

## Book Reviews

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## Boekresensies

### Personal and panoramic

**Patricia W. Romero, *African Women: A Historical Panorama***

Markus Wiener Publishers, Princeton, 2015

359 pp

ISBN 978-1-55876-576-4

US\$ 26.95

In *African Women: A Historical Panorama*, Patricia W. Romero seeks to address what she perceives as a gap in existing scholarship on the history of African women, namely a lack of personalisation and case studies in accounts of women who have made important interventions in the historical narratives of Africa. While recognising the many high quality works by noted historians, Romero introduces her text by expressing her desire to “produce a different type of book” (p ix). This is something she certainly accomplishes because her text deviates somewhat from most historical scholarship in terms of its style and format. Her focus throughout the work is indeed on the women whose personal stories and contributions she wants to bring into sharper relief in academic conversations. As her title suggests, the view she provides on African women is a panoramic one that encompasses pre-colonial, colonial as well as post-colonial African history. The attempt to combine a panoramic overview with a focus on personal stories is a challenging task that Romero has set herself but, I would argue, she manages to produce a text that adds value to our academic understandings of African women’s roles in history.

Given the subject matter, the author is obliged to pay considerable attention to the myriad forms of epistemic, socio-political and economic oppression that have shaped the narratives of women on the African continent and continue to do so. Without shying away from the reality of gendered oppression, Romero never loses sight of women’s resilience and the creative ways in which they exercise agency, even in contexts of severe structural disempowerment. This commitment to celebrating African women’s strength is reflected in the chapter delineation with Chapter One dealing with “Pre-colonial Queens and Powerful Women” and the final chapter being entitled “The March of the Women”. This last chapter is devoted to African women’s vital contributions in spheres ranging from literature to fashion and sport. By beginning and ending her text with celebratory stories of women’s power and accomplishments, the author cushions the necessary but difficult discussion on topics such as female genital mutilation and gender violence in times of war.

Chapter Two deals with European interactions with the Khoe/San at the Cape of Good Hope and Romero begins with a useful differentiation between the “various Khoisan people we shall be meeting at the Cape” (p 21). This sense of the author and readers being fellow travellers through a narrative that is populated by characters whose stories are highly personalised and whom readers get to meet is evident throughout the text and the writing style aligns well with Romero’s aim of offering “a different type of [history] book” (p ix). This chapter also includes a discussion of imagery and the racialised and gendered female body that resonates with topical contemporary debates about the symbolic and discursive violence that are all too often inherent in evaluations of women’s appearance. Chapter Three is devoted to the subject of women and slavery. This is obviously a weighty topic that has received extensive scholarly attention and in less than twenty pages, Romero does not claim to offer an in-depth analysis. She does, however, provide a helpful overview that distinguishes between the different manifestations of slavery in the specific temporal and spatial location of the Cape of Good Hope under the Dutch, in East Africa and in West and Central Africa. Romero again combines personal stories with a larger overview that considers the enduring legacy of slavery on societies throughout the continent. Chapter Four is titled “Transitioning” and it attempts to cover a range of topics that is so broad that it feels somewhat unwieldy at times. It includes sections on missionaries in South Africa; missionaries and travellers (which includes poetry as well as references to the literary outputs of Chinua Achebe); women as royals and their ceremonial roles; witchcraft; spirit possession and traditional beliefs. Each of these brief sections deals with issues that could easily be, and have frequently been, the sole topics of entire monographs or edited collections.

In Chapter Five, titled “The South African Body: Defiled, Diseased, Devastated, and Destroyed”, Romero turns to another widely analysed subject, namely the story of Sara Baartman. This discussion furthers her earlier consideration of imagery and the female body but it does not really add any new insights to Baartman’s history. In the same chapter, Romero then moves to sections dealing with women and the South African War (including extracts from the reports of Emily Hobhouse on concentration camps); rural African women; patriarchy and hardships; the evolution of women as leaders; the role of Germany in South West Africa (now Namibia) and Herero women. Chapter Six deals with another substantial subject, namely women and colonialism in Africa, while Chapter Seven considers women’s experiences of anti-colonial conflict and health. The important issue of health is discussed further in Chapter eight where Romero’s analysis of women’s concerns in post-colonial Africa includes the vital topics of AIDS and female genital mutilation. As is to be expected, the personal stories that intersperse this chapter are particularly harrowing.

