

Book Reviews

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Boekresensies

Swashbuckling with a conscience

John Laband, *Bringers of War: The Portuguese in Africa during the Age of Gunpowder and Sail from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century*

Frontline Books, London, 2013

262 pp

ISBN 978-1-84832-658-3

R499.00

The pull of riches, the push of religion: a recipe for centuries of violence and sacrifice in the name of duty, in the hope of glory. Here the story of Portugal in Africa is told as a military history. There are no arguments, no theories. In that sense the book is an easy read, as well as a vivid and richly detailed narrative. A caution, as one absorbs the horrors: it is well to remember that the Portuguese, styled as “bringers of war”, were not alone in that regard. The book’s six chapters pertain to regions. By consolidating accounts of Portuguese exploration and conquest in north, west and east Africa, the author provides chronologies that are readily grasped. The several timelines are drawn together in a master chronology of the near-five century period covered, namely, 1385–1856. Southern Africa hardly figures in this history. The death of Francisco de Almeida at the hands of Khoikhoi in Table Bay merits only a footnote (p 68).

Chapter 1 details Portugal’s interest in Morocco. Most usefully, it provides a history of Christian-Muslim contestation, as well as of rival Muslim factions, which is relevant to all that follows. Portugal had expelled the Moors 200 years ahead of Spain. To block their return it seized Ceuta, and then other ports as far as Agadir. Its ill-fated invasion in 1578 had the character of a crusade. The crucial battle, which left the Moroccans rich in booty and prisoners, is related in surprisingly precise detail. This reader was intrigued by the descriptions of weaponry. For example: “twenty-eight distinct actions were required to discharge a single shot from an arquebus” (p 8). Despite that, the Moroccan cavalry desired – and mastered – the arquebus. After their defeat the Portuguese left Morocco alone, bar retention of the ports of Ceuta, Tangier and Mazagão.

With Portugal’s interest in North Africa disposed of, Laband takes readers back in time to feats of exploration that are familiar to South Africans. The Cape Khoikhoi make a brief appearance when Bartolomeu Dias fires on them as they threaten his crewmen, fetching water at Mossel Bay in 1488: “mentally exhausted after days of riding the storm, vulnerable and very far from home, he reacted furiously” (p 45). Early on, the reader is aware that the author is “in the head” of protagonists. With respect to Morocco, Portugal’s King “Sebastião burned with obsessive zeal ...” (p 15). When Mombasa was sacked in 1505, the *mfalane* (ruler) was driven from the town: “While his emissaries sought out [Francisco] De Almeida, he hovered disconsolately among the palms with his courtiers ...” (p 64). And so on. Ravaging the Swahili Coast is the title of this second chapter – a coast that “stretched for 2 000 miles between the port towns of Sofala in the south and

Mogadishu in the north” (p 50). On gaining access to Indian Ocean trade, the Portuguese needed ivory and gold dust, traded through Swahili ports, in order to purchase the precious spices sold in Europe. That put them in conflict yet again with Islam. Laband asserts: “The Muslim-dominated Indian Ocean trading area was until then free of sectarian strife and open to Hindus and Jews” (p 53). The Christian invaders changed all that. Their arrival at Malindi, as reported by an Arab historian, provided the title of this book. After multiple swings of fortune respecting control of the several East African ports, the Portuguese focused their energy on Moçambique Island where they erected a fort and, soon afterwards, a hospital.

Throughout this phase of conquest and discovery, Portugal’s elite embraced a vision of Christian triumph over Islam with the aid of Christians who, for centuries, were isolated in Ethiopia. Portugal’s twin goals were to block the Strait of Bab el-Mandeb, to “deny the Red Sea to Muslim shipping”, and, by way of Jeddah, to “sack Mecca and then hold it for ransom against the restoration of Jerusalem to the Christians” (p 73). This “ultimate crusader’s fantasy” required the help of Prester John – an umbrella term for Ethiopia’s ruler, whomsoever that may be at any given time. Nor was the wish for contact one-sided. Down the centuries, embassies travelled in both directions. Portugal’s ambitions were not lost on Muslim potentates who fended off Portuguese aggressions. In 1527 a Muslim leader commenced a *jihad* against the Christians of Ethiopia. “Coming to the Aid of Prester John” (chapter 3) details the years of warfare which, in 1541, saw the landing of a small Portuguese force led by Cristóvão da Gama, fourth son of Vasco, then Governor of India. We are told:

When they began their march inland to the cheery sound of their fife and pipe band, they knew that to all intents and purposes they were being abandoned to their fate. Consciously, they regarded themselves as crusaders, even Christian martyrs ... (p 95).

In 1542 that force was routed. No detail is spared respecting the fate of Cristóvão and his comrades. The warfare continued. Portugal had failed and Ethiopia was Islamicised, bar small pockets of tenacious Christians.

This is a military history, published by Frontline whose promise is: “Quality military history for the knowledgeable reader”. In his introduction, Laband states that “considerable emphasis is placed on the nature of the widely differing societies confronting each other in war and, more particularly, on their diverging military cultures” (p xxiv). He honours that pledge throughout the book and the historical sweep respecting the Horn of Africa appeared to me of particular interest. There are also arresting details such as the fact that the Ethiopian warrior “rode with his big toe in a stirrup ring, rather than resting his foot on a stirrup iron like the Portuguese or Ottomans” (pp 84–85). This can be seen at No. 23 in the second set of illustrations. By the sixteenth century’s close, the Portuguese had to defend more than 40 forts and factories (trading stations), from Africa to Japan.

In chapter 2, Laband described Portuguese advances with respect to shipbuilding: construction of a stronger hull conferred advantage with respect to sails, equipping them to outclass other maritime powers. Able to dominate Indian Ocean trade, they were tempted to over-extend. In that situation, they were obliged to protect trading posts with fortifications. That was hugely expensive, thus

they had to be selective. Chapter 4 returns to the Swahili coast where, in 1558, the fortress São Sebastião on Moçambique Island had been completed. Forty years later, Fort Jesus stood ready to protect a second East African port – Mombasa (it would be lost to a Muslim force in 1631).

