

Book Reviews

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Boekresensies

The genesis of the South African foot soldier

Willem Steenkamp, *Assegais, Drums and Dragoons: A Military and Social History of the Cape, 1510-1806*

Jonathan Ball Publishers, Johannesburg and Cape Town, 2012

376 pp

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R267.00

The history of South Africa's armed forces dates back to just more than a century ago, because the unitary state was formed only in 1910, and the Union Defence Forces (since 1957 known as the South African Defence Force, and since 1994 as the South African National Defence Force) was established only in 1912; nevertheless, the country's military history can be traced back many centuries. The first clash between European soldiers and indigenous inhabitants took place at Saldanha Bay in 1510, between Portuguese seamen and members of a local Khoina clan. After Jan van Riebeeck established a refreshment station at the Cape in 1652, the next century-and-a-half saw the Cape under Dutch/VOC (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, i.e. Dutch East India Company) control. The second British occupation of the Cape in 1806 ushered in a new era in the history of that colony, as well as for the whole of southern Africa.

When the South African Infantry Association decided that it wanted a book published on the South African infantryman, they had no need to look further than Willem Steenkamp – journalist, tour guide, expert on the military history of southern Africa, and author of several books; including noteworthy publications on the war in Namibia and in Angola (1966–1989), such as *Adeus Angola* (1976), *Borderstrike: South Africa into Angola* (originally published c. 1983; re-published 2006) and *South Africa's Border War 1966–1989* (1989).

Throughout the millennia, it has been the infantryman who has always borne the brunt of fighting in wars. Today, of course, this is also true of the infantry woman. Consequently, many casualties suffered in most wars have been infantrymen; and foot soldiers indeed suffer greater extremes of danger, discomfort and fatigue than most other combatants. The first-ever “soldiers” in pre-historic times, were “infantrymen”, and today, notwithstanding all the technological developments and other innovations, the infantry are still crucial in most conflict zones. Computers and cyber warfare, unmanned vehicles on land, in the air, and on and under the sea have changed the nature of battle space, but ultimately, the eyes, ears and decisions of men and women on the ground, often in close proximity to the enemy (which may include other/opposing men and women and/or improvised explosive devices) are needed to ensure success in areas of conflict. This also holds true for the years 1510 to 1806, which are the focus in Steenkamp's *Assegais, Drums and Dragoons*, a book that examines the role of infantrymen at the Cape, but at the same time, develops into an absorbing military and social history of the Cape Colony under Dutch rule.

This excellently researched book is not a learned treatise on warfare or a military textbook, but rather an informal history of South African infantrymen of all races and nations throughout the recorded social history of the Cape in the course of three centuries, albeit that the history and analyses are well-documented; see in this regard the many endnotes (pp 331–364), as well as a fairly comprehensive bibliography (pp 365–370). Thanks to the index (pp 371–376), the serious student of military history can easily gain much from the wealth of information that is contained in the book.

Steenkamp succeeds in telling his story without fear or favour and he focuses on events, rather than on the exploits of individual regiments, except where it is necessary. The narrative is told in an entertaining and instructive way, and the book has fulfilled all the aims set out in the Foreword and Introduction, including indicating and fostering “the respect that real fighting soldiers often conceive for one another after they have laid down their arms, a respect that transcends differences of race, religion and belief that politicians, propagandists and others seek to keep alive to serve their own base purposes. They have yet to learn that if you unfairly denigrate your former enemy, you denigrate yourself in the process as well” (p viii).

Assegais, Drums and Dragoons is a mixture of social and military history. As Steenkamp correctly points out, the Cape’s soldiers were shaped by a bewildering variety of influences and events that go back many years. The book is also, in essence, about the genesis of the South African foot soldier of today; a type of soldier who grew to what he (or she) is today through an evolutionary process that took several centuries.

Steenkamp follows a chronological approach and presents the history of infantrymen against the background of a military and social history of the Cape by way of fifteen chapters. He starts off by describing the clash at Saldanha Bay in 1510 (already referred to above); describes the Dutch/VOC’s role at the Cape since 1652, including its defensive measures; the guarding of the Cape and its vital sea route; military life in the Cape; the gradual demise of the VOC; the (first) British conquest of the Cape in 1795 (and the role that infantrymen played both on the side of the British and the Dutch during the short campaign); the Cape under Batavian (Dutch) rule from 1803 to 1806; and the (second and final) British conquest of the Cape in 1806 – with special reference to the battle at Blaauwberg on 8 January 1806 (a relatively small clash, and yet one of the most crucial battles ever fought on South African soil) and, once again, the role played by foot soldiers.

Then follows an epilogue, in which Steenkamp asks “What if ...?” with reference to the battle at Blaauwberg. There are also six very informative appendices, dealing with the VOC and slavery; the controversy with regard to the naming of the Khoina and Bushmen; routine at the Castle of Good Hope in the 1720s; an analysis of the battle at Blaauwberg; the military units involved in the clashes at Muizenberg (1803) and Blaauwberg (1806), and their uniforms; and the later careers of the key figures referred to in the book. The book also includes five very useful maps and 37 illustrations (of some of the main characters referred to in the text, of uniforms, and depictions of some of the battles that are described).

Since 1806, there have been many, many conflicts in what is today South Africa and in almost all of them, infantrymen have played a major role, from the frontier wars in the Cape Colony to the Anglo-Boer conflicts; and in two world

wars, South African infantrymen fought outside the borders of their country against imperial expansionist and racist regimes. Hopefully, sooner rather than later, the military and social history of the Cape from 1806 onwards, but also of South Africa, will be told as expertly as has been done by Willem Steenkamp in his excellent *Assegais, Drums and Dragoons*. This book, which underlines the importance of knowledge of military history for the understanding of our chequered history in general, is highly recommended.

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Mystery, intrigue and insight in pursuit of the Chobona

Hazel Crampton, *The Side of the Sun at Noon: A Quest*

Jacana Media, Johannesburg, 2014

486 pp

ISBN 978-1-4314-0940-2

R250.00

The Side of the Sun at Noon is an engrossing tale delivered by a skilful hand at bringing history to life. Hazel Crampton has followed up her first full-length book, *The Sunburnt Queen* (2004), with an equally compelling narrative; a quest (and a seemingly plausible discovery) in pursuit of the Chobona. In the process, Crampton has produced a history book that reads like a detective novel. The work is “un-academic” in its presentation and style, and so enjoyable to read, that one could be forgiven for thinking that it is more a project in literary intrigue than historical inquiry. The 130 pages of endnotes and references at the back of the book suggest otherwise and bear testament to the extensive research on which the volume is based.

The Chobona have proven to be elusive over the centuries; so much so that those who spoke of their existence have often been written off as the bearers of fanciful imaginations. One such individual was Eva Krotoa, the main interpreter for the Dutch in Cape Town in the mid-seventeenth century. It was from Eva that Jan van Riebeeck, the first commander of the VOC fort at Table Bay, originally heard of the Chobona – a pale-skinned people with long hair who were said to live in large, stone houses far inland, to the north-east of the Cape, and who were rich in diamonds and gold. However, as Crampton points out, Eva was merely the interpreter conveying reports of the Chobona made by several notable Khoi chiefs, including Sousoa of the Chainoqua. Though Eva knew of the Chobona, she was not Van Riebeeck’s sole source of information. Crampton shows how Eva was unfairly dismissed by several twentieth century scholars for her accounts of the Chobona: at best an immature peddler of fantasy; at worst a fabricator and a liar.

Among many of the work’s qualities is the author’s sensitive treatment of Eva, who is among the many familiar characters who appear in the text. One such character is the Dutchman, Jan Huygen van Linschoten, who was the secretary to the Archbishop of Goa. In the 1580s, he managed to steal closely-guarded secrets on Portuguese trading routes in the East before publishing them. *Itinerario* became required reading for navigators and VOC officials, including Van Riebeeck. The publication was also largely responsible for inspiring Dutch efforts to find the legendary southern African kingdom of Monomotapa. In a coincidental twist, the inhabitants of Monomotapa, like the Chobona, lived in stone houses and were said

to be rich in gold and diamonds. That the “great lord” of the Chobona and the “emperor of Monomotapa were one and the same” was a conclusion Van Riebeeck quickly reached, though Crampton posits that this was misguided (p 326).

Nonetheless, Van Riebeeck was so convinced of the link between the Chobona and southern Africa’s own El-Dorado that he organised an expedition to travel from the fort in a bid to locate Monomotapa (which was in modern-day Zimbabwe, some 3 000 kilometres from the Cape) in February 1658. This particular expedition only managed to get about eighty kilometres north of Cape Town; a dismal failure. But this did not deter Van Riebeeck from trying again and he organised several subsequent expeditions. He eventually left the Cape without coming close to locating the Chobona, although his successors, including the first governor, Simon van der Stel, took up the mantle. None managed to accomplish the feat.

Was this because the Chobona never actually existed, or was it due to unrealistic expectations on the part of those who were looking for them? For the European settlers in the south-western corner of the African subcontinent, the interior to the north was a land of mystery; a place which evoked rumours, fear and myth. Crampton proposes that Van Riebeeck’s imagination was too “Eurocentric, or too Orientalist”; “he was looking for European-style cities or concentrations of eastern-style pagodas and, since they did not exist, he never found them” (Van Linschoten’s map actually depicted pagodas in the southern African interior) (p 326). However, as the author points out, “South Africa is littered with stone ruins” (p 271). The handiwork of the Sotho-Tswana comprises hundreds of stone settlements stretching across much of the southern Highveld. Yet, these stone dwellings were modest; “by no means the grand structures of Great Zimbabwe” (p 326). Still, the largest concentration of stone ruins is to be found in what was once the “homeland of the Hoja” (p 271). Were they, perhaps, the mysterious Chobona?

The Hoja were Sotho-speakers incorporating branches of the Fokeng, Kwena and Taung, among others. They did not have a centralised power structure, but rather lived in “numerous small groups, each with its own chief and identity” (p 270). The similarities between the Hoja and the descriptions of the Chobona provided by Cape Khoi informants are striking. They lived in stone, corbelled houses far inland, to the north-east of the Cape. They had access to gold and diamonds and their elite wore gold ornaments and imported cloth. The Hoja also had pale complexions. Crampton explains that the name Hoja was derived from the nickname of a founding chief: Mabula was referred to as Sehoja; the old, phonetic spelling being Legoya, which is a “corruption of Lekgoa – white person” (p 304). This point elicits questions about the extent of European and Arab commixture among southern African inland societies emanating from trade and contact on the east African coast, in particular, Delagoa Bay. An abiding feature of the work is the numerous glimpses into the historical hybridity of identities in the region, well before sustained European settlement in the south-west. Crampton points out that during the seventeenth century, Eva’s time, the Hoja were known as the Kubung, “which bears more than a passing resemblance to *Chobona*” (p 325).

The author has covered a great deal of ground (some of it quite rocky, both literally and figuratively) in presenting her hypothesis of who the Chobona may

have been. Even so, it would be unfair to suggest that parts of the text are extraneous; *The Side of the Sun at Noon* is more than the sum of its parts. In pursuit of the Chobona, Crampton has drawn our attention to several neglected, or even ignored, aspects of southern Africa's pre-colonial history. In doing so, she has shown the worth of investigating tales of fancy for they may lead to other, less imaginary discoveries. Behind every rumour there may just be a nugget of truth. One such neglected aspect concerns the existence of thriving "long-distance communication and trade" in southern Africa well before sustained European settlement (p 88). The presence of *Cannabis sativa*, the scientific name for what South Africans colloquially call *dagga*, illustrates the point. Crampton explains that contrary to what some twentieth century scholars argued – that the plant smoked by the Khoi was actually an indigenous herb, *Leonotis leonurus* – it is now clear that the narcotic which was in such ready supply at the early colonial Cape was in fact *Cannabis sativa*. Originally from Central Asia, it was introduced to southern Africa by Arab traders approximately one thousand years ago. From the east African coast it was relayed to the south-western Cape via the Hancumqua and Hessequa Khoi of the eastern Cape.

Crampton explores other historical traces of extensive trade links criss-crossing the pre-colonial southern African interior which facilitated the transfer of imported goods. For instance, Cape Khoi obtained red beads and copper from the Nama, who lived to the north-west, spanning the Gariep River. It has been determined that the red beads exchanged between the Nama and Cape Khoi were actually cornelians from India which had been imported via the east African coast, most probably passing through the hands of Portuguese traders along the way. And there are yet more relics of what Crampton calls the "long-vanished economies" of the pre-colonial past, especially along the middle Gariep River (p 149). Two absorbing examples include the Kakamas Peach and the Weeping Willow, both of which are originally from China and both of which were present on the Gariep River before the arrival of Europeans in the region.

It appears the Hoja enjoyed a fair degree of prosperity for much of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. They were known to grow tobacco and wheat, which also would have been acquired from traders along the east African coast; tobacco, originally from the Americas, was introduced by the Portuguese, while wheat originated in the Middle East. There are reports of the Hoja supplying the Korana, Griqua and Boers with wheat prior to 1820, thus indicating the production of surplus. Why then had the Hoja all but disappeared from the southern Highveld by the time the Voortrekkers first arrived there in the late 1830s? Crampton suggests that the Hoja suffered significant upheaval and displacement as a result of the *Difaqane*. Given that the "invaders of Dithakong" have been identified as having emanated from the southern Highveld (Hoja territory), this is highly likely. The *Difaqane* led to the disruption of livelihoods, trade networks and knowledge systems. Crampton argues that the *Difaqane* obscured the world before it to such an extent that it was easier for twentieth century scholars to dismiss the Chobona as fabrication, rather than pick up the scattered pieces and perhaps most notably, take Eva, a teenage Khoi girl, on her word.