This is a text that will be of use to scholars of African history and politics as well as those whose analytical focus is on gender. Perhaps partly as a result of her interest in the personal narratives of women, Romero’s text is accessible enough for a non-specialist market. In terms of the sheer range of the topics that are addressed, this is an ambitious work and it might be criticised for failing to add new insight into each of those areas of research. However, Romero makes it clear that this was not her

intention. For the reader who approaches the text with a sense of being respectful of what Romero set out to do, there is much to be gained from this personalised panorama.

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**Appealing work for those interested in colonial and labour history**

**Duncan L. Du Bois, *Sugar and Settlers: A History of the Natal South Coast 1850-1910***

Sun Press, Bloemfontein, 2015  
415 pp  
ISBN 978-1-920382-70-4  
R375.00

This recent publication by Duncan L. Du Bois is an interesting and rich account of the history of Natal's South Coast during colonial times. It is based on Du Bois's PhD thesis entitled "Sugar and Settlers: The Colonisation of the Natal South Coast, 1850–1910", which was accepted by the University of KwaZulu-Natal in 2014. Natal's South Coast during colonial times was known for its cultivation of coffee, cotton and sugar. However, it was the cultivation and production of sugar which promoted the arrival of settlers and the extension of Natal's southern frontier to the Mtamvuna River.

In this interesting publication the author provides a rich narrative of the socio-economic, political and geographical factors that shaped and defined the history of the South Coast. Colonisation along this coast was far from benign. It was jettisoned against multiple factors and events. For example, shortage of labour, lack of infrastructure (roads, railways and bridges), political woes, and the impact of the Anglo-Zulu War were all significant issues. There were tireless efforts by settlers in the Alexandra and Alfred counties to redress some of their pertinent grievances. For example, between 1880 and 1885, no less than 18 petitions were submitted to the government: four concerned the need to establish telegraphic links between the South Coast and Durban and Pietermaritzburg; three requested the establishment of a separate magistracy in the Lower Umzimkulu district of Alfred County; three called for improvement to the harbour works and the granting of fiscal status to the river port; while two appealed for the construction of a bridge over the Mkomanzi; and others dealt with general colonial issues.

The book is divided into three parts. Part One provides a comprehensive account of settlements in the area such as Isipingo, Lower Mkomanzi, Alfred County, and Alexandra County. It also documents the role and contributions of pioneer families such as the Reynolds and Crookes and their influence on the economic and political development of the South Coast region.

Part Two examines settler interaction with the African and Indian communities and how this shaped and defined racial attitudes. Settler concerns towards the African population were largely in the context of land purchases and ownership; labour migration; the scarcity of African labour and issues of crime and security. In examining the Indian settlement along the South Coast, Du Bois highlights anti-Indian hostility in the context of trade, settlement and labour. Anti-Indianism was displayed by both colonial officials and settlers who were keen to retain white control of the retail, wholesale and African trade. Hence trading licences became a contested issue in the region (as indeed it did in other parts of Natal). Settler concern against “itinerant traders known as dukawallahs” led to calls for the restriction of trade (retail, wholesale and hawkers) licences to Indians. These narratives provide some interesting insights into colonial racial attitudes, the competition for trade, land ownership, and labour issues.

Part Three examines the South Coast region between the years 1894 and 1910 in the context of economic growth (including matters such as capital, shipping, roads, railways, property investment, and commercial agriculture); pestilence (particularly locusts and rinderpest); and political instability (notably the Anglo-Boer War and Bhambatha Rebellion). However, what is lacking in this study is a gendered lens on the lives of the settlers along the South Coast. In Part Three, some aspects of settler society are eluded in the context of the role of women (as well as in Part One, where Mrs Georgina Nelson's account provides a glimpse into the role of women in colonial history) but it is very limited both in scope and content. Issues such family life, religion, education, household structures and gender roles could have been explored further to highlight colonial attitudes towards settler women and the challenges they endured in the process of setting up homes along the South Coast. For example, what role did women play in settler society? Did they participate in civil society and if so, at what level? What economic and political opportunities were available for women in colonial society?

