en die Achterhoek, steeds die groen longe van Nederland. Die unieke skoonheid van die streek word dan ook verwoord in die digter Achterberg se versreël “De avond ligt in flessengroen gesloten ...” (p 319).

Teen die einde van sy navorsingreis besoek Schoeman byna as 'n nagedagte ook – buite die Gelderlandse grense – Hertogenbosch en Den Haag. Tog vind hy selfs hier spore van die Suid-Afrikaanse verbintenis. Die Arnhemse Beck-familie het 'n Haagse grootoom wat skoolmeester-digter was en in verskeie tekste Gelderland besing het, en wat in sy dagboek wat onlangs herdruk is, 'n

verbasend helder en volledige beeld [gee] van 'n enkele menselewe aan die begin van die Goue Eeu. In die jaar toe Jan van Riebeeck 'n seuntjie van vyf was in Schiedam, en Batavia onlangs eers tot stand gekom het as hoofstad

van die VOC in die Ooste (p 359).

En aan die hof van Willem V het 'n jong offisier, J.T. van der Kemp, met groot uitbundigheid gedien voordat hy hom bekeer en na die Kaap vertrek het.

*Riviereland* sluit af met 'n verwysing na 'n VOC-verslag, waarin die in Persies geskrewe woorde op die muur van die destydse keiser weergegee word: "As daar 'n paradys op aarde is, is dit hier." Volgens Schoeman se slotwoorde onderskryf hy daardie uitspraak ten opsigte van sy eie lewe: "die verlede is verby, die toekoms is onvoorspelbaar, al wat wel bestaan is hierdie oomblik, die ewige hede" (p 381). Na my mening bring *Riviereland* egter aan sy leser 'n oortuigende weerwoord: dit is juis deur die dinamiese interaksie met die alomteenwoordige verlede, dat die hede sinvol (ewig?) word.

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## **Belangrike bydrae tot die geskiedskrywing oor die vroeë Kaap**

### **Karel Schoeman, *Burgers en Amptenare: Die Vroeë Ontwikkeling van die Kolonie aan die Kaap, 1662-1679***

Protea Boekhuis, Pretoria, 2011

504 pp

ISBN 978-1-86919-272-3

R325.00

Karel Schoeman se *Burgers en Amptenare: Die Vroeë Ontwikkeling van die Kolonie aan die Kaap, 1662-1679* is die vierde band in sy reeks oor die VOC-nedersetting aan die Kaap wat deur Protea Boekhuis uitgegee is.

In hierdie studie behandel Schoeman die lewens van die reeks gesagvoerders wat Van Riebeeck aan die Kaap opgevolg het: Zacharias Wagenaer, Cornelis van Qualberg, Isbrand Goske en Joan Bax. Vermoedelik sal die vyfde en laaste band oor die tydperk van die Van der Stels handel. Benewens die rol van die hoë amptenary aan die

Kaap, beskryf Schoeman ook die lotgevalle van die gewone burgers, die armes en ook die paar wat ekonomies uitgestyg het te midde van die onderdrukkende maatreëls wat die VOC as 'n handelsorganisasie met winsbejag op die Kaapse burgers afgedwing het.

In die eerste drie hoofstukke word die vorige loopbane en lewens van die kommandeurs in detail behandel en sal selfs die ingewydes in die vroeë Kaapse geskiedenis nuwe insigte verkry, danksy Schoeman se ongelooflike breë kennis en vertroutheid met veral Duitse en Nederlandse joernale en boeke waarvan talle tydgenootlike bronne is. Die vierde hoofstuk handel oor die Kaapse amptenary en die laaste vyf hoofsaaklik oor die vyburgergemeenskap, die kultuur wat plaaslik ontstaan het en ook die ontstaan van die vryburger-elitegroep. In die proses lig Schoeman die proses uit waarop burgers kon floreer: Henning Hüsing het gevorder van skaapwagter van die VOC se skape tot een van die rykste persone in die vroeë Kaapse samelewing omdat hy die pag vir vleislewering van die plaaslike owerheid ontvang het. Behalwe die vleispag was die verkryging van die wynpag by uitstek die wyse waardeur rykdom aan die Kaap verkry kon word. Schoeman verskaf dan ook heelwat inligting oor die ekonomiese situasie van die burgery en inligting oor die lewensomstandighede van die Nederlandse setlaars in die VSA waar die Wes Indiese Kompanjie (WIC) hulle gevestig het. Hierdie tipe vergelykende studie kan gerus méér deur ander historici gevolg word om die situasie in 'n wyer konteks te plaas. Heelwat inligting wat vir studente van ekonomiese geskiedenis van belang is, word in die hoofstukke oor die vrye bevolking asook die slawebevolking verskaf.

Die kultuurlandskap word in hoofstuk 5 behandel en is veral van waarde vir kultuurhistorici want dit dek inderdaad 'n bonte verskeidenheid van onderwerpe: vanaf klere en skeepskiste tot bakstene en dakteëls. En dan ook natuurlik kom Schoeman die bibliofiel en oud-bibliotekaris te voorskyn in die bespreking oor die soort boeke en leesstof wat daar in die vroeë Kaapse nedersetting was.

Die omvang van die inligting vervat in al die hoofstukke van *Burgers en Amptenare* is, by wese van spreke en met verwysing na die digter, so

wyd soos die Heer se genade. Die leser kom op feitlik elke bladsy af op nuwe inligting wat sy geskiedkundige kennis laat toeneem; of dit op plaaslike of globale geskiedenis van toepassing is, is van minder belang. En elke bladsy getuig van die fenomenale taal-, boeke- en feitekennis waaroor Schoeman beskik. Maar juis hierdie feit het ook sekere nadele: Schoeman skryf sy eie taal en gebruik woorde wat vir die deursnee-leser onbekend of vreemd is. Van hierdie woorde is die “onfortuinlike” Hackius (p 71), Goske se “installasie” as goewerneur (p 88), setlaars wat hulle op ’n eiland “installeer” en nie “vestig” nie (p 90) en die verwysing na die “krusiale jaar 1670” (p 307) enkele voorbeelde van Schoemanismes wat telkens in sy skryfstyl voorkom.

’n Klein setfout wat my persoonlik getref het, was die vermelding van die bekende VOC-werknemer Elias Hesse (p 222) wat as Heese verskyn.

In vorige resensies van Schoeman se boeke in hierdie reeks het ek reeds melding gemaak dat die gebruik van endnote dit vir die ernstige leser wat graag wil sien watter bronne gebruik is, ’n moeisame taak is om heeltyd heen-en-weer te blaai op soek na verwysings. Hiermee word die leesritme elke slag gebreek. Ongelukkig blyk dit die nuwe mode te wees, ook by gepubliseerde proefskrifte, en kan die blaam moontlik op die uitgewer geplaas word vir hierdie uitleg. Hierdie kritiek doen egter nie afbreuk aan die uiters belangrike bydrae wat Schoeman tot die Afrikaanse geskiedskrywing oor die vroeë Kaapse geskiedenis lewer nie.

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## Rich insights into the Dutch Cape Colony

**Karel Schoeman, *Cape Lives of the Eighteenth Century***

Protea Book House, Pretoria, 2011

676 pp

ISBN 987-1-86919-484-0

R375.00

Karel Schoeman, best known to the general public as one of South Africa's leading novelists, is also a prolific historian of the early Cape Colony. In recent years he has published an astonishing number of books on the VOC Cape, all of them based on detailed research and with the novelist's eye for telling detail and empathetic understanding of a world very different from our own. But most are in Afrikaans and few have been translated, thus denying his work to international readers and to many South Africans.

*Cape Lives* remedies this. In a series of 17 chapters, each focused on the life of an individual and his or her family and associates, Schoeman provides a rich compilation which partly draws on his previous work but also offers new material. The lives have been chosen to include a wide range of people, women and men, wealthy and impoverished, indigenous, slave, settler and visitor, and take the reader on a journey from the inside of Cape Town houses to beyond the Orange River and deep into the eastern reaches of the colony. They include some well-known names, such as Rijk Tulbagh and Robert Gordon, but many unfamiliar figures who only appear because of the accidental survival of their writings or their fleeting appearance in a court record or household inventory, such as the murder accomplices Maria Mouton and her slave Titus of Bengal, the "free coloured entrepreneur" Frans Lens or the Kruger and Prinsloo frontier farmers. Overall the book shows the complexities of interweaving networks of kinship, economic relationships, patronage and information transfer which extended beyond the Cape deep into the Indian Ocean and Atlantic worlds.

As might be expected of such a writer, the book is a cracking good read. Although Schoeman often refers to the need of the historian



to eschew imagination and stick to the facts, this does not prevent him from revealing the emotions, frustrations and ambitions of his characters in ways which make them more fully human than is the case in most historical works. The past may have been another country, as Schoeman frequently reminds us, but its inhabitants thought and acted in ways which made good sense to them and it is the job of the historian to make that explicable to the modern reader. Schoeman provides a model of how this can be done.

Each chapter is self-contained and the casual reader can dip into it as they choose but when read as a whole it vividly illustrates the social diversity and complexity of the Dutch Cape in a way that most general books ignore. It should certainly be a first read for any newcomer to the period. It will also swiftly disabuse those who have been brought up on a diet of school and popular “tourist” histories (as Schoeman describes them) of many myths. The Dutch Cape was not a dull, isolated and bucolic world but was closely interlinked with the social, political and economic forces sweeping the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds of the eighteenth century. Books and learning were not unknown; religious commitment was not confined to the established church; women could and did take an active part in the shaping of a colonial society.

The interpretation of many specific events is overturned: van der Stel had a strong case against self-serving colonists; the Huguenots were not all successful entrepreneurs; Gordon may not have committed suicide. Most significantly, and this is perhaps the overall thrust of the book, race was not the defining feature of the early Cape and its society was much more complex and nuanced than the rigid divide of settler and slave which is now so frequently promulgated. Slaves pervade the book, and Schoeman certainly does not deny the inequalities and injustices of a slave society, but they appear not as a separate caste but as progenitors of families. The “free coloured” men and women of the book play a particularly significant role, as burghers, farmers and explorers, although Schoeman points out that racial hierarchies and prejudices became more overt as the century wore on and were more firmly entrenched after the British took over.

One of the great strengths of the book is its use of newly available sources. Schoeman has long been active in using long-forgotten sources, both published and archival, and has developed an extensive network of librarians and researchers to assist him in doing so. Some of the lives have been chosen because they can be illuminated from personal letters and diaries, sources which are rare for the VOC period. The book also makes extensive use of estate inventories and probate records, many of which were transcribed by a team of experts sponsored by the Dutch government in 2003–2009. Sometimes these are over-used: lists of possessions can be revealing and Schoeman often does more than merely list them, but at times the eye wanders over yet another catalogue of bedspreads and pots.

All this produces a highly valuable book. But it is also a frustrating one. Schoeman has a habit of inserting lengthy digressions into his chapters, on topics sometimes only marginally relevant to the main focus, in a way reminiscent of the encyclopaedists of the eighteenth century itself. This makes it difficult to use as a work of reference, and although the full index does help there are many details and themes which are not indexed and one suspects will lie buried in the text.

Maybe this does not matter too much. Schoeman and his publishers state that the book is intended for “non-specialist and non-South African readers”. That may be so, although Protea Book House will need to ensure that its marketing (especially overseas) is more vigorous than is currently the case. But it has led to one severe disadvantage: the failure to acknowledge sources. There is a general source note for each chapter which gives broad indications and suggestions, but the source of precise quotations and specific details are missing. This will be especially frustrating for the genealogist, since Schoeman’s assiduous work in unearthing family histories and relationships cannot be followed up for lack of references. Several of the chapters are heavily based on the work of other historians, sometimes acknowledged, but sometimes not. This invalidates much of the material for the serious researcher and means that the book will not find its deserved place amongst specialists. Perhaps this was Schoeman’s decision, and reflects his ambiguous relationship with the

academy. Perhaps it was the publisher's demand in order to reduce the length of an already extended volume. But it is a serious disadvantage of an otherwise exceptionally rich volume.

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### **Veelvoudige bande tussen Nederland en die Britse Kaap**

**Carla van Baalen en Dick de Mildt (reds.), “Weest Wel met Alle Menschen”: De “Kaapse Brieven” van Cornelius de Jong van Rodenburgh**

Verloren, Hilversum, 2012

640 pp

ISBN 978-90-8704-282-0

€39.00

Cornelius de Jong was ’n admiraal in diens van die Nederlandse Republiek, wat oor die jare 1792–1795, letterlik die laaste jare van die ou VOC-bewind, by twee geleenthede ampshalwe meerdere maande aan die Kaap deurgebring het. Die ervaring is vasgelê in sy tweedelige *Reizen naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Ierland en Noorwegen, in de jaren 1791 tot 1797* (1802–1803), ’n boek wat verdien om herdruk of gedigitaliseer te word. Vroeg in 1795 is hy hier getroud met ’n dogter van J.J. Lesueur, lid van die Politieke Raad wat die Kaap agt maande later aan ’n Britse besettingsmag sou oorhandig, en mettertyd het hy na Nederland teruggekeer met sy vrou en hul dogtertjie, Jeannette, wat nog aan die Kaap gebore is.

Jeannette de Jong is in 1815 getroud met J.A. Truter, ’n seun van die destydse hoofregter van die Kaap (die latere Sir John), wat in Nederland studeer het, en die 218 briewe in die boek wat hiermee bekendgestel word, is hoofsaaklik dié wat De Jong aan die egpaar geskryf het ná hul terugkeer na die Kaap. Die korrespondensie is in 1828 beëindig, ná Truter se vroeë dood en die weduwee se

terugkeer na Nederland met hul kinders, wat hul verdere lewens daar deurgebring het.

Ongelukkig vir die Suid-Afrikaanse leser, bestaan die Kaapse materiaal in hierdie briewe hoofsaaklik uit insidentele opmerkings en reaksies aan De Jong se kant, terwyl aanhalings uit die briewe van die egpaar Truter tot enkele voetnote beperk is. Wat wel duidelik hieruit blyk, is egter die veelvoudige bande wat gedurende die eerste dekades van die negentiende eeu nog tussen Nederland en die ou “Hollandse” families van die Kaap bestaan het, en in stand gehou is deur briefwisseling, die aanwesigheid van teologiese en regstudente uit die Kaap in Nederland, en gereelde besoeke van Nederlandse skepe op pad na Nederlands-Indië (die huidige Indonesië) aan Tafelbaai.

Die lywige sagteband is netjies uitgegee, die briewe in hul oorspronklike spelling, maar met die gebruik van hoofletters en interpunksie aangepas, voorsien van ’n uitgebreide inleiding wat agtergrondinligting verskaf, en ’n aantal portrette en tekeninge uit familiebesit verdien veral vermelding. Daar is klaarblyklik sorg aan die verklarende voetnote bestee, en sover dit Suid-Afrikaanse sake betref, is daar slegs enkele klein foute van mindere belang; maar die register is tot persoonsname beperk en die inskrywings is ongedifferensieer, sodat die belangstellende met soliede blokke bladsynommers gekonfronteer word.

Opsommend kan daar gesê word dat dit wat die boek uit Suid-Afrikaanse oogpunt bied, interessant is, maar helaas nie veel meer nie. Die Truters se gedeelte van hierdie korrespondensie oor die tydperk 1815 tot November 1822 is egter in die Utrechts Archief beskikbaar, en uit Suid-Afrikaanse oogpunt verdien dit nadere ondersoek met die oog op moontlike publikasie.