This is a rich text delivered in an engaging and often humorous style, interspersed with brief accounts of the author's own journey of discovery. Has Crampton conclusively proven who the Chobona were? No, the available evidence is too patchy, too approximate to lend itself to a conclusive argument.

Nonetheless, the premise is reasonably, possibly true. An abiding quality of the work is the author's deft interweaving of an extensive range of sources – indigenous oral traditions, archaeological findings, Arabic writings, linguistic conventions, contemporary traveller's records, and archival material – to reveal a picture of South Africa's past that is bound to challenge preconceptions and force the reader to think again.

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A powerful critique of recent colonial historiography

Jeff Guy, *Theophilus Shepstone and the Forging of Natal*

University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Scottsville, 2013

566 pp

ISBN 978-1-86914-249-0

R380.00

The majority of Guy's work has been a deeply rooted and fine-grained history of African peoples in both Natal and Zululand, focusing specifically on power and production both before and during the colonial occupation of these regions. His close and careful readings of sources have primarily centred on the social and political economy of African peoples within and between these spaces, most notably in *The Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom* (1979), *The Maphumulo Uprising* (2005), and *Remembering the Rebellion* (2006). Conversely, Guy's work has significantly avoided centring on settler and colonial society in Natal. Indeed, his major exceptions to this, *The Heretic* (1983) and *The View from across the River* (2002), instead centred on members of the Colenso family; men and women whose political and social commitments led to a mutual rejection of settler society and its grasping rapacity. By selecting the towering figure of Theophilus Shepstone, Natal's long-serving Secretary of Native Affairs, Guy focuses on the development of colonial Natal while still paying attention to the intricacies of African action and larger imperial ambitions on the continent. In so doing, Guy discusses at length the motivations and prejudices of Natal's settler society, particularly as seen through newspapers and political debates. The result is *Theophilus Shepstone and the Forging of Natal*, an elegantly constructed and engaging narrative that compiles six decades of south-eastern African history within a tome of somewhat formidable length.

Theophilus Shepstone is a towering and certainly contradictory figure in the history of Natal and Zululand. His many successive policies, developed throughout his three decade-long tenure as the Secretary of Native Affairs, have been central to understanding the development of indigenous-African relations within the colony and through the twentieth century. These policies have been often homogenised under the heading of "the Shepstone System", offering the idea of a coherent set of principles that allowed colonial Natal and later the South African state to implement a form of indirect rule over the African peoples of the region. This iteration was initially championed by Natal's first historians in the early twentieth century and gained further purchase in David Welsh's *The Roots of Segregation* (1971) and Mahmood Mamdani's enormously influential *Citizen and Subject* (1996). Guy takes exception with the common historiographical interpretation of

Shepstone and his system, arguing that the system was not actually Shepstone's at all. Rather, Guy asserts that

Shepstone's policies came to an end before he left office. This is not to say that policies and arguments made in Shepstone's name came to an end – indeed, once he was no longer in office, they were appropriated, reinterpreted, and the “Shepstone system” was used to defend what was called Natal's native policy (pp 8–9).

For Guy, the “Shepstone system” is a constantly perpetuated misnomer, first advocated by Natal's settlers after Shepstone had lost formal power in Natal. The actual policies that Shepstone advocated were a contradictory collection of assertions that first and foremost sought to preserve as long as possible African pre-capitalist systems of economic and social production. Chief among these involved the preserving of land for African use, a move that consistently put Shepstone at odds with a belligerent and growing settler population as the nineteenth century progressed. For settlers, Africans were coddled by Shepstone's policies, which allowed them to remain economically independent of settler coercion and therefore kept settlers from obtaining the cheap labour they so vociferously demanded. Yet in a colony in which Africans outnumbered white settlers by at least eight to one, Shepstone rightly saw that Africans could not be completely or thoroughly alienated by settler demands. For as long as possible he hoped to delay capitalist attempts to undermine the economic independence of Africans within the colony, a process that became increasingly difficult as a variety of political and social factors began to push events in favour of Natal's settlers by the late 1860s.

Guy argues that Shepstone was able to achieve this delayed transformation through a canny and cynical manipulation of language and interpretation. Having grown up in southern Africa and having acquired an early fluency in African languages, he frequently mobilised his command of language to assert a sole command of the needs and concerns of Africans. This linguistic power made him frequently indispensable to generations of imperial administrators in the colony and left him considerable room to interpret and manoeuvre in his dealings with Africans, administrators, and colonists alike. Similarly, Shepstone's knowledge and manipulation of the written word allowed him to keep many of his African interlocutors in the dark about developments in the colony or wider empire. It is this state of intentional linguistic ambiguity that makes studying Shepstone and his policy work exceedingly difficult for historians of Natal. Guy himself notes in studying Shepstone's records, “what is invaluable is so adroitly intermixed with the manipulative that to distinguish the one from the other is only possible through close comparative reading and precise contextualisation” (p 2). In order to do so, Guy undertakes an ambitious and largely successful approach. *Theophilus Shepstone and the Forging of Natal* is not a direct biography so much as the close reading of a life in documents with careful attention to the social, political, and economic changes that resulted in Shepstone's near half-century residence in Natal.

In the wake of the disastrous annexation of the Transvaal in 1877 by the British government and the destruction wrought by the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, circumstances shifted decisively against the continued economic and social autonomy of Africans in Natal. Guy traces the large-scale collapse of Shepstone's multiple policies to the decade after the war, newly codified in the Natal Native Law Code of 1891. By then, Shepstone's attempts to preserve land and relative

independence for African labourers was eclipsed by the increasing demand of settler capitalism, bolstered by the gold and diamond fields beyond Natal's borders. What arose in its place was not Shepstone's doing, but rather, "the Shepstone system", "a reconstructed system, a settler system, cobbled together from elements of the policies with which he was associated, and to which his name gave historical cohesion and political respectability" (p 504).

This analysis, one that simultaneously privileges policy change and claims of historical continuity, forms the crux of Guy's convincing argument. By closely reading the primary documents that constituted Shepstone's official life in Natal, Guy seeks to not only correct historical interpretations of both the man and the colony, he actively challenges the process of writing the history of Natal. Indeed, Guy's approach offers a significant critique for historians of southern Africa, particularly those of colonial Natal. In *Theophilus Shepstone and the Forging of Natal* Guy laments scholarship that suffers from the "heavy weight of the established secondary sources, which are too often simply accepted and reworked as historical givens. Then, instead of locating the text firmly within the historical conditions in which it was produced, the text is treated as discourse" (p 11). Although this is something of a simplistic rendering of critical readings of colonial texts and discourse analysis, there is certainly merit in this critique.

Guy's assertions about Shepstone, and more notably about colonial Natal and African responses, are based on decades of painstaking, original archival research. While I believe that discourse certainly has a significant role to play in understanding how power operated in colonial societies – and more importantly, how those historical actors viewed these operations of power – I do think Guy is right to emphasise the need for a re-examination of Natal's primary sources within their historical context. Otherwise, historians run the risk of "stay[ing] intellectually at home, in places and amongst people with whom one is more familiar, the significance of the remote other asserted certainly, but with a gesture rather than engagement", as Guy argues (p 11). Such an interpretive strategy does not do the lengthy and fraught process of historical change justice, and allows for an ahistoric reading of cultural concepts in the present back into the nineteenth century; a process Guy describes as the conflation of "people and things, *abantu* and *izinto*" (p 521). This analysis remains pointedly relevant in contemporary South Africa as politicians and traditional leaders make totalising claims of authority and power that ignore the messy realities of change throughout centuries of colonial (and ostensibly post-colonial) history.

Guy's book is a necessary addition to Natal and larger South African historiography not simply for its painstaking research and engaging narrative. It also presents a powerful critique of recent colonial historiography and ahistoric assertions of tradition in the present. *Theophilus Shepstone and the Forging of Natal* is an important book that demonstrates Guy's keen eye for the intricacies of settler society in Natal as well as his usual astute observation of African agency in the region.

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An absorbing eyewitness account of a pivotal period

E.J. Kärström, *Eighteen Years in South Africa: A Swedish Gold-Digger's Account of his Adventures in the Land of Gold (1877-1896)*, edited by I. Rudner, translated by I. Rudner and J. Rudner

Africana Publishers, Cape Town, 2013

229 pp

ISBN 978-0-620-58140-0

R195.00

If ever there was an eyewitness to history, that distinction falls to the unnamed narrator in E.J. Kärström's account of South Africa in the late nineteenth century. Translated from the original Swedish, Kärström claims that it is a faithful rendition of the narrator's exploits during a pivotal period in South Africa's history. Unsurprisingly, from the outset, this raises questions of authenticity, yet this is nevertheless an absorbing piece of literature which vividly recreates fascinating people, events and places.

The book itself is composed of very brief chapters of between one and three pages in length, each describing an episode in the narrator's travels through southern Africa. Interspersed with these chapters are black and white photographs and sketches illustrating the account. Opening in a manner reminiscent of the fictional *Robinson Crusoe*, the narrator describes his childhood in the Swedish village of Askersund which instilled in him a love for adventure and the ocean. Acting on this impulse, he took up positions on various cargo vessels eventually reaching the coast of South Africa where his ship, the "Ellen Bruse", was unceremoniously wrecked off the coast of East London.

This auspicious beginning marked the start of a series of rollicking adventures as the intrepid hero traipsed all over the subcontinent in a personification of the nineteenth century explorer depicted in the *Boys Own* stories that were voraciously consumed by the reading public during this period. The emphasis here is on the young, single European unburdened by the fetters of family and financial responsibility who is free to make his fortune in a land that offers ample opportunity to do so. The narrator's accounts of his work in railroad construction, in diamond and gold mining and as a member of the infantry in various volunteer regiments, illustrate this belief.

Beyond this individual perspective however and, with the benefit of hindsight (and a century of historical change), the text becomes a valuable account of the process of colonisation in South Africa. From the outset, the narrator displays an ambivalence regarding the existing race relations in southern Africa. His early exploits as a volunteer involved in the Xhosa uprising under Chief Sandile, the Anglo-Zulu War, as well as the conflict with the Basotho in Mafekeng, predisposed him to view indigenous groups as a hostile enemy needing to be subdued. Yet he also displays contempt for the products of the "civilising mission":

The native who comes directly from the kraal is a willing worker and keen to learn his work and satisfy his 'baas' in every way. The so-called civilized or Christian native speaks English, sings hymns, apes the whites in manner of dress, and also apes the lower-class whites in bad habits. He is usually unsuitable for hard work and considers it beneath his dignity to use hoe and spade (p 37).

His words also stem from a period of expansion in South Africa where public works and mining required a docile black labour force with little place for the aspiring black middle class. Throughout his adventures, his companion is the erstwhile Bambo, a minor Zulu prince whose search for true love is a source of much humour in the narrative.

The world created here is a homosocial one. Where women do appear, they serve as the foil for Bambo's amorous pursuits. The narrator's own attempt to attain domestic bliss is subverted by a Boer patriarchy disapproving of his wanderlust and empowered to speak for the prospective bride as women "did not have the intelligence to differentiate between good and bad, and matters always had to be decided by the elders" (p 49). Yet this is also a world where relationships and identities are fluid. The incipient signs of racial domination and economic inequality that would culminate in apartheid are evident, particularly in the narrator's accounts of the brutality and arbitrary justice meted out by the Royal Charter Company in Rhodesia. Simultaneously, however, Bambo is able to pursue white women with little consequence and becomes the first black man to work his own claim on the diamond fields.

From the perspective of the historian, the vision painted of South Africa is an arresting one. The discovery of diamonds in the Kimberley area and, subsequently, gold on the Witwatersrand paved the way for the industrial development of the region and this is very much in evidence in the book as railway lines are built, ports developed, new technologies are making their appearance in the mining industry and sidelining the small speculators in favour of monopolies with sufficient capital to invest in an expensive enterprise. There are get-rich-quick schemes and speculation, small towns on their way to becoming bustling cities, accounts of larger-than-life figures such as Cecil John Rhodes, Paul Kruger and Barney Barnato and all the dramatic tension associated with great transformation. It is South Africa in the process of becoming and makes for a riveting tale.

Other than pure entertainment value, the strength of this work lies in its graphic portrayal of a lost world, usually only recreated in South African historiography. The first-person narration, with its necessarily blinkered perspective, allows the reader to interrogate the assumptions of race, gender and imperialism that permeated nineteenth century South African society; assumptions that were to have a lasting impact on notions of equality, inclusion and nationhood.

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Another gem from a masterful military historian

Edward M. Spiers, *Letters from Kimberley: Eyewitness Accounts from the South African War*

Frontline Books, London, 2013

198 pp

ISBN 978-1-84832-657-6

£19.99

This is another gem from Edward Spiers, Professor of Strategic Studies at the School of History, University of Leeds. A leading authority on the Victorian army, Spiers recently co-edited *A Military History of Scotland* that received the Saltire

Prize for the best book on Scottish history in 2012 and the Templer Medal from the Society for Army Historical Research. A grant from the Scouloudi Foundation in association with the Institute of Historical Research made the publication of *Letters from Kimberley* possible. It is the second book by Spiers on eyewitness accounts from the South African War or Anglo-Boer War. The first, entitled *Letters from Ladysmith: Eyewitness Accounts from the South African War*, contained letters from the Natal front from the outbreak of the war on 11 October 1899 till the relief of Ladysmith on 28 February 1900 and after.