Nevertheless, Du Bois must be commended for his extensive use of primary sources such as Government Gazettes, Blue Books, parliamentary sessional papers, magisterial reports, debates of the Legislative Assembly, commission reports, diaries, and newspapers – all of which are amply supplemented by secondary sources. This adds to the rich narrative on the history of the South Coast's economic and social development. Collectively, these sources provide new insights and approaches to the study of colonial history in Natal.

In conclusion, Du Bois makes a valuable contribution to the historiography on colonial Natal, more particularly that of the South Coast region. It is a stimulating and thought-provoking study that seeks to unravel the complexities and challenges of the early settlers and their interaction with Indian immigrants and the indigenous peoples of the region. Themes such as racial hierarchy, class, identity, and labour permeate the book, highlighting the interactions and connections between each of them and how they impacted the history of the South Coast. The work challenges traditional historical perceptions and generalisations of the South Coast region by

unearthing new perspectives and lost narratives of a significant area in colonial Natal. It is based on original research and will certainly prompt historians to re-examine and re-think Natal's colonial history in the context of its socio-economic development. This important study will certainly appeal to students and scholars who are interested in colonial and labour history.

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### **New avenues for research on Setswana-speaking communities revealed**

**Andrew Manson and Bernard Mbenga, *Land, Chiefs, Mining: South Africa's North West Province since 1840***

Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 2014

191 pp

ISBN 978-1-86814-771-7

R350.00

Interest in the historical dynamics of ethnicity and land ownership in South Africa have been on the rise recently. In the introduction to this work, the authors deal with the importance of the history of the Setswana-speaking population of today's North West Province of South Africa. They also provide detail on the location of the province and show that the territory offers a number of unique features, including its important mining industry. The authors have in the past published scholarly work on the Batswana and their history. In this publication, they continue in the same vein by highlighting some of the neglected aspects of Batswana history. The information is drawn from unpublished material and the existing literature compiled by both researchers. It attempts to fill the gaps that exist in our understanding of the history of African people in the region, especially in the twentieth century. Excluding the introduction and the conclusion, the book is divided into seven chapters which are chronologically and thematically linked to one another.

The first chapter investigates the role played by the Tswana leader, Chief Moiloa II of the baHurutshe in the context of the broader history of Batswana in South Africa. Generally speaking, as argued by the authors, the prominent historical Batswana personalities are well-known and respected in South Africa, but little has been written on them. In 1834, Moiloa II and Mokgathe settled in a place called Modimong on the Harts River. It was here that they were attached to the Kora, an independent Khoekhoe community under the leadership of David Mossweu. During this period a power struggle over succession ensued between Moiloa II and his uncle. The former collaborated with the London Missionary Society (LMS). The LMS was prepared to receive the baHurutshe in the Madikwe district and sought to convert the Southern Batswana to Christianity, emphasising education and the cultivation of European mores and cultural norms. This challenged the ethical values and belief systems of the baRolong and baTlhaping. Towards the end of 1858, Moiloa II requested the LMS missionaries, then with the Bakwena at Diteyane in Botswana, to

visit him, and three missionaries, led by the Reverend Ferdinand Zimmermann did so. The involvement of the missionaries with the Batswana changed their lifestyle in significant ways.

Chapter 2 provides a brief discussion of the South African War (1899–1902) and its aftermath to 1908. Here the authors explore and analyse the various roles played by the black participants in the war and its impact upon them. Interestingly, the chapter contributes to the relative lack of scholarly works on the participation of black people in the so-called Anglo-Boer War, although in recent years this has been addressed to some extent. With this chapter, the misconception that black people were largely unaffected by the war is corrected. The focus of the chapter is on the baKgatla, the baRolong, and the baHurutse, with passing reference to minor players, such as the baFokeng, baTlokwa and others.

In chapter 3 the authors elaborate on the question of land disputes from 1900 to 1940. This was termed by many historians as the “crisis of control”. Land acquisition disputes and other material interests resulted in conflict, either among ruling factions or between the chiefs and their followers. The distinct ethnic characters of the communities were also sources of conflict. During this 40-year period, the authors argue, the issue of ethnicity became the glue that kept the disparate factions of communities together. Nevertheless, instability remained, caused primarily by questions of control over material resources.