*Karel Schoeman*  
*Universiteit van die Vrystaat*

## Pioneering study of the multilingual ecology of the Cape

**Achmat Davids (ed. by Hein Willemse and Suleman E. Dangor), *The Afrikaans of the Cape Muslims from 1815 to 1915***

Protea Book House, Pretoria, 2011

318 pp

ISBN 978-1-86919-236-5

R220.00

*The Afrikaans of the Cape Muslims from 1815 to 1915* is the edited version of Achmat Davids' (1939–1998) impressive MA dissertation of 1991. The text provides a comprehensive introduction to nineteenth- and twentieth-century Arabic-Afrikaans (i.e. Afrikaans written in Arabic script), building on earlier philological research by Adrianus van Selms and Hans Kähler. While much of the discussion focuses on issues of transcription (chapters 4 and 5), Davids' most inspiring contribution is the way in which he contextualises the Arabic-Afrikaans texts with regard to the *longue durée* of their genesis. This stretches back to the early days at the Cape; the slow and gradual formation of a distinct slave society; the role played by prominent Muslim leaders and other “free blacks”; the rise of Islam after the emancipation of the slaves (1838); and the importance of local *madrasahs* from the late eighteenth century onwards (chapters 2 and 3). The editors, Hein Willemse and Suleman E. Dangor, have edited the original lightly and included English translations for all Afrikaans texts. The volume also includes a short foreword by Theo du Plessis (Davids' supervisor at the University of Natal) and a concluding commentary by Christo van Rensburg.

The 1990s, when Davids wrote his thesis, were a time when the history of Afrikaans was studied with renewed interest and its complex nature – not quite a creole, but close to it – became accepted in mainstream Afrikaans historical linguistics. The groundwork for this shift was carried out from the 1980s onwards by South African

linguists such as Christo van Rensburg, Theo du Plessis and Ernst Kotze, as well as Hans den Besten (Netherlands) and Paul Roberge (USA). Davids' thesis was an integral part of this collective rethinking of the history of Afrikaans, and was widely read and cited by linguists at the time. However, as a thesis it remained out of the public eye, available only to those who had access to university libraries.

Re-reading Davids' work almost 20 years later reminded me how far we have come in Afrikaans historical linguistics. That the history of Afrikaans is "essentially the story of communication between black and white in the early history of the country" (p 259), is no longer doubted by any serious linguist, and when we teach Afrikaans historical linguistics today we focus in our lectures on contact and interaction in a linguistically diverse colonial society. However, in our quest to understand the complex history of Afrikaans, we were, perhaps, also a little insular at times. We were focused rather single-mindedly on tracing the genesis of Afrikaans and thus approached other languages primarily under the old creolist heading of "substrate" (as opposed to the "superstrate", Dutch). In other words, Khoesan, Malay, and Creole Portuguese were of interest to linguists mainly because their lexicon and structures left traces on Afrikaans. Yet, these languages were more than simply "substrates": they were vibrant community languages which were spoken, and sometimes written, until the mid-to late-nineteenth century. As historical sociolinguists it is time to turn our attention to these languages and begin to study them as an integral part of the multilingual ecology of the Cape, rather than as mere building blocks of Afrikaans. Davids' discussion of Malay especially raises questions such as the following: What kind of Malay was spoken and written at the Cape? How was it shaped by successive generations of slaves and exiles from Indonesia, by new migrations as well as locally born slaves and "free blacks"? And what was the influence of Afrikaans on Malay, rather than vice versa?

Of great interest to the historical sociolinguist are also Davids' observations regarding the use of Bugis/Buginese, an Austronesian language spoken in Indonesia (chapter 2). Although Bugis/Buginese was not a *lingua franca* (like Malay), it was also not a short-lived or

marginal language at the Cape. For example, Tuan Guru, who was banished to the Cape in 1780, made use of Bugis/Buginese in the interlinear translations of his Arabic writings, and “Jan of Boughies signed his will in the Buganese script as late as 1843” (p 53). An important factor for the survival of Bugis/Buginese was the existence of a literary tradition among the Indonesian slaves. Although only a few documents have survived, one has to concur with Davids’ interpretation that a “network of written correspondence must have existed among the Buganese slaves” (pp 78f.). Davids’ research further suggests that literacy at the Cape was not limited to Dutch, Malay and Bugis/Buginese. There is also evidence that slaves were literate in Makasar, a language closely related to Bugis/Buginese, and Sunda, a language of Java. Davids’ meticulous documentation broadens our linguistic archive in significant ways and suggests directions for future work in historical sociolinguistics.

In chapter 3, Davids traces the broad history of Afrikaans writing for Muslim religious instruction. He provides a useful periodisation of this genre:

- *1815 to the late 1870s*: application of the *Jawi* script, a version of the Arabic alphabet which was already used for writing Malay. These texts show considerable linguistic variation.
- *From the late 1870s onwards*: the so-called post-Effendi period in which writers tended to follow the linguistic conventions established by Abubakr Effendi in his text *Bayān al-Dīn* (“Exposition of the Faith”, 1877). This led to a decrease in orthographic and grammatical variation.
- *From the late 1890s onwards*: publication of religious texts in Roman script. This period began in 1898 with a text published by Iman Abdurakib ibn Abdul Kahaar. Linguistically, writings in Roman script drew more strongly on Dutch than those written in Arabic script, and were directed at recent converts (p 100).

It is important to note that several of these texts were written by individuals who came to the Cape only as adults, and thus learned

the local vernacular as a second language. As a result, the writings show traces of “learner Afrikaans” (Christo van Rensburg, p 296). For example, Davids comments as follows with respect to Abubakr Effendi: “his Afrikaans was certainly not free from the English he learned to speak while he was writing *Bayān al-Dīn* ... the language of *Bayān al-Dīn* is not typical of Cape Muslim Afrikaans in the 1860s” (p 119). In addition to strong and unusual admixture from English, Effendi’s text also shows syntactic influence from Arabic (p 246). Thus, when interpreting nineteenth-century Arabic–Afrikaans texts, we need to be mindful of linguistic proficiency and cross-linguistic influence, as well as the fact that the texts were frequently published – and thus probably also edited – abroad: “in Bombay, Cairo and Constantinople” (p 120). However, rather than a “problem” which detracts from local authenticity, the non-native status of many writers bears witness to the global embedding of local Muslim communities.

I was somewhat puzzled by Davids’ strong assertion that the Afrikaans in Arabic script is “almost like audiotape-like recordings of the spoken Afrikaans of the Cape Muslims” (p 17). While (vocalised) Arabic script was certainly used in highly innovative ways at the Cape to represent Afrikaans phonology as accurately as possible, it cannot be described as a “phonetic script” (p 17) which conveys sounds with “absolute accuracy” (p 154). An important reason why the Arabic script cannot be described as phonetic is the presence of persistent orthographic variation. Variation is, by definition, not a feature of any phonetic transcription method. In the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) each sound is represented by precisely one symbol, and each phonetic symbol tells the reader, unambiguously, how a particular sound should be produced. This was not the case for Arabic Afrikaans. For example, Davids discusses the widespread combination of two vowel diacritics in the texts: the *fatha* (indicating [æ] in Arabic) and the *kasra* (indicating [i]). If the Arabic–Afrikaans writing system was indeed phonetic, then this particular grapheme combination should have corresponded to one sound only. However, according to Davids’ discussion, it could stand for two different sounds: a mid-central vowel (as in *met* [mæt]) and a mid-front vowel (as in *het* [hɛt], see p 185). Davids himself acknowledges the existence



of orthographic variation in the texts. Thus, he writes about the “misplacement of graphemes” (p 158), “spelling mistakes” (p 159), less than “meticulous ... placement of vocalic symbols” (p 242), as well as the uncertainty of the reader who has to apply “imagination to the reading matter”, i.e. rely on knowledge outside of the actual orthographic representation in order to produce the sound intended by the writer (p 159). This caveat, however, does not distract from the enormous orthographic inventiveness which is so carefully documented by Davids: writers of Arabic Afrikaans found creative ways in which they could “bend” the Arabic script and make it suitable for writing Afrikaans.

Theo du Plessis refers to Achmat Davids in his Foreword as a “community researcher” (p 13). Socio-historical work of the type and depth presented by Davids not only requires community support and participation (the “[m]any people who opened their cupboards of family heirlooms”, p 11), it is also deeply transformative and changes the way we imagine ourselves as South Africans. The impact of the text goes well beyond Davids’ humble aim of raising “an awareness of the existence of Cape Muslim Afrikaans” (p 16). Davids’ careful research reminds us of the deep complexities of our past and thus the challenges of our future – the “community” includes all of us.

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### An attempt to pin down a phantom?

#### **Kevin Shillington, *Luka Jantjie: Resistance Hero of the South African Frontier***

Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 2011

306 pp

ISBN: 978-1-86814-549-2

R220.00

The school teacher in me wants to say: “Put up your hand if you have never heard of Luka Jantjie.” I had not, even though, while pursuing my interests, I compiled a substantial list of Khoisan and persons of part-Khoisan descent in the relevant period. He makes an important addition.

Throughout the book under review, Luka Jantjie is referred to as Luka: his father was “Jantjie”. Luka was born c. 1835 to parents of “mixed Batlhaping–Korana ancestry” – the latter a branch of Khoisan who settled amongst the Batlhaping, southernmost of the Batswana. Both parents were descendants of Chief Mothibi (1772–1845) and thus were cousins. On Jantjie’s death in 1881, Luka became chief, or *kgosi*, of one branch of the Batlhaping.

The author’s *The Colonisation of the Southern Tswana, 1870–1900*, published in 1985, laid the foundation for this present work. I have not read *Colonisation*, but the dates suggest a focus less on the history of the indigenous inhabitants than on their interactions with colonists and other intruders following the mineral discoveries of that era. With *Luka Jantjie* we get detailed reconstructions of genealogy; Batlhaping politics; and the indigenes’ responses to missionaries, hunters and farmers, tax collectors and so on. Of particular note is the endless physical dislocation that resulted from those encroachments. Readers familiar with the Cape Colony’s eastern frontier will find the north, depicted here, an alien and confusing environment: land is won and lost but without the rivers that define boundaries; wars are won or lost but they defy orderly numbering. Luka’s world was harsh in ways that strike the reader as strongly determined by its physical features. A

diverse cast of characters vied for dominion of parched and rugged lands, no longer linked to users by custom but by ever-changing lines on maps.

The book gains lustre from the fact of Shillington's early acquaintance with Luka's territory and the interviews he conducted then with descendants and others of that community. It is something to be able to cite the evidence of oral accounts he himself collected at the outset of his engagement with the region, as he did in 1978. This biography conveys a feel of the place and its people, over and above its understanding of the politics which drove events. It also works well as a detailed military history.

So what manner of person was Luka? Here the author had a difficulty. There are various records of correspondence and meetings with the colonial authorities. Where Luka speaks, as *kgosi* and adult, he impresses as skilled in representing his interests and those of his followers. Unsurprisingly, in the circumstances, most assessments of Luka by the authorities are negative. Such dichotomies are the stuff of history and historians must find ways to deal with them. But Luka's early life is largely undocumented: how to reconstruct his childhood, the telling influences, the attainment of qualities that will be useful to a future leader? What are the options?

Shillington adopts a "would have", "must have", "possibly", approach. This is ubiquitous in chapter 2, "Birth and Early Life", and persists throughout the book. A page with seven "would haves", plus a "probably" and a "likely" (p 22) seems an excessive dose of uncertainty. The practice continues:

*Sometime in his teens, probably after he left school, Luka would have learned to load and fire a gun and he would have acquired at least one gun of his own. He probably also learned to ride a horse (p 25).*

Now and then, a speculative conclusion is adduced: Luka "would have witnessed and perhaps taken part in the battle of Dithakong. It is possible that the slaughter witnessed in that battle instilled in him a lifelong aversion to warfare" (p 14). After the slaying and beheading

by Boers of Gasebonwe, half-brother to Jantjie, in 1858, we are told:

*It was an image that would have made a deep impression upon Luka, even though he was not present at the time. It may even have influenced his determination not to surrender when he himself was confronted by armed colonists later in his life (p 37).*

Leap ahead to 1897 and the denouement of the story when Luka takes stock of certain ominous developments: “It would have reminded him just how dangerously volatile colonial volunteer forces could be once their blood was up.” After an unsatisfactory interview with an official, Luka departs “with a heavy heart” (p 214). Where sources are plentiful, historians have, to a point, to imagine the subject (and, be it not forgotten, to rigorously evaluate the sources). Where sources are sparse, and a subject’s achievements overlooked or made to seem peripheral, the task of reconstruction appears more challenging. Suppose, in this case, the author began with a journal article: no “heavy hearts”, no “deep impressions”, a few sober ventures beyond the probable. The book that followed could present a life story more effectively affirmative. The approach adopted has the consequence that the book reads as a sustained attempt to pin down a phantom.

One point of interest to this reader is the matter of Luka’s command of reading and writing. Jantjie’s conversion to Christianity meant, in part, that Luka enjoyed the special attention of London Society missionaries who taught him to “read and write in Setswana” (p 23). That knowledge

*demystified the world of the makgowa [white people], enabling him to read documents and formal communications for himself. His ability to write added authenticity to messages sent between dikgosi [chiefs] and in due course it enabled him to communicate in writing with colonial officials (p 24).*

At a meeting (1869) with M.W. Pretorius, the president of the ZAR, the *dikgosi* were required to put their names to an agreement. It is “likely,” we are told, “that Luka was able to read enough of the Dutch document to understand its central thrust” (p 46). Later, that claim seems tenuous: “Although Luka is believed to have spoken some Dutch/Afrikaans, he appears not to have spoken any English

...” (p 128). “Believed to have spoken some” makes “able to read” most unlikely. Luka’s level of literacy need not influence our respect for his role as a “resistance hero” but it does, in my view, deserve more careful treatment than it receives here.

I was struck by the following: “... the lay missionary James Read, proved only too willing to trade guns in exchange for ivory and other hunting produce ...” (p 9). In the way of “popular” histories, footnotes are kept to a minimum but I hope that the source for this bald assertion of fact is to hand.

The book is beautifully illustrated. The pictures include two of Luka: one when he enjoyed success as a stock farmer, big game hunter and diamond prospector; the other prior to his shocking beheading after he was shot while defending his last redoubt, in the Langeberg. There are also fine maps, a glossary, and a helpful list of “Key Characters”.

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### **A comprehensive tour de force on Namibia**

**Marion Wallace (with John Kinahan), *A History of Namibia: From the Beginning to 1990***

Jacana Media, Johannesburg, 2011

476 pp

ISBN 978-1-77009-887-9

R249.95

The last comprehensive history of Namibian history was published in 1988. Two years later, the former South West Africa gained national independence after a protracted and extremely violent history of colonial oppression, first under German rule (1884–1915) and subsequently under the South African occupation. Since 1990, international research on various topics in Namibian history has proliferated, although it seems that interest in its former colony has

waned quickly in South Africa.

The objective of comprehensive histories is not only to provide a narrative of important events but also to take stock of new trends in the relevant debates. Marion Wallace has succeeded in presenting a new general history of Namibia that reflects more recent academic concerns, such as gender and culture. With the hindsight of more than two decades of post-colonial developments, this book also provides an important supplement to many previous narratives that viewed the aspired national independence of the territory as the ultimate historical objective.

Wallace has digested an impressive number of published and unpublished sources. Her discussion of the economic, political and cultural dynamics in Namibian history pursues a chronological approach that makes the complexities accessible to both academic readers and a wider audience. John Kinahan, the leading archaeologist of Namibia's pre-colonial past, has contributed an excellent opening chapter that provides the necessary background for Wallace's narrative that begins in the early eighteenth century. Analysing the pre-colonial networks of hunter-gathering and herding societies, Wallace provides a lively picture of the internal power dynamics before the arrival of the Europeans. She presents an equally succinct account of the transformations that occurred when European traders and missionaries inserted themselves into the socio-economic fabric of the different African societies before the annexation of the territory by the Germans in 1884 marked a significant stage in Namibia's colonial history.

Her examination of one of the central events of the German period, such as the genocidal war that led to the extermination of large numbers of the Herero and Nama from 1904 to 1908, provides a concise analysis of the events and of the historiography, without becoming involved in the polemics that have characterised a great deal of the respective academic and political discussion. The sections on the period of the South African occupation from 1915 to 1990 carefully cover the domestic and international aspects of the struggle of the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO)

against South African apartheid, but they do not gloss over the incidents of human rights violations in SWAPO camps that have led to bitter debates in the country. A brief look at the political and economic developments in post-colonial Namibia rounds off this comprehensive tour de force, ending the book on a generally positive, but not uncritical, note on Namibia's current economic and political situation after having traversed a long way from the most oppressive type of colonialism to a democratic country. Wallace has presented an excellent new general history, including a 34-page bibliography, which should be compulsory reading for any researchers in the field. It remains to be hoped that this book will help to resuscitate interest in Namibian history among South African scholars.