Soon after the outbreak of the war the Boers laid siege to these three important towns – Mafeking and Kimberley in the Cape Colony and Ladysmith in Natal. Kimberley, a few miles from the north-western border of the Orange Free State Republic, was besieged on 14 October. It was only to be relieved 124 days later, on 15 February 1900, by Major-General John French and his Cavalry Division, which formed part of Lord Methuen's relieving force. Kimberley did not possess the strategic significance of Ladysmith, nor did it have a charismatic leader like Colonel Robert Baden-Powell in Mafeking, but, known as the "Diamond City", it was the largest and wealthiest town invested. Ironically it was also the temporary home of arch-enemy of the Boer republics – former prime minister of the Cape Colony, Cecil John Rhodes, who had made a fortune in the diamond and gold industries. He entered the town the day before the outbreak of war. Equally ironically, his friend, Dr Leander Starr Jameson, was besieged inside Ladysmith on the Natal front. Spiers quotes Arthur Conan Doyle, war correspondent during the Anglo-Boer War, who wrote of "the painful but notorious fact" that "considerable friction" existed "between the military authorities [Colonel Robert Kekewich and his chief staff officer, Major O'Meara] and a section of the civilians, of whom Mr Rhodes was chief".

In this book, Spiers has included some 261 carefully-selected extracts from letters about the siege of Kimberley (first-hand accounts) written by soldiers and civilians, and a handful of Boer prisoners, which were published originally in 99 British metropolitan and provincial newspapers. These newspapers include: *Essex County Standard*, *Lancashire Daily Post*, *Leeds Mercury*, and *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*. The letters cover the British experience from all the major regiments and support arms engaged, both in the relief forces and inside Kimberley, and include material on the pursuit of a retreating General Piet Cronjé until his capture with 4 000 Boers at Paardeberg on 27 February 1900. There are also letters and extracts from siege diaries from the English-speaking community in Kimberley. They include letters from the mayor; a range of military personnel in the Kimberley Rifle Volunteers, Kimberley Light Horse, the Town Guard, Cape Mounted Police; and women, with one first-hand account of living in the mines.

Extremely valuable is that Spiers places each letter in its proper context with some excellent introductory and explanatory paragraphs. Where these letters refer to principal individuals or events, or err in their commentary, the letters are annotated. Perspectives from a few enemy letters that appeared in the local newspapers are sometimes added. Full references with subheadings, including the title of the newspaper and the date, are given with each letter. The letters or topics are numbered and where more than one extract comes from the same letter on different topics, links to previous passages are identified by reference to those numbers.

The basis of the selection consists of letters from soldiers in the relevant infantry-of-the-line battalions sent to family and friends at home, and then passed on to the local press, usually about four weeks or more after despatch from South Africa. The newspapers readily filled their columns with "Letters from the Front" among other material. These (nota bene) uncensored letters attracted editorial attention by virtue of their local interest, particularly for the provincial newspapers; their often blunt and graphic phraseology; and their readiness to make points about commanders, battles, the enemy, and campaigning generally that would never be found in official despatches. Some Lancastrian newspapers eagerly followed the fortunes of the men of the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment, half of whom were besieged in Kimberley and the other half in the relief column.

In his Introduction, Spiers assesses the siege and its significance. This is followed by six chapters with extracts from letters and editorial comments on the defence of Kimberley; the advance of the relieving force through the battles of Belmont, Graspan and Modder River; the Battle of Magersfontein, where the Highlanders "marched to their graves"; the beleaguered and bombarded Kimberley; and the relief of Kimberley and the subsequent surrender of Cronjé. A final chapter assesses the significance of the siege through the eyes of contemporaries and subsequently, in understanding how the participants coped with the challenges of a siege and securing its relief.

The extracts from the letters, Spiers explains in his Introduction, are reproduced in their original form to reflect the feelings of residents during and after the siege, and of officers and other ranks as they struggled to cope with the demands of modern warfare. They indicate how newspapers and their editors came to understand and respond to events in connection with the siege. They also provide first-hand commentary on events on the battlefield, particularly the challenges of crossing fire-zones swept by smokeless-powder, flat-trajectory, and magazine rifles, as at Modder River and Magersfontein. These letters shattered the widespread under-estimation in Britain of the highly-mobile and well-armed Boers, adept at field-craft, and, as at Magersfontein, entrenched under the skilful direction of General Koos de la Rey. The letters also testify to the way in which imperial Britain was able to recover from initial defeat, and to exploit the passivity of the Boers by deploying massive military forces across the seas and forwarding them rapidly to the front by rail. They also reveal, says Spiers, some of the social effects of the war, such as the displacement of refugees at the beginning, and the destruction of homes and property by both belligerents.

This reviewer's choice extract was already spotted by the writer of the fly-leaf: Spiers states in his explanatory note (p 88) that for most Highlanders the enduring memory of the Battle of Magersfontein was lying prostrate on the veld unable to move after the unexpected Boer fusillade from the concealed trenches. As a Seaforth sergeant observed (p 88):

There was nothing for it but to lay down and pretend to be dead, and this I did about 5.30 a.m. till, I suppose six p.m., the sun pouring down on me all the time, and not a drink of water all day, and dare not stir hand or foot, and expecting every instant to be my last. I could hear nothing but the cries, moans, and prayers of the wounded all round me, but I daren't so much as look up to see who they were. Shots and shells were going over me all day from the enemy and our side, and plenty of them striking within a yard of me – I mean bullets, not shells – and yet they never hit me. I believe

some of our fellows went off their heads and walked right up to the enemy's place, singing till they dropped them.¹

In a recent chapter on the Anglo-Boer War, this reviewer juxtaposed the experiences of a British soldier, Herbert Unwin of Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry, at Spioenkop, taken from Spiers' previous book, *Letters from Ladysmith*,² and a young Boer combatant, Deneys Reitz. Spiers has produced a remarkable book and it is highly recommended for the reader who enjoys social and military history. There is now the onus on him to compile that third volume in what would be a magnificent trilogy – the siege of Mafeking. It is something to look forward to from the desktop of a brilliant historian.

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A truly remarkable biography

Lindie Koorts, D.F. Malan and the Rise of Afrikaner Nationalism

Tafelberg, Cape Town, 2014

466 pp

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R358.00

Gordon S. Wood in his book, *The Purpose of the Past: Reflections on the Uses of History* (2008), argues that the problems and issues of the present should be the stimulus for historical forays into the past, but they should not be the criterion for what the historian finds in the past. The historian has to break loose from the immediate demands of the present and portray the past in its own context with all its complexity. In South Africa, struggling to come to terms with the destructive legacy of apartheid, this is a daunting challenge for the biographer of D.F. Malan, the stern and grim-faced prime minister of the apartheid state between 1948 and 1954.

To resist the demands of the present, Lindie Koorts has written *DF Malan and the Rise of Afrikaner Nationalism* with the stated intention to understand and explain "without any attempt at apology or justification" her subject's role in the rise of Afrikaner nationalism, and the creation of the apartheid state. Her stance is that by understanding Malan, one not only grasps his world, but also comprehends how his actions and personality shaped the Afrikaner and South Africa. Koorts succeeds admirably in fulfilling the biographer's most challenging task: to understand what her subject thought at the time whether or not she happens to agree with him. She furthermore masters Malan's long and varied career as theologian, newspaper editor and politician while never becoming obscured by the vastness of his historical circumstances. In doing so she reflects the ambiguity, uncertainty and "differentness" of the past, as well as the complexity of Malan's personality.

Koorts convincingly argues that Malan's political success was based on his intense religious belief. As a young man he was painfully shy with a sense of inferiority and crippling self-doubt, but his fervent belief that he had a special

1. "Singing to Death", *Manchester Evening News*, 16 January 1900, p 5.

2. F. Pretorius (ed.), *A History of South Africa: From the Distant Past to the Present Day* (Protea Book House, Pretoria, 2014), p 244.

calling to serve God and the Afrikaner led to him becoming a clergyman in the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC). His status as a clergyman – DRC ministers were treated like demi-gods by their congregations – turned him into a formidable and respected public figure. His stern demeanour, combined with his clerical garments made him a terrifying figure for children. In his Graaff-Reinet congregation the children would hide when they encountered him in the street. In reality Malan was more tolerant and open minded than most of his fellow DRC ministers. For example, he practised Higher Criticism and agreed that some Biblical events, such as the story of Jonah and the whale, were symbolic. He was furthermore sympathetic to the theory of evolution. This did not place Malan at odds with the DRC because he did not focus on theological disputes, but on his desire to serve the interests of his fellow Afrikaners – eradicating poverty, improving education, advancing Afrikaans as a language, and protecting their political rights. He fiercely resented British cultural hegemony, especially the dominance of the English language and concluded that political power had to be obtained without compromise, or the Afrikaner faced extinction. For this reason he rejected the conciliation policy of Louis Botha and Jan Smuts. This explains why as a rural DRC clergyman he was headhunted to become the first editor of *Die Burger*, why he became the undisputed leader of the Cape National Party (NP), a prominent member of the Hertzog cabinet, and ultimately leader of the “Purified” NP in 1934, leading the party to victory in the election of 1948.

In his private life Malan could be a humorous and warm person. He was a doting father to his adopted daughter, but his public persona was the opposite. Believing that he had a holy mission to secure the future of the Afrikaner he was grim, aloof and stern; a good hater who could deal ruthlessly with those he differed from. This was evident in his dealings with the adherents of national-socialism in the 1940s. While the rise of Nazi Germany made many Afrikaners receptive to fascism and the use of violence to secure an Afrikaner republic, Malan rejected national-socialism as alien to the Afrikaner character and traditions. As a result he set out to destroy the influence of totalitarian pro-Nazi movements such as the Ossewa-Brandwag, led by the charismatic Hans van Rensburg, and the Nuwe Orde of Oswald Pirow, a fervent admirer of Adolf Hitler. By 1943, after an emotional and bitter struggle, Malan had achieved his goal and the NP was the sole political platform of Afrikaner nationalism. Purged of fascist sympathies the NP attracted enough Afrikaner support from Smuts’s United Party to win the 1948 election.

The most striking section of the book deals with Malan’s role in the founding of the apartheid state. Koorts paints a portrait of an old and increasingly frail and exhausted Malan, out of step with a changing world after the Second World War. For him politics remained the struggle between the forces of Afrikaner nationalism and British imperialism. He wanted to remove Coloureds from the common voters roll in the Cape Province because he believed that the British had enfranchised them with the sole aim to counterbalance the Afrikaners.

Malan’s final years in politics were furthermore consumed by the succession battle that raged within the NP. Here Koorts casts new light on the inner dynamics of the party after 1948, especially the feud between J.G.H. Strijdom, the leader of the Transvaal NP, and Malan. Strijdom was a volatile personality and a severe critic of Malan and his policies. He regarded Malan as too moderate on apartheid and the desire for an Afrikaner republic, and felt that he was too Cape orientated in his cabinet appointments. Cabinet meetings were

stormy and Strijdom took his discontent into parliament and the NP caucus. Malan, on the other hand, had a low opinion of Strijdom's judgement, confrontational nature and views on race, and saw him as a divisive figure who would fracture the NP. Hating Strijdom with a passion, he was determined to deny him the right to become the NP leader and premier. Strijdom was, however, too powerful to be denied the premiership in 1954 when Malan eventually retired. Ultimately Malan's leadership between 1948 and 1954 was not busy with blueprints for the apartheid state, but with personal and petty score settling.

There is much to admire in *DF Malan and the Rise of Afrikaner Nationalism*, but Koorts's interpretation of the effect on Malan's political career of his feelings of guilt and self-disgust at being safe and in comfort as a student in the Netherlands during the South African War could be viewed as too simplistic. Malan was to be haunted by accusations that he was a coward and that he had fled to the Netherlands to avoid the war. Hertzog, for example, in the parliamentary election of 1938 accused him of being a traitor because he had never fought in the South African War. Koorts convincingly rejects the accusation of cowardice by pointing out that as a Cape Afrikaner in Stellenbosch it was impossible for him to join the republican commandos with the outbreak of the war. She is, however, less convincing in arguing that the only legacy of his Dutch stay was that his nationalism was shaped by his experience of late nineteenth-century European nationalism. Is it not possible that Malan's uncompromising Afrikaner nationalism, his rejection of the conciliation policy of the South African War heroes Botha and Smuts, and his eventual break with Hertzog, another war hero, was an attempt to compensate for his stay in the Netherlands and to eradicate his feelings of shame and guilt? There is no documentary proof for this assertion, but the historian's view of the past is not merely reduced to that of the recorded.

It is furthermore a pity that the book does not have a conclusion to evaluate the legacy of Malan's heroic image as the stern and unbending saviour of the *volk* on Afrikaner nationalism. In the 1980s and 1990s Dr A.P. Treurnicht, leader of the Conservative Party and a fervent admirer of Malan, emulated his hero's rejection of conciliation politics by vehemently resisting the political reforms of P.W. Botha and F.W. de Klerk. This contributed to an atmosphere that encouraged right-wing violence which in turn came close to derailing the political compromise of April 1994.

The few points of criticism are, however, minor ones. In terms of Woods's criteria for a historian, "[t]o be able to see the participants of the past ... in the context of their own time ... and to be able to relate it without anachronistic distortion to our present is what is meant by having a historical sense", Lindie Koorts has historical sense in abundance, making *DF Malan and the Rise of Afrikaner Nationalism* a truly remarkable biography.³

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3. G.S. Wood, *The Purpose of the Past: Reflections on the Uses of History* (Penguin Press, London, 2008), p 11.

An obscure struggle stalwart brought to light

Colin Bundy, Govan Mbeki: A Jacana Pocket Biography

Jacana Media, Johannesburg, 2012

168 pp

ISBN 978-1-4314-0487-2

R130.00

It is an unfortunate truth that the writing of history, with all its injustices done to past events, is more often than not left to those who triumph at the caucus, the ballot box or on the battlefield, rather than to those who are a little more obscure. What societies tend to forget tells as much a story as what they choose to remember. This is as true today as it has been throughout the course of history. Govan Mbeki can be said to be one of the more obscure characters of South Africa's liberation struggle. His life today is not celebrated in the same manner as those of numbers of his contemporaries. However, Colin Bundy's biography, in a very condensed yet effective way, does challenge this state of affairs.