Chapter 4 begins by unpacking the nature of life in the reserves of the former western Transvaal and Northern Cape, which today constitute the North West Province. In the reserves, separate “tribes” were meant to occupy district reserves; the land was allocated and used on a communal basis and white farmers could not own land in these reserves. This system of land occupation began in 1910, the year the Union of South Africa was created, and ended in 1955 with the enforcement of the Bantu Authorities Act that paved the way for the incorporation of the “Bechuanaland Reserves” into the emerging Bantustans. The chapter highlights the challenges the Batswana faced in settling in the reserves. The hardships they experienced are highlighted, including that the land allocated was not suitable for agriculture; there was low rainfall; poor quality of soil; the vegetation was dominated by scrub grasses; there were frequent droughts; and locusts devastated the area in 1925 and again in 1933. Furthermore, the communities suffered when the government tried to curb the locusts by spraying the crops – leading to the death of many animals. The growth of a progressive rural elite and an administration generally supportive of innovation, education and “advanced” farming methods emerged.

Chapter 5 highlights rural resistance with specific reference to the baHurutshe revolt during the years 1957–1958. This was in response to the issuing of passes for women in the Moiloa Reserve. The chapter provides an analysis of the reasons for the revolt, led by Abram Moiloa, and supported by the women. The authors succeed in locating the resistance in the broader women’s struggle against the question of passes in South Africa. The state managed to quell the resistance and a number of people

were arrested. The matter was worsened by the government's withdrawal of the postal and transport services in the reserve, thus denying resisting women access to medical treatment. The authorities also attempted to enforce the acceptance of the passes by involving the courts. For the most part this proved successful; 474 people were arrested, but only 39 convictions were made. The failure to obtain convictions was also due to the baHurutshe enlisting the services of Shulamith Muller and George Bizos.

The next chapter, chapter 6, discusses the politics of Bophuthatswana as a Bantustan from 1977 until 1994. It examines how the land, comprising the western Transvaal bushveld and the former Bechuanaland reserves, was incorporated into Bophuthatswana under the leadership of Chief Lucas Mangope. The role of the political parties which contested the Bophuthatswana political space, such as the National Seoposengwe Party and the Bophuthatswana National Party is discussed. The latter's split in 1975, which led to the formation of the Bophuthatswana Democratic Party under Mangope, is also examined. In the 1980s, Mangope tried to bring many powerful *merafe* in the bushveld and Bophuthatswana under his direct control. The first were the baKgatla ba Kgafela in the Pilanesberg/Rustenburg area. It was in the 1980s that Mangope continued in his attempt to crush and replace rural-based opposition, particularly among non-Tswana chiefdoms. His government's power was demonstrated when he alienated the baTlhaping in Taung. He ordered the killing of what was referred to as the "surplus" donkeys in all the districts of Bophuthatswana.

Finally, chapter 7 summarises the impact of the expansion of the platinum mining sector and the massive windfall that accrued for nearly all the baTswana in the Rustenburg region. It discusses how the baFokeng successfully obtained an equitable share of the royalties from Impala Platinum. Interestingly, to date, their affairs are still largely conducted under the auspices of the Royal Bafokeng administration, headed by the current Kgosi Leruo Molotlegi of the Royal Bafokeng Nation.

On reading this book, it is apparent that the authors have simply scratched the surface as far as this kind of history is concerned. The intention can be summarised as opening up a number of new perspectives which will hopefully be explored more fruitfully in the future. The book is recommended as a "must read" for historians and South Africans in terms of expanding their understanding of Setswana-speaking communities and their histories in South Africa.

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## Eugène Marais herontdek

**Carel van der Merwe, *Donker Stroom: Eugène Marais en die Anglo-Boereoorlog***

Tafelberg Uitgewers, Kaapstad, 2015

531pp

ISBN 978-0-624-07342-0

R400.00

*Donker Stroom* is 'n aangrypende stuk werk. Carel van der Merwe vertel die fassinerende verhaal van Eugène Marais se lewe voor, tydens en na die Anglo-Boereoorlog wat tot nou toe onbekend was. Die implikasie hiervan is dat daar nou nuwe insigte oor die enigmatiese Marais bekom is. Hy was nie slegs die digter, koerantman, natuurwetenskaplike en Afrikaner held waarvoor hy vandag nog bekend is nie. Sy doen en late in die tydperk 1887–1907 wys dat hy 'n groter rol gespeel het in die vorming van Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis, en dié van gebeure rondom die Anglo-Boereoorlog spesifiek, as wat ons tot nou toe gedink het.