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### **Veterinary medicine in its socio-historical context**

#### ***Karen Brown, Mad Dogs and Meerkats: A History of Re-surgent Rabies in Southern Africa***

UCT Press, Cape Town, 2011

234 pp

ISBN 978-1-91989-596-3

R253.00

Academics working on any aspect of veterinary medicine in southern Africa frequently lament the paucity of relevant literature. Covering the whole of southern Africa, Karen Brown's account of the epidemiology of rabies, a first of its kind, will certainly lessen this burden. There is much to recommend in this book. Brown circumvents a number of methodological challenges to come up with a very interesting and informative account, which is useful for a number of fields including anthropology, history, veterinary medicine and public health. Taking a chronological approach, this book, which commences in 1800, deals with five main themes in seven well-

written chapters. These include: human-animal relationships and the impact of rabies on developments in science and on public health policies; the cultural impact of rabies on how South Africans have viewed wildlife; the socio-economic impact of colonialism on the distribution of rabies; the evolution of Western knowledge about rabies; the role of the state in rabies control; and how rabies brought social anxieties into the limelight.

Brown explores the recorded debates surrounding the existence of rabies in South Africa prior to 1893, and considers how they influenced ideas about Africa's disease environment. While acknowledging the difficulties in penetrating the lived experiences of Africans, she uses evidence from European adventurers and explorers to aver that there was no rabies in South Africa before 1893. Although she appreciates the existence of reports suggesting that people may have died of hydrophobia in the 1820s, Brown utilises memoirs by John Barrow, William Burchell, David Livingstone and James Martin to develop a not totally convincing argument that there was no rabies in South Africa before the 1893 Port Elizabeth outbreak. She reaches this conclusion by depending, as she says, on "the narratives provided by those who stayed longer in Africa than accounts given by travellers whose residence in a given place was far more transitory" (p 36). Indeed, the 1893 outbreak, as Brown argues, was the first definite confirmation of rabies by sub-inoculation, but this conclusion is problematic because the ideas of black Africans, who had stayed in the territory much longer than European explorers, were not captured. In fact, P.S. Snyman's study of rabies shows that Africans had known the genet to have been responsible for rabies outbreaks since 1885.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, Brown's discussion of the social, medical and political history of the 1893 rabies epidemic in Port Elizabeth is intriguing. In this discussion, she grapples with the fact that scientists in South Africa did not always have the respect comparable to that practised in Europe (p 50). She reveals that the relationship between the metropole and

1. See P.S. Snyman, "The Study and Control of Vectors of Rabies in South Africa", *Onderstepoort Journal of Veterinary Science*, 15, 12, 1940, pp 9-140.



colonies was not unilinear because there were many inter-exchanges of scientific ideas. Like Lance van Sittert,<sup>2</sup> she argues persuasively that the application of regulations was racial in nature because there was stricter enforcement of regulations in African townships (p 59). However, unlike van Sittert, whose main interest was what the epidemic reveals of race and class relations in the late nineteenth-century Cape Colony, Brown explains why rabies has become both an emergent and resurgent disease in twentieth-century South Africa. Furthermore, she demonstrates that in some South African colonies veterinary policy was influenced by the belief that Africans played a major role in spreading the disease. Rabies control policies evoked many emotions among both blacks and whites. Her discussion of the 1893 Port Elizabeth and 1902–1913 Southern Rhodesian outbreaks vividly illustrates public defiance to policing (p 68). However, defiance to veterinary measures in southern Africa was not limited to rabies.<sup>3</sup>

Brown argues that in South Africa the rabies virus had a wide range of potential hosts. In so doing, she demonstrates that veterinary scientists were oblivious to certain things that were already known to white settlers and blacks. Her discussion of the 1928 Transvaal rabies case involving two schoolboys, reveals that there was another rabies variant indigenous to South Africa caused by the yellow mongoose. Although this surprised veterinarians, both black and white farmers, Brown demonstrates, knew “about rabies and associated it with a number of species, in particular mongooses and wildcats, such as the genet” (p 83).

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2. L. van Sittert, “Class and Canicide in Little Bess: The 1893 Port Elizabeth Rabies Epidemic”, *South African Historical Journal*, 48, 2003, pp 207–234.
  3. See D. Gilfoyle, “The Heartwater Mystery: Veterinary and Popular Ideas about Tick-Borne Animal Diseases at the Cape, c. 1877–1910”, *Kronos*, 29, 2003; C. Bundy, “We Don’t Want your Rain, We Won’t Dip: Popular Opposition, Collaboration and Social Control in the Anti-Dipping Movement, 1908–16”, in W. Beinart and C. Bundy (eds), *Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa* (James Currey, London, 1987); W. Mwatwara, “‘The Tick was not Slow to Take Advantage’: Conflicts in the Struggle against East Coast Fever in Southern Rhodesia (1901–1920)”, *South African Historical Journal* (in press 2012).

With the exception of her discussion of the Rhodesian outbreak and how it affected South Africa, Karen Brown only begins to place rabies in its sub-regional context in chapter 5. Drawing extensively on scientific literature to elucidate the epidemiological situation in the region, Brown examines the debates about, and the impact of the southward migration of canine rabies in the mid-twentieth century. She makes an interesting connection between rabies outbreaks and the increase in labour migrancy from areas that were already badly affected by the disease. The timing, she argues, coincided with particularly severe outbreaks in Northern Rhodesia and Bechuanaland which spread into Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe (pp 115, 143). She explains the spread of rabies across Southern Rhodesia by transport networks which enabled people from as far as Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia to move easily with their dogs over long distances, in the process “providing thoroughfares for animals and viruses” and enabling rabies to escape from its pre-colonial canine north of the Zambezi River (pp 114, 115). Just as in Northern Rhodesia, outbreaks in Bechuanaland increased in the 1947–1948 season. In that same time, rabies made inroads from Angola into South West Africa. Brown does, however, acknowledge that Africans in all these areas knew about this disease dating back to pre-colonial period.

Furthermore, Brown links the escalation of rabies outbreaks during the 1960s in KwaZulu-Natal to rapid urbanisation, and the expansion of shanty towns and informal settlements. However, she posits that these were not the only factors because the destabilisation policy pursued by the Nationalist Party in Zimbabwe and Mozambique from the 1970s also played an important part. Mozambicans migrated into KwaZulu-Natal in large numbers and often brought diseases across the border (p 154). The activities of the apartheid regime, the author argues, inadvertently undermined the ability of South Africa’s veterinary and health services to manage rabies at home. In her last chapter, Brown analyses the link between HIV/AIDS and rabies, arguing that dog owners who died from AIDS have led to “an alarming increase in the feral dog population because there are not enough individuals willing or able to take on abandoned dogs, as

had been the custom in the past” (p 167). This is hardly convincing, given that no evidence is adduced to demonstrate how the pandemic has affected laws of inheritance among black Africans in KwaZulu-Natal. She also argues, without providing any evidence, that the deterioration of Zimbabwean veterinary and medical infrastructure resulted in rabies outbreaks along the South African border between 2005 and 2007. She avers that many Zimbabwean refugees during this period crossed the border with dogs, a point unsupported by any documentary evidence (p 168). A recent, in-depth study of the Zimbabwe crisis and migration by J. Crush and D. Tevera does not mention this at all.<sup>4</sup> An interview held with the National Field Technical Superintendent (Division of Veterinary Field Services, Zimbabwe), Simbarashe Choga, suggests that the Veterinary Services Department did not collapse, as argued by Brown, because, unlike other sectors, it retained its financial and technical support from Western countries.<sup>5</sup>

Brown’s study is not without its flaws. Its problem is not semantic in nature but lies in Brown’s synecdochic approach to the subject. The book exposes a bigger historiographical problem in southern African historical studies: that is, the tendency to draw from South African experiences to portray the southern African situation. Its bias towards South Africa, in general, and how the rabies epidemic has affected South Africa in particular, is clear (p 108). Although the title of the book portrays Brown’s intention to cover the whole region, very little (if anything) is said about how other countries (Mozambique, Namibia, Lesotho, Botswana, Swaziland, Malawi and Angola) reacted to such outbreaks, either local ones or those across their borders. Angola is only mentioned in its role as the source of the Namibian outbreak (pp 115–116).

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4. J. Crush and D. Tevera (eds), *Zimbabwe’s Exodus: Crisis, Migration, Survival* (SAMP, Cape Town, 2010).
  5. Interview by Wesley Mwatwara with Simbarashe Choga, Mushumbi Pools, Zimbabwe, 14 March 2012.

## Historical perspective on a current pandemic

### **Myron Echenberg, *Africa in the Time of Cholera: A History of Pandemics from 1817 to the Present***

Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011

232 pp

ISBN 978-0-521-18820-3 (pb)

£17.99

This book by one of the pioneering medical historians of Africa, Myron Echenberg (emeritus professor of history at McGill University in Montreal) provides a good example of how adding a historical perspective can help explain a current problem. The current problem he focuses on is why surges of cholera have become one of the top five killers per decade in sub-Saharan Africa, even though the disease is easy to prevent (using chlorine bleach) and to cure (by oral rehydration therapy). Notwithstanding such counter-measures, four years ago the disease ravaged Zimbabwe, while eight years earlier it rampaged through KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga and the Eastern Cape. In fact, since 1995 more than 95 percent of the world's cholera deaths have been in Africa. But it was not ever thus.

Some 150 years ago most deaths from cholera occurred in Asia, Europe and North America, while 40 years ago Asian deaths from cholera still constituted 77 percent of all cholera deaths in the world; and those in sub-Saharan Africa made up just 22 percent of the global total. Today this situation has been completely reversed. Deaths from cholera in Asia now make up less than 2 percent of the world's total, those in sub-Saharan Africa the rest.<sup>6</sup>

In seeking to explain this sharp shift in the global prevalence of cholera, Echenberg does what historians do best – he applies a historical lens to the question and thereby puts it into a long, explanatory perspective which stretches back to 1817. This allows

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6. N.H. Gaffga, R.V. Tauxe and E.D. Mintz, "Cholera: A New Homeland in Africa?", *American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*, 77, 4, 2007, p 706.

him to see that the six pandemics between 1817 and 1947 which preceded the current one, had but a limited impact on sub-Saharan Africa, at least if the patchy sources available are to be believed. The parts of the continent worst hit by these pandemics were mainly those further north in closest contact with Asia and the Middle East via returning pilgrims, sailors and seaborne traders, namely North Africa, Senegambia, the Swahili Coast and islands like Mauritius, Madagascar and the Comoros. Penetration deep into the interior was unusual; this Echenberg is forced to imply by the silence of contemporary records.

By the time the current pandemic of cholera, the seventh, broke out of Indonesia in 1961, conditions congenial to its appearance in Europe and North America – insanitary water supply and poor sanitary disposal – had long been significantly curtailed there by public health initiatives. In contrast, in sub-Saharan Africa, such cholera-friendly conditions were beginning to develop on the back of accelerating urbanisation; the flight of refugees from wars and political instability; drought and famine – all circumstances which the growing prevalence of cholera highlighted clearly. Like any pathogen geared to maximizing opportunities to reproduce itself, *Vibrio cholerae* (the pathogen causing cholera) took full advantage of all these human and nature-made conditions. As Echenberg expresses it, cholera was able to spread in sub-Saharan Africa because

*of the increased severity of risk factors, a minority of which stemmed from natural phenomena, and a majority from deteriorating social, political, and economic conditions most sub-Saharan Africans endured after the mid-1970s (p 109).*

His historically-informed solution to this is simple, if over optimistic in the recession-struck world of 2012:

*What is required is for governments in Africa and in the West to act [to uplift the region economically and socially] out of enlightened self-interest, as did their counterparts [in the developed world] a century ago (p 183).*

At a less transnational level, the book furnishes the first continental overview of the six pre-1961 pandemics, drawing on what published material is available in English and French. On the seventh pandemic

he offers a similar continental survey, but complements this with several case studies which focus on the more serious outbreaks in countries like Senegal, the DRC, Angola, South Africa and Zimbabwe, the latter meriting a separate chapter subtitled “Portrait of Cholera in a Failed State”, which argues that the benighted policies of Mugabe’s government “turned a cholera outbreak ... into a regional disaster” (p 180).

Heavily dependent on the World Health Organisation’s *Weekly Epidemiological Report* and articles in medical and current affairs journals, these case studies are narrow in their focus and provide more an epidemiological history which tracks pathways of the disease than a holistic history of epidemics. The voices in the text are more those of doctors, scientists, policy makers and social analysts than of ordinary people stricken or threatened by cholera. Popular, religious and cultural responses are heard only very briefly. Surely it is as important for these to be included too, not only because they come from the majority of historical actors affected by the pandemic but also because it is their behaviour which ultimately must be integral to any successful bid to curtail cholera? After all, you can take a person to the bitter, chlorine-bleached water, but you cannot make them drink if they do not understand why they should.

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### **Short biography accessible yet flawed**

#### **Dan Wylie, *Shaka: A Jacana Pocket Biography***

Jacana Media, Johannesburg, 2011

155 pp

ISBN 978-1-77009-962-3

R99.95

The arguments presented in Dan Wylie’s new *Jacana Pocket Biography* of Shaka, the famous nineteenth-century king of the Zulu, are those for which he has already become well known. As is to be expected,

the volume is a condensed summary of his previous works, *Savage Delight: White Myths of Shaka* (2000) and *Myth of Iron: Shaka in History* (2006), the latter being the first comprehensive scholarly biography of Shaka. In terms of this new volume's accessibility to a wider audience, there is much to praise. Written as an introduction to the topic, in a witty, engaging style, it will almost certainly be well received by a novice readership. Arranged in eleven concise chapters, it can also be recommended as a valuable initial foray for those interested in reading more substantial scholarly works on Shaka and early Zulu history.

That being said, Wylie is no less the omniscient narrator in this short biography than he was in *Myth of Iron*; an approach for which he was criticised after its publication but which survives intact in the current volume. As with *Myth of Iron*, we are presented with a biography of one of South Africa's most mythologised characters, which the author insists is actually impossible to write. While Wylie "would love to write a proper biography", he informs us that "the evidence on which to base one doesn't exist" (p 96). This is due to serious uncertainties surrounding the integrity of the available evidence, which the author describes as "a limited number of dubious sources with dubious anecdotes" (p 96). What this means, however, is that as with *Myth of Iron*, the credibility of this volume's rehashed arguments remains questionable. Indeed, for those familiar with Wylie's previous works, there is nothing new on offer here and the old flaws unfortunately remain.

At the outset, Wylie is at pains to contend that most of what we think we know about Shaka is simply wrong. The most famous monarch in the history of the Zulu people has been the victim of "politically motivated myth-building, outright lies, culturally biased misconceptions, sloppy scholarship and unthinking repetition" (p 9). His analysis is arguably at its strongest when it comes to reappraising the related historiography and, in particular, the earliest accounts of Shaka by an assortment of European adventurers and traders. Chapter One is dedicated to highlighting the lack of verifiable written sources,

as well as the shortcomings of *The James Stuart Archive*, a rich collection of oral testimonies of Zulu history and traditions provided by Zulu informants around the turn of the twentieth century. According to Wylie, the latter is “the main source upon which the present book is based” (p 24). Still, like the published “eye-witness” accounts of Nathaniel Isaacs (*Travels and Adventures in Eastern Africa*, 1836) and Henry Francis Fynn (*The Diary of Henry Francis Fynn*, 1950; compiled by the same James Stuart of the eponymous archive), the collection of oral testimonies of Shaka are also “contradictory”, exhibiting “political biases, forgetfulness, propaganda, [and] lies” (p 25). Those accounts of Shaka which do appear in *The James Stuart Archive* were recorded many decades after his death and are undoubtedly “riddled with malicious stories put out by Dingane”, Shaka’s half-brother, assassin and successor (p 97). Wylie acknowledges that “[i]n short, there is practically no one we can trust entirely” (p 26).