In many ways, Govan Mbeki's political career represents a microcosm of the development of an organisation to which he was very committed: the African National Congress (ANC). A common misconception about the ANC among many analysts today, is that it is a party torn by division in a manner unknown in its glorious past. In fact, this has never been the case. The ANC, both historically and currently, is better understood as being described as a "broad church" of political pressure groups and it remains for them, as well as for the state of South Africa as a whole, both a blessing and a curse.

Ideologically speaking, one of the biggest divisions that has for many decades haunted the ANC, and which continues to do so today, is that of the nationalistic school of thought vis-à-vis the socialistic and communistic schools of thought. The formation of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) under the leadership of the former president of the ANC Youth League, Julius Malema, is testament to this; as is the ongoing influence of the Freedom Charter as opposed to other economic development plans. As South Africans celebrate twenty years of political freedom, it is only natural that questions arise such as: "Has the political freedom acquired in 1994 brought with it economic freedom, such as is suggested in the Freedom Charter?" For some, this question becomes all the more pulsing when it is kept in mind that South Africa's political transition was a negotiated one, with no clear winners or losers.

It is against this backdrop that the life and political career of Govan Mbeki, with his lifelong affiliation to the South African Communist Party (SACP), must be examined. In classical Marxist tradition, Mbeki relied to a large extent on the interpretation of economics to analyse political developments. He graduated in 1941 from the University of South Africa with a degree in economics. In an article written by Mbeki during that time, commenting on the 1936 land legislation, he noted that "... so long as the Native Reserves are regarded as a reservoir of cheap labour, so long will overstocking continue" (p 57). This chain of thought continued throughout his life. If, Mbeki noted, the ANC were "to set up a bourgeois democracy after freedom it would be to entrench capitalism to the detriment of the oppressed" (p 157). However, as noted by Bundy, by the "early 1990s, these views were out of step with what was happening in the committee rooms of CODESA" (pp 157-158).

However, Mbeki's legacy is not only overshadowed by ruling ideologies within the ANC. According to Bundy, "there is a sceptical, even hostile, view of Govan Mbeki surfacing in scholarly treatments of South Africa's political history"; these are fittingly addressed by Bundy, casting Mbeki in a different perspective (p 147). Leaving his ideological preferences aside, there can be little room for discussion when describing Mbeki as a struggle stalwart. He was a co-author of "Operation Mayibuye", and, as a member of the SACP, he played a key role in the development of the armed struggle. Mbeki spent 25 years (more than a quarter of his entire life) on Robben Island, where he served his fellow inmates through educational programmes. In the words of Ahmed "Kathy" Kathrada, Mbeki "was a teacher, not only in his choice of profession, but in essence and soul" (p 153).

Another aspect of Mbeki's career that is explored by Bundy is that of authorship. Although Mbeki is unlikely to be remembered as an author, he did make significant contributions in the various capacities that he served. "In almost everything he wrote", notes Bundy, "the written word was deployed as part of a broader social and political project" (p 149). He was more devoted to the struggle for liberation than to scholarship, in the process, using the written word as a tool to further political viewpoints. Bundy criticises "excessive claims" made in reference to Mbeki's writings, summarising him chiefly as "a pamphleteer, polemicist and reporter; when he had the time to devote himself to the task, he was a commentator, essayist, analyst and author" (p 148).

Govan Mbeki: A Jacana Pocket Biography is an important historiographical contribution. It is a critical and above all, a balanced reflection on the life of Govan Mbeki. Its greatest attribute is perhaps that it succeeds in painting a nuanced picture of Govan Mbeki without losing sight of historical context and perspective, as biographies often tend to do.

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Personal reminiscences on life as a member of the Black Sash

Rosemary Smith, *Swimming with Cobras*

Modjaji Books, Cape Town, 2011
169 pp
ISBN 978-1-920397-37-1
R184.00

Swimming with Cobras is a memoir by former Black Sash member, Rosemary Smith, who was born and raised in the United Kingdom. Smith moved to South Africa in 1966 and through this memoir she delivers a refreshing, personal perspective on South Africa's socio-political context from the mid-1960s through to the dawn of democracy in 1994. While the title of the book is a curious one, the first chapter explains its significance, detailing how Smith once swam in a river in the Eastern Cape while unbeknown to her there was a cobra swimming nearby. It was only after she had been alerted to the snake's presence that fear set in. The distress brought on by this experience is used as a metaphor for the fear felt by political activists during apartheid. Aside from setting up this metaphor, Smith also introduces the prevailing tone of the work, namely the diverse activities the Black

Sash engaged in; these included, for example, attending funerals, which served as an act of solidarity as well as an opportunity to monitor the event for the potential recruitment of new members and for exposure of the organisation. One of the challenges that emerged through these events was language. While none of the Black Sash women could speak Xhosa or Zulu, and thus they could not communicate with a wider black audience, this did not prevent them from getting noticed during this politically turbulent time.

The second chapter moves into a more personal sphere focusing on Smith's early life and career as a medical social worker in the UK. Smith's humanitarianism is reflected as she describes her encounters with people experiencing socio-economic hardships. This attribute becomes apparent later in the book when Smith's political activism was further developed in South Africa. The author's political identity was also affected by her brief move to the USA, which is discussed in chapters 3 and 4. In these chapters, a comparison is made between the USA and South Africa, where Smith concludes that the USA had a more "glitzy" approach to politics while in comparison, South African politics was morally scarring and isolating. This seclusion was exacerbated by a number of factors including the country's geo-political location and the restricted access to information and news.

From chapter 5 onwards, Smith's change of identity from passive humanitarian to political activist becomes the main focus. The author explains when and why she joined the Black Sash in the 1960s, while also contextualising the Senate Bill, which triggered the Black Sash into action in 1955. Alongside explaining this background, Smith also discusses the multiple identities women had to create, being wives and mothers, as well as in her specific case, being a white political activist during apartheid.

By the sixth chapter, Smith focuses on the functioning of the Black Sash, specifically its advice offices. These offices were a vital part of the organisation and were led by its volunteers in order to demonstrate Black Sash members' commitment to the organisation and its cause. These advice offices gave the organisation insight into what was happening at grassroots level, but they also contributed to the labelling of the Black Sash as an anti-apartheid organisation that was functioning to assist and educate the oppressed. Contributors to the organisation varied from local residents to academics. This theme is discussed in detail in chapters 7 and 8 and provides a valuable, fresh perspective on the Black Sash. Smith concludes that regardless of race, women were the most affected by apartheid due to their domestic responsibilities, work commitments and also because of the onerous consequences of apartheid legislation such as the Group Areas Act.

Towards the end of chapter 8, Smith highlights the threat of detention, especially towards fellow activists. The threat of solitary confinement was constantly looming over comrades involved in anti-apartheid organisations. It was common for such activists to have their bags packed in case they were suddenly detained. These experiences resonate with that of Ruth First's book, *117 Days*,⁴ in which First provides chilling insight into what it was like to be jailed in solitary confinement as a South African anti-apartheid activist. The theme of detention continues in chapter 9, and the role of spies is also discussed, showing how they

4. R. First, *117 Days* (Penguin Classics, London, 1965).

intimidated organisations. With thousands of people being detained in the late 1980s, the need for anti-apartheid organisations to work together became more apparent. As a result, Black Sash members were encouraged to "leave the ivory tower" and to join other women's organisations like the influential Federation for South African Women (FEDSAW). This increased the scope of networks and contacts for the Black Sash and encouraged them to become involved in the wider anti-apartheid movement.

An unlikely character-locale emerges towards the end of the book: Grahamstown was a clear influence on Smith's political experiences, and the reader is introduced to the roles of poverty, violence, solidarity and political activism in this town in shaping Smith's identity. Grahamstown's socio-political history was publicised through tours the Black Sash organised. Certain events and individuals and the effects of legislation were highlighted during these tours. Pass laws in particular were a point of concern and Black Sash members would raise funds to free people who were unfairly persecuted because they had violated these laws.

In chapter 11, the Black Sash is analysed from an international perspective by exploring its interactions with other political activists in exile. By 1990 the Black Sash attended the Women's Committee of the Dutch anti-apartheid movement. This illustrates how widespread the movement was and how the Black Sash was exposed to international contact and influence. Smith then shifts focus from the international to the domestic. Chapter 12 focuses on the democratic process in South Africa making reference to Mandela's release and the overall direction of the Black Sash amidst the changing context. Despite this positive change, Smith discusses underlying frustrations which were reflected in violent demonstrations. This is discussed specifically with reference to townships and the lack of basic necessities such as clean water. As such, by the mid 1990s, the Black Sash became more involved in empowering the public through education and it ran workshops in rural areas to teach people about the voting process. The book ends with the transformation of the Black Sash from an anti-apartheid organisation into a non-governmental organisation (NGO). This new NGO status was because of the changing socio-political context; there was an awareness that the Black Sash of the 1950s could no longer function in the same manner in the transformative 1990s. Advice offices shifted their focus to a wider platform, not only dealing with welfare matters, but also queries relating to insurance and finances.

This is a captivating memoir. Smith has a strong personal connection to all the stories discussed throughout the book. She paints a vivid comparative picture, highlighting the contrast of life in the UK in the 1960s with her experiences in South Africa. Throughout the work, Smith successfully situates the Black Sash within the wider context of national political organisations, such as the African National Congress and the Progressive Party, as well as women's roles in society, which she portrays as active, though limited. Smith also draws attention to other welfare organisations that she and the Black Sash were involved with, including GADRA, FEMSA and Christian Aid. The dominant themes in the book are those of violence, solidarity and family as they related to women under apartheid. The role of family units in particular is explored from Smith's own close-knit family vis-à-vis the socio-economic impact on other families in rural areas who were broken up as a result of the political circumstances of the era. At times it is difficult to follow Smith's recollections because they tend to be sporadic, but nonetheless, it is these memories that illustrate the unpredictability and fear which were part and parcel of

life under apartheid for political activists. Although the work is a memoir written from a personal point of view, Smith has also consulted historical records ranging from those of the Black Sash to the volumes published by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). These insights make this book a well-balanced and valuable read.

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Formidabele ontleding van die SAW se betrokkenheid in die Grensoorlog

Leopold Scholtz, *Die SAW in die Grensoorlog 1966-1989*

Tafelberg, Kaapstad, 2013
530 pp
ISBN 978-0-624-05408-5
R320.00

Leopold Scholtz se studie oor die Grensoorlog is die jongste toevoeging tot die groeiende, sogenaamde grensliteratuur aangaande Suid-Afrika se aandeel aan die konflik in Namibië en Angola gedurende die tydperk 1966–1989. Dit is inderdaad een van die omvattendste publikasies oor die oorlog aangesien Scholtz se werk 'n aantal jare na die einde van die konflik geskryf is. Die skrywer het die voordeel van retrospeksie en sedert die einde van die oorlog het verskeie nuwe bronne daarvoor beskikbaar geraak wat die moontlikheid van nuwe perspektiewe op die gevegte meebring.

Scholtz verklaar prontuit dat weens die volgehoue tekort aan bronne vanuit Swapo- en MPLA-kant 'n ewewigtige boek oor die oorlog onmoontlik is. Meer as 90 persent van die beskikbare bronne is Suid-Afrikaans van oorsprong:

Dit was wel moontlik om met betreklike akkuraatheid 'n geveg of operasie van die Suid-Afrikaanse kant te rekonstrueer, maar die beeld van die ander kant bly meestal in newels gehul. As dit duideliker was, sou my vertolking van sekere Suid-Afrikaanse optredes moontlik anders kon wees (pp ix–xi).

Vandaar waarskynlik die titel *Die SAW in die Grensoorlog*. Die skrywer verklaar ook dat sy boek nie polities korrek is nie, dit nie die finale woord oor die Grensoorlog is nie, en dat baie bronne van die Sowjet, Angolese, Kubaanse en Swapo-kant vorentoe sal opduik, terwyl die SAW-bronne oor die oorlog ook nog nie naastenby uitgeput is nie. Daarby het Scholtz onder andere self as Reservemaglid met die rang van kaptein in verskeie posisies in die SAW gedien.

Die studie is inderdaad 'n formidabele en lywige in diepte beskrywing en ontleding van die SAW se betrokkenheid by die konflik. Die boek van 19 hoofstukke begin by Operasie Savannah, toe Suid-Afrika in Angola na die val van die Portugese kolonie daar betrokke geraak het. Dan volg 'n ontleding van die ontwikkeling van die SAW se militêre doktrine en militêre en veiligheidstrategie tot ongeveer 1977 en hoedat dit aangepas en ontwikkel is tot 'n doktrine van geïntegreerde, gemeganiseerde, mobiele oorlogvoering. Hierdie strategie is verfyn deur talentvolle offisiere soos Constand Viljoen, Joep Joubert, Roland de Vries en Jannie Geldenhuys. Die SAW se agtereenvolgende oorgrensoperasies van 1978 tot 1984 word vervolgens chronologies ontleed. Daar is ook hoofstukke oor die aard van die teeninsurgensieoorlog in Namibië, Swapo se optrede in ballingskap

en internasionale ontwikkelinge. Daarna volg ses hoofstukke oor die operasies wat tot die klimaks van die oorlog, die sogenaamde Slag van Cuito Cuanavale, gelei het, gevolg deur die vredesonderhandelinge en Scholtz se ontleding en sieninge oor wie die Grensoorlog gewen het.