Die boek begin met 'n verduideliking van die agtergrond waarteen die outeur se navorsing geskied. Van der Merwe werp lig op die gapings in die bestaande kennis oor Marais se lewe, veral die tydperk rondom die Anglo-Boereoorlog, en hy verduidelik watter leidrade hom geprikkel het en tot verdere navorsing gemotiveer het. Wanneer hy dan die leisels van Eugène Marais se lewensverhaal in 1887 optel, volg 'n verhaal wat die verbeelding aangryp – sy tyd as joernalis in die Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR) en sy bemoeienis met die Uitlandersaak, sy jare in Londen as regsstudent, sy ekspedisie deur die destydse Portugees-Oos-Afrika en die versoenende rol wat hy na afloop van die oorlog gespeel het. Om die besondere aard van die werk gestand te doen, mag daar nie veel meer van die inhoud in 'n boekresensie soos dié weggegee word nie.

*Donker Stroom* is 'n groot stuk geskiedskrywing. Die diepte navorsing word bewys deur meer as 70 bladsye se bronverwysings, eindnotas en bronnelys. Desondanks lees die boek egter relatief maklik. Dit is tematies goed georganiseerd, die hoofstukindeling is slim en die feit dat al die voetnotas agterin die boek verskyn, maak dat die leser somer flink vorder. Dit verg egter steeds taamlike konsentrasie aan die kant van die leser, maar as dit gelees word soos 'n roman, soos wat dit die outeur se oorspronklike intensie was om te skryf (p 2), is dit 'n genotvolle en ryke leeservaring.

Soos dit 'n goeie biografiese werk betaam, vertel *Donker Stroom* meer as slegs die lewensverhaal van Marais. Dit is ook 'n uitstekende relaas van die geskiedkundige konteks waarbinne hierdie lewe afgespeel het, sowel as hoe hierdie lewe met daardie konteks verbind was. Van der Merwe verduidelik byvoorbeeld hoe iemand soos Percy FitzPatrick, wat in later jare bekendheid as skrywer van *Jock of the Bushveld* sou verwerf, bygedra het tot die groei van spanning in die ZAR voor die oorlog, en hoe Marais met hom bevriend was. Belangrike gebeure soos byvoorbeeld die “Great Deal” onderhandelinge voor die oorlog word netjies uiteengesit, en daar word verduidelik in watter hoedanigheid Marais daarby betrokke was. Wat die outeur dan vermag, is



om 'n goeie geheelbeeld te skets van Eugène Marais as aktiewe agent binne sy dinamiese historiese konteks.

Deur die loop van *Donker Stroom* word daar baie aandag aan Marais se sentimente en oortuigings as politieke joernalis geskenk – iets wat nog nie in sulke detail vantevore gedoen is nie. Die leser sien net hóé progressiewe Afrikaner vir sy tyd hy inderdaad was. Marais het in 1890 op twintigjarige ouderdom die redakteur van *Land en Volk* geword, en dié koerant het tot en met sy laaste uitgawe in Augustus 1907 'n baie spesifieke rol vertolk. Voor die oorlog was Marais en *Land en Volk* daarop toegespits om die bedrog van die Kruger bewind uit te lig, terwyl hy na die oorlog 'n versoenende rol tussen Boer en Brit vertolk het – “indirect assistance” aan die koloniale regering, soos Alfred Milner dit self gestel het (p 382). Met genoegsame voorbeelde en verduidelikings wys Van der Merwe duidelik hoe *Land en Volk* ingespan is om hierdie doelstellings te bereik.

Een van die meer opvallende aspekte van Marais se lewe wat deurgaans belig word, is sy geneigdheid om leuens te vertel. Daar word gewys hoe Marais heel moontlik aan 'n geestestoestand, naamlik pseudologia fantastica gelyk het. Simptome van hierdie toestand was:

beslis deur die loop van sy lewe by Marais aanwesig. 'n Mens dink dadelik aan sy leuens oor sy ouderdom, sy rol in die ontstaan van *Land en Volk* en die Transvaalse progressiewe beweging, sy graad aan die Cape University, sy uitslae by die Inner Temple, sy geneeskunde opleiding in Bonn, sy parool in Londen, sy propaganda ter behoeve van die ZAR, asook sy kwansuise deelname aan die Anglo-Boereoorlog (p 232).