We meet the Zimba, whose name replaced that of a European conqueror when Rhodesia became Zimbabwe. Fierce warriors and cannibals, they enjoyed many conquests until 1589 when they were driven from Malindi: “Tradition has it that only about 100 of the Zimba ... ever reached their own country again” (p 120). Here Laband offers a footnote: “More prosaically, some historians contend that the leaders of the Zimba succeeded in establishing chiefdoms in the areas they had conquered, which endured into the colonial period.” Historians may be disappointed that the author does not take on this issue, in the way that historians normally do. More helpfully, he provides excellent descriptions of fort design and construction. He also explains in succinct terms the means by which the Dutch and British overtook the Portuguese and Spanish with respect to financing the enormous costs attached to empire. Ultimately, the Dutch failure to capture Moçambique Island left Portugal free to explore the interior from that base.

Readers unfamiliar with the Portuguese quest for “The Elusive Gold of Mutapa” (chapter 5) will find this a gripping story. Numbers of pioneering Portuguese were absorbed by local populations, among whom they enjoyed a peculiar status:

In the Zambezi valley the enfeebled Portuguese crown had no option but to leave the *prazeiros* (holders of crown estates) alone so long as they provided *chikunda* (military retainers) to keep order, maintain the roads and keep up government buildings ... by the mid-nineteenth century four or five *wazungu* (Afro-Portuguese) family groups dominated the whole Zambezi valley ... (p 190).

Long before the nineteenth century, the *prazeiros* had to accept that gold was not the fast track to wealth the Europeans had imagined. Here again, the author usefully explains how things were made, how in practice they worked – in this case, the difficulties miners faced if they were to exploit the region’s gold bearing rock. Awakened to that reality, the Portuguese gave their attention to other trade goods: to ivory, and to slaves.

Throughout this book, slavery is “the elephant in the room”. The index leads us to slave capture, and to slavery as practiced by Europeans, by Muslims and by Africans themselves, where it is referred to prior to chapter 6. With Portugal’s acquisition of Brazil, the hunt for slaves escalated to the point where millions were taken from regions such as Angola:

An economy developed by the seventeenth century in which slaves worked the Portuguese farms along the main rivers in their colony of Angola to produce the food to feed the slaves penned up in Luanda awaiting export to the New World (p 194).

Slavery is the focus of the book’s final chapter, “Wars and Miseries” – a title, like that of the book, found in sources where Africans gave vent to the feelings roused by the intrusions of the Portuguese.

Bringers of War is swashbuckling with a conscience. The tale is told in lively fashion. Few nouns – or verbs, for that matter – are wallflowers:

Lethally for the arrogant, if heavily outnumbered, Christian community, the Swahili angrily resented the blatant corruption and sharp dealings of Portuguese officials and traders, and abhorred the increasingly energetic attempts of Christian missionaries to convert them ... To please the white men, they killed the unfortunate sultan and delivered his body to the gloating [Captain Sima] de Melo Pereira. He in turn pickled the "traitor's" decapitated head and triumphantly dispatched it as a trophy to the astonished viceroy in Goa (pp 135–136).

This is not a cavil. We have a rich language so why not use it? It may, however, surprise readers habituated to sober texts. The fore-mentioned conscience is formalistic. The institution of slavery is deplored, but this book does not pretend to explore it. I enjoyed the explanations of concrete things: the construction of ships and of forts; the techniques required by mining; the evolution of weapons. At the end, we are told of the advantage of flintlocks over matchlocks – and reminded of the demands of the ancient arquebus: "only seven distinct drill movements were required to fire a flintlock" (p 239), compared with that weapon's twenty-eight. The book succeeds as a readable military history. *Bringers of War* includes excellent illustrations, a helpful glossary and an invaluable chronology.

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Mission history with an anthropological twist

Ingie Hovland, *Mission Station Christianity: Norwegian Missionaries in Colonial Natal and Zululand, Southern Africa, 1850-1890*

Brill, Leiden and Boston, 2013

263 pp

ISBN 978-90-04-25488-6

R1554.00

Ingie Hovland's *Mission Station Christianity* is a consummate and welcome addition to the mission history canon. Histories of Christianity and mission in southern Africa enjoyed a heyday during the 1990s. This was due to growing interest in religious identities among colonised peoples and the complex connections between Christianity and indigenous resistance and assimilation at the time. The works of Jean and John Comaroff and Elizabeth Elbourne were exemplars of this trend. Their path-breaking studies were worthy heirs to the remarkable, earlier contributions by Norman Etherington. After a quiet decade, histories of Christianity and mission are showing signs of resurgence. Richard Elphick's recent monograph, *The Equality of Believers: Protestant Missionaries and the Racial Politics of South Africa* (2012), signals renewed momentum in the field. Hot on his heels is Ingie Hovland's new offering. This thought-provoking text proffers a mission history with an anthropological twist. In doing so, Hovland has taken up a call made by Etherington back in the 1970s for interdisciplinary studies to provide more comprehensive analyses of the study of mission.

Histories of mission have tended to focus on African experiences while sidelining the missionaries. British and American mission societies have also

received the lion's share of attention when compared to studies on Swiss, German, French and Scandinavian missions (p 8). Hovland's anthropological history of the Norwegian mission in the Kingdom of Zululand and neighbouring British Natal between 1850 and 1890 forwards an exciting new direction for mission history in light of these imbalances. The book manages to bring missionaries and Africans into the same analytical frame. It does so by focusing on space. The study explores the centrality of mission station space in shaping interactions between the Norwegian missionaries and the Zulu they were attempting to convert (Hovland ought to be commended for her deft handling of the complicated matter of "Zulu" identity in the mid to late nineteenth century). Space emerges from her argument as a valuable analytical lens through which to view contests over colonial politics, hierarchies, religious practices, and moralities, among, and between, both the missionaries and their target community. Hovland's strongest and most valuable contribution rests on her sublime treatment of the Norwegian missionaries, who constitute the focus of the work.

Missionaries in the ranks of the Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS) adhered to the principles of Lutheran Evangelical Christianity which emphasised the importance of pietism, conversion and a personal relationship with God (p 10). In the 1840s – when the NMS first committed missionaries to Zululand and British Natal – the mission was guided by the "abstract idea of the equality of all Christians, whether European or African" (p 4). African members of the new Christian community were also to be afforded the opportunity to establish indigenous churches. In contrast, though, the Norwegian mission "ended up developing practices and patterns of interaction that facilitated European rule over African converts" and even found theological reasons to justify European political control in Africa (p 4). In step with this development, the author points out that there was a significant policy shift on how the mission was to be implemented. In theory, the mission started out championing the itinerant strategy; regularly travelling across Zululand in a bid to reach potential converts. In practice, the missionaries came to affirm a station strategy; establishing and residing at a permanent, physical settlement.