Betreffende die SAW se militêre strategie en agenda was 'n regimeverandering in Angola volgens Scholtz nooit die doelwit nie, maar wel om Swapo tot Angolese grondgebied beperk te probeer hou deur onder andere Unita as pro-SAW hulpmag in stand te hou. Scholtz kyk ook eerlik en onbevangen na gevalle waar aanvanklike aanvalsplanne (en dikwels swak beplanning van die leëropperbevel in Pretoria) op papier uiteindelik nie met die praktiese uitvoering daarvan geklop het nie, maar dat die SAW se vasberadenheid en goedopgeleide troepe en veldoffisiere tog die operasies merendeel in Suid-Afrika se guns laat eindig het. 'n Groot pluspunt van Scholtz se werk is dat dit, benewens 'n chronologiese narratief van die verskillende SAW-operasies, 'n aaneenlopende geheelbeeld van die Grensoorlog bied (weliswaar hoofsaaklik vanuit 'n SAW-perspektief), insluitende broodnodige perspektiefstelling en kontekstualisering. Daarby word elke operasie aan die einde van die betrokke hoofstuk ontleed ten opsigte van oorwinnings en verliese, foute begaan en lesse geleer. Vir Scholtz was die Suid-Afrikaners se operasionele suksesse aan hulle mobiele oorlogsdoktrine te danke.

Die skrywer deins ook nie terug om kritiek te lewer oor 'n aantal aspekte wat die Suid-Afrikaanse strategie en taktiek tydens die oorlog betref nie. Hy is duidelik 'n bewonderaar van die doktrine van gemeganiseerde mobiele oorlogvoering, veral soos verfyn en toegepas deur genl.maj. Roland de Vries en andere (p 461). Trouens, die kern van die boek draai om 61 Gemeganiseerde Bataljon-groep en die gevegte van hierdie groep soos wat die oorlog al hoe meer van 'n onkonvensionele na 'n konvensionele karakter verander het. Dit is eweneens opvallend dat die skrywer ten opsigte van primêre bronne baie min van die SANW-dokumentasiesentrumbronne gebruik gemaak het, maar merendeels van dié van 61 Meg-aanlynargief.

Scholtz lewer onverbloemde kritiek op die leëropperbevel, en by name veral lt.genl. Kat Liebenberg, hoof van die leër teen 1987, en genl. Jannie Geldenhuys, hoof van die SAW, dat die SAW by Cuito Cuanavale na aanvanklike suksesse dit nie met mobiele agtervolging van Fapla-magte gekonsolideer het nie (p 303). Omdat die Suid-Afrikaanse magte stuksgewys en blykbaar aarselend, i.p.v. met een groot operasie om die vyand te vernietig, in die eskalerende gevegte ingestuur is, het hierdie taktiek die Angolese magte geleenthede gebied om te ontsnap. Die aangewese doktrine van snelle mobiele oorlogvoering om die vyand te uittoerlê, is in die laaste fases van die Grensoorlog ten gunste van attrisie of "uitputtingsdenke" laat vaar (pp 254–255).

Dit skemer ook deur dat die leëropperbevel, anders as die Suid-Afrikaanse offisiere in die veld, die Angolese terugvegvermoëns onderskat het. Scholtz se simpatie lê dan ook duidelik by die veldoffisiere. Die SAW het takties en operasioneel nooit voldoende reserwes gehad nie wat hulle taktiese moontlikhede aan bande gelê het omdat die leëropperbevel en politici soos P.W. Botha as gevolg van moontlike politieke reperkussies dit nie wou magtig nie (pp 324 en 331). Ter perspektief stel Scholtz dit wel, soos reeds gesê, dat dit nooit die doelwit van die SAW was om spesifieke gebiede in Angola permanent te verower nie, maar slegs om die Angolese en Kubaanse magte te stuit om Unita te oorrumpel.

Voorts verklaar hy dat hoewel die Suid-Afrikaanse soldate groot respek vir hul Swapo eweknieë gehad het laasgenoemde se leierskap gebrekkig was. Hy het ook nie 'n groot dunk van die Fapla-magte nie, maar is van mening dat die Kubane gemotiveerd, dapper en aggressief geveg het. Die gevegseenhede van die SAW se dienspligtiges was meestal goed opgelei en het goed gevaar, maar opgeroepte burgermagineenhede was soms tydens intensiewe konvensionele operasies nie opgewasse vir die taak nie, juis omdat hulle militêre kundigheid sedert diensplig agteruitgegaan het.

Aangesien die gevegte in Angola teen 1989 'n strategiese dooiepoint bereik het waarna vrede bewerkstellig is, is die vraag wie die oorlog gewen het eintlik irrelevant omdat sake op die slagveld nooit tot so 'n punt gedryf is nie. Tog, in die lig van die lang openbare polemieke en politieke propaganda sedert die vredesluiting oor wie nou eintlik die Grensoorlog gewen het, wy Scholtz dan ook sy laaste hoofstuk aan die vraag. Maar juis in hierdie opsig raak sy vertolking van die oorlog problematies en verskaf hy self dualistiese antwoorde. Op 'n hele paar plekke is die boek 'n betoog teenoor ander pro-Kubaanse standpunte, dat Suid-Afrika nie die oorlog verloor het nie, maar in die meeste gevegte die botoon gevoer het, veral teen Fapla. Maar dan word weer verklaar dat niemand werklik die oorlog verloor het nie en dat alle partye "op een of ander manier as wenners uit die konflik getree het" (pp 434, 456, 459 en 462). Aan die ander kant verklaar die skrywer dat Castro wel die propaganda-oorlog van die Slag van Cuito Cuanavale gewen het en dat hy 'n meesterlike strategie was.

Scholtz skryf ook dat die SAW sedert 1987 al hoe meer 'n logistiese onvermoë ondervind het om sy troepe te bevoorraad. Dit het daartoe bygedra dat aanvalle uitgestel moes word wat taktiese voordele verdel het. Teen 1988 het die digte bosse by Cuito Cuanavale aansienlike navigasieprobleme veroorsaak en daartoe bygedra dat die SAW se gevegsplanne om terugtrekkende Angolese magte af te sny, nie na behore uitgevoer kon word nie. Mynvelde het mobiliteit ook al hoe meer belemmer, terwyl moreel verlaag is deur gebrek aan vars kos, wasgeriewe en gevegsonderdele, asook verweerde uniforms en 'n onophoudelike vlieëplaag. In hoofstuk 17 erken Scholtz dat die SAW ná Cuito Cuanavale nie meer instaat was om Angola, veral wat die lugmag betref, offensief met 'n groot mag aan te val nie. Derhalwe is daar teen die middel van 1988 'n defensiewe plan vir die verdediging van Suidwes-Afrika se grense in die geval van 'n Kubaanse aanval voorberei.

Scholtz gee ook toe dat die Suid-Afrikaanse lugmag se Mirage C2 en Mirage F1AZ vegvliegtuie teen die 1980s verouderd was en eintlik reg deur die oorlog "die spyt afgebyt het" (p 407). Die Suid-Afrikaanse vlieëniers se opleiding was volgens hem egter van beter gehalte as dié van die Angolese en Kubane. Hy kom tot die gevolgtrekking dat wat luggevegte betref, die oorlog onbeslis geëindig het (p 412). Desondanks lei mens af dat sou die oorlog voortgesit gewees het nadat die Kubaanse magte hulle teen 1989 naby Calueque bevind het, die Suid-Afrikaners as gevolg van 'n gebrek aan voldoende mannekrag en oorlogstuig, veral wat vegvliegtuie betref, waarskynlik in gevegte nederlae sou ly. Dus, wat die kwessie betref van wie die oorlog dan nou sou gewen het, bly dit in die woorde van die Nederlandse historikus Pieter Geyl "een discussie zonder eind".

Op bladsy x verklaar Scholtz dat dit sy "taak as historikus is om die verlede so akkuraat moontlik te rekonstrueer, om die feite so billik moontlik te ontleed en so goed moontlik te verstaan". In hoofstuk tien, waar Swapo en sy Plan-weermag

behandel word, maak hy egter geen geheim van sy anti-kommunistiese sienings nie en verbind Swapo gedurende die Grensoorlog aan kommunisme. Dis jammer dat die skrywer nie meer informasie aangaande Swapo se motiewe en optredes teenoor sy eie mense kon bekom nie. Daar word slegs inligting aangaande Swapo se vervolging en marteling van sy eie afvallige volgelinge weergegee wat die organisasie se beeld in die boek uiteraard hoofsaaklik negatief vertolk. Daarteenoor word die beweerde menseregteskendings van die Suid-Afrikaanse veiligheidsmagte, veral ten opsigte van Koevoet, baie lukraak behandel. Die sigwaarde van die beweerde menseregte-oortredings deur Suid-Afrikaanse soldate, waarvan daar baie in kontemporêre media van die tyd verskyn het, is dus glad nie in diepte ontleed nie. (In alle regverdigheid moet egter genoem word dat Scholtz hierdie kwessie wel ten opsigte van Suid-Afrikaanse troepe by die Slag van Cassinga deeglik onder die loep neem). Koevoet was een van die kardinale gevegsgroepe wat die gewaande en ongeoorloofde Swapo-inval van Maart 1988 in Suidwes-Afrika help afweer het en mens sou graag meer van hulle aandeel wou lees.

Verder is dit ook so dat Scholtz minimale aandag gee aan die periode 1976–1977 van die Grensoorlog, die tydperk van die sogenaamde “korporaalsoorlog”, behalwe om te sê dat die dienspligtroepe in daardie stadium nie goed teen Swapo opgewee het nie. Hoewel dit grotendeels korrek is, is daardie gedeelte van die Grensoorlog nog basies onaangeraak deur skrywers, en die heldedade, suksesse en mislukkings van daardie periode moet beslis nog aangespreek word. Mens sou ook graag wou weet, watter rol die Suid-Afrikaanse vlootoffisier en Sowjet-spioen, Dieter Gerhardt, gespeel het om Russiese en Kubaanse raadgewers vooraf te waarsku van komende oorgrens SAW-operasies in Angola. Gerhardt was tydens die Grensoorlog die hoof van die Simonstad-vlootbasis. Elke keer as 'n groot oorgrensoperasie plaasgevind het, het 'n Suid-Afrikaanse vlootskip, waarvan Gerhardt geweet het, op dieselfde breedtegraad aan die Anglolese kus gelê om radioseine vir die SAW te herlei. Die rol van die *recces* wat onontbeelike taktiese informasie aan die SAW tydens gevegte verskaf het, word wel waar van toepassing in die relevante hoofstukke genoem. Maar wat van hulle eie gevegte, soos waar sewe van hulle teen 'n oormag van Swapo of Fapla-lede heroïes gesterf het en die mislukte “Cabinda-avontuur”? En wat van die kwessie van Suid-Afrikaanse krygsgevangenes soos Johan van der Mescht en Wynand du Toit? Ander kleiner kwessies wat pla, is dat die grootste gedeelte van hoofstuk 11 oor Kuba, die USSR en Unita in Angola struktureel dalk beter by die begin van die boek sou ingepas het. Scholtz is soms ook geneig tot oordrewe beeldspraak, bv. “Die groot gepanserde kolosse [Suid-Afrikaanse tenks] het soos onkeerbare prehistoriese monsters vorentoe beweeg en alles en almal letterlik onder hul rusperbande fyngemaal” (p 301).

Maar ten spyte van bogenoemde kritiek, is Scholtz se boek, vanuit 'n Suid-Afrikaanse oogpunt beskou, goed nagevors en as gesoute joernalis beskik hy oor 'n goeie verhalende skryfstyl. Die boek lewer 'n goeie bydrae tot die historiografie van die Grensoorlog, waarvan die skywer tereg self sê die finale woord nog nie geskryf is nie. Scholtz se boek word aanbeveel vir krygshistorici en belangstellendes in die Grensoorlog. (Die resensent was self 'n dienspligtige wat grensdiens in die 1970s gedoen het).

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Another example of the power of the biography

Beverly Naidoo, *The Death of an Idealist: In Search of Neil Aggett*

Jonathan Ball Publishers, Johannesburg & Cape Town, 2012

432 pp

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R212.00

Beverly Naidoo's *The Death of an Idealist: In Search of Neil Aggett* is at once an intimate account of the author's attempt to discover a distantly known first cousin, as well as a story of the late years of apartheid. The book intertwines personal narrative with public history, to offer another example of the power of the biography as a mode of historical analysis, at once able to capture a society in microcosm while drawing in the historical macro. In her explanation for writing the book, the author recounts hearing the news of the death of Neil Aggett in police custody in 1982, while she was living in exile in England. Her return to South Africa, resurfacing her own history as a political prisoner who had left for exile in the 1960s, are the launch pads for the "search for Neil Aggett".

We are first to discover a stereotypically colonial upbringing of the young Neil in Kenya, and the role of his father, Aubrey, in the repression of the *Mau Mau*. The story follows the Aggett family's departure for South Africa, in search of greater "security"; a painful miscalculation, as it will later emerge, that spins the meaning of the word on its head. Following the Aggetts arrival in South Africa, the reader is taken through Neil's school career, where his diaries provide an interesting insight into his early ethical sensitivity, as demonstrated in his New Year resolution: "Be friendly to *everyone*" (p 41).

The narrative moves quickly to Neil following his older brother Michael into medical school at the University of Cape Town, a source of much pride to parents Aubrey and Joy. Neil's own metamorphosis from a conventional student into a romantic outsider is narrated through his letters home as well as a discussion of his early poetry. We are introduced to a student increasingly critical of societal norms and turning to Western philosophy. The reader is then introduced to Elizabeth (Liz) Floyd, a young fellow medical student, who was destined to form a lifelong relationship with Neil and is a vital source for the author.