Hier is dus 'n blik op Marais se persoonlikheid wat nog nie vantevore gedoen is nie.

Met die opbloeï van Afrikaner nasionalisme in die vroeë 20ste eeu is Eugène Marais tot Afrikaner held verhef. Sy vriend en die Afrikaner geskiedskrywer Gustav Preller was hoofsaaklik hiervoor verantwoordelik. Marais se rol in die Taalbeweging en sy pionierswerk in die velde van Afrikaanse poësie en natuurwetenskaplike navorsing het van hom 'n ikoon gemaak. *Donker Stroom* ontbloot egter nuwe insigte oor Marais se lewe wat sy ikoon status bevraagteken. Dit is byvoorbeeld duidelik dat sy politieke oortuigings in die tyd rondom die Anglo-Boereoorlog nie gestrook het met die beeld van hom wat Preller geskep het nie. Hierdie verskynsel sê dalk egter meer van Preller as geskiedskrywer en Afrikaner nasionalisme se behoefte aan helde as wat dit enige iets oor Eugène Marais sê.

Carel van der Merwe is in 2015 met die Protea Boekhuisprys vir beste gepubliseerde werk in Afrikaans beloon. Vir die uitstaande gehalte werk wat *Donker Stroom* in soveel opsigte is, en vir die feit dat hy 'n splinternuwe hoofstuk in die lewe van 'n ikoniese figuur soos Eugène Marais ontdek het, is dit die minste wat hy verdien.

**A not so far-away war...**

**Ian Liebenberg, Jorge Risquet and Vladimir Shubin (eds), *A Far-Away War: Angola, 1975-1989***

Sun Media, Stellenbosch, 2015

207 pp

ISBN 978-1-920689-72-8

R350.00

The South African helicopter-borne assault on Ongulumbashe in August 1966, a known South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) base in the north of the then South West Africa, signalled the beginning of the so-called South African "Border War". The conflict lasted for roughly 24 years until 1989. The South African Defence Force (SADF) and the South African Police (SAP) were involved in counterinsurgency operations in South West Africa from the 1960s when SWAPO categorically decided to use force in its quest to gain the independence of Namibia. The SADF, under the auspices of Operation Bombay, also assisted the Portuguese government in Angola during its counterinsurgency campaign against the various nationalist movements within the territory. These were the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). The general security situation in southern Africa changed drastically in 1974 following the overthrow of the Portuguese government during April of that year. Angola gained its independence from Portugal in November 1975, and the MPLA assumed leadership of the country despite an ongoing civil war. The South African government sought to deliver a crushing blow to both SWAPO and the MPLA by intervening in the Angolan civil war.

The SADF conducted a series of cross-border military operations into Angola in support of UNITA until the implementation of UN Resolution 435 in 1989. The independence of Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, and the safe havens and support offered by these countries to South African nationalist movements, furthermore diminished the so-called *cordon sanitaire* in southern Africa. It was against this backdrop that the SADF became increasingly involved in the Cold War in Africa as a proxy of the Western powers – and in particular the United States of America, while Russia and Cuba actively participated in the war in Angola in support of the MPLA government. This created a situation conducive for the South African liberation movements, and in particular, the African National Congress (ANC), and its military wing uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK), to challenge the political rule of the apartheid government aggressively from the relative safety of the southern African "frontline" states. Despite the independence of Namibia in 1990, and the advent of democracy in South Africa in April 1994, the history surrounding the conflicts in southern Africa during the Cold War, and the related independence struggles, are still highly contested. Proverbial "history wars" are still being fought between various academics, soldier-authors, and amateurs from both sides of the conflict.

The 2015 publication of *A Far-Away War: Angola, 1975-1989*, provides a fresh perspective on all these conflicts. The editors, Ian Liebenberg, Jorge Risquet and Vladimir Shubin, offer a compendium of chapters which provide an alternate view to the traditional drum and trumpet histories of the SADF veterans on the Border War. It is commendable to see a former South African conscript, a Cuban revolutionary and the former head of the Africa Section of the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, joining forces to publish a book on the Border War. All three editors were also in one way or another personally involved in the conflict in southern Africa throughout this period.