Having sufficiently discredited the sources upon which the subsequent chapters are based, the reader is nonetheless expected to follow along as the author sets out to de-mythologise Shaka and re-represent him in a more nuanced and accurate guise. Wylie certainly succeeds in complicating an often taken-for-granted story of “the genius militarist who rose from humble beginnings to forge a nation” (p 10). The Shaka that emerges from the text is a complex individual. It is an image far removed from that of the bloodthirsty despot who orchestrated the rise of the Zulu “nation” through ingenious military tactics and a series of strategic offences against neighbouring peoples, throwing the African subcontinent into political and demographic upheaval during the 1820s. Here, Shaka is portrayed as “tough, wily and adept” (p 97); an “able man” who was a “canny politician”; an “opportunist” and a “make-do artist” (p 146). Wylie argues that initially, during Shaka’s early reign in the 1810s, the key motivation for expansion was the quest for security in an already turbulent south-east African interior. The crux of this line of argument is that by the early 1820s, “Shaka had cobbled together a Zulu-centred polity primarily for defence” (p 123). It is argued that when Shaka went on the offensive in the years just prior to his death in 1828, again, this was in response to the need for security; it was “not conquest for its



own sake” (p 123).

For anyone with a keen eye on Zulu historiography, the mfecane-busting mould in which this biography has been written would have become glaringly obvious by now. At the beginning of Chapter Two, Wylie asserts that “this whole book will be devoted to overturning” the mfecane model. This is a bold ambition for such a little book. Given the condensed nature of the text, it is disappointing that this thread is not sufficiently sustained as a theme throughout the book and it is not even revisited in the conclusion. While it is certainly plausible that a thorough re-conceptualisation of the life of Shaka would add much to the stalled, though far from settled mfecane debate – contrary to Wylie’s contention that “[w]e know now ... that the ‘mfecane’ model is simply untenable” – the author continues to remind us that the evidence upon which he is basing his reassessment is imprecise, vague and questionable. Thus, nothing is conclusively proven and the debates about the character and rule of Shaka and the mfecane remain open and contested.

Whether this work presents a more authentic account of Shaka’s life is difficult to determine. The lack of in-text referencing makes it impossible to interrogate the sources Wylie has used to supposedly refute numerous embellishments and inventions which he argues have become “truth” (p 15). In numerous instances Wylie, the authoritative biographer rescuing his subject from a litany of misconceptions, makes sweeping dismissals of what we have been led to believe. This is “rank nonsense”, that is “rubbish”; Shaka “was not a pathological mass murderer”; “he did not slaughter large numbers of cowards”; “he did not obliterate the Langeni or any other group”; “he did not kill his own mother” (p 97). Given that throughout the text we have been regularly reminded of how unreliable the sources are, these forthright dismissals invite a healthy dose of scepticism.

The contentious and complex nature of the “Shakan” myth is also not sufficiently fleshed out. Apart from a few fleeting references to the factually incorrect, though internationally famous 1986 television series (p 7), as well as the largely fictional best selling “biography” by E.A. Ritter (p 10), the “Shakan” myth is underplayed. This is to the

detriment of the overall discussion. The tension between who Shaka really was on the one hand, and what has been written and spoken about him, and why, on the other is imbalanced. The various accounts of the European explorers and traders are systematically dismissed; those of Isaacs and Fynn labelled as suspicious testimonies of “two frontier ruffians” (p 21). Their motives for representing Shaka as a deranged bully are easily established as “Shaka’s depredations became a crucial element in a wider imperial campaign” (p 21) and it suited their own commercial ambitions in the interior.

However, the oral testimonies of James Stuart’s Zulu informants are too often simply judged on the basis of their counter-weight to the European travel accounts. Yet, they are not necessarily more authentic than the written stories. As Wylie notes, they too are full of contradictions and discrepancies. This is to be expected, for they are a reflection of oral tradition and are not necessarily intended to convey historical accuracy. As oral tradition, the generational influences upon the transformation of what may have been literal accounts into metaphorical “truths” need to be taken into account. The possible motivations for why certain informants emphasised particular “Shakan” “truths” as opposed to others is not addressed at all. With oral tradition, the telling detail is not to be found in the minutiae, but in the meaning that is conveyed. The divergences in the details of specific events in no way points to fabrication by default, but rather what individuals, several generations on, thought Shaka had been capable of.

Nonetheless, one of the volume’s strengths is the discussion of how the Zulu polity came into being through what Wylie terms a “propaganda of belonging”, which is discussed in some detail in Chapter Seven (p 94). Whatever the methods employed to incorporate neighbouring groups, it was Shaka’s policy thereafter to assimilate those groups into the Zulu fold (p. 85) and to “institute a new language of belonging which cut across former, fragmentary clan or ethnic identities” (p 93). It would appear that a bewildering array of tactics was used to foster a shared Zulu consciousness although it is unclear how many of these strategies can be attributed to Shaka

or to others in his inner circle. Together with the appropriation of rituals and the invention of genealogies in order “to assert common origins” (p 93), “linguistic propaganda” was also used “to suggest a new, common identity” (p 92).

In the end, scholarly justice cannot be done to a life as literally and historiographically rich as Shaka’s in a pocket biography. Most of the criticisms levelled here are perhaps unfair given the scope and intended target audience of the book. Then again, some of the witticism, while no doubt meant to appeal to a lay audience, appears ludicrous. The most fitting example is when Wylie suggests, though “[i]t’s not possible to say [so] with certainty”, that he “wouldn’t mind betting that throughout his reign Shaka sentenced to death fewer people than the 269 executed by the state of Texas during the governorship of George W Bush” (p 94). Setting the analytical and stylistic blemishes aside, the book would have also benefited from the inclusion of a glossary and a few more detailed maps.

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### In his own write

#### **Hlonipha Mokoena, *Magama Fuze: The Making of a Kholwa Intellectual***

University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Scottsville, 2011  
338 pp  
ISBN 978-1-86914-191-2  
R238.00

Magama M. Fuze emerges from this exceptional study as a far more interesting and thoughtful character than modern scholars have imagined. The very circumstances that propelled him into the public eye in the 1860s and 1870s ensured that he would be underrated as an independent thinker. Anglican Bishop J.W. Colenso during the

early, evangelical phase of his career enrolled Fuze as a student in his short-lived experiment in elite education, Ekukhanyeni School. After the school fizzled out due to Colenso's financial problems and loss of interest, Fuze stayed on as the bishop's printer. From time to time Colenso wheeled him out as an "authentic" voice of Zulu public opinion. Miraculously, Fuze's views always ran parallel to the bishop's current enthusiasms. After his death, Fuze continued in the employment of the Colenso daughters, Harriette and Agnes, who dedicated their lives to the bishop's last cause: justice for the Zulu royal house. In this capacity he accompanied Dinuzulu during his exile on the island of St. Helena. Up to this point Fuze's public life may be regarded as a textbook example of colonial ventriloquism; he was ever the loyal subaltern whose black skin and Zulu speech could be invoked in support of the Colensos' positions on current affairs.

However, on his return from St. Helena in 1896, Fuze fell out with Harriette and Agnes over the question of his pay. This marked the moment when he finally escaped from their thrall and let his own distinctive voice be heard. For the remainder of his life he mostly made his own way, soliciting subscriptions to support what he promised would be a definitive account of *Abantu Abamnyama* ("The Black People and Whence they Came"). From the 1890s he also made his presence felt as a contributor to newspapers such as *Ilanga lase Natal* and *Ipepa lo Hlanga*. These journals had emerged from missionary-sponsored experiments of the 1870s but by the 1890s editorial control had largely passed to African editors. Reportage and discussions among readers were conducted in both English and Zulu. Over the course of his last three decades, Fuze's contributions were made mostly in Zulu, so a full appreciation of his corpus of writing has awaited someone with Hlonipha Mokoena's command of the language. Operating where literature, history and anthropology intersect, she is able to convey the most subtle nuances of expression and meaning. Unlike the Kenyan novelist Ngugi Wa' Thiong'o, who made a political choice to forsake English for Kikuyu, Fuze seems to have preferred Zulu because he found it a more supple medium. The author shows his capacity for puns, innuendo and myriad other

stylish variations which could not have been accomplished in English.

Mokoena argues persuasively that twentieth-century historians, transfixed by the idea of the educated Zulu as “native informant” missed seeing the creation of “an African-originated narrative style” (p 52). Literary scholars have preferred to study African writers in English, thereby conveying the false impression that Zulu speakers were slow to develop a literary sensibility. The book’s subtitle, “The Making of a *Kholwa* Intellectual” recognises the fact that Christianity was central to the development of a Zulu print culture. This was not because of “the valorisation of the Zulu language by Colenso and his printing press” (p 134), but because from the arrival of the first American Congregational and Presbyterian missionaries in 1836, it had been decided that the evangelisation of the Zulu should be conducted in their language.

Access to the written bible, an essential tenet of Protestantism, required the production of grammars and gospels, which began rolling off the American Board presses well before Colenso appeared on the scene. All the major denominations – even the linguistically challenged Methodists – agreed to use a common grammar. A sign of shared purpose among the competing missions was that Colenso’s translations, which some suspected might be contaminated by heresy, were welcomed because of the bishop’s evident gift for languages. The consequences for national consciousness among the literate elite cannot be overstated. Every person who acquired literacy in Zulu immediately gained access to a community where native speakers were the acknowledged masters of knowledge about verbal and written expression. The colonial condescension directed at defective English vanished when the conversation shifted into Zulu. Soon even the haughty court circles round the royal house were forced to acknowledge that the excellence of their oratory was no match for the worldly erudition of the literate *kholwa* (the term used for Zulu Christians). The Zulu of the *kholwa* thus set the standard for the language spoken and read by millions of twenty-first century South Africans.

The degree to which literacy in Zulu could turn the tables in dealings with colonial authority is illustrated by the case of H.C. Lugg. The man charged late in life with translating Fuze's *magnum opus* into English cut his teeth as a young bureaucrat in Natal's Native Affairs Department translating Zulu passages from *Ilanga lase Natal* for perusal by cabinet ministers obsessed by the idea that seditious writings were being spread in a language they could not understand. This provoked the equivalent of a linguistic shootout when Governor McCallum called *Ilanga lase's* editor, John Dube, in for questioning about supposedly treasonable language during the so-called Bhambatha rebellion in 1906. When Dube protested that his words may not have been correctly translated, the governor insisted that he apologise in print for impugning the superior Zulu language skills of the white men at the Native Affairs Department.<sup>7</sup>

Mokoena's use of Fuze as a representative *kebohwa* intellectual does not blind her to his idiosyncrasies. One of the most engaging features of the book is the way she allows his quirky personality to shine through. Fuze can hardly be considered an orthodox Christian. While Colenso was less likely than most to promote rigid orthodoxy,

Fuze embarrassed the bishop where it was most likely to hurt when he became a polygamist. Colenso had argued in the 1850s that polygamous converts from the heathen should be allowed to maintain their existing family ties. However, he laid down the law when it came to Christian men taking additional wives. The decision by his best known converts, William Ngidi and Fuze, to expand their households was a bitter blow to the bishop's reputation as a missionary. It must have been discomfiting for Colenso sitting on the Natal Native Commission of 1881–1882 when Fuze gave this reply when asked whether polygamy was a good thing:

*It is a good thing, because a man with one wife only is a poor fellow. I consider a man has a right to take as many wives as he wishes. Our forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*

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7. British Archives, Kew, Colonial Office (CO) 179/235, McCallum – Elgin, 30 May 1906.

*had more wives than one.*<sup>8</sup>

This brief statement supplied proof enough that Fuze had declared his intellectual independence. His later contributions to debates about blackness, Bantu origins and life after death reveal a questing mind at work. Mokoena tends to treat these as the product of his own reflections, but a case can be made out for the impact of wider influences. When he proposed a northeast African origin for the Bantu-speakers separate from the supposed Garden of Eden in Asia, he may, as the author contends, be speculating on the separate creation of different races. However, on the same evidence it could be suggested that it was through his contact with scholars such as Alice Werner that Fuze knew of Harry Johnston's thesis of Bantu origins. Similarly, when he wrote "We are not black, we are dark brown", he may have been arguing that it was time to substitute Western concepts of racial difference for the metaphorical use of blackness in the praises of Dingane. As a *keholwa* intellectual, Fuze would have been aware of turn-of-the-century debates about spiritualism, theosophy and reincarnation. He most certainly would have known of Rider Haggard's thoughts on life before and after death. When he mused about his own life before birth, he may merely have been reflecting on broader intellectual movements of his day.

In any case, Mokoena has done long overdue justice to a considerable figure and in the process opened new paths for research. Her book deserves a place on every South African scholar's bookshelf. It may not be uncharitable to hope that before long she leaves her post at Columbia to take up a position worthy of her considerable talents in the country of her birth.

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8. Natal Blue Books, *Evidence before the Natal Native Commission of 1881–1882*, p 166.

**Excellent account of a pioneering politician**

**Heather Hughes, *The First President: A Life of John L. Dube, Founding President of the ANC***

Jacana Media, Johannesburg, 2011

312 pp

ISBN 978-1-77009-813-8

R225.00

Published on the eve of the centenary of the founding of the African National Congress, this book has come at a most appropriate time. This is a biography of John Dube, the second son of early Christian converts, James Dube and Elizabeth Namazi Shangase, who had come to live on the famous mission station Inanda, founded in 1857 by Daniel Lindley of the American Zulu Mission (AZM). James Dube, who was originally from the Qadi chiefdom headed by his father, Chief Langalibalele, under King Shaka, was ordained pastor by Lindley in December 1870.

One of five brothers, John Langalibalele Dube was born on Inanda Mission on 11 February 1871. In 1881, following his early education on Inanda Mission, the young Dube entered the famous Adams College at the age of ten and quickly adapted to a life of punctuality, routine and regularity. The institution was for a long time one of the leading AZM education centres for young African men. It was at Adams College, at the time under the “forcefull influence” of the American missionary, William C. Wilcox, that Dube’s characteristics of “singlemindedness, persistence and dogged determination, which would underpin his emergence as a leader” (p 38) began to show.

On completion of his studies at Inanda, at the request of Dube’s mother, Wilcox took John with him to the United States in 1887 for further studies, thus following the example of earlier young African men from South Africa, notably John Nembula and Pixley Seme whom he probably saw as role models. From 1888, Dube studied Theology at Oberlin College for about two years. He then returned home in 1891 and worked briefly for the AZM as a preacher in Durban. He married Nokutela Mdimba in January 1894 and together they went



to the US “to equip themselves more effectively as missionaries to the heathen”. while based in Brooklyn under the Lewis Avenue Congregational Church. Dube graduated from the Union Missionary Training Institute in May 1898 and was ordained a pastor a year later. On his return home, he was appointed to head the Inanda Mission in mid-1899.

While in the US, Dube greatly admired and was influenced by Booker T. Washington whom he saw as a role model. That is why on 26 July 1901, he established his Ohlange Industrial School. Balancing his role as head of Ohlange with his new interest and involvement in politics, Dube became a founder member of the Natal Native Congress in Pietermaritzburg on 1 June 1900. In 1907, he resigned from the Inanda church and the AZM, in order to pursue “wider interests” as he was becoming more and more politically active. Hughes skillfully shows how, in the aftermath of the Bambatha rebellion of 1906, Dube exhibited political and moral courage by exposing the brutality of the rebellion specifically and attacked racial injustice against Africans in Natal.

Thus it was no surprise that in May 1909, when the various regional African political organisations in the country met in the Waaihoek Location of Bloemfontein and formed the South African Native Convention, John Dube was elected its vice-president under Walter Rubusana, the president. Three years later, on 8 January 1912, again in Bloemfontein, Dube was elected president of the slightly renamed South African Native National Congress (SANNC) by a large majority because he “was easily the best-known nationally, with almost matchless experience” (p 162). Apart from this busy new role, Dube also ran and managed the *Ilanga* newspaper until 1915. Within weeks of his election as SANNC president, Dube was leading his Congress executive to the Minister of Native Affairs in Cape Town to present a petition attacking the myriad of legal restrictions and racial prejudice against Africans. Over Barry Hertzog’s segregationist bills, Dube again led a deputation to the government, but to no avail.