The Norwegian missionaries occupied an awkward position, traversing the border between the independent Zulu kingdom (until 1879) and the British colony of Natal (p 17). They were not members of the dominant class on either side. They had few resources, constant pecuniary difficulties and they did not share a common language with the local, British colonial officials. Given that they did not originate from an imperial or expansionist European nation, and given their precarious place on a British colonial frontier, it could be assumed that they would have acted differently to British, French, German or American missionaries (p 201). Rather, as noted, the missionaries of the NMS actually came to endorse European control of Africans. They even supported the British annexation of Zululand in 1879, though not without a few dissenting voices (pp 206–210). In an attempt to account for this apparent contradiction, Hovland draws a convincing connection between the original intentions of the mission, namely to consider all Christians as equals and to embrace itinerancy, and how the mission actually unfolded. This is where Hovland's use of space as an organising concept proves its worth.

With the mission coming to reside in the physical form of a station, the role of space – and the effect it had on Christianity in practice – is illuminating. In many ways, mission stations were borne out of a practical challenge inherent in the Christian faith: “the problem of presence”; how to make an invisible God visible; how to communicate Christ (p 30). This task necessarily took on a material form. For the Norwegian missionaries, it came to involve the construction of “a new kind of space” that would facilitate a substantial share of the necessary communication; space and things can “speak” as loudly as words, perhaps even louder (p 30). But by taking hold of pieces of land in order to establish their mission stations, the missionaries inadvertently created spaces “that facilitated a Christianity closely aligned with colonialism” (p 21).

Hovland contends that this was because mission stations, as “Christianised” spaces and moral domains, emphasised difference and separateness while being located in a social and cultural landscape not of their own making. Cordoning off the mission space was important for the Norwegian missionaries and the Zulu royal house alike, because it protected the authority of each. Yet, by being cordoned off, the missionaries were able to use the mission stations to subvert and prohibit “integral parts of Zulu culture and social structure” which were considered inimical to Christianity. These actions ended up posing a political threat to the Zulu king and his chiefs (p 163). Even so, the royal house considered it useful to allow the missionaries to stay in Zululand. Hovland shows how mission stations came to be regarded as extraterritorial spaces by the Zulu leadership. Though this measure was opposed by the missionaries, as they insisted that Zulu converts could still be Zulu subjects, it underlined the separation of the mission station as a distinct space with its own internal hierarchy, atop of which stood the European missionary.

Though the Norwegian missionaries initially “focused on religious difference between Christian and “heathen” customs”, Hovland demonstrates that “the way the missionaries organised the spatial set-up of the mission stations” actually produced racial separation and accentuated racial difference (pp 163–165). Mission land came to be regarded as “white land”. The sole figure of authority on the mission station was a white man. The mission station bore a striking resemblance to a Zulu homestead, except with a white, male missionary as headman. The hierarchical relations stemming from this spatial arrangement flowed along racial and gendered lines, as opposed to solely religious ones. While the missionaries may have originally subscribed to the abstract idea of the equality of all believers, the “stylised movements of everyday life” on the mission station came to reflect a colonial state of affairs (p 165). Hovland suggests that this colonially-inspired spatial order influenced a shift in missionary thinking over time. By the late 1870s, the majority of missionaries residing in Zululand and British Natal were approving of the extension of imperial rule, with African political independence increasingly regarded as an obstacle to effective evangelisation (p 209). The author has provided a persuasive argument in this regard.

It must be noted that Hovland often ends up arriving at the same conclusions made by earlier writers on the history of mission in southern Africa, in particular Etherington, Elbourne and the Comaroffs. The extent to which the collective works of these authors has come to dominate the field is made evident

by Hovland's regular deferral to their arguments. While the anthropological approach of the study is novel, large sections of the book present known conclusions, re-packaged via a new example. That being said, *Mission Station Christianity* is an engaging text filled with intriguing insight into how "being Christian" in a colonial border region of southern Africa was communicated through contests over space. It is a must-read for anyone interested in the fields of mission history and the anthropology of Christianity.

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New light on a dark subject

Elizabeth van Heyningen, *The Concentration Camps of the Anglo-Boer War: A Social History*

Jacana Media, Johannesburg, 2013
416 pp
ISBN 978-1-4314-0542-8
R320.00

Elizabeth van Heyningen's intelligent and comprehensive social history of the concentration camps of the Anglo-Boer War is sure to become the new standard bearer on the subject. Based on rich government records (especially files of the Superintendent of Refugee Camps in the Free State Archives) along with inmate testimonies, Van Heyningen offers an intimate portrayal of life inside the camps and a clear-sighted vision of the motivations and limitations of those civilian and military officials in charge. Scholars interested in the range of sources Van Heyningen uses can consult: <http://www.lib.uct.ac.za/mss/bccd/index.php>.

In the same vein as Liz Stanley's *Mourning Becomes* (2006), Van Heyningen cuts through what she calls the politicised "haze" of camp commemoration, which emphasises the suffering and martyrdom of inmates as a central component in the building of Afrikaner nationalism. She combats existing scholarship in a spirited fashion, whether it be *Die Konsentrasiekampe* (1954) by J.C. Otto, a scholar "extensively committed to the nationalist project" (p 20), or the "crude example" (p 21) of Owen Coetzer's *Fire in the Sky* (2000).

She treads on hallowed ground, perhaps, when she twice describes Emily Hobhouse as an "arch-propagandist" (pp 16 and 121), although her contextualisation of the pro-Boer advocate within the antagonisms of British party politics is measured and necessary to understand how the camps controversy played out in Europe. By demystifying a venerated mythology, Van Heyningen seeks to overturn simplistic binaries of British brutality and Boer suffering. In the process, she offers a rich portrait of the highs and lows of camp policy; of the immense diversity of the camp system across space and time; and of successes as well as tragic failures. Much existing historiography conflates the extreme with the norm, Van Heyningen complains, for it implies that the dreadful conditions of late 1901 were representative of a more complex and variable experience that unfolded over more than two years. "Undoubtedly violence towards women occurred and was firmly swept under the carpet by the British" (p 111), Van

Heyningen concludes, but “in reality, life [in the camps] was not entirely bleak” (p 283). “Occasional moments of enjoyment” even punctuated the “mundane monotony” of camp life (p 318).