The aim of the book, according to Liebenberg, is to contribute to the wider understanding of the war in the south of Africa and to the ongoing socio-historical dialogues about this conflict, by providing a different view from that given in the published works of the former South African generals and servicemen. Furthermore, Liebenberg makes it clear that the work is exploratory, and that the various authors of the chapters offer a multitude of new perspectives and voices on the conflict in Angola and Namibia. As such, the book is a consolidated volume of some previous works by Liebenberg and Shubin and is bolstered by academic and popular inputs from South Africans, Germans, Russians, and a Cuban.

Despite its somewhat misleading title, this publication does not only deal with the South African military involvement in Angola between 1975 and 1989 but offers both a regional and international analysis of the events in South Africa and Namibia throughout the period. There are eight key theoretical chapters. In the first chapter, Liebenberg provides a brief outline of the Namibian struggle for independence over the past century. This makes for an interesting read, because it is of paramount importance to understanding the origins of the Border War. In the following chapter, Phil Eidelberg analyses the Angolan War through the lens of a Cold War template, in which he postulates the primary motives behind the foreign participation of both Russia and Cuba in the wars in southern Africa and the Horn of Africa.

Two chapters, one on the militarisation of South African society between 1972 and 1988, and another on national service and resistance to conscription are, in my view, the backbone of the publication. They provide valuable insights on the home-front of the conflict and go some way towards explaining the rampant militarisation of South African society throughout this period. The strength of these chapters is that they are written by former national servicemen in the SADF who had first-hand experience of military service and border duty during the Border War. Incidentally, the authors later joined the various anti-apartheid movements and became active war-resisters involved in the End Conscription Campaign, the National Union of South African Students, the Voëlvry Movement and the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA).

In addition, Liebenberg provides an interesting chapter on the historical relations between South Africa and Russia which stretches from the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902) to the liberation struggle of the latter half of the twentieth century. There

are also three fascinating chapters which deal with the Soviet, Cuban and East German involvement in the Border War and the military, political and economic support which these countries offered the MPLA, SWAPO and the ANC. These chapters include references to Russian, Cuban and German archival material on the conflict. As such, the contributions provide a voice from the other side. The book concludes with three chapters of photographs of previously unseen images of the war.

The most obvious gap in the book is the lack of narratives from the MPLA and SWAPO on the Border War. This matter was discussed at some length during the “War for Southern Africa” symposium organised by the Departments of History and Military History of Stellenbosch University. The hallmark of this symposium was indeed the fact that the differing opinions offered by the various speakers throughout the day were acknowledged and respected, and that an academic space was created for a non-political discussion on the war.

The symposium concluded that access to the South African Department of Defence Documentation Centre (DOD Archives) is relatively straightforward, but permission to view documents in the MPLA and SWAPO military archives is diametrically more complicated. One can only assume that any application for access to the MPLA and SWAPO archives will have to follow a political channel fraught with bureaucratic hurdles. However, unless these archives are opened to researchers in the future, the final word on the Border War will never be written, nor will a complete understanding of the conflict be gained. The classified archival material in the DOD Archives can, however, be accessed through recourse to the Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA) of 2002, and it is thus no surprise that archival material from this archive is mainly cited in historical works dealing with the conflict to date. Despite this, it is commendable that some of the authors of this book have gained access to the Cuban, Russian and German archives, which strengthens the source base of the publication.

In general, the book comprises some 200 pages, of which the chapters per se only stretch to about 120 pages. However, a very useful, detailed bibliography compiled by Gert van der Westhuizen, is also provided, listing the myriad of source material available on the Border War. The bibliography includes the books, academic articles, chapters in books, reports, unpublished theses, internet sources, websites, literature, audio-visual sources and art exhibitions that deal with the war.

I highly recommend *A Far-Away War: Angola, 1975-1989* to all those interested in the Border War and the liberation struggle in South Africa, Angola and Namibia. It is a welcome addition to the burgeoning literature on the conflict that raged in southern Africa at the time, because it challenges some preconceived, and often conservative, historical notions. The book should be considered for possible inclusion in study material at university level for courses focusing on aspects of war and society in southern Africa during the Cold War period.