Following the passing of the 1913 Land Act, Dube led yet another deputation, this time to London in May 1914, which again was

fruitless. On that trip, disillusioned by negative responses from the British government and other bodies in England, Dube made the error of returning home abruptly and alone, for reasons that were not plausible, leaving Walter Rubusana in charge of the delegation, who felt abandoned and disappointed. In the deputation, Saul Msane in particular never forgave Dube for this. Pixley Seme too did not take kindly to Dube's action. Consequently, when the SANNC executive returned home, they were split into two camps between Msane's followers and Dube's. Dube, nevertheless, continued to be politically very active. Thus in the late 1910s, for example, he continually and boldly campaigned against Durban's racially restrictive laws and the 1913 Land Act.

This was a time when African politicians were not yet making "radical" demands to the white authorities, such as "one person, one vote." Instead, Dube advocated racial harmony, "the need to move forward cautiously; the need to assert the dignity of African peoples" (p 208).

On a personal level, Dube and his wife, Nokutela, were unable to have children because of Nokutela's alleged infertility, which eventually resulted in the two going their separate ways. He went to live in Johannesburg, while she went to face a "lonely existence on a farm in the Transvaal" and eventually died of a kidney ailment in January 1917. Dube remarried in August 1920 at age 49 while his new wife, Angelina Khumalo, was 21. They had six children.

Dube's presidency came to an end in late June 1917, partly because of his opponents in the SANNC executive who never forgave him for earlier having left them "in the lurch" in England when he returned home alone. He was succeeded by Sefako Makgatho. But Dube remained on the SANNC executive and continued to be politically active. He was also active in the ethnic Inkatha organisation founded in December 1921. He died on 11 February 1946 at the age of 75 and was buried at Inanda "so that he could keep watch over Ohlange for ever" (p 255).

*First President* certainly gives a very comprehensive account of John Dube. But one is left wondering how much richer the account could have been if John Dube's personal/family archive had not "vanished" just after his death in 1946 (p xv). Perhaps we would have had a different and/or fuller understanding of him if Hughes had had access to that archive. Throughout the book, Hughes provides the reader with a context to each stage of Dube's life and experiences, which gives a comprehensive understanding. But at times the reader is left to guess what happened. When, for example, Dube was summoned to appear before the Permanent Under-Secretary for Native Affairs, Samuel Samuelson, in March 1903, we are not told what actually transpired in the meeting (p 102). When Dube and Wilcox began their voyage from South Africa to the US in 1887 (pp 45-46), the latter simply vanishes from the narrative and reappears only when Dube has completed his studies at Oberlin College (p 51).

The book also quite often lacks an analytical reflection and a critical distance from its subject. Dube's abrupt departure from England in which he "abandoned" his SANNNC executive colleagues is a case in point. Hughes could have given the reader a more critical insight into that issue. Dube's differences with, and apparent "vindictiveness" towards, A.G. Champion is another example. Furthermore, there ought to have been at least one map in the book showing where the events and developments discussed occurred.

Overall, however, the book is an excellent account of John Langalibalele Dube's life that adds enormously to our understanding of not just the origins of the African National Congress but also its wider regional and national historical context.

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## An alternate reading of a charismatic figure

**Scott Couper, *Albert Luthuli: Bound by Faith***

University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Scottsville, 2010

291 pp

ISBN 978-1-86914-192-9

R238.00

At the outset of his biography of Albert Luthuli, Scott Couper makes clear his claim that he wishes to consider the influence of his Christian beliefs on Luthuli's political philosophy which, in turn, impacted upon the way he desired to carry out the struggle against the apartheid state. Not without controversy, *Albert Luthuli: Bound by Faith* offers an alternate reading of a charismatic and influential figure that departs from the dominant nationalist discourse. This point of departure comes in the form of the decision to initiate the armed struggle on the part of the African National Congress (ANC). Couper builds a painstaking case to convince the reader of his argument, tracing the life of Albert Luthuli from his birth in Natal to the suspicious circumstances surrounding his death in 1967.

The first chapter, "The Home of My Fathers pre 1897–1927" focuses on Luthuli's Christian background. His grandparents, Ntaba and Titisi Luthuli, were converted by Aldin Grout of the American Mission Board who established a mission station in Umvoti – present-day Groutville – in rural Natal. They were of the Congregationalist faith which was to have repercussions for Albert later on. Some aspects of Congregationalism included a firm stance on democracy and resistance to oppression. Other Protestant missionaries who were also concerned about the exploitation of the indigenous people included David Livingstone and John Philip who established a mission at the Cape in 1860. In addition, the impetus was on liberalism in the form of individual land tenure, class mobility and progress.

Ntaba Luthuli was elected chief by the *amakholwa* at Groutville with his son, Martin, following in the same vein. Albert was born in Bulawayo and after the death of his father when he was an infant,

returned to Natal to be raised by his widowed mother and his uncle, Martin. He was educated in the manner of his class, attending John Dube's Ohlange Institute for a short period as well as Edendale College, where he engaged in student protest – his first form of activism. It was here that his exposure to white teachers inculcated his belief that the African ideal was a synthesis of both indigenous and European cultures. Albert went on to become school principal at Blaauwbosch while serving as a Methodist preacher. He was subsequently awarded a bursary for Adams College where he was further strengthened in his belief that the ultimate role of a Christian was to act positively in the world. This, and the next chapter, “The Christian Mode, 1928–1959”, focus in some detail on the impact of various institutions in shaping Albert's character and subsequent political activism. He joined the Natal Native Teachers' Association; the Zulu Language and Culture Society; and the Native Representative Council – the latter confirming his belief in the futility of working closely with the government for change.

By 1935, Albert had followed in the family tradition of being elected chief of the *amakholwa* community at Groutville. He found his role less than rewarding, perceiving himself to be a mere mouthpiece for state policies, with little real power to implement necessary change. As chief, he was also exposed to the social and economic difficulties and injustices perpetuated on his people daily. By 1944, he had joined the ANC at a time when the organisation was becoming increasingly radicalised due to the efforts of its Youth League which began to advocate civil disobedience in opposing the apartheid state in 1949. Two years later Albert was elected president of the Natal ANC and was arrested for the first time in 1952 for his participation in the Defiance Campaign. He was accused by the state of allegedly not fulfilling his role as a chief and was thus removed from his position. The same year saw him become president general of the ANC. His election to the position was supported by the Youth League and Nelson Mandela was named as Luthuli's deputy.

Even as he rose to the highest echelons of nationalist struggle, Luthuli remained loyal to the church whilst aware of its shortcomings.

For him, the church should assume a pragmatic role in addressing people's needs rather than just holding onto what he termed "disembodied principles" (p 62). His political activism reflected this and he received his first banning order in May 1953. By 1955, increasing ill health meant that he did not attend the Congress of the People in Kliptown where the Freedom Charter was signed. Luthuli was not involved in the drawing up of the Charter either and while approving its broad principles, had reservations on certain aspects, particularly its stance on "multiracialism"; although he favoured "non-racialism", he bowed to the majority decision on its adoption.

The mid to late-1950s marked a turbulent time in South African politics. Luthuli was arrested under the Suppression of Communism Act in 1956 but was acquitted a year later. He continued in his belief that white Christian liberals had an integral role to play in the liberation struggle even as growing radicalism was evident in the black nationalist movements. The Pan Africanist Congress was formed with its strong identification with the anti-colonial struggles on the continent but Luthuli was steadfast in his belief in "South African exceptionalism" (p 77) where the white population was an important component of the country and its future. The Bantustans were created by the end of the decade and while Luthuli opposed their formation on "economic, social and political grounds" (p 80), he also did so based on his religious belief that tribalism was un-Christian.

Chapter 3, "Storm on the Horizon, 1960" hints at the upcoming divisions between Luthuli and increasing radical ANC policy. In the wake of Sharpeville, Luthuli protested by publicly burning his passbook. His decision to do so at the home of Tony Brink of the Liberal Party was a means of affirming the role he perceived for white liberals in the struggle. As the leader of the ANC, an organisation that had by now, been banned, he was imprisoned during the Treason Trial. This isolation from ANC leaders symbolised the gap between him and the rest of the movement's leadership. Luthuli continued to advocate non-violent resistance because a move to violence would result in the increased use of state force as well as alienating white supporters. Increasingly, however, Mandela began to move towards

pan-Africanism and he and other leaders felt that their existing mode of resistance was proving ineffective.

The following chapter, “The Tempo Quickens, 1961” is arguably the heart of the book where Couper draws the threads of his argument together. Mandela’s rise as the charismatic leader of the organisation was accompanied by the relegation of Luthuli to a figurehead. Before the release of Mandela’s autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, Couper argues that the literature suggests that Luthuli was unaware of the ANC’s decision to form MK. *Long Walk to Freedom* and subsequent accounts, however, imply that Luthuli was, in fact, cognisant of such a decision. At the National Executive Committee of the ANC in June 1961, Mandela made an argument for the abandonment of non-violence. Luthuli dissented, suggesting that this would be too great a policy shift without adequate consultation with all those involved in the struggle. His compromise was the formation of an armed wing that was distinct from the ANC but nevertheless remained under its control. Drawing upon the work of Meer, Couper suggests that Luthuli wanted to re-open the discussion at the meeting of the Congress’s Joint Executive where he could possibly gain further support from those who favoured continuance of non-violent resistance. The resolution taken here, after much debate, was that those who formed a military wing would not be disciplined for their actions.

As the ANC was moving towards a change in policy, Luthuli was awarded the Christopher Gell Memorial Award for his commitment to non-violence as well as the Nobel Peace Prize. In his many speeches during that period he continuously affirmed his advocacy of non-violent protest in the light of Gandhian principles. After his return from Norway, MK went public by orchestrating a number of explosions around the country. Luthuli, until then unaware of the formation of the armed wing, was upset by these events. Despite this, he refused to condemn the movement and Couper cites three reasons for this: Luthuli blamed the repression of the apartheid state for the move to violent resistance; MK had been formed through consensus; and once it came into existence, acceptance was the only option left to him.

The years after this saw the increasing marginalisation of Luthuli from the ANC. He continued to publicly advocate non-violent resistance. He published his autobiography, *Let My People Go*, in 1962 and the title once again was a reflection of Luthuli's spiritual beliefs where he perceived himself akin to the biblical Moses leading his people out of bondage. He also maintained ties with other international leaders who shared similar views such as Martin Luther King Jr in the "Appeal for Action against Apartheid". A fear shared by King and Luthuli was that within the context of the Cold War, the ANC's use of violence would alienate the Western powers, especially as the ANC began to make overtures to Communist governments for assistance. Nevertheless, during the Rivonia Trial, Luthuli maintained his support of his comrades. This support has been taken to mean that he tacitly approved of the armed struggle. Couper, however, argues that this was not the case – solidarity did not mean consent.

The final chapter, "Alone on the Tracks, 1967" paints a picture of a man in frail health, with hypertension and failing sight. Marginalised by the ANC and banned by the apartheid state, he was no longer considered a political threat. For Couper, then, Luthuli's fatal accident on the train tracks was not part of a conspiracy to silence him but was instead simply a tragic accident.

Couper's biography portrays a complex but deeply consistent man who was motivated by his spiritual concerns above his political ones. His stance against the use of violent protest would prove to be prophetic, culminating in the arrest of most of the ANC leadership. While parallels have been drawn between Mandela and Luthuli, Couper shows that they had little in common other than their desire for liberation. However, to acknowledge the differences between them is not to do either a disservice but to present a more nuanced account of the country's long struggle towards freedom. By writing an account of one of the more neglected figures in the anti-apartheid struggle, Scott Couper has made an invaluable contribution to the existing historiography.

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## The meek shall not inherit South Africa

**F.A. Mouton, *Prophet without Honour. F.S. Malan: Afrikaner, South African and Cape Liberal***

Protea Book House, Pretoria, 2011

184 pp

ISBN 978-1-86919-414-7

R180.00

South Africa's political landscape, past and present, is populated by a rich and colourful cast of characters. Unfortunately, the dearth of political biographers has meant that save for a few exceptions, prime ministers and presidents have monopolised scholarly attention. These men have come to embody the eras under their rule, while their allies and rivals have been reduced to a near-faceless mass of minions.

Alex Mouton has bucked this trend by writing the biographies of dissident insiders, such as Margaret and William Ballinger, Schalk Pienaar and now, Francois Stephanus (F.S.) Malan. His subjects personify Michael Walzer's model of the connected critic, insiders who are nevertheless critical; voices of conscience who nullify claims of an overarching, homogenous morality. Taken in this light, a biography of F.S. Malan is certainly merited, since it not only adds to the historiographical texture of early twentieth-century politics, but also records the life of that rare breed of Afrikaner who was not a nationalist; a member of the establishment who also challenged its racism and the expedience with which African rights were traded for the sake of white compromise.

F.S. Malan was a contemporary of Jan Smuts at the Victoria College and Cambridge, a protégé of "Onze" Jan Hofmeyr, and the editor of the Afrikaner Bond mouthpiece, *Ons Land*, who was gaoled for libel during the South African War but who emerged from prison to plead for a united South Africa and for the preservation and even extension of the Cape franchise. As one of the South African Party's (SAP) leading lights, Malan came within reach of the premiership, but could never seize it. He failed to recover from the SAP's exile

to the political wilderness in the 1920s and became a marginalised figure who faded from the political scene and disappeared into historiographical oblivion.

Malan was a paradoxical figure whose defence of the Cape franchise made him a remnant of a bygone era to his contemporaries, but a revolutionary in the eyes of historians with the benefit of hindsight. Mouton reflects his subject's Janus face in the book's title, *Prophet without Honour* and in the title of its final chapter, "Keeping the Old Cape Flag Flying in the Last Ditch". Whether Malan was indeed a political prophet, or merely the personification of the fate of the Cape Liberal tradition, is hard to tell. His political fortunes seem to follow those of Cape Liberalism in twentieth-century South Africa. In the new post-Union political parties and parliament, the three Northern provinces formed a power bloc which systematically suffocated the south's liberalism<sup>9</sup> and whittled away its non-racial franchise. By the time Hertzog's Native Bills were passed in 1936, F.S. Malan had been reduced to a political non-entity. He became a voice in the desert.

By writing the biography of a man who rose to high office, but could never quite reach the pinnacle, Mouton inadvertently demonstrates the dynamics of early twentieth-century Afrikaner politics and the characters of the men who did indeed reach the top. F.S. Malan is portrayed as a tortured soul, a man who struggled to reconcile his principles with the realities of political life. He dissented, but yielded for the sake of compromise, and struggled to reconcile his idealism with his political impotence. The rough-and-tumble of political life seemed to overwhelm him: every slight was a blow; every insult left a bruise. In contrast, the men who rose to power were those who were thick-skinned enough to deflect

9. Nationalism followed the same fate as liberalism. In his biography of J.H. Hofmeyr, Alan Paton noted that it "is one of the remarkable facts of South African history, that while it is commonly accepted that today we are ruled by the ideology of the North rather than of the South, of the Transvaal rather than of the Cape, it was in the Cape that modern Afrikaner Nationalism was born and nurtured". See A. Paton, *Hofmeyr* (Oxford University Press, London, 1964), p 284.

the viciousness of white politics.<sup>10</sup> They were ultimately pragmatists; master strategists who built support on the basis of compromise and political alliances. F.S. Malan, while a thoroughly admirable human being, did not seem to possess these qualities. As a youth and an established politician, he was determined not to stand in Jan Smuts's shadow. However, he failed to match Smuts's persona and alienated himself from Smuts and the SAP's strategically important inner circle, which doubtless contributed to his political demise.