Framed by a discussion of legacy and commemoration that usefully compares the trauma and selective memory of camp inmates with survivors of the Holocaust, Japanese internment camps, and the atrocities of apartheid, Van Heyningen’s chapters unfold thematically and chronologically. The narrative begins by considering the people of the camps. In contrast to popular notions reinforced by the post-war testimony of mostly literate and wealthy women, she argues that the vast majority of camp inmates were impoverished and socially marginal. With the sympathy of a social historian, Van Heyningen rescues the landless *bywoner* from the condescension of a posterity that tends to remember the average inmate as “middle class”. In a later chapter, Van Heyningen also notes that one-third of adult inmates were in fact able-bodied men, a notion that runs counter to the common assumption that camps only concentrated women and children, the heroic victims of an ungentlemanly war. It is too simple, Van Heyningen continues, to assume that male inmates were craven collaborators – “joiners” or “*hendsoppers*”. Instead, we must consider the compelling economic demands of family. Men could earn income in the camps to support their wives and children during and after the war, and by the end of 1901, Britain’s camp administration paid more money in wages to inmates than to official staff.

Van Heyningen is sympathetic to the experiences of camp inmates, noting “there is no reason to believe that the stories the women told were not a valid expressions of their suffering” (p 122). But she is keen to distinguish the suffering of inmates from the mindset and motives that governed the management of the camps. While they operated within a military context, the camps, importantly, were administered for most of their existence by civilian authorities, whose agenda was often at odds with that of the military. Understanding the rival authorities involved in camp administration; the disconnect between imperial centre and periphery; and the often ad hoc and contingent quality of British decision making is an important step toward appreciating the many contradictions of an institution that contemporaries referred to, interchangeably, as both “refugee camps” and “concentration camps”.

The most important contribution comes, perhaps, in chapter 3, which depicts the camps not only as instruments of military strategy – the dominant impression one garners from such classic works as S.B. Spies’ *Methods of Barbarism?* (1977) – but of a tentative (and far from effective) exercise in imperial poor relief. British administrators drew inspiration from a humanitarian impulse, albeit one cast in the condescending terms of Victorian “civilising missions”, to distribute emergency relief and inculcate the “British” habits of thrift, cleanliness, and industry into a population conceived in the terms of the day as “ignorant and unschooled in civilised ways” (p 28). As tragic as they were, death rates resulted from a habitual obsession with frugality in matters of government charity (exemplified by the miserly English Poor Law) rather than any punitive agenda. The British “did not see the internment as forced” (p 117), and the camps were “not meant to be prisons” (p 118). In this regard, however, the book might have discussed in more detail the fenced-off “undesirable wards” used to punish

insubordinate inmates. Van Heyningen alludes to the “unique” case of Winburg camp, which “was really a prison housing ‘undesirables’” (p 117), but she makes no mention of a similar enclosure at Bloemfontein – the “bird cage” – where “singing birds” were “worked 8 hours a day with pick and shovel”. In this nuanced and balanced account there is surely room to consider more fully the forced incarceration of the socially and politically “undesirable”, while still preserving the revisionist emphasis on humanitarian aid.

Other chapters examine work; education; nutrition; and concentration camps for black Africans (a story that remains unavoidably incomplete owing to a lack of sources). The practise of medicine in the camps and what Van Heyningen has previously deemed a “clash of medical cultures” provides a chapter of special interest. Folk remedies and humoral theory (a derivative of eighteenth-century European medicine) confronted a professionalised science that enshrined the hospital rather than the home as the locus of care. Much to the dissatisfaction of many camp inmates, the men of science replaced family and friends as the principal healers. Ironically, Van Heyningen points out, British medicine was also steeped in an outdated miasmatic approach to disease. But in the minds of camp officials, it was a vehicle of medical advance and sanitary reform.

The pivotal chapter “Winds of Change” brings to light an often-neglected dimension of the camps: their reform into model sanitary institutions. New camps on the Cape and Natal coasts were the result of significant investment and forethought, and by applying the many lessons of nineteenth-century discipline and sanitation, they achieved death rates of close to zero. The coastal camps proved that the healthy management of concentrated populations was possible. With more careful planning and with greater trust between haughty British doctors and camp inmates, epidemics of measles and typhoid (the principal killers) *could* have been avoided. This chapter also reminds us that the camps were *historical* constructs that varied greatly over time. The camps of October 1901 bore little resemblance to those of May 1902.

This work should be required reading for historians of the Anglo-Boer War, as well as for those invested in such diverse issues as social reform, the development of Afrikaner nationalism, and the cultural history of medicine. Van Heyningen’s book speaks to a South African audience, and it engages in historiographical debates specific to South Africa’s national past. It also illuminates the double-edged nature of British imperialism and its contested programmes of violence and humanitarianism. A rich, empathetic and carefully researched account, Van Heyningen’s book also forms an important source for those interested in the global development of concentration camps and other technologies for the management of populations on a macro scale. Current research is increasingly exploring connections between British camps in South Africa (and also India) and similar colonial practices in the German, American and Spanish empires. Although she does not spell it out, Van Heyningen provides the first step in a larger project: that of tracing the imperial and transnational origins of twentieth-century practices of crisis management, forced detention, and humanitarian relief.

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Haunting images, diverse “voices”

Bill Nasson and Albert Grundlingh (eds), *The War at Home: Women and Families in the Anglo-Boer War*

Tafelberg, Cape Town, 2013

272 pp

ISBN 978-0-624-05899-1

R350.00

This beautifully illustrated book will appeal to a wider audience with a general interest in the Anglo-Boer War, though the volume concentrates on the experiences of women, children and families during the conflict. The haunting images tell a story about the trials and tribulations both Afrikaans and black South Africans faced in the concentration camps throughout the country and make a contribution to the history of the period in their own right. The chapters have been organised in such a way that various thematic aspects surrounding the Anglo-Boer War are systematically addressed.