"Searching" is the title of a poignant chapter detailing Neil's visits to London, Paris and Germany. Neil returned to South Africa, somewhat disillusioned by Europe, to complete his medical studies and headed to the Eastern Cape, with a gradually developing sense of his place in the wider scheme of things and where he encountered young black doctors, shaped in the political crucible of the Durban Medical School, for a time the centre of the Black Consciousness Movement. Here Neil showed an openness that allowed him to learn and was to set a pattern for his later years as a trade unionist. As Naidoo writes of Neil, "his ability to listen, and his openness to understanding Black Consciousness ... [became] a positive starting point" (p 76).

Naidoo's account of Neil Aggett describes a post-Soweto white left world, riven by "disputes and feuds" (p 81), of which one feud was between so-called "workerist" unions that favoured a narrower focus on the interests of the unions, as opposed to the so-called "populists", who strove to align the unions with wider

political aims, specifically the overthrow of apartheid. Perhaps one of the most evocative elements in the book is the recreation of the day-to-day lives of a counter-cultural group of people in Johannesburg, who together in varying and inchoate ways, attempted to refashion a new form of society, which emphasised communal work and sharing, and rejected the materialistic values that were (and still are) dominant. At the time, unions were viewed with a great amount of respect, as avenues through which meaningful change could be initiated, and were difficult to gain access to. As Naidoo explains, Neil was initially viewed with suspicion by those in trade union circles, as a naïve radical, too outspoken for the *realpolitik* of the unions. A happenstance meeting with Gavin Andersson, the brother of a previous classmate, led to Neil's induction and maturation from a radical outsider into a more seasoned and canny unionist. Andersson's role as political tutor is recreated with the author, who acknowledges her debt to him for introducing her to the subtleties of political debate in the activist circles of the time.

The narrative quickly gathers pace with the arrest of Barbara Hogan, a University of the Witwatersrand student and African National Congress (ANC) operative. There is an intimacy that bares witness to Beverley Naidoo's own experiences more than a decade before. Naidoo explains how Hogan is cruelly tricked into surrendering the names of "close comrades", which leads to Gavin, Neil and Liz's arrests among others. The reader is then introduced to the dark world of John Vorster Square, which Naidoo memorably compares to the spectacles of the building's namesake. The cut and thrust of police questioning form the substantial part of the narrative, as the macabre characters of the old South African secret police are introduced: Neil's chief interrogator, Lieutenant Steven Whitehead, and his maniacal superior, Major Arthur Benoni Cronwright.

Naidoo's account is able to point to the tension between the ANC in exile, and its underground "structures" in the 1980s, highlighting disconnects between the two branches, as well as the myth of formal organisation and a looser structure in reality. It was tragically the state's own obsession with a more formal hierarchical system, closer to the fantasy of the ANC in exile, which led to the police's frenzied search for a grand ANC cell structure and the brutal torture of Aggett and others in that quest. What Naidoo's account describes instead are the efforts of unionists, of an older generation and younger activists, to organise within the realm of the law; what Barney Pityana, the Black Consciousness activist, described as pushing the "Bounds of Possibility" to the limit. It is introduced in the book as "reformist practice, revolutionary content", a delicate juggling for which Neil was initially judged to be ill-suited. It was this formal, legal face, that the police set about to dismantle through brutally long hours of interrogation. Neil Aggett's statements in custody are used as a valuable source and their gradual incoherence is used to depict his growing mental anguish in the hands of his tormentors.

Naidoo describes two possible scenarios of the circumstances surrounding Neil Aggett's death: a simulated suicide, orchestrated by his torturers, or a genuine taking of his own life. As the evidence is presented it is the latter which seems more probable; a suicide which nonetheless implicated the security police, who had reportedly "broken" Aggett. The subsequent inquest into Aggett's death is told in a compelling way. Reported as the longest ever, drawn out over nine months, and compared with the inquest into Steve Biko's murder in detention four years before, Naidoo patiently follows the twists of argument of the prosecution and defence, leading to the magistrate's shocking final dismissal of the culpable

homicide of Neil Aggett by his torturers, and the exoneration of the secret police force. Sadly, it was only through Aggett's death, at the funeral in central Johannesburg, where the city was brought to a virtual standstill by a sea of "young blacks" from the townships that for a brief moment the ideals for which he had died were realised.

Naidoo devotes a few short chapters to the Aggett family's own search for justice through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), and once again Liz Floyd emerges as the powerful narrator, and indeed Naidoo accords her the honour of the final words, given at Neil Aggett's former high school, Kingswood College: "You need to learn about ... the country we live in: the effects of the past on people ..." (p 432). The importance of such an account of aboveground anti-apartheid activity, as that presented masterfully by Beverley Naidoo, must surely be emphasised. The book led to a series of articles in the *Mail and Guardian*, exposing Aggett's chief interrogator Steven Whitehead's career as a security specialist, at one time in the hire of the South African government. Such revisiting of history is able to provide both an instructive model for engagement today, as well as to balance the personal with the broader political canvas on which "History" is usually sketched.

There is a danger in the eulogy, and especially where the person's death approaches a form of martyrdom, to valorise the individual beyond recognition. The painful aspect of the book, as noted by Naidoo, is that: "The fact that he was white, and the first white detainee to die in security police hands, finally focused white attention on an issue that black South Africans had known for years" (p 310). Aggett's fame is thus in part, perversely, due to South Africa's racialised history. Part of the power of Naidoo's narrative is the way in which it links generations of activism, mentioning her own experience in the 1960s, to the role of Black Consciousness Movement activists in the early 1970s, to the trade union leaders in the post-1973 to 1976 era, and ending her account with the launch of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983. Aggett's place in that struggle was tragically cut short, but nonetheless this biography serves to illuminate the courage of generations of one, and many, young South Africans who embraced a non-racial vision for the country.

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Reading cultures in a divided past revealed

Archie L. Dick, *The Hidden History of South Africa's Book and Reading Cultures*

University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Scottsville, 2013

196 pp

ISBN 978-1-86914-247-6

R215.00

Archie L. Dick's book entitled, *The Hidden History of South Africa's Book and Reading Cultures* is an important study on the development of book and reading cultures in South Africa over the past 300 years. That the book manages to carry the reader along on this contested and often conflicted history of South Africa in an engaging style is a credit to the author. While the text follows historical chronology,

it is organised around eight themes; the opening chapter discusses the period between 1658 and 1800, and the final chapter explores a significant contemporary theme entitled, "Combating Censorship and Making Space for Books".

This reviewer found the author's use of illustrative materials such as the photographs of primary sources and sketches most valuable. Among these illustrative materials is the notebook of Johannes Smiesing, a slave and schoolmaster who spent most of his life in the slave lodge in Cape Town (p 16). The selection of such illustrations allows the reader to "read" much more than is made available in the author's text. In addition to the photographs and sketches mentioned above, the "Early Muslim Prayer Book" and "Letters of the Alphabet and Morning Hymn" in Smiesing's notebook are more than just illustrations. The reader can appreciate Smiesing's own handwriting, and perhaps ponder on the choice of words he used in the notebook. One also wonders how keeping a diary shaped his inner self. Did Smiesing consider the activity an escape or a hobby that allowed him to record his daily activities on paper; words on paper that were so much part of his life and identity as a slave and schoolmaster?

The first two chapters of the book allow the reader to become aware of the challenges and rewards of writing about books and reading in a slave society, where writing, and more so reading, always held the potential to undermine the entire slave system and its vertical social relations. The author succeeds in unearthing materials that would have otherwise escaped an untrained eye. The book introduces the reader to the unequal world of the Cape where slave masters sought not only to control the labour of their slaves, which they legally owned, but also to determine the type of knowledge slaves could acquire. While slave owners allowed slaves to learn how to read, they channelled their curiosity to reading materials that would justify the hierarchy that characterised master-slave relations at the Cape. This being so, Christian moral books were preferred over the more political writings stemming from Europe, especially France. It is revealing that this type of "censorship", or what the author calls "a simplistic causal analysis of the effects of reading material on the likely reader", influenced South African authorities from early times at the Cape to the more recent political system of apartheid. Although the author does not quite make that link, it is safe to say that what one sees during apartheid was a more aggressive destruction of ideas in the name of defending an unsustainable ideology.

Dick's book weaves together femininity and masculinity in refreshing ways. In the initial chapters, one meets women teaching reading to those who would otherwise not have had the opportunity to acquire the skills of reading and writing. From the late nineteenth century to the Second World War, women organisations were at work, building what they termed "nations of readers". While their labours ignored provincial boundaries, their focus excluded blacks. In chapter 4 the reader finds women at the forefront of the battle of ideas, so to say. The Second World War saw white women through organised formations such as the Victoria League, the Guild of Loyal Women of South Africa, the Transvaal Women's Educational Union, the Afrikaans Christian Women's Society, the South African Women's Federation and the South African Home Reading Union, taking a leading role in distributing books to soldiers in the trenches and to the injured lying in hospital beds. Not surprisingly, segregationist and race-based views that influenced the political landscape in South Africa leading up to 1948 shaped the decisions these organisations made. There was no attempt to broaden their work beyond white readers. Whenever the opportunity arose, the organisations' work reflected the

thinking of segregationist politicians. Indeed, readers would do well to appreciate what not to do when one has the means to broaden access to books and reading to society at large.

Read together, chapters 4 and 5 open an interesting debate about the roles of English progressive librarians during apartheid. These professionals seemed to have acquiesced, if not accepted, to orders from apartheid ministers in Pretoria. Like the women's organisations who vetted literature destined for black soldiers, English-speaking librarians did not raise a voice against what the author calls a "holocaust of literature" (p 93). If voices were indeed raised, they were not loud enough to disturb the mass incarnation of books, if not ideas. Leading apartheid librarians' ideas on South African society lacked what Arjun Appadurai has referred to as a "shelf life".⁵ Of course, this was partly due to the fact that they tried to defend a system that has been roundly regarded as a crime against humanity. So, in their desperate attempts to make their views look or sound scientific, they committed what Dick calls "intellectual fraud". Such was the career of P.C. Coetzee, a leading apartheid librarian who "laundered" an American educator, Jesse Shera's concept of "social epistemology" to suit his segregationist and race-based concept of "culturology of readership".

Through interviews and conversations with anti-apartheid political activists in the Cape, Dick provides new insights into how users of libraries and readers of books interpreted their actions. While in a more conventional sense, a library houses books and provides a space for reading, anti-apartheid activists such as Christian Ziervogel extended or re-defined the meaning of libraries. For these activists, the small libraries that they had in coloured and black townships served as spaces for discussions for both those who knew how to read and for those who were illiterate. Not only was the library culture transformed, the very practice of reading took on a new form. Faced with constant harassment for reading or being found in possession of banned literature such as for example communist literature, activists like Vincent Kolbe developed new ways of reading. This involved using books that were available, but focusing on quotations that meant something to their conditions. In a sense they put into practice what Steve Biko had said in the early 1970s when he wrote, *I Write what I Like*. In this case, the activists read what they liked.

Chapter 6 provides a rare analytical insight into South Africa's book and reading cultures. Dick gives details of what the Group Areas Act did to "library physical space and book supply to black and coloured townships". Dick shows that "the standards for physical space were race-sensitive", and unfair (p 103). He writes further:

Library bosses claimed that branch libraries serving 30,000 to 50,000 people should have a standard floor area of 700m² to 900m². However, for the white Sea Point branch library with a projected population of 33,430 it was 1,022m², or 30.6m² per 1,000, and for the white Camps Bay branch library with a projected population of 6,500 it was 372m², or 57.3m² per 1,000. But for the working-class coloured Hanover Park branch library with a projected population of 60,000 it was 840m², or 14.0m² per 1,000, and for Bonteheuwel branch library with a projected population of 45,000 it was 361m², or 8.0 m² per 1000.

5. A. Appadurai, "The Research Ethic and the Spirit of Internationalism", *Items*, Social Science Research Council, 51, 4, 1997.

These figures illustrate the extent to which apartheid authorities sought to manipulate and stifle book and reading cultures in South Africa. It seems that one of the reasons for this was that the government did not want coloured readers to feel comfort at public libraries or enjoy the experience of reading in a public space. In addition to the limitations on physical space, government censored, or banned, books were used as evidence against political prisoners in court, such as was the case during the Treason Trials.

While all these draconian measures were put in place inside South Africa, outside the country South Africans in exile had access to a wide and varied range of literature. Libraries such as the one at Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO) in Tanzania provided readers with Afrikaans, English and African language literature of diverse ideologies.

The Hidden History of South Africa's Book and Reading Cultures is an absorbing text. In a sense, it invites more work on reading cultures in South Africa. If that could be achieved, one can look forward to a more comprehensive history of the book in South Africa in the not too distant future.

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An important contribution to the intellectual history of South Africa

Andrew Bank and Leslie J. Bank (eds) *Inside African Anthropology: Monica Wilson and her Interpreters*

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This is a quite excellent and important edited volume. The book sets out to challenge the “official history” of anthropology in southern Africa by explicating the role of Monica Hunter Wilson’s African research assistants in the production of her ethnographies. Resisting the exhausted trope of anthropology’s “hidden colonialism”, Wilson’s relationships with her key assistants – Godfrey Pitje, Livingstone Mqotsi and Archie Mafeje – are presented as fundamentally collaborative (though not always fully acknowledged) and the knowledge produced out of these relationships characterised as “much more complex than simple dualistic models allow” (p 6). Wilson is depicted as helping nurture a “vibrant insider ethnographic tradition” via the African anthropologists who she helped train and researched with (p 5). Andrew Bank’s opening chapter argues for the importance of her childhood socialisation by her missionary parents, cut from the cloth of liberal Scottish missionary Christianity, and her schooling at the racially mixed Lovedale mission in shaping “the openness with which she related to African research assistants” (p 38). Bank shows how Wilson moved in relatively cosmopolitan and left-wing circles (her friendship with the Egyptian nationalist, Munira Sadek, and South African leftist intellectual, Eddie Roux, feature prominently) when she attended Cambridge University. Her liberal inclinations and interest in social change in Africa were nurtured in these social circles, leading her to focus her intellectual energies on social anthropology.