Mouton's empathetic portrayal of this sensitive but admirable character brings us to the relationship between the biographer and his subject. Biography is essentially the biographer's interpretation of the biographical subject – it is impossible to divorce the two. It has become common practice for biographers to acknowledge their presence in the text and, if they admire the main character, to admit to it. Good, critical biographers then use a number of safeguards to ensure that their accounts do not degenerate into the realm of hagiography. The most important of these are thorough primary research and the acknowledgement of their character's failings, however unflattering these may be. By this measure, Mouton succeeds with flying colours. His veneration for Malan is clear (and there are times when his description of Malan's life work reads like a laudation), but his research is meticulous and he has provided a warts-and-all portrayal of his subject. F.S. Malan may have been a beacon of liberalism and political conscience, but Mouton reveals that he was also a man who neglected a depressed and insecure wife – even during her pregnancies – and who would rather keep an appointment with a political luminary than be present at the birth of his child (p 77). When it came to the political arena, Malan may have been a voice of dissent, but when faced with a *fait accompli*, he chose to toe the party line where a more courageous individual would have resigned his cabinet position (pp 121, 140) – as Jan Hofmeyr, the era's more famous liberal authority, indeed did in 1938.

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10. A notable exception was Louis Botha, who found it difficult to deal with the Nationalists' mockery. However, Mouton portrays Malan as an excellent strategist and bridge-builder, which explains his rise to power.

While this biography certainly makes a valuable contribution to post-apartheid Afrikaner historiography, I would have liked to see a more literary approach to the text itself, which would have brought its rich sources to life. Although biographers, unlike novelists, may not stray from their sources, they – and any other historian for that matter – do have license to present their material imaginatively and to utilise the narrative form to tell a gripping tale. This is the reason why biography is such a popular and accessible genre to lay audiences. In the case of this biography, the author clearly favoured a more conventional academic style of writing. This, coupled with the brevity of the text, means that the reader struggles at times to get under the main character's skin and to understand his thought processes and important turning points, which are stated as fact, rather than explained.

A case in point is Malan's transition from a shy, uncertain youth to a firebrand politician in the wake of the Jameson Raid. The change is introduced rather abruptly by quoting Mordechai Tamarkin's description of Malan (p 31). The author's own impression would have carried more weight. The sparseness of the text (whether by choice or on the insistence of the publisher) also means that the supporting cast of characters remain in the shadows, with the result that Malan's relationships, such as his mentor-protégé bond with "Onze" Jan Hofmeyr, are unexplored. By harnessing the biographical genre to its full extent and by writing a longer biography, Mouton could have added even more and richer layers to his narrative and characters.

That being said, Mouton's work is nuanced and original and it demonstrates the contested nature of early twentieth-century South African politics and of Afrikaner identity. In the bipolar milieu that followed Union, F.S. Malan's imprisonment during the South African War branded him in the eyes of the English community as a treasonous anti-British intriguer, while his pleas for conciliation and a united South Africa under the Union Jack made him an Imperial lackey in the eyes of Afrikaners. In such an environment, a voice of reason would not be heard – but at least it has not gone unrecorded.

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## Gandhi was a terrible father and husband

Judith M. Brown and Anthony Parel (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Gandhi*

Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011

273 pp

ISBN 978-0-521-13345-6

£18.99

Gandhi was an indifferent father; an authoritarian husband; and a demanding and eccentric friend. He was politically and socially conservative and saw no inherent virtue in the idea of the independent woman or emancipated untouchable. His reading of religion, as of political theory, was idiosyncratic and his pronouncements apodictic. He was willing to lay his life on the line and fast whether it was for communal harmony, for concessions from the colonial state or to put the lid on social radicalism. Anyone attempting to refine a theory of Gandhianism is reduced to perplexity at the myriad inconsistencies and conjunctural certainties.

Yet, the appeal of Gandhi is universal, probably because of the simple take home message of non-violence, peace and green economics. He is seen as having brought imperial power to its knees through a recalcitrant ethics of moral engagement. However, this insistence on moral engagement produced bizarre pronouncements like his advice to the Jews of Germany in 1938 to resort to non-violent means against Nazi persecution. Perhaps it is precisely because Gandhi's thinking cannot be easily rendered as consistent or coherent that it presents a perennial challenge. One may be drawn if one is a philosopher to the challenge of recreating the "integrity" of his thought, or as a historian to the sheer contradiction and non-coherence of his ideas that make sense only within discrete historical moments. Or one may opt, like the editors of *The Cambridge Companion to Gandhi*, to produce a set of anodyne reflections, rather like the Gideons Bible, on different themes: Gandhi on economy, on non-violence and so

on. Barring a few essays that engage with the sheer singularity of Gandhi's thinking, on the whole the book sticks to the straight and narrow.

Many of Gandhi's earlier perceptions survive into the present in more or less sophisticated renditions. Churchill's dyspeptic dismissal of Gandhi as a half-naked fakir, finds a reprisal in Perry Anderson's recent broadside in the *London Review of Books* which is uncomprehending, as befits a rational Marxist, of Gandhi's religious idiom. Rajni Palme Dutt, stalwart Stalinist of the Communist Party of Great Britain in the 1940s, saw Gandhi as a bourgeois mascot, suborning the masses to the imperatives of capital. This has been reiterated by the eminent political thinker, Partha Chatterjee, who sees the Gandhian moment within Indian nationalism as the moment of "manoeuvre" because the subalterns are disciplined into future citizenship. George Orwell's take on Gandhi – that his tactics were feasible only against an empire such as that fashioned by the British, premised on the rule of law – has had a different life, with neo-imperialists like Niall Ferguson using the idea to reiterate the glories of Empire.

Eccentric and brilliant readings like that of the historian Shahid Amin who showed that Gandhi was nothing more than the sum of his perceptions among people in the countryside – a man whose image was forged in the crucible of rumour – have been few and far between. The book under review takes the idea of Gandhi for granted. There is no indication of changing perspectives, except that the careful and informed reader can see that most of the essays are informed by the spectres of renditions past. And nowhere is this more evident in the chapter on Gandhi and social relations which provides a Palme Dutt-like indictment of Gandhi's pusillanimity and vacillations.

Gandhi is generally studied as an Indian thinker, and nothing could be more patently untrue. He spent most of his adult life in England and South Africa, returning to India only when he was in his forties. Once in India, he was plunged *in media res* as he reshaped the

idiom of the nationalist struggle, moving it beyond the petitioning of discontented elites to a political arousal of the peasant, the worker, and women in general. Within limits of course. His movements were characterised by a start-stop rhythm, as he put the brakes on any movement that exceeded the bounds of the nationalist leadership. His ashrams in India were devoid of books, and much of what he wrote was based on reading that he had done while in England and South Africa. Leela Gandhi, in a superb book shows how Gandhi was deeply influenced by the fashions of his time in Victorian England: pacifism; animal rights; vegetarianism (his first ever written tract was on the vegetarian habits of Indians); theosophy and Christian Esotericism.

His first broadside against modern civilisation *Hind Swaraj* (1909) was written while returning to South Africa from London after a failed mission to England to argue for the rights of Indians in South Africa as imperial citizens. Gandhi did not begin life as a nationalist, nor indeed did he experience a moment of epiphany against empire and racism when he was thrown out the train at Pietermaritzburg. Almost until the commencement of the First World War he remained committed to the idea of imperial citizenship and in Keith Breckenridge's memorable phrase, saw himself as a "voluntary bureaucrat" helping the South African state in its initial efforts at building a surveillance state, lauding the accuracy of fingerprinting and reading up on recent advances.

His first setback came in 1909, after the failure of the mission to get the English government to stand by its promise of imperial belonging to the Indian. *Hind Swaraj* apart from its rejection of modern civilisation carries within it the detritus of Victorian thought: the romanticism of Ruskin; the critiques of industrialisation and of "white slavery" within factories echoing Edward Carpenter and Richard Sherard; and strangely enough, the idea of "degeneration" as a counterpoint to civilisation read through the works of the late nineteenth-century theorist of degeneration, Max Nordau. It carries critiques of early marriage and unrestrained sexual activity, and bears the shadow of eugenics which was to emerge as a major movement

in the early twentieth century. The crisis of liberal democracy with the entry of the masses into electoral politics was writ large in the book and the idea of the *satyagrahi* as the disciplined leader of the masses, owed not a little to Gandhi's reading of Carlyle as much as Nordau. The idea of the *satyagrahi* arose at the juncture of the crisis of liberal democracy and it was forged in England and South Africa and carried over to India. The *Cambridge Companion* has little to say on any of this.

Two essays out of the dozen or so in the volume stand out for their originality, clarity and commitment to a fresh interpretation. Akeel Bilgrami addresses the issue of Gandhi's deeply personal and idiosyncratic reading of religious texts within the latter's opposition between literalism and the spirit of texts. Gandhi was robust in his disavowal of external authority: "I decline to be bound by any interpretation, however learned it may be, if it is repugnant to *reason* or *moral sense*" (p 95). There is an emphasis on individual experience over universal predicates as a touchstone of truth; an informed and proper subjectivism, as it were. But at the same time, Gandhi was concerned with the question of how we are to give ourselves the right to universalise our own moral and religious convictions to others instead of lapsing into what Bilgrami calls the diffidence of relativism. He then provides a brilliant gloss on *ahimsa*. If *himsa* is present even in criticism made of individual human beings based on principles, what if one were to make a judgement based on one's conscience rather than on principles? Then, as Bilgrami argues, others could arrive at truths other than one's own in an experiential way "without contradicting one's own experience" (p 99). It is the move from saying, "When I choose for myself, I generate a principle for everyone to follow" to the position that, "When I choose for myself, I set an example for everyone else" (pp 100, 101). Bilgrami also glosses Gandhi's insistence on cultivated patience as virtue; his anxieties on the cognitive enslavement of India to the West; and his resistance to the "exile of God" that placed God outside the universe, desacralised nature and led to its ruthless plunder. In the end, Gandhi understood that what is bad in humans cannot be constrained by mere good politics as in becoming citizens. The transformation had



to be in *swaraj* or rule over oneself.

Anthony Parel, the editor of the definitive text of Gandhi's classic *Hind Swaraj*, provides a complex reading of Gandhi's thinking on the state. Gandhi has been claimed by anarchists and anti-colonialists alike in their misunderstanding that he rejected the state altogether. Parel draws careful distinctions between the state that Gandhi wanted and the one he did not. He rejected the aggressive state, the state as a soulless machine, states based on religion and the notion of reasons of state. He put forward the idea of a "civic nationalism" in which the nation was not a homogeneous organic community, but, rather, a pluralistic political community. On the other hand, Gandhi was for the state as the protector of rights, even if it required the enforcement of human rights by coercive means. However, he believed that no state could redeem the poor from their poverty unless the poor "on their own, willed to get out of it" (p 164). An important facet of his political philosophy was support for the legitimate use of coercion by the state for maintaining internal order and external security. Parel cites the neglected *Bulletins* that Gandhi wrote in 1918 which argued that Indians ought to learn how to bear arms and to reject the "pseudo-philosophy" that separated *artha* from *dharma*, or duty from morality. Gandhi tacitly approved India's intervention in Kashmir in 1947: moral idealism was tempered by political realism. And Parel reminds us that it was Gandhi's clear understanding of the omnipresence of violence, and the impossibility of perfect non-violence that underlay *ahimsa*. In his precise, and somewhat chilling, words:

*The world is bound in a chain of destruction. In other words himsa is an inherent necessity of life in the body ... None while in the flesh, can thus be entirely free from himsa because one never completely renounces the will to live (pp 168–169).*

The *Cambridge Companion* ignores the transnational aspect of Gandhi's thinking, except for an excellent essay by Jonathan Hyslop. Nor does the volume engage with the recent interest in Gandhi as a bilingual intellectual, someone who wrote both in Gujarati as well as English; texts in neither language were exact translations of the other. Both Ajay Skaria and Tridip Suvrud have explored the slippages, evasions and aporia opened up by Gandhi's choice

of words combining textual, linguistic and historical scholarship. There has been, too, a resurgence of interest in Gandhi as a moral philosopher since 2009 (marking a 100 years of *Hind Swaraj*) which has enlightened us about his attitudes towards history, politics and ethics. Essays by Uday Mehta, Akeel Bilgrami, Faisal Devji and Aishwary Kumar (in the journals *Modern Intellectual History* and *Public Culture*) while marred by an ahistorical approach and a tendency to treat Gandhi as a brain in a vat, have enlightened us on issues other than non-violence and truth alone. For instance, Aishwary Kumar shows with great theoretical sophistication how Gandhi saw himself as an exemplar enacting a universal ethical politics, rendering the world at large and its actors as Gandhi's unequals. This performative solipsism meant that social movements, particularly for political resolutions to untouchability, broke against Gandhi's recalcitrance. With forthcoming books by these writers on Gandhi in 2012, this year promises to generate a new paradigm. The *Cambridge Companion* can be safely consigned to undergraduate reading thereafter.

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### **South Africa's neglected martyr**

#### **Lindy Wilson, *Steve Biko: A Jacana Pocket Biography***

Jacana Media, Johannesburg, 2011

160 pp

ISBN 978-1-77009-963-0

R99.95

Lindy Wilson's short biography of the late anti-apartheid activist, Stephen Bantu Biko (1946–1977), has already been in circulation for 20 years in the form of an introductory biographical chapter to the edited collection, *Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black*

*Consciousness* (1991).<sup>11</sup> With this Jacana Pocket Biography, Wilson has revisited her text to make it more accessible to a wider reading public and used the opportunity to reflect again on the life of Biko. This is the only book-length account of Biko's life to date, a stark contrast to the vast amount of literature on other anti-apartheid activists and African National Congress leaders, and indicates an uneasy silence over the life of Biko.

Wilson sets the scene well in the chapter "Early Years" with a detailed introduction to the formation and early history of the South African Students' Organisation (SASO), the black-only student organisation started by Biko and other like-minded black student leaders in 1968. We are presented with Biko's "life-giving force" and "vitality" (p 13) and his anti-authoritarian leadership style, which facilitated and developed those he led. The longest chapter, "Bantu – Son of Man, 1973–1977" (pp 75–111), details his banning from Durban to his mother's house in King William's Town, Eastern Cape. It begins with the poignant return of Biko to his community, empty-handed without a degree (p 78), after having left for Durban seven years earlier to begin his medical studies.

Wilson shows that the banning of Black Consciousness activists in 1973 spread the discourse yet wider into black communities: "Banning failed to destroy the spirit and development of Black Consciousness. The next few years saw the flowering of the most imaginative and practical projects it was to produce" (p 91). As Biko switched from medical to legal studies, he developed his rhetorical and critical skills and used court appearances, related to minor offences against his banning, to spread the message of Black Consciousness across a much wider audience. As a native of the Eastern Cape, Wilson is particularly interested to explore this stage of Biko's personal and political development, and as such the early part of his life in Durban receives less focused attention.

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11. B. Pityana, M. Ramphela, M. Mpumlwana and L. Wilson (eds), *Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1991).

Appropriately, Wilson's biography is as much about the group of people around Biko. He was essentially a social person and developed a circle of loyal friends, lovers, and fellow activists who supported him. Through interviews Wilson allows their voices to communicate Biko as they knew him. A most valuable aspect is Wilson's sensitivity to the experiences of female activists and family members associated with Biko; she reminds us that "Biko was surrounded by women who loved and nurtured him" (p 114). Wilson emphasises the importance of medical doctor, fellow activist and now prominent academic, Mamphela Ramphele, as "a constant sounding board in his political thinking and this made a huge difference in the restricted environment of King William's Town" (p 115). As the narrative moves on, the deepening crisis in Biko's personal life is apparent, with a triangular love relationship between Biko, his wife Ntsiki, and Ramphele (p 116). In 1977 Biko's marriage finally broke down as Ntsiki filed for a divorce. Biko's blind-spot, Wilson asserts, was his approach to his wife, which remained "traditional", that of "a role-model wife who was supposed to understand and accept whatever her husband chose to do" (pp 116–117). Wilson is particularly concerned with violence against women and children in South Africa and draws on the essential message of Black Consciousness to apply to women, "Do not be a part of your own oppression" (p 151). In so doing, she shows the richness of Black Consciousness as a deep emancipatory vein in South African politics.