The first chapter establishes the background of the tension between the British and Boers, simultaneously stressing the importance of the concepts of Afrikaner nationalism and patriarchy. Chapter 2 adds to this context by discussing the strategic scorched-earth policy adopted by the British troops. Chapter 3 has a women-centred approach, addressing Nonnie de la Rey's life during the war. The next chapter explores the quotidian in the concentration camps, while chapter 5 focuses on the interplay between British doctors in the camps and the Afrikaans women's medical knowledge. Chapters 6 and 7 look at specific populations interned in the concentration camps, with the former exploring children's experiences and the latter, the roles and experiences of black South Africans. Chapter 8 turns to a discussion of the role of humour and how it was used as both a defence mechanism and as a means of resistance by the Boers. Chapter 9 then details the creation and planning of the Women's Monument in Bloemfontein, followed by Chapter 10 which discusses the contextual meaning of the monument from its construction in 1913 through to the present day. The book ends with a chapter on Emily Hobhouse's speech at the inauguration of the Women's Monument. All these chapters make use of captivating and thought-provoking images. As primary sources, these photographs give the “invisible actors” – the women and families – a much stronger representation than is the case in related works. Most of these images have not been used before when exploring the Anglo-Boer War. As such, the work offers a new approach on how we understand the impact of the war on women and families, and also acts as an informative snapshot of life during the period.

One of the gems in this book is Zelda Rowan's chapter on Nonnie de la Rey. This chapter on the wife of the Boer commander, Koos de la Rey, gives the reader an opportunity to learn more about a woman who refused to become a victim during the war. She was self-sufficient and could make bread, candles and other commodities while being a fugitive in the veld for 18 months, leading her six children and three servants away from danger. Themes such as her relationship

with the British troops and the origins of the identity of the *volksmoeder* (directly translated as the “mother of the nation”) emerge, leaving the reader with a sense of admiration for Nonnie’s strength and determination. There are other sporadic descriptions of women’s experiences in the concentration camps scattered throughout the book, supported by illuminating first-hand accounts. This at times breaks the seriousness and sombre feelings a reader might otherwise experience when reading about the concentration camps, however some of these accounts are also harrowing, with women appearing as helpless victims. One of these narratives, in particular, is incorporated into Jan van der Merwe’s contribution in the second chapter, which explores the Havenga Report on rape.

Several important themes emerge throughout the book. Race is a central point of historical analysis in both Van Heyningen’s and Nasson’s chapters. These chapters demonstrate that the Anglo-Boer War often took the form of an “us versus them” scenario where both black and white South Africans were oppressed by the British. Moreover, Afrikaner nationalism and patriarchy also emerge as significant themes, especially in the chapters by Grundlingh and Rowan. Both themes are important for understanding how the Afrikaner opposition organised itself against the British. In addition, religion is discussed as a prominent theme by Duff, specifically in relation to the activities of the Dutch Reformed Church and how religion played an influential role in the raising of children in the concentration camps. Duff’s chapter also discusses the role of class, showing how children were treated differently by British soldiers depending on what class they belonged to. The innocence of children in the concentration camps is poignantly captured through the discussion of the toys available to them – one example which stands out in particular, is that of a simple screw with which three year old Japie Berg used to play.

Lastly, the theme of imperialism is strongly echoed in the final chapter. The book ends with Emily Hobhouse’s speech at the inauguration of the Women’s Monument in 1913 in Bloemfontein. While her speech reflects the role of British imperialism and its shortcomings through the establishment of the concentration camps during the war, she also highlighted the need to recognise the important role women played in society during the conflict. This speech was a wonderful read, but this reviewer would have liked to have read more on Hobhouse’s perspectives on the war, the concentration camps and how this affected families in the camps. The individual contributions by the authors are excellent pieces, independently written, and each provides a unique perspective on a dire and tragic period in South African history. The different methodologies used throughout the various chapters demonstrate the diversity of “voices” at play during a politically turbulent period, including those of women, children, black and white South Africans.

While numerous, captivating stories of women and their families in the Anglo-Boer War are included, there are other women’s stories that have been excluded – these could have contributed greatly to this book and its overall purpose. The aim, as noted, is to explore the role of women and families during the Anglo-Boer War, however at times the reader is left wondering why families and women do not always take centre stage and feature more prominently in this volume. What, for instance, were the experiences during this period of women

such as Issie Smuts, General Jan Smuts' wife? Instead of being placed under house arrest by the British troops, she wanted to be sent to the concentration camps so she too could bear the hardship of what other Boer women were enduring. And what of Olive Schreiner, who, while living under the political turmoil of the war, published pro-Boer works such as *An English South African's View of the Situation* (1899) and *Eighteen-Ninety-Nine* (1900), both of which allowed an international audience to be exposed to the horrors of the war? The role and resilience of such women were later enshrined in the Women's Monument in 1913 and by incorporating these individuals the discussion of this Monument towards the end of the book could have been enhanced, specifically in the chapters by Johan van Zyl and Albert Grundlingh, who address the creation and the underlying meaning of the monument.

Nonetheless, *The War at Home: Women and Families in the Anglo- Boer War* makes a significant contribution to the existing literature on the Anglo-Boer War, demonstrating diverse experiences and forwarding a valuable, new approach to our understanding of the period. This is an excellent book for the wider public. It offers new insights on the concentration camps and the experiences that women and families had to endure. It is a beautiful book to have in one's collection. It also has the ability to spark an interest in the Anglo-Boer War generally, encouraging the reader to learn more about South Africa at the turn of the twentieth century.

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Small book, big history

Howard Phillips, *Plague, Pox and Pandemics: A Jacana Pocket History of Epidemics in South Africa*

Jacana Media, Johannesburg, 2012

168 pp

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R90.00

This review begins with two confessions: firstly, asking me to review *Plague, Pox and Pandemics* was something of an easy pick since, having taught a module "Epidemics and Social Change in Historical Perspective" for over a decade, I have long been a convert to the premise of and arguments put forward in this book. Secondly, reading it several times has not assuaged the chronic case of professional jealousy which it has induced in me, for Phillips has given us a powerful, punchy and poignant text that exposes some of the key forces shaping our region's history over the last several centuries. Indeed, taking a "holistic, social history of disease perspective ... this book ... places epidemics firmly within the country's past and treats them as something not extraneous to the mainstream of its history" (pp 9–10). It is therefore not only a history of epidemics in South Africa; it is a history of South Africa in the modern world.