Andrew Bank's second chapter on the "intimate politics of fieldwork" elaborates on the "thoroughly collaborative" nature of the fieldwork Wilson conducted with her African research assistants in the Eastern Cape during the first two years of the 1930s. Bank highlights the ways in which Wilson – in a standard practice at the time to shore up ethnographic authority – largely wrote this intimacy and co-production out of her most celebrated monograph, *Reaction to Conquest*. More interestingly, Bank suggests that Wilson's key research assistants for her East London fieldwork powerfully shaped her declension view of the social and cultural consequences of urbanisation for African communities.

This point is demonstrated at greater length in Leslie Bank's chapter "City Dreams, Country Magic" where he re-reads Wilson's East London field-notes to show how her reliance on respectable mission-educated research assistants and informant networks resulted in ethnographic accounts preoccupied with the moral aspects of "detritorialisation", which was so different to the view of urban African life in Ellen Hellmann's *Rooiyard*.⁶ Wilson's field-notes reveal that she and her research assistants asked informants about their dreams, but they made no appearance in her actual published writing on East London. Bank convincingly suggests that if Wilson had drawn on this material, she might have developed a more complicated view of the relationship between the rural and the urban in shaping the identities of her informants.

The African "interpreters" at the heart of the book are least present in Rebecca Marsland's chapter which discusses the relationship between Monica and her husband Godfrey Wilson in the context of their ethnographic research in Tanzania. Godfrey's exceptional linguistic ability was a great aid to his fieldwork, but Marsland also identifies a gendered division of ethnographic labour, with Godfrey more at ease in masculinist beer-drinking spaces than Monica, who focused her energies on more reserved forms of observation in feminised spaces of home and education. After Godfrey's death by suicide at the end of World War Two, Monica began the three decade "labour of love" of turning hers and Godfrey's Tanzanian research into their "Nyakyusa trilogy"; monographs which he dominates despite her authorship. It was, Marsland argues, an exercise in "curious self-effacement", through which, ironically, she becomes a less visible "interpreter" in her own right. Andrew Bank, Sekiba Lekgoathi and Timothy Mwakaseke's chapter discusses the critical role of Leonard Mwaishumo as one of the Wilson's key Nyakyusa research assistants. He is depicted as an "insider ethnographer" who produced a significant body of "vernacular texts" in the field, which powerfully shaped the character of the Wilson's published work.

Sean Marrow's chapter explores Wilson's time at Fore Hare Native College at the close of World War Two, charting her relationships with African faculty there (like Z.K. Matthews, whose autobiography she helped compile after his death) and some of her most prominent students. Wilson was appointed at Fore Hare when its brand of Christian liberal paternalism was still largely intact. Shortly after the war, she and her African students could still hold out some hope of African academic advance. Marrow's chapter is the first of three successive chapters focusing on African students whom Wilson trained, but whose academic aspirations were ultimately blocked by white supremacy. Marrow's focus, Godfrey Pitje, showed immense promise (the research for his Masters degree included

6. E. Hellman, *Rooiyard: A Sociological Study of an Urban Native Slum Yard* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1948).

pioneering ethnographic work on sexual education among the Pedi) but his advancement within academic circles was repeatedly frustrated by racism. Leslie Bank writes about Livingstone Mqotsi's trajectory from promising Wilson protégé to exiled school teacher in Zambia and England.

Andrew Bank and Vuyiswa Swana write about Wilson's collaboration with Archie Mafeje, perhaps the most well-known victim of racism in apartheid era universities. The emphasis here is on demonstrating the importance of Mafeje's "insider" knowledge to their *Langa* monograph.⁷ Perhaps most interestingly, in the decades that followed, Mafeje very deliberately tried to distance himself from the liberal mode in which *Langa* was written. Initially, however, he was very positive about the project in private correspondence with Wilson, and more sympathetic towards respectable African elites in Langa than the youthful rebels he later embraced. The authors correctly call for caution about "projecting too confident and assertive an intellectual identity for Archie Mafeje" back into the early years of his collaboration with Wilson.

The penultimate chapter by Chris Saunders and Sean Marrow reflects on the relationship between anthropology and history in Wilson's work. Like other anthropologists of her time, she appears to have been convinced that an anthropological approach was the only way to study history in Africa, but she appears to have never lost her early interest (she initially studied it at Cambridge) in history. Her special interest in archaeology led her to playing an important role in refuting apartheid's hoary "empty land" myth. Her close relationship to Leonard Thompson was particularly important as they undertook their *Oxford History of South Africa* project, driven by their liberal commitment to break with settler historiographical traditions to incorporate South Africa's black majority into the history of the country, with an emphasis on "interaction".⁸

The discussion of behind the scenes negotiations on the production of the *Oxford History* contains some surprises: Shula Marks and Anthony Atmore, two key revisionist critics of the liberal tradition, were considered as contributors. Saunders and Marrow underline the ways in which the *Oxford History* circulated influentially within liberation struggle networks. The general emphasis is on arguing for the important – and underappreciated – contribution of the two volume project to moving South African historiography forward, in large part precisely through her pioneering (and prescient) bringing together of anthropological and historical approaches.

The closing chapter re-examines the role of research assistants in anthropological research, though largely through a reflection by Pamela Reynolds on her own fieldwork experience in this regard. Reynolds goes over the familiar ground of ethical debates which featured centrally in the "self-reflexive" turn within anthropology over the last few decades. These are fraught questions, which the previous chapters address largely through detailed empirical explication of the complexity of relationships between Wilson and her assistants. Reynolds takes a more philosophical approach to these questions, which this reader found rather less enlightening than the more fine-grained studies contained in the rest of the volume. No doubt the chapter reflects the diverse disciplinary backgrounds of the

7. M. Wilson and A. Mafeje, *Langa* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1963).

8. M. Wilson and L.M. Thompson (eds), *The Oxford History of South Africa*, 2 volumes (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1985).

participants in the original conference out of which this volume emerged, but it is perhaps not the strongest note on which to conclude an otherwise excellent book, which makes an important contribution to the intellectual history of South Africa. Clearly written, well edited and handsomely illustrated (with the exception of some grainy photographs) the book is highly recommended.

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A journey through a site of contrasts

Kees van der Waal (ed.), *Winelands, Wealth and Work: Transformations in the Dwars River Valley, Stellenbosch*

University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 2014
258 pp
ISBN978-1-86914-260-5
R315.00

This text represents the culmination of the collaboration by staff and postgraduate students from the University of Stellenbosch in the Dwars River Valley. The collaboration has resulted in an academic work that aims to examine the changes in practices and place as a result of shifts in both local and global patterns of political and economic life. The text seeks to map out a range of responses to the global neo-liberal forces at a very local level and in doing so it has touched on rather topical issues in South African anthropology and history today. Examples of these themes are shifting populations; new models of development; the slow violence of poverty and domination; and emergent and protean forms of dominance as well as responses, such as the new Pentecostalism. All in all the work takes the reader on a journey through a site of contrasts. The reader encounters gentlemen's wine estates, squatter camps, abandoned farm houses, idyllic villages (gentrification) and a people's desire for respectability through housing, family, church, work and heritage. It follows in the tradition of anthropologists like Fiona Ross who has attempted to document the experience of raw life in the new South Africa.

In the opening chapter the reader is introduced to the working concepts of the book, which are as follows: transformation, gentrification, development and *ordentlikheid* (respectability). Transformation is the old stock and trade of anthropology; the discipline has always been charting reactions to a changing world. In the past it has been about the reaction of "the Other" to colonialism, to modernity, to capitalism, to independence. And of late in South African anthropology, it has been very interested in documenting and theorising the culture of the country's political transition. *Winelands, Wealth and Work* quite aptly focuses on how the inhabitants of the Dwars River Valley are experiencing the effects of the post-1994 political transition here in South Africa. Moreover, the text blends in an examination of neo-liberal shifts and their impact on agriculture, employment and deepening poverty as well.

The second of the working concepts is gentrification. Gentrification is a visible manifestation of the transformation and thus offers a valuable lens through which to examine and compare the class and culture of economic changes. A third concept or "core notion" is that of development. This is one of the more contentious concepts due to its dubious histories. Here at the outside we are given

insight into the critical use of the notion by the collaborators. The reader is referred to James Ferguson and Arturo Escobar for their critical engagement with the idea of development. The idea of development, we are reminded, has a dual nature; on the one hand we find a development industry which is always full of hope and certainty in contrast to the “level of practice” where we are confronted with “paradox, counter-productivity, failure, ambivalence and irony” all of which the authors intend illuminating through the research process (p 19).

Lastly, the authors operationalise a term that has been popularised largely through the work of Elaine Salo (2003) and Fiona Ross (2010), namely *ordentlikheid*. The text treats *ordentlikheid* in two ways: in one instance as a defence against the imagined onslaught of the indecent and secondly, as an aspirational concept. Thus on the one hand *ordentlikheid* signals a struggle to maintain decency, social values or communal standards. In this usage, it is an attempt to “protect” the home and community from negative, external influences. The first usage of *ordentlikheid* finds its clearest expression among the middle classes, while the second usage is represented by the “fugitive aspirations” of the destitute, inadequately housed, the unemployed, the former farm worker and the poorly schooled, all of whom live in hope of attaining the social decency implied by the concept.

In the rest of this review I want to briefly summarise some of the contributions in four parts. First, the history of dispossession; second, the varying patterns of transformation as evidenced through resettlements, development interventions and gentrification; then the chapters that have a more thematic interest; and lastly, the theoretico-ethnographic conclusion. I am particularly enthused by the historical contribution on the Dwars River Valley made by Tracey Randle. The chapter uses both primary and secondary sources to construct a history of dispossession in the region. Overall the chapter is a well researched history of the region that spans most of the period from earliest European occupation to the radical policies of apartheid to the present. Moreover, the author does not simply tell the story of dispossession, but frames it within the theoretical construct of “slow violence”. The chapter is a carefully measured story that does not lose pace or flow due to paucity of sources and it provides the reader with a clear sense of the historical processes that are relevant to later chapters. This entire chapter in its relation to subsequent contributions in this volume is indicative of the amount of work that the researchers spent on co-ordinating their research questions and efforts.

The next section of the book identifies and examines three varying patterns of transformation in the region: state sponsored development and resettlement, share equity schemes and lastly, gentrification through the establishment of private secure housing estates or gated communities. These trends in transformation are examined in three different sites: Languedoc, Solms-delta, and Boschendal. The story of Languedoc resettlement is one of discontent and adjustment, social activism, social ills such as drug and alcohol abuse, but above all it is about how community is established and people eventually triumph or make do with the hand they are dealt. The tale is almost cliché in South African urban development after 1994 with the struggles to adjust to life in RDP housing developments that bring together former farm labourers, backyard-dwellers, evictees and other destitute or inadequately housed people.

Solms-Delta is a much celebrated success story of the Western Cape winelands. The main thrust of the chapter on Solms-Delta is to contrast the stated aims of land reform (in the form of a share equity scheme) as opposed to welfare ventures. The evidence the author suggests points towards privately undertaken welfare ventures, such as sport, music and profit-sharing being far more successful than official state schemes at creating empowerment and upliftment. The author argues that a small measure of paternalism on the part of those driving the scheme is partly responsible for the success of the Solms-Delta model. Lastly the Boschendal estate and the contestations it has brought to light again bring the legacies of apartheid into focus. Many fear that the proposed housing component of the spatial development plan would simply re-inscribe onto the landscape old class distinctions. Above all the concern is that these secure housing estates do not forward the goal of integration which is considered to be a key policy direction in the post-apartheid era.

The next part of the book deals with the subject matter of transformation in a very different way. Instead of focusing on sites as the previous sections did, the authors instead select particular themes to give us a view of how people are reading and dealing with the transformations. The first of these is the chapter by Kruger who deals with the slow violence of poverty. Kruger has not taken the connection between poverty and violence for granted and rather wants to offer us a critical examination of the link between two ideas – violence and poverty. Indeed she has applied a unique methodology she calls psycho-ethnography in an attempt to show how we as researchers may be complicit in the production of such accounts of poverty. Her results suggest that people experience the slow violence of poverty with a “bizarre mixture of disempowerment and agency” (p 151). If the account here is anything to go by, then we can certainly look forward to her forthcoming book.

We are further treated to chapters about the role of women “dorp supporters” (town supporters) who are the backbone of the “communities”, again echoing the work of Salo among women in Mannenberg. The subsequent chapters deal with the role of neighbourhood watches as mechanisms for policing decency in the settlements. Lastly we are given a glimpse of the changing role of religion through the increasing popularity of Pentecostal churches in what are predominantly settlements founded around churches of the Calvinist tradition. The suggestion is that the changing needs in the neo-liberal world produce a particular set of desires that the Pentecostal tradition responds to directly.

Winelands, Wealth and Work concludes with a glimpse at the Gif squatter settlement. Many residents in this and other squatter settlements across South Africa continue to live as if apartheid has never ended; that the impact of racial capitalism still haunts these localities. Robins suggests that there are worrying trends such as continued retrenchments that would make the conditions of slow violence found at Gif settlement the possible reality for an increasing number of residents of the Dwars River Valley. In conclusion, he leaves us with a cautionary question; he asks us to wait and see “whether ‘sustainable development’ in the valley becomes an economic reality or simply another dystopia” (p 229).