Wilson has a particular view to establish the crucial role of Black Consciousness in relation to the struggle against apartheid. After the Soweto uprising of 1976, she writes that there were concerted efforts to bring the liberation movements together, and that there was "a growing political consensus that the Black Consciousness Movement was the 'least contentious' of the political organisations to attempt some kind of unity of focus" (p 120). There are other small allusions to contemporary historical debates. For example, Wilson makes a short remark on the influence of Black Consciousness on the labour unrest of 1973, that Durban dockworkers refused to elect a leadership in the first three months of that year, mirroring the strategy of SASO to avoid a rigid hierarchy that could be targeted (p 77). Wilson also

represents Black Consciousness as a fresh new energy, breathing life into a tired exiled liberation movement (p 148) with the exodus of young activists from South Africa after 1976 to join the armed struggle.

Wilson's biography of Biko confirms the emphasis of new research on Black Consciousness, which asserts the importance of the theological framing of the discourse. She uses Christian imagery early in her account to paint a messianic picture of Biko, using his African name, "Bantu" (people) to draw the parallel with Jesus Christ as the "son of man", a title which Biko also often evoked for himself (p 18). Echoing the doctrine of the Incarnation, Jesus equally being "the son of God", Wilson writes of Biko, "He was essentially human but also exceptional" (p 15). Christian imagery reappears at crucial stages in the narrative. Wilson describes Biko as "a religious person in the broad sense of the word" (p 81) and emphasises his close friendships and deep respect for Aelred Stubbs and David Russell, both celibate Anglican priests, and his belief in God but rejection of the church, which he considered to have been compromised by tradition and power. In the conclusion, religious language again comes strongly to the fore as Wilson searches for language to describe Biko's death, describing a crucifixion scene in Biko's cell (p 147), as he was chained to the walls of his cell, bleeding and dying.

The final chapter, "A Life Still to be Dug out" implies the need for continued engagement with the life of Biko and a more extensive critical biography. It was Biko's death as a young man, which "left a life of such promise in the air, so to speak" (p 147). Wilson attempts to use her knowledge of Biko's life and character, to present an instructive conclusion and mandate for the "what if"-role Biko would have played had he not been murdered (p 151). Wilson criticises the hierarchical form of leadership that is widespread in South Africa and contrasts it with Biko, a leader who "freed people to take their destiny into their own hands" (p 153). Has South Africa unwittingly fallen into a new form of inequality? Wilson quotes Biko, recalling the strength and moral clarity of his voice: "If we have a mere change of those in government positions, what is likely to happen

is that black people will continue to be poor ... and our society will be run almost as of yesterday” (p 150). Wilson’s portrait of Biko is particularly apposite given the dearth of accountable leadership in South Africa and will help address a significant gap in the biographies of anti-apartheid heroes.

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### **A glimpse of the “enemy”**

#### **Gennady Shubin and Andrei Tokarev (eds), *Bush War: The Road to Cuito Cuanvale: Soviet Soldiers’ Accounts of the Angolan War***

Jacana Media, Johannesburg, 2011

200 pp

ISBN 978-1-4314-0185-7

R189.95

The publication of a South African edition of the recollections of Soviet military advisers who served in Angola during the late 1970s and 1980s is something of an anomaly in the burgeoning corpus of literature on the regional conflict. The Russian edition formed part of a series called the *Oral History of Forgotten Wars*. The war might be forgotten throughout the length and breadth of the erstwhile Soviet empire but in South Africa there is currently considerable interest in the history and legacy of the conflict. Internet sites, memoirs, novels, as well as photographic and art exhibits that include “Border War” or “Bush War” in the title have proliferated. The use of the latter phrase in the title of the book under review is obviously a marketing ploy that seeks to capitalise on its recognition value for South African readers. It almost certainly does not feature in the Russian vocabulary about the Angolan War.

The editors have compiled an assortment of oral testimonies, diary entries, memoirs and reflections of Soviet advisers, specialists and translators that add up to a rather fractured collection. The narratives have clearly not been selected on account of their literary qualities for most of the pieces are poorly constructed and anything but compelling reading. For instance, the lengthiest chapter by the interpreter Igor Zhdarkin comprises extracts from notebooks kept during his tour of duty in Angola supplemented with the texts of telegrams sent to the Military District Commander and retrospective comments which serve to elucidate the content of the entries. This is followed by a chapter in which Zhdarkin reflects on certain aspects of his experience in Angola. Even when taken together these chapters do not make for a seamless story. Indeed, this reader was hard pressed to retain an interest in the individual stories. They might be first-hand accounts but they simply do not hold one's attention. So instead of being drawn into the Soviet experience of the Angolan War, I found myself asking what these stories revealed about other participants. I was particularly keen to see whether the Soviet accounts challenged or contradicted commonplace South African understandings of the conflict.

South African military histories are preoccupied with three events that occurred on Angolan soil: Operation Savannah; the Cassinga "massacre"; and the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale. Each of these episodes has engendered a voluminous literature and considerable controversy. The Soviet soldiers' accounts share some of these concerns. The first advisors in southern Angola apparently arrived in October 1976, so there is no discussion of Operation Savannah (or its Cuban counterpart, Carlota). The events of 4 May 1978 receive only passing mention, but the protracted conflict near Cuito Cuanavale between September 1987 and July 1988 is clearly the focus of attention. This is suggested by the book's sub-title, as well as the space devoted to the final phase of the Angolan War.

Prior to the establishment of the Pechora anti-aircraft system in southern Angola, the South African Air Force (SAAF) was able to carry out intelligence gathering missions and bombing raids

with virtual impunity. A Soviet advisor who was instrumental in deploying the system, Vladimir Kostrachenkov, claims that the SAAF deliberately bombed civilian targets in southern Angola (p 19). The single most notorious attack was the 1978 raid on Cassinga which served as SWAPO's regional military headquarters as well as a transit camp for refugees. The Soviets, following their clients, regarded the bombing and subsequent capture of the base by paratroopers which resulted in as many as 1 000 casualties, as a "massacre".

This is not the place to revisit this controversy,<sup>12</sup> but Vladimir Varganov reckons that the shot-up parachutes abandoned by the South Africans are testimony to the "resistance offered by the PLAN units" (p 16). This statement obviously contradicts SWAPO assertions that Cassinga was only a refugee centre and housed no military personnel or installations whatsoever. Varganov also mentions that the SAAF inflicted heavy losses on the Cuban forces based in Techamutete that had joined battle to render assistance to SWAPO. This is borne out by the previously unpublished photographs from Moscow's Africa Institute which shows the twisted metal of burnt-out trucks, as well as a destroyed personnel carrier. These images are in stark contrast to those showing Soviet advisors posing with captured SADF vehicles and other materiel dated 1988.

Co-editor Gennady Shubin's position in the ongoing controversy about the outcome of the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale frames the accounts provided by contributors to the volume. In his introduction to the Russian edition which serves as a preface to the volume, he refers to the South African "military defeats of March–June 1988" (p 7). The accounts included here concede that the SADF held the early initiative when they won a tactical victory at the Lomba River where the FAPLA advance on UNITA's headquarters at Mavinga was stopped in its tracks. But the repulse of the SADF's subsequent frontal attacks on well fortified positions in the Tumpo triangle proved

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12. I have done so in G. Baines, "A Battle for Perceptions: Revisiting the Cassinga Controversy in Southern Africa", in Philip Dwyer and Lyndall Ryan (eds), *Theatres of Violence: The Massacre, Mass Killing and Atrocity in History* (Berghahn, Oxford and New York, 2012), pp 226–241.



a decisive setback in its bid to capture Cuito Cuanavale. Zhdarkin's diary entry of 9 November 1987 makes it clear that the SADF was not content to destroy Cuito Cuanavale's airstrip but seemed intent on taking the town (p 55). The engagement ended in a military impasse because neither the South African nor the Angolan/Cuban forces had attained their objectives. Shubin contends that the stalemate was broken by Cuban forces that gained air and land superiority (p 191). The Cubans outflanked the SADF forces who had no air cover and advanced on the Namibian border. The translator, Vladimir Korolkov, moots the existence of plans for a Cuban invasion of Namibia (p 186). Whether the South Africans regarded the Cubans as posing a serious threat to the security of their country is an equally moot point. Still, Shubin insists that the South Africans sued for peace and that their withdrawal from Namibia amounted to "a face-saving disengagement" (p 191).

Shubin includes an Appendix titled, "Gauging the Losses and the Outcome", in which he critiques the frequently reproduced figures pertaining to the battle of Cuito Cuanavale provided by retired SADF General Jannie Geldenhuys.<sup>13</sup> He reckons that Geldenhuys has underestimated the SADF's losses of materiel, especially with respect to aircraft. He also questions whether the Angolan/Cuban casualty figures provided by the SADF are reliable. Equally significantly, he queries why the losses sustained by the SADF's surrogates, UNITA and the SWATF, are not included with SADF personnel. The quibbling over losses is rather a pointless exercise for the outcome of a war cannot simply be determined by statistics. It is worth bearing in mind Clausewitz's dictum that "war is a continuation of policy by other means." In other words, war is a second-order instrument of politics. From this perspective, Shubin is correct to assert that "the battle near Cuito Cuanavale might be classed as a draw, but in reality South Africa lost the war" (p 198 n. 18 and p 199 n. 29). For all intents and purposes, the SADF defended the apartheid system

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13. These are located in J. Geldenhuys, *A General's Story: From an Era of War and Peace* (Jonathan Ball, Johannesburg, 1995), pp 222–223 and the revised version, *At the Front: A General's Account of South Africa's Border War* (Jonathan Ball, Johannesburg, 2009), p 240.

rather than the country's territorial integrity. Hence the loss of power and privilege by the (white) minority amounted to a defeat for the apartheid army.

The apartheid state built a small nuclear arsenal but stopped short of using it against its enemies. But it appears that the SADF was prepared to use chemical weapons against the Angolans and their allies. Zhdarkin notes that FAPLA's 59th Brigade, as well as its Soviet advisers, were affected by poison gas on 29 October 1987 because they had no gas masks (p 49). The observation is made without rancour which suggests that the Soviets themselves had no compunction about employing chemical weapons. Former Chief of the SADF (and later Minister of Defence), Magnus Malan, reckoned that the track records of the Cubans and Soviet Union showed that they were well versed in the use of such weapons. In his memoir, he cites an instance of the use of chemical gas by FAPLA/Cuban troops during the battle of the Lomba River in September 1987, but claims that a change of wind direction rendered it counter-productive.<sup>14</sup> He adds that the SADF only developed non-lethal or incapacitating types of weapons, and that he never authorised the offensive application of chemical weapons. He dismisses as "propaganda" a claim made by Radio Luanda that UNITA used such tactics against FAPLA. But the evidence that emerged about Dr Wouter Basson's chemical and biological programme, codenamed Project Coast, would seem to lend credence to the Soviet charges.

Nonetheless, most of the Soviet advisors speak well of the South Africans and their fighting capacity. They are called "gentlemen" when they issue statements informing the Soviets that they are not the targets of the SAAF's bombing sorties against the Angolans and should depart from the battlefield (p 161). This tactical manoeuvre was apparently aimed at avoiding an international incident but makes nonsense of the apartheid state's rhetoric that they were waging war against "communist enemies". The Soviets, for their part, avoided direct engagement with SADF forces as far as possible but sustained

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14. M. Malan, *My Life with the SA Defence Force* (Protea Boekhuis, Pretoria, 2006), p. 269.

some casualties, as well as having personnel taken captive.

The Soviet advisors displayed racism in their treatment and poor opinions of the FAPLA troops. Their comments about the Angolans are unflattering, to say the least. Zhdarkin remarks upon the cowardice of FAPLA officers in the face of the SADF assault on the Lomba River (p 40); the unwillingness of the Angolans to engage in battle (p 123); and their panic when confronting the SADF's special forces known as the Buffalo battalion (p 153). He is not alone in this assessment. Varganov attests to the fact that the Angolans have no stomach for fire fights (p 15). Whilst the Soviets had little more than contempt for FAPLA, they apparently had respect for SWAPO's tenacity. If these comments are representative of the opinions of the Soviet advisors in Angola, it seems that they were better disposed to their enemy than their clients because the former were white. Indeed, Zhdarkin is candid enough to admit that he is better able to identify with white South Africans than he is with black Angolans. Indeed, he felt no compunction to apologise for his racism and yet he was later promoted for performing his "international duty" (p 164). The discourse of the Soviet soldiers was clearly at odds with the credo of socialist solidarity which sought to vanquish colonialism and racism. Like its South African counterpart, the Soviet state's official ideology was bankrupt.

Whereas the Soviet advisors had little in common with their Angolan clients, they speak of warm working relationships and fraternity with the Cubans (p 15). This was presumably not only because some of the Cubans were white. Varganov expressed admiration for Fidel Castro with whom he came into contact when the Cuban leader visited Angola in 1977. He clearly was impressed by Castro's charisma and command of the battle situation. By contrast, he notes that the Soviet leadership was out of touch and issued unrealistic instructions based on poorly informed strategic evaluation of the situation on the ground (p 13).

Other advisors note that the Cubans did not rely on the Angolans for intelligence but conducted their own reconnaissance and information gathering, sometimes preferring to conduct joint

operations with SWAPO rather than FAPLA (p 153). But the advisors fail to mention the tensions that strained Soviet–Cuban relations over the strategy to be followed in the final phase of the war in Angola. Thus it is ironic that many of them were awarded the Cuban medal to the “Heroic Defenders of Cuito Cuanavale”, whilst the Cuban commander, Brig.-Gen. Ochoa who, according to Korolkov, was “responsible for defeating the enemy forces at Cuito Cuanavale” (p 188), was executed. Korolkov repeats the official line that Ochoa was sentenced to death by a military tribunal for drug trafficking, but this reader sensed a degree of disbelief. He possibly shares a widely-held perception that Castro felt threatened by a potential rival for power and had him eliminated. For all Castro’s commitment to international working class solidarity, he was not above sacrificing Cuban conscripts and generals on the altar of political expediency.

Soviet accounts of the Angolan War (translated into English) are few and far between. Cuban and Angolan accounts are equally rare. So this publication is to be welcomed if for no other reason than it affords South Africans a glimpse of how the “enemy” perceived the geopolitical situation in southern Africa and how ordinary Soviet soldiers experienced the late Cold War conflict.

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## Valuable trade union history fails its potential reading public

### **Kally Forrest, *Metal That Will Not Bend: The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa 1980–1995***

Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 2011

566 pp

ISBN 978-1-86814-534-8

R225.00

This book is an addition to the growing number of contemporary South African trade union histories published since the 1980s.<sup>15</sup> Within the space of 22 chapters the author traces the rise of NUMSA through its predecessors MAWU and NAAWU and examines how it built and used workers' power. The huge influence that NUMSA exercises as the largest affiliate (it had 235 000 members by 1989) in the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) is confirmed by its many leaders who became part of the post-apartheid South African

15. See for example K. Luckhardt and B. Wall, *Organize or Starve: The History of the South African Congress of Trade Unions* (Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1980); J. Lewis, *Industrialisation and Trade Union Organisation in South Africa, 1924–55: The Rise and Fall of the South African Trades and Labour Council* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1984); D. MacShane *et al.*, *Power! Black Workers, their Unions and the Struggle for Freedom in South Africa* (Spokesman, Nottingham, 1984); D. Ncube, *The Influence of Apartheid and Capitalism on the Development of Black Trade Unions in South Africa* (Skotaville Publishers, Johannesburg, 1985); E. Webster, *Cast in a Racial Mould: Labour Process and Trade Unionism in the Foundries* (Ravan Press, Braamfontein, 1985); S. Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today: African Workers in Trade Unions 1970–1984* (Ravan Press, Braamfontein, 1987); J. Maree, *The Independent Trade Unions 1974–1984: Ten Years of the South African Labour Bulletin* (Ravan Press, Braamfontein, 1987); J. Baskin, *Striking Back: A History of Cosatu* (Ravan Press, Braamfontein, 1991); R. Southall, *Imperialism or Solidarity: International Labour and South African Trade Unions* (UCT Press, Cape Town, 1995); G. Adler and E. Webster, *Trade Unions and Democratization in South Africa, 1985–1997* (Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 2000); K. von Holdt, *Transition from Below: Forging Trade Unionism and Workplace Change in South Africa* (University of Natal Press, Scottsville, 2003); and M. Friedman, "The Future is in the Hands of the Workers": *A History of FOSATU* (Mutloatse Arts Heritage Trust, Houghton, 2011).

political and labour elite, including names such as Bernie Fanaroff, Alec Erwin, Moses Mayekiso, John Gomomo, Tony Ehrenreich, Enoch Godongwana, Danny Oliphant and Willys Mchunu, to name but a few.