As is shown in each chapter, epidemics – both "real" and "constructed" – are prisms through which we can see the dynamics, values and operations of societies at particular moments. Common responses to the eruption and spread of

a disfiguring, crippling, or quickly-killing disease include: fear, blaming, stigmatising, appeals to – or questioning of – religious and other authorities; quarantining, shunning, surveillance; medical innovation (albeit not always effective, or benign); and state intervention (or failure to act). To link incidences of these, as Phillips does, with key moments in South African history – the demise of the indigenous communities of the Cape; the roots of segregation; the rise and shape of racialised capitalism; apartheid; and the creation of the “perfect storm” of conditions on which the modern era’s most serious infectious diseases are still playing out, is no small achievement.

Such a book is long overdue. For, as Phillips remarks in the admirably brief introduction, despite the now long-standing international historiography of the importance of the impact of infectious disease, “epidemics ... loom small in accounts of South Africa’s past, almost in inverse proportion to the anxious attention they attracted when they raged” (p 9). In outline, each of the book’s five chapters focus on one infectious disease, which variously comprise several outbreaks, or waves, or manifest in one short, sharp and devastating visitation: smallpox in the eighteenth through to mid-nineteenth centuries; bubonic plague at the close of the nineteenth century; the deadly influenza of 1918–1919; polio in the mid-twentieth century; and, inescapably, HIV/AIDS from the 1980s through to today.

Most readers will immediately wonder why, given their vast significance – and fairly substantial representation in the historiography – tuberculosis, syphilis, malaria, as well as cholera, and indeed “the rinderpest” (an epizootic, but one which had such an impact that in South African English at least, it has become a colloquial reference to a catastrophic event that marked the end of an era) are not covered, and why polio – an epidemic that affected a relatively small number of South Africans (most of whom were middle class and white) – has a chapter dedicated to it. Phillips’ answers to this are convincing, for his poxes, plagues and pandemics have been selected because they occurred during – and indeed perhaps gave rise to – “pivotal moments in the country’s past”, and each left “a mark both deep and wide on the fabric of society” (p 11). Moreover, some of the candidates for inclusion in the book have become long-term, endemic illnesses rather than occurring in epidemic form. This is most notably the case for tuberculosis, despite its newer, deadly synergy with HIV, and the recent scares surrounding MDR-TB and XDR-TB (multi-drug resistant and extensively multi-drug resistant tuberculosis, respectively).

The book is precisely written, accessible, eminently readable, and, as I have found out, can be effectively deployed as a valuable teaching tool. Indeed, I only wish I had had it for more than my final year of teaching my own course, for which students review a book, usually selected by them. In 2013, the module was taken up by 19 students: only three of whom were in any way acquainted with academic history, or with the history of South Africa, or were based in the humanities; and possibly only three of whom – and definitely not the same three – had any initial interest in the topic. None of them had any grounding in the medical sciences, or, indeed much understanding of the scientific method.

Moreover, despite living in a world where awareness of HIV/AIDS has – perhaps dangerously – become almost humdrum background noise, most of these students had never heard of the great ‘flu pandemic of 1918–1919; nor, strikingly, of polio. They had never seen illustrations of a smallpox victim, nor did they have any inkling that the bubonic plague had ever struck anywhere outside of a Western European village in the 1400s – let alone any idea that southern Africa has been deeply affected by the eruption at times of these and other major epidemics of human disease. Fortunately, however, assigning *Plague, Pox and Pandemics* as the “default” review text vindicated Phillips’ hope that after finishing the book, “South African history should not look the same to readers” (p 11) and much of what follows draws (with their permission) on the reviews written by these students.

Given licence to include judging (briefly) a book by its cover, this is where most of the reviews began, and – worthy academic publishing houses please take note – their comments bring home just how important clever design can be. As one student described it, “the book’s colour red signals danger; the human skull signifies death – these reflect the contents of his study.” Another amplified:

The drawing of the skull is normal at face value, but once you have the book in your hands, you start to notice the items that make up the skull’s “face”. First the eyes are made up of, one; the South African map, and two; of the rats that were believed to carry the ... bubonic plague. The teeth are made out of tombstones, and the mouth is drawn with [crutches] which were mainly used by patients with polio ... The ears have faces of a young boy and a girl; this could either represent the orphans that are left because of the HIV/AIDS pandemic or the fact that some of these diseases affect both young and old people. On the nose there are signs which look like hazard warning signs for a poisonous substance or chemical. The book cover is very graphic and the colour choice for red and white may represent the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Since most students from outside of the discipline of History presented to the seminar class via amply illustrated power-point slides, and/or made reference to the many movies and television series that portray grisly and frightening epidemic diseases such as Ebola, some wished for more gore, however. “The author could include catchy pictures rather than dainty ones that he includes in the book”, said one. This prompted me to wonder whether Jacana might think of producing its Pocketbook Series as a series of short documentaries, although I remain convinced that the power of prose – especially as finely rendered as that in this book – is essential for nuance, texture and subtlety.

Despite their surprise at learning that “Othering” and racialised prejudice does not flow in one direction only (see pp 34–35, on smallpox in the nineteenth century: “Basters accusing Korana of bringing the disease to them in 1804, Hurutshe Tswana blaming Ndebele in 1835 ...”), my students were reluctant to loosen their grip on positive narratives of scientific progress and the march of modern medicine. Many sought – not unlike those caught up in the midst of a plague itself – meaning and lessons, and hope:

Technological improvements and love to care for one another were developed by epidemics. In hospitals caring for the sick, orphanage homes were built during the epidemic of Spanish flu, where most adults and [there is also the example] of

breadwinners [who have] died and food supplements in the current time of HIV/AIDS.

Another wrote: "The important subject is that with this narrative approach, we as a nation learn to know the system of epidemics and to ensure that the next one does not terrify or tremble us."

Perhaps unsurprisingly, several struggled a little with the chapter on polio, which manifested in South Africa first in 1917–1918, and then "as a countrywide epidemic ... three more times, in the summers of 1944/5, 1947/8 and 1956/7, all as increasingly serious offshoots of broader global pandemics. In between, it smouldered in the background" (p 95). One of the readers commented: "The author included the most unlikely case of finding middle class people affected the most by disease during the polio epidemic of the 1950s; and mostly [it was] whites [who] were found to have the disease [rather] than Africans ..." This chapter is in no way less clearly written than the others, but the analysis proved challenging to stereotypes and the argument is probably the most complicated of the book, for it rests on a basic understanding of how the poliomyelitis virus adapts in and outside of the human body; and, in an apparent paradox, how immunity to polio was reduced with the proximity to sanitation, especially treated water facilities. Overall, the reviewers were in agreement that:

... the book was definitely interesting and worth the read. It was fascinating to see how ... disease does not only leave many dead, but that it has effects on societies far beyond that ... H. Phillips depicts how diseases can change leadership, can create hatred between different groups (religiously, culturally and racially), but not only does it have negative effects on a society, disease can help improve health care systems, they can show that some people that are in power are not doing their jobs properly (which may lead to better leadership) and it may bring people in different fields to work together.