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A critique of military culture that is both hit and miss

Abel Esterhuise, Francois Vrëy and Thomas Mandrup (eds), *On Military Culture: Theory, Practice and African Armed Forces*

UCT Press, Cape Town, 2013

304 pp

ISBN 978-1-77582-066-6

R375.00

The origins of this book lie in the productive collaboration between the Strategy Department of the Faculty of Military Science, Stellenbosch University and the Faculty of the Royal Danish Defence College, with two editors, Abel Esterhuise and Francois Vrëy, hailing from the former institution and Thomas Mandrup from the latter. In particular, the publication benefited from a conference that was hosted by the two institutions in 2011 on military culture and African armed forces and the chapters are largely based on papers presented at this conference. This explains the nature of the edited volume.

The reader will not find “a main argument” or “a key theme” on military culture and African armed forces proffered here; rather the contributions in the book speak broadly to the topic of military culture from different angles. These include a rich variety of theoretical underpinnings, methodological approaches, as well as diverse contexts of military culture with an effort to relate most contributions in some way to African armed forces. The editors note: “Scarcity [of contemporary scholarly literature on African military culture], dated views and African contributions thus form three arguments underpinning the rationale for introducing this publication” (p xv). With one caveat the book succeeds in what it sets out to do, namely to fill the void(s) identified in this quotation (more about the caveat later).

The book opens with an introductory chapter by the three editors which provides a useful discussion on what military culture is. It then poses two sets of questions which, we are told, drive the debate on military culture. The first set focuses on “how culture informs the strategic and security outlook of a society and thus, the employment of the armed forces within a particular security context” (p xvii). These questions relate to the “culture as context” notion favoured by Colin Gray.⁹ The second set, which the editors aver are of greater relevance to the publication, “relate to the role of culture in the institutional make-up and nature of armed forces” (p xviii). This reviewer disagrees with the preference attached to the second set of questions and actually thinks that the contributions made by the book relating to the myths, discourses and (taken for granted) organising principles that come to structure societies’ expectations of militaries are equally, if not more, interesting.

Three chapters address the issue of changing societal expectations of the military and its impact on military culture. Chapter 1 by Hudson and Henk provides an overview of how the post-Cold War “broadening” of the concept “security” resulted in new roles for the armed forces, a topic also addressed by Dandeker in chapter 2. Both these chapters could have benefited from the literature on world

9. C.S. Gray, *Modern Strategy* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999).

military cultural norms and how these norms come into being, evolve and diffuse.¹⁰ Invoking the Canadian experience, Okros in chapter 3, also proposes a model for how military culture can adapt to dynamic societal expectations. Another excellent contribution speaking to “culture as context” is McKinley’s dissection and fundamental critique of security culture based on the widely held belief of the “blood sacrifice” soldiers make in the name of duty. The chapter shakes our common sensibilities of the military in a way reminiscent of Franco Fornari’s *The Psychoanalysis of War*, but does so more through a cultural studies lens than Fornari’s psychological one.¹¹

And then there is the exceptional contribution by Musambayi Katumanga, a scholar based at the University of Nairobi and Kenya’s National Defence College. Katumanga’s chapter ticks all the boxes of what this reviewer understands the editors wanted to achieve with this volume. Like McKinley, he moves beyond mainstream theory, using a critical theory framework, in particular the notions of mirror images and inverted mirror images of military culture, to explain “mutating insecurity challenges in Kenya” (p 129). In doing so, he provides a fresh African insider’s perspective on a set of cultural drivers that are usually superficially boxed under the label “weak states” or “state fragility” by mainstream Western scholarship (for a typical example of the treatment of these drivers by Western scholars, see Hudson and Henk’s chapter in this volume). Feeding his framework with the cultural impact of the colonial condition and its post-colonial triggers in Kenyan history, the chapter identifies a military-cultural nexus that is a breeding ground for “oligopoly (as opposed to monopoly) of violence” and the concomitant weakening of the state in Kenya. His framework could productively be applied to other cases in Africa.

The editors loosely group contributions to the volume into two sections. Section one addresses the theory of military culture and its relationship to society (chapters 2 to 5) and section two ‘operationalises’ military culture through a number of case studies (chapters 6 to 13). This does not mean that section two does not contribute to our conceptual or theoretical understanding of military culture, but rather that the focus is on specific country contexts. Most of the chapters in section two also address the second set of questions posed by the editors in the introduction, namely the role of culture in the institutional make-up of armed forces.

The case studies include Australia (Jans), Kenya (Katumanga), Ethiopia (Berhe) and five contributions on South Africa by South African scholars (six if Vrëy’s chapter on strategic culture and its application to post-apartheid South Africa, which is grouped in section one, is included). A reader looking for a more balanced distribution of contributions in terms of “African armed forces” as the title of the book teases, will rightfully be disappointed. However, if we excuse the South African numerical bias and take the chapters on South Africa at face value, they provide an impressively comprehensive introspection of South African military culture from respectively, a historical (Van der Waag); institutional (Nathan and Esterhuise); theoretical (Vale); and sociological (Heinecken) perspective.

10. For example, T. Ferrell, “World Culture and Military Power”, *Security Studies*, 14, 3, 2005, pp 448– 88.

11. F. Fornari, *The Psychoanalysis of War* (Doubleday, New York, 1974).

The editors conclude in the final chapter that the arguments by most of the contributing authors highlight two issues. Firstly, militaries are “instruments of war” and this necessitates a particular cultural orientation that relates to a war-fighting ethos, setting soldiering apart from other professions with the resultant need for internal cohesion reflected in military professionalism. This may be referred to as the trans-societal military cultural dimension. Secondly, militaries serve their societies and as such need to reflect societal-specific values and norms, which in turn wins them external legitimacy from their societies. The interaction, and at times tension, between these two issues and the need to balance them, impact military culture in terms of civil-military relations, military effectiveness and the value base of the military (p 268).

And now for the caveat: The editors’ aim was to fill a void in the literature on military culture and African armed forces, which is sparse and dated. Although this was largely achieved in an ultimately readable book, the editors conclude with a normative and somewhat uncritical prescription of what is deemed “necessary” to get military culture “right”. Peter Vale in chapter 10 makes a strong case for more reflexivity in scholars’ choice of theory and approach, in particular to move beyond mainstream Anglo-American dominance in this area of scholarship. But the editors are guilty of falling back on precisely that, feeling the need to artificially tie together the energised messiness of the debates on military culture presented by the contributors to the volume in a neat positivist bow:

This means, in short, that societal imperatives define the ethos and conduct of military personnel in operations, whereas military professional imperatives drive the ethos and behaviour of soldiers in the barracks during times of force development and training. Getting this right is the concentrated essence of military culture (p 269).

But is it really? Or is this the cultural horizon (or mirror image) beyond which the editors and many Western educated and trained scholars and practitioners in this field for that matter, struggle to see?

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Black medical education and struggles against apartheid in South Africa

Vanessa Noble, A School of Struggle: Durban’s Medical School and the Education of Black Doctors in South Africa

University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Scottsville, 2013
385 pp
ISBN 978-1-86914-252-0
R345.00

Aptly entitled *A School of Struggle*, Vanessa Noble’s book is a vital contribution to South Africa’s burgeoning medical historiography and its niche lies in its focus on the apartheid era’s University of Natal Medical School for black candidates. Although a few of South Africa’s iconic teaching hospitals such as Groote Schuur (in Cape Town), and Baragwanath Hospital (in Johannesburg), have recently received book-length analyses illuminating some of the issues covered in Noble’s book, the rich and complex medical history of South Africa would be incomplete without a thorough analysis of the country’s main producer of black medics during the apartheid era.

This medical school emerged in the early 1950s and claimed its spot in history as the country's first "blacks only" institution offering medical degree qualifications that were recognised by the country's professional medical bodies. In addition to this distinct characteristic, the school's historical importance goes beyond the stethoscope in that it developed to become the seedbed of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) and other anti-apartheid movements with a national resonance. As an apartheid construct, Noble says memorably, this institution "both reflected and resisted apartheid influences in complex ways" (p 2). This line of thought is charted successfully as Noble knits together a story with diverse contrapuntal strands.

Medical schools at the Universities of the Witwatersrand and Cape Town officially offered medical tuition to a token number of black candidates at the time, but as Noble argues, these students endured many racial restrictions that were associated with such white medical schools. In addition, the onset and consolidation of apartheid from the 1950s onwards made it even more difficult for these institutions to admit black students. In detailing the complexities of the founding of Durban's Medical School, Noble gives a great deal of attention to its long pre-history and its legion of benefactors such as the obscure African woman from Johannesburg's Alexandra township who donated money towards the school's construction. Zulu traditional leadership was also very supportive in this regard.

Noble offers some measured praise for the innovative curriculum the medical school offered, which incorporated the human and social sciences in addition to providing training in social, preventive and community medicine. Closer ties between the school and the Durban-based Institute of Family and Community, spearheaded by progressive doctors Sydney and Emily Kark, made the social medicine option possible. However, this later became a source of friction because the state misinterpreted social medicine to mean "socialised medicine", which was, they alleged, promoted by communist societies. Here Noble also offers another little known aspect of the Karks' history: black students' initial opposition to this apparently "ghettoising" social medicine curriculum which was not offered in other medical schools in the country. However, this cutting edge curriculum atrophied in the 1960s, not because of student opposition, but due to factors related to state disinterest, limited funding and the departure of enthusiasts.

The medical school's staff and leadership are portrayed in the book as activists and strategic in their thinking because they had to deal with a right-wing state that was hell bent on thwarting any form of racial fraternisation by creating separate institutional spaces. The staff had to walk a political cum pedagogical tightrope created by apartheid conditions, to produce a notable number of black doctors. By 1994 the institution had produced no less than 2 413 doctors. Some of them, such as Soromini Kallichurum, returned to the medical school to join the academic staff.

However, the author also indicates that very large numbers of students fell by the wayside. Academic support programmes – which included a bridging year – offered to medical students seemed to be inadequate and were surpassed by what was offered at the Medical University of South Africa (MEDUNSA), another black medical school which opened during the 1970s. In the post-apartheid context, academic support has become central to the transformation agendas of many universities in South Africa and Noble reminds us that some models work better

than others. The author also indicates that successful medical training depends on a host of other variables such as the condition of teaching hospitals. The Durban students were exposed to appalling conditions in teaching hospitals such as the King Edward VIII Hospital which in many ways is a stark mirror image of the condition of some hospitals twenty years after the attainment of democracy. In addition, the training and experience of black medical students and interns was compromised by rampant racism. For instance, the book covers the problem of white nurses' insubordination to illustrate the racism and awkward situations experienced by trainee black doctors in teaching hospitals.

Turning to the students who enrolled at Durban's medical school, the author shows that many of them were driven into political activism by frustration with systematic subjugation. This activism gave birth to "a confident and defiant black consciousness" from the 1960s (p 5), paving the way for a broader activism which intersected with national liberation struggles during the 1970s and 1980s. As the seedbed of the Black Consciousness Movement, led by well-known activists such as the late Bantu Stephen Biko, Noble also illuminates some interesting links between this movement and African community healthcare development schemes spearheaded by former students such as Mamphela Ramphele.

And yet the book does not merely eulogise this black consciousness and activism, but tells a more complex story that does not shy away from the contradictions and divisions within the student body. The student collective was characterised by tensions along ideological and ethnic lines: black Africans and Indian Africans often had divergent political opinions. Family backgrounds, different visions and gender differences also created fault lines within the student body and there were also some students who were politically apathetic for a variety of reasons. This approach by Noble successfully undermines the unitary and triumphalist narrative of the post-apartheid era. However, this is done with a great deal of empathy.

The author also uses a good selection of illustrations to give readers some useful visual insight into the history of the institution. A couple of hilarious cartoons and photographs help colour the story for the readers. For instance, photographs on pages 139 and 140 show the extremely close location of black medical students' recreational facilities and residence to the industrial oil refinery, giving a powerful picture of the responsible authorities' total disregard for the welfare of these students. Unfortunately, the images on the cover page are of poor quality, something which should be blamed on the publishers. However, this book should not be judged by its cover! Indeed, in the appendices section, the book also has five tables that have some useful statistics on enrolment and through-put, covering the years from the late 1950s to the early 2000s.

As the author is quick to admit, the book does not claim to cover all aspects of the medical school's complicated history. Nonetheless, in the interests of scholarly engagement one could pick on one or two lines of inquiry that could be enlightening if probed beyond the covers of this book. Noble broaches the notorious issue about the prohibition of black students from accessing white patients and dissecting cadavers as part of their training, which meant, it seems, that apartheid decreed that racial fraternisation was not allowed in life or in death. Ethically, this practice was wrong – period. But practically, did this have any impact on a group of medical graduates who were destined to work among their fellow blacks anyway? Asked differently, which diseases were – and are still –

“whites” only or “blacks” only ailments? Does pathogenesis differ between these races?

Also, although the author did well to show that black doctors helped resolve communication constraints and cultural incomprehension in the delivery of healthcare, the patients’ own views and experiences with black and white doctors could have balanced the narrative. There are also a few – perhaps even minor – editorial issues that could have been smoothed out. Obviously the chapters were written separately and put together at a later stage. So the author introduces, almost fully, some characters more than once: for instance, Soromini Kallichurum (pp 55–56 and 135) and Alan B. Taylor (pp 63 and 136). There is also lack of consistency in currencies used: the bursary schemes are still quoted in pounds (even since 1961) while the cost of constructing the Alan Taylor residence is given in rands.

However, these minor editorial issues do not detract from the shine of a well-written and accessible book. Durban’s medical school and the country’s legion of former medical students; current medical students; medical humanities students; public health department bureaucrats; and the informed public, will find this book very valuable, especially at a time when South Africa is grappling with reforming its public health system to introduce a National Health Insurance scheme. The training and deployment of doctors is still an issue of concern, and Noble’s book could be an important source of insight.

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