Chapters 1 to 5 (1980–1984) deal mainly with NUMSA and its predecessors building local power through various organising strategies which include its early focus on organising the workplace and developing and educating shop stewards, committees and organisers. These chapters also spotlight strategies to increase membership aided by the Wiehahn recommendations which brought Africans into the industrial relations system, and by union mergers in different parts of the metal sector which aimed to organise workers nationally.

Chapters 6 to 8 (1983–1989) trace NUMSA's building of national bureaucratic bargaining and organisational power. The union streamlined its internal systems, enabling it to operate more efficiently and to stabilise its income. It entered the national metal industrial council controversially, and through major industrial action became the most important bargaining partner in both the engineering and automobile sectors. This allowed it to consider how to reshape its industries.

Chapters 9 to 15 (1989–1995) reveal a now powerful NUMSA taking on employers and winning substantial gains in both wage and non-wage areas. However, in a recessionary climate where its industries are declining and bleeding jobs, and after a disastrous national engineering strike, the union turns to developing and implementing an alternative vision. It now aims to create stable and predictable conditions to bolster the rebuilding of South Africa's embattled metal sectors while attempting to raise pay and the social wage. This programme is flawed by tensions between national leaders and the factory floor and other faulty assumptions which some believed were an ideological cover for retrenchments. Chapters 16 to 22 (1980–1995) deal with NUMSA's socialist politics, tracing its different political strands with an emphasis on its fierce independence and how this is compromised by political conditions in South Africa,

including the outbreak of severe violence, and the nature of the alliances it forged.

The author, Kally Forrest, also published other trade union histories and is a former editor of *The South African Labour Bulletin*. This position gave her excellent access to all the prominent role players in the metal union sector: metal workers; organisers; shop stewards; strike leaders and activists; union educational officers and administrators; as well as union secretaries and presidents. The text is interspersed with various interviews held with these personalities. The large variety of unique photos of workers, union leaders, strike actions, union councils, etc. augments the value of the book. Chapters 18 and 19, which describe the violent clashes and bloodshed between the COSATU-backed NUMSA and the IFP-backed UWUSA in the late 1980s and early 1990s for domination and control of the African metal labour force, are of special significance. Although these events are not unknown to the public at large, the author presents important perspectives on the dynamics of the power relationships between these two trade union entities – e.g., NUMSA and COSATU’s strategies to defend their members from the escalating and unbridled violence as well as the decisive role that cultural traditions and tribalism played during the internecine strife.

The book is an adaptation of the author’s PhD thesis and that is the problem with this publication. Instead of reducing the narrative into a more concise version, say a manageable 250-odd pages to make it more reader friendly, this publication entails a mammoth 486 pages of contents even after admitting (p v) that the study was reduced from an “overtly long PhD”. Engaging with the book requires long and tedious reading. Page after page, the narrative follows the procrastinated process of the rise of NUMSA literally from shop floor to shop floor; factory to factory; industry to industry; and strike to strike. Too many quotes from interviewees, too many discussions on socialist and labourist theories and Gramscian concepts interspersed into the text, as well as long explanations of the ideological and administrative battles fought to build up the union, inhibits the successful transformation of a PhD text into a more palatable

narrative for a wider readership in book format.

Structurally the book could also be improved. Until chapter 15 it follows a more or less logical sequence of events, but thereafter it becomes chronologically disjointed. A better structural approach would have been to separate trade union development and political engagement, the first concentrating on the founding processes of NUMSA and the second on its involvement in the South African political scene.

Forrest's book provides valuable insights and information on the history and dynamics of contemporary African trade union development in South Africa and as such is a valuable reference for academic scholars in the field of labour history, industrial sociology, etc. Unfortunately however, its shortcomings probably put the book beyond the reach of rank-and-file trade unionists, the actual potential reading public whose history was written. Academic authors aspiring to involve a wider reading public than a mere small atomic group of intellectuals, should perhaps heed the words of the renowned and celebrated social historian Charles van Onselen, who said that historians should guard against impenetrable prose if they wish to reach beyond the domain of theoreticians.

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## Nuanced study of Zimbabwe's recent history

### **Erin McCandless, *Polarization and Transformation in Zimbabwe: Social Movements, Strategy Dilemmas and Change***

University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Scottsville, 2012

254 pp

ISBN 978-1-86914-218-6

R215.00

The “Zimbabwean crisis”, as it is now commonly referred to, has seen a marked change in the fortunes of the southern African country. The dramatic fluctuations in the country’s social, economic and political realities have, unsurprisingly, been well documented and have generated a huge amount of literature on Zimbabwe and its progress through the 1990s and 2000s. However, this literature is tremendously divided and has led to a severe and debilitating polarisation in debates over the roots, causes and implications of the “crisis.” The political and ideological milieu of Zimbabwe’s shift after 1997 has meant that there has been ample ammunition for supporters and detractors of President Robert Mugabe and his party, ZANU-PF (Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front), to load into their scholarly cannons. Consider, for example, the land issue, which has probably been the most divisive. As L. Cliffe et al. have commented:

*Those who condemned the illegality and brutality of the [land acquisition] operations were prone to see them as ... ill-advised economically with disastrous effects predicted for agriculture and ... the overall macro-economy. Equally predictably, defenders of radical redistribution and the justice of widely spreading rights to land as “progressive” ... tended to expect a long-term expansion of land-based livelihoods and more intensive land use ... Other logically possible combinations of views on process and outcomes – for instance, that however repressive the means, increased food security and a wider spread of livelihoods might result, or alternatively, that however justified the ending of a racial basis for land rights might be, it would not deliver at the level of production – hardly*

*seem to figure in debates.*<sup>16</sup>

The implication is that more work needs to be done to deliver more nuanced appraisals of recent events in Zimbabwe, less determined by position and ideology.

With this in mind, *Polarization and Transformation* is a relevant example of a piece of work trying to move beyond a predetermined setting to discuss the convergences, similarities and function of two very different social movements in Zimbabwe: the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) and the Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans' Association (ZNLWVA). The book "investigates Zimbabwe's story of polarization and prospects for transformation through the perspective of two pivotal social movement organizations – the NCA and the ZNLWVA – and the strategy dilemmas they have confronted in trying to mobilize change" (p 5). These two organizations are situated on opposite ends of the political divide in Zimbabwe. The NCA was hugely influential in effecting a "No" vote against the ZANU-PF-backed constitution in the constitutional referendum of February 2000, while the ZNLWVA has been at the forefront of the land occupation process since 2000 and has fostered close ties with ZANU-PF. As such, the author's choice of these two organisations makes for an interesting study on the ways in which these two movements operated.

The book is divided into two sections. The first offers a detailed analysis of the history and organisational structure of both movements. In chapters 3 and 4 the structure, identity and driving interests of both organisations are explored. The level of access offered to McCandless by both organisations makes these chapters particularly worthy of note. In chapter five, she examines in more detail the strategy dilemmas and actions of the two groups. She explains that despite the NCA and the ZNLWVA being from opposite sides of Zimbabwe's polarized divide, they have faced similar strategy dilemmas that arise from two questions: whether to

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16. L. Cliff, J. Alexander, B. Cousins and R. Gaidzanwa, "An Overview of Fast Track Land Reform in Zimbabwe: Editorial Introduction", *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 38, 5, 2011, p 908.

work with the government and/or international donors, or against them (*participation/ resistance*); and secondly, whether to foreground political or economic strategies in actualizing transformative change (*rights/redistribution*) (p 105).

The focus falls on three main events: the NCA's "No"-vote campaign; the ZNLWVA's involvement in the land occupations; and the NCA's use of mass action as its primary strategy in the post-referendum period. These three events illustrate the mobilisation capacity of these movements and their organisational capacity. They also reveal the effects of their involvement and the implications this has had on the country's social and political make-up.

The second part of the book (chapters 6 and 7) focuses on "understanding the changes that have resulted from the social actions of the NCA and the ZNLWVA and the theory and practice implications for civic organisations and social movements striving to foment transformative change and peace" (p 147). A key concept for McCandless is that of "social process outcomes", which she asserts "effectively merges concepts of social process, outcomes, and impacts, and better reflects the messy realities of social action" (p 151). Again, the three examples of the "No"-vote campaign, the land occupations and mass action are used. Chapter 7 consolidates the findings of the book and reflects on the first two years of the power-sharing agreement between ZANU-PF and the MDC (Movement for Democratic Change). The final conclusions are that "both sides of the strategic rights/distribution dilemma need to be taken seriously and addressed in the interests of transformative change" (p 148).

The scope of this study is interesting and the attempt at comparing and contrasting two very different social movements on extreme edges of the political continuum in Zimbabwe, is a valiant one. However, *Polarization and Transformation* is not without its issues. The book is highly repetitive and the constant defence of position, assertion of unit of study; and theoretical packaging read very much like a PhD thesis. All this serves to alienate the reader and makes it unlikely that the book will attract a wider, general readership. Much more problematic is the historical contextualisation. This applies not

only to the overarching historical narrative of Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, but more specifically the land issue, the relationship between the war veterans' associations and government, and the emergence of political and social opposition movements in Zimbabwe in the 1990s. The land issue is the most pertinent here, considering the author's focus on the land occupations after 2000 and ZNLWVA's involvement. In her analysis of this process, McCandless is overly reliant on the work of Sam Moyo and those of a similar ideological standpoint, such as Scoones and Yeros. As Raftopolous has noted:

*For Moyo and Yeros the problem of the violence of the state is dwarfed by the broader structural violence that the "radicalized state" in Zimbabwe is confronted with, and the criticisms of those who have highlighted these violations are dismissed for their "resort to 'human rights' moralism". For these two authors a "deeper form of democracy" can "only be set on a more meaningful and stable footing by structural changes".<sup>17</sup>*

The assertions of Moyo have attracted a huge amount of criticism from numerous Zimbabwean academics, on both the left and the right, including Raftopolous, Phimister, Alexander and Hughes. Yet these debates are not discussed in any detail in *Polarization and Transformation* and the process of events, according to Moyo, is the accepted version by McCandless. The failure to situate the land issue and the role of the ZNLWVA into the wider context weakens the overall project and is indicative of the book's inability to grapple with the wider scholarship on Zimbabwe and its history.

That said, *Polarization and Transformation* covers very important ground, on which others can and should build. More needs to be done to access the nuances and overlaps of events in Zimbabwe over the last 15–20 years, rather than the dramatic and the separate. Hopefully future research will follow the example set here by McCandless and offer valuable insights into the interaction of different movements and groups in Zimbabwe's fragmented political and social landscape.

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17 . B. Raftopolous, "Response to the Mamdani Debate", Association of Concerned African Scholars website, available at <http://concernedafricascholars.org/response-to-the-mamdani-debate/>, accessed 28 March 2012.

## South African identities and the need for archives

### **Xolela Mangcu (ed.), *Becoming Worthy Ancestors: Archive, Public Deliberation and Identity in South Africa***

Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 2011

168 pp

ISBN 978-1-86814-532-4

R210.00

“South African identity, like that of any nation”, notes Xolela Mangcu in his preface quoting Kwame Anthony Appiah, “is a work in progress. Its meaning will repose in an archive that remains to be written” (p xv). The construction and continuous development of that archive is a crucial way in which we can deepen the roots of our democracy, but in reading *Becoming Worthy Ancestors*, one often wonders if South Africa is not moving in the opposite direction.

The publication of this collection of essays follows a series of public deliberations as part of the Constitution of Public Intellectual Life Project at Wits University. Taking “identity”, amongst others, as a subject of discussion, is an ambitious undertaking. Where do we start when we want to discuss identity in South Africa? This question is mirrored by the ever-pulsing question in constructing any archive – what do we retain and what do we destroy? These questions are not uniquely South African. They relate to our existence in numerous ways and at times in those most fundamental aspects, for example gender. The focus in these essays, however, remains on the South African landscape. Despite venturing in different directions, it is South African identity which forms the core of all the essays.

It is not a voluminous publication, despite concentrating on subjects of which much can be said. The discussions are indeed often “tentative”, as noted in the preface, yet the text succeeds in its stated aim: to highlight the importance of public deliberation in the ongoing construction of identity and archives in South Africa.

It is impossible to provide a detailed discussion of every essay in this collection in the space of a single review, and to provide a bird's eye view of each seems superfluous because the preface has already covered this terrain. Rather, I will try and comment on each, providing more detail on some than on others. As can be expected, the material in this collection is very diverse. This makes an informed discussion on each topic even more challenging.

Martin Bernal's essay, with its focus on linguistics and the development of culture since ancient times is very interesting, but at times difficult to absorb. The same can be said of the essays by Ntongela Masilela and Pumla Dineo. These essays will however, be of great value to researchers making a much broader and intense study of these particular topics.

Mangu's essay, entitled "Evidentiary Genocide: Intersections of Race, Power and the Archive" is perhaps of such a nature that one feels more at ease to comment. Having read the entire collection of essays, and in particular this essay, I was perhaps more sensitive than usual to what was taking place during South Africa's 21 March celebrations of 2012. Although Mangu's essay is mostly on Black Consciousness and the apparent misrepresentations thereof, one could not help but to understand criticism aimed at the ruling party as far as the 2012 celebrations of the Sharpeville massacre in the same context. While there was anger over the decision to have the main celebration at the historic Kliptown, there was also criticism of the apparent failure to give adequate attention to the role of the Pan Africanist Congress and Robert Sobukwe. The late Frederick Van Zyl Slabbert argued in much the same spirit as Mangu. In his "Some Contest the Assertion that I am an African", of which the title is really self-explanatory, Van Zyl Slabbert reflected on identity in South Africa, specifically in relation to his own role in South Africa's development. This is done as a kind of a memoir, using his typically unorthodox style of writing (note, for instance his comment on the biography of Magnus Malan).

The American-based academic, Kwame Anthony Appiah provides a fascinating essay on the role of selective memory in constructing

a national archive, while the renowned scholar of the making of nations, Benedict Anderson's essay, "The Goodness of Nations" opens up an interesting dialogue with Appiah's.

Concluding this collection of essays is a very important piece by Carolyn Hamilton on "Why Archive Matters: Archive, Public Deliberation and Citizenship". In this essay, Hamilton delivers a number of grave warnings. Discussing the situation on archives in South Africa, she notes that

*In the archival institutions of today the appreciation of past records assemblages is limited because of the repressive circumstances of their making, attitudes that prevail despite the many historical studies which make effective critical use of those archives, and which themselves fuel postcolonial critique (p 140).*

The situation, argues Hamilton, is aggravated by skills shortages. She writes:

*Few archival professionals have the skills to reposition the colonial and apartheid archival legacy and to inaugurate policies and projects that challenge or reshape its disgraced elements and foster an appreciation of the wealth of information which they contain over and beyond the intentions of their architects" (p 140).*

In addition, Hamilton demonstrates that archives in South Africa are vulnerable to political pressure. This threat is definitely a possibility because "those in power" might choose to "safeguard their interest", implying that the role that archives can play in deepening the roots of democracy will correspondingly dwindle.

Despite this collection being described as "tentative" by its editor, *Becoming Worthy Ancestors* is an important contribution. It is important both in trying to make sense of the numerous challenges and complexities with regard to public memory, archives and archiving in South Africa, as well as providing a glimpse into the contested construct called identity. While it is important to study the past and critically reflect upon our heritage, the essays in this volume also remind us of the importance of maintaining and developing various archives, and crucially, serve as a reminder that the key to this process is public deliberation.

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