Another student put it well: "The book can be recommended for both history and medical students and anyone who seeks to do research on the history of epidemics in South Africa. Overall the author did a great job." I can only concur, and salute a miniature masterpiece. This is big history in a small book.

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Making the world their own again in a new era?

Meghan Healy-Clancy, *A World of their Own: A History of South African Women's Education*

University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Scottsville, 2013

312 pp

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R285.00

There must be a reason that there are so many powerful women in politics in South Africa, although recently – with the notable exception of the Public Protector, Thuli Madonsela – some of them have made a negative impression on the media and the public. Even then their prominence and a confidence that

sometimes seems out of proportion to their real achievements are in need of an explanation, especially in a country where women's rights have not advanced much beyond rhetoric.

Some of the explanation may be found in the kind of schooling they received, although, for the ones with poor reputations such as the late Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, we might not wish to hold their schools responsible for all their character traits. As it happens, Tshabalala-Msimang was one of the graduates of the Inanda Seminary that is the focus of Meghan Healy-Clancy's study. The former Minister of Health exhibited some of the typical characteristics of "old girls" from the school founded by the American Board for Foreign Missions long before Tshabalala-Msimang's time in 1869: she was resilient and sure of herself. Arguably, she was also responsible for large scale human devastation. But, perhaps our judgment should be mitigated by an understanding of the deep contradictions that characterised her formative experiences. Tshabalala-Msimang's abrasive approach and support of a particular kind of Africanist policy that many now agree was extremely damaging, should be seen in the context of a school that endowed girls with a real education and sense of worth that apartheid then did its best to dash. Some former pupils have reported that their initial reaction on encountering the world outside their school was anger that it had prepared them so little to feel that they were second or even third rate citizens.

Healy-Clancy's main theoretical objective is to reveal how the plan for "social reproduction" conceived of, first by the "benevolent empire" of the American missions and then more insidiously by the apartheid state, in which women would play the role of nurturers and reproducers of the labour force at a knockdown price, actually backfired. Ironically, she comments, by being cast as central to remoulding the family and peopling the teaching and caring professions, women became the recipients of skills that they could and did use to challenge apartheid. Healy-Clancy thinks perhaps this helps to explain what she calls the "new gendered contradictions" of post-apartheid society (p 2). It is a contention worth considering since the contradictions are so glaring.

As Healy-Clancy notes, very little attention has been paid to girls' schooling in the general literature on apartheid and education, beginning with the collection of essays edited by Peter Kallaway thirty years ago, which made forceful connections between the two, influenced by the so-called revisionist school's contemporary indictment of capitalism for its enabling role in the creation and sustainability of apartheid.¹ Subsequently, Jonathan Hyslop tried to loosen the bonds somewhat, making the evolution of Bantu Education less directly indebted to the specific requirements of capitalism, without relinquishing the Kallaway et. al thesis that they enjoyed a generally beneficial mutual relationship.² Hyslop argued that an important ambition of Bantu Education had been to net the huge numbers of African children who were not in school in the 1940s and, in numerical terms, it had measurable success. He also pointed out, without discounting some of the very considerable and innovative alternative education movements of the 1950s

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1. P. Kallaway (ed.), *Apartheid and Education: The Education of Black South Africans* (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1984).
 2. J. Hyslop, *The Classroom Struggle: Policy and Resistance in South Africa, 1940–1990* (University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Scottsville, 1999).

and later, that because Bantu Education was able to offer schooling (whatever its debased nature) to many who had been shut out of the mission schools because of limited resources, the extent of parental opposition was fairly limited. Building somewhat on Hyslop's observations about the contradictions embedded in Bantu Education, Healy-Clancy intends to highlight the feminisation of African schooling impelled by Verwoerd's declared intention to increase the proportion of women teachers and as a consequence of needing to staff racially segregated facilities. Inanda escaped the worst of Bantu Education, ironically being allowed to pursue an increasingly intellectual curriculum. After their initial shock at being treated as inferior once they had left the school, many of its alumni describe a stubborn determination to prove themselves and the record of their successes is impressive.

Healy-Clancy handles the social reproduction aspect of her thesis elegantly and persuasively. Her description of how the school navigated its potentially deeply problematic relationship with Buthelezi and Inkatha is excellent and sensitively done. Her study is also peopled with vivid characters, perhaps more so in the early chapters than in the latter ones. There is nobody that quite competes with the indomitable Mary Edwards, first principal of Inanda, who set out from her home in Troy, Ohio in one of the most turbulent eras of Natal's history at the end of the 1860s, prepared to set up an American household in a part of Africa, teaching Zulus with whom she was only acquainted through missionary periodicals. Back home, to which she kept on threatening to return, Edwards had been the secretary of the Ladies Missionary Society for the First Presbyterian Church. She was part of an extraordinary epoch in American missionary history when female missionaries substantially outnumbered men. When she arrived at Inanda she was supposed to get to work on preparing wives for African clergy. Evidence of her relationships with the girls and her impatient correspondence with the Board suggests that she sometimes entertained other kinds of ideas for their future. In the beginning, without any knowledge of the Zulu language and unsympathetic responses to her requests to the Board to allow her the opportunity to gain some, MaEdwards made some of the *kholwa* girls into teaching assistants. Her loving maternal relationship with one of these – Talitha Hawes (not to be confused, as Norman Etherington evidently did, with Dalita Isaac, Pixley ka Seme's sister and not quite as "pure" as principal Fidelia Phelps fancied) is well drawn from the existing evidence. Sadly, MaEdwards' ambitions for Talitha to go to college in Ohio were defeated, but Talitha's subsequent success was a tribute to her schooling nonetheless.

There are also the fascinating accounts of the so-called "kraal girls" who came to Inanda as a refuge from forced marriages in contravention not only of the will of outraged parents but also the patriarchal legislative order maintained by the British colonial system with its particular Shepstonian version of indirect rule. MaEdwards has been remembered in a subsequent re-enactment, which probably took considerable dramatic licence, holding out against the magistrate's order that girls from the school be sent back to the husbands that had been chosen for them. Healy-Clancy's hypothesis about how girls strategised around temporary defections to Inanda in a period when homesteads had come under considerable pressure from the state and the depredations of the rinderpest epidemic is very suggestive. MaEdwards herself, after a single "self-declared furlough" (p 57) in the

middle of the 1870s, stayed on at Inanda until she died in her bed in 1927 aged 98 years.

In the rest of the book we encounter the other principals, including MaKoza who was, by the sound of it, MaEdwards' equal in terms of indomitability and who produced graduates well-equipped to make their mark on post-apartheid South African society. But she is a less well-developed character than is MaEdwards. We learn of MaKoza only through the retrospective musings of her former charges and not through her own correspondence, as we have an opportunity to do with MaEdwards. There is nobody quite like Talitha or Dalita either. Healy-Clancy's strategy in the later chapters changes from fairly detailed biographical sketches, poignantly illustrated by black and white photographs of individuals with that peculiar aura that photographs of long ago possess, to borrow from Walter Benjamin's famous observation, to a more self-consciously pursued theoretical argument in which women's reminiscences are relayed to us at a rate which allows us to catch only fleeting glimpses of them. In her acknowledgements, Healy-Clancy admits to having been distracted sometimes by "narratives" (p xii) as if it were a fault that had to be checked by one of her mentors. Her argument is very lucid and evidentially strong. But I can't help wondering what the narratives were that she sacrificed to an idea of how one should write history.

Healy-Clancy leaves us with various challenges in relation to the values that we try to perpetuate through school curricula. In particular, she asks that we engage with the fact that while many women have been empowered in certain ways in South African society there are still intractable obstacles to their advancement in the workplace and the statistics of gender violence in this country are chilling, to say the least. It is to be hoped that Healy-Clancy's competent and well-written study will serve as an invitation to other scholars to conduct far more research into women's education and to ask more probing questions about the continued failure of school curricula and schools as institutions to provide women with the skills and self-esteem they need to avoid abusive relationships with men (and, on occasion other women) and to make their own way in the world.

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A challenging text inviting further inquiry

Saul Dubow, *South Africa's Struggle for Human Rights*

Jacana Media, Johannesburg, 2012

151 pp

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R118.00

In contemporary discourse the term "human rights" is very common. It is sometimes assumed that its meaning is self-evident, and that there has always been a struggle to achieve such rights. In his Introduction to this short, clearly-written and often stimulating book, Saul Dubow points out that the term, which has come to acquire a much more expanded meaning in recent times, is "not conducive to rigorous definition" (p 12). Does it include collective as well as

individual rights? What are those rights? Sensibly avoiding a narrow definition, Dubow is interested in exploring struggles for human rights over time.

Since 1994 South Africa has had a Human Rights Commission and a public holiday called Human Rights Day. The *South African Journal on* [sic] *Human Rights* has been published since 1985. John Dugard published a classic text entitled *Human Rights and the South African Legal Order* in 1978. And yet Dubow is the first scholar to tackle the history of the development of a concept of human rights in this country. As he points out, the idea of “human” rights is relatively recent (and is not used in, say, the title of the Bill of Rights that lies at the heart of the post-apartheid constitution), so his title is anachronistic. It is often much easier to establish what people were struggling against (such as segregation and apartheid) than what they were struggling for. Such quibbles aside, Dubow, who has touched on this topic in some of his previous writing – such as his article on “Smuts, the United Nations and the Rhetoric of Race and Rights” (*Journal of Contemporary History*, 43, 1, 2008, pp 43–74) – now boldly ranges over much of South African history to explore “competing rights’ regimes” (p 11), opening up a significant field of study, while making a series of assertions, many of which cry out for more detailed exploration.

The earliest context in which one can speak of a struggle for rights in South Africa, he claims, relates to what in the era of Dutch East India Company rule at the Cape was called “burgerschap” [sic], and he briefly discusses the rebellions against Company rule in the late eighteenth century. Then, after the British took over the Cape, a small but very vocal humanitarian group lobbied both for the ending of slavery and for ameliorating the lot of the Khoi. This humanitarianism fed into an often ambiguous Cape liberalism, more concerned, Dubow suggests, with rights for white colonists than for indigenous peoples. After skipping rapidly from the campaign for freedom of the press in the 1820s to that for political rights, omitting, say, the struggle for responsible government at the Cape, Dubow moves into the twentieth century, where he draws upon his chapter in the second volume of the *Cambridge History of South Africa* (2011) to write about the further confinement of rights to whites after the creation of the new South Africa in 1910. He briefly describes the growth of challenges to white supremacy before and after 1948, the year that saw both the advent of apartheid and the passage by the United Nations General Assembly of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Dubow shows how the issue of rights for black South Africans gained traction in the international community, alongside the growth of the idea of the universality of human rights and the development of a global movement for achieving those rights. He suggests that the mid-1970s was “a key moment in the process of linking anti-apartheid struggles to the international human rights movement” (p 16), and associates the growth of a concern for human rights in South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s with the rise of non-governmental organisations. Finally, in a chapter cleverly entitled “Setting the New Nation to Rights”, he explains why both the National Party, after decades of hostility to human rights, and the African National Congress (ANC), which had proposed a Bill of Rights in 1923 and again in 1943, both came to accept in the late 1980s the need for a human rights regime embodied in a democratic constitution. Despite the human rights activism we have seen since 1994, perhaps most notably in the work

of the Treatment Action Campaign on the issue of HIV/Aids, Dubow points to ongoing concerns about respect for human rights in South Africa. Twenty years after the advent of democracy, the ANC government has clearly often failed to protect human rights, while it is not evident, Dubow writes, that a broad civic and political consciousness of the importance of human rights has become rooted in popular culture (p 9). One topical issue relates to what extent the rights accorded South African citizens are to be extended to refugees from other African countries.

Dubow's little book, then, is concerned with very different rights and very different contexts in which there were struggles for those rights. There was no single "struggle for human rights" in this country, and much more work is needed on the connections, if any existed, between the very different struggles he writes about. But Dubow has produced a very challenging text, and it is now up to others to show its weaknesses and investigate its themes in greater depth.

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