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## **Border War nostalgia, political amnesia, and a real life tragedy**

### **Delville Linford with A.J. Venter, *As the Crow Flies: My Bushman Experience with 31 Battalion***

Protea Book House, Pretoria, 2015

287pp

ISBN978-1-4853-0268-1

R275.00

*As the Crow Flies* is the latest in a spate of Border War books to hit the shelves and, no doubt, will be devoured by an ever growing and appreciative audience. The authors of these books put pen to paper for a complex set of reasons. Some do so to come to terms with a difficult and harrowing period of their lives. Others do it to “set the record straight” and give meaning to the sacrifices which they and their comrades made on behalf of a government that was the pariah of the world. Yet others, do so to provide a record of their service for posterity. The events that took place in the Border War were often seminal in the lives of the participants. Sometimes the narratives they produce are confessional, but more often, they are used to justify their actions in a brutal war. Delville Linford and many others of his time see themselves as honourable, apolitical soldiers, fighting for the government of the day.

Few who experienced the trauma of the “Bush War” will readily admit that they fought to uphold the apartheid system. Many will reason that they risked their lives and that of their men to halt the advance of communism and buy time for the politicians to negotiate an equitable settlement. The context of this book is very different from the world that we inhabit today. The author hails from a period when many of his peers honestly believed that they were fighting to uphold Christian and “Western civilised” values against a barbaric, violent, backward and chaotic enemy, influenced and manipulated by the dreaded scourge of communism. They saw themselves as likeable, noble individuals who merely responded to the “terrorist” and communist threat with a calm, measured, well-trained and capable force. Military service was heroic, an opportunity for personal growth and a necessary sacrifice for the common good. For many, it was a rite of passage and a coming of age in pursuit of a noble cause.

Linford sums up many of these sentiments in one concluding sentence:

So ended the year of our Lord 1975. I was glad to have been a part of such a remarkable and exhilarating adventure and was more than happy that the Good Lord had thought it fit to bring me out of the whole thing unscathed. I was also enormously pleased that I was able to play my small part in the history of the Bushmen people and 31 Battalion (p 252).

The backdrop for the narrative is set in 1974, during the period just before the Portuguese withdrawal from Angola. The South Africans launched a hasty and ill-prepared invasion of Angola called Operation Savannah. In this ill-conceived operation, Delville Linford, the author, was in command of Combat Group Alpha, a

ragtag assortment of ex-FNLA deserters and two Bushmen companies. By all accounts, Delville Linford was an accomplished career soldier having joined the military in 1953. He later graduated with a BMil from the Military Academy in 1957. His formal training and area of expertise was with the artillery until 1972. In 1973 he was appointed senior South African liaison officer to a Portuguese sector commander at Serpa Pinto, Angola. It was during this period that he learnt of how the Portuguese effectively used Bushmen in a counter-insurgency role. His time with the Portuguese was short lived but instructive. He returned to South West Africa in 1974 where he started training the Bushmen based at Omega, later called Battle Group Alpha, as part of Operation Savannah.

The story of the Bushmen who fought for South Africa in the Border War began long before they became part of the South African Defence Force (SADF) in 1974. Their military service started with the Angolan-Portuguese colonial government. The Portuguese Intelligence Service began to recruit Bushmen in 1966 to bolster the intelligence and reconnaissance needs of their security forces. These Flechas, or arrows as they became known, grew to a complement of over 2 000 by 1974. The Portuguese took advantage of the long-standing animosity between black Africans and Khoisan to facilitate the recruitment of the latter to do their military bidding. The Flechas took to their new role with aplomb and soon graduated from mere intelligence gatherers to become fully fledged soldiers. They wore Portuguese uniform and went into battle with modern assault rifles and equipment. In exchange for their new found status and safety (their families were accommodated on various bases), many accepted Christianity and gave their unflinching loyalty to the Portuguese.

Inevitably, the demise of the Portuguese colonial government in 1974 brought about danger for all those who had cooperated with the colonial forces. During the seven months between the collapse of the Portuguese government and the granting of independence to Angola, many Flechas and their families were persecuted, threatened or killed by the vengeful liberation movements. Political circumstances and survival forced the Flechas, yet again, into the hands of those seeking to maintain colonial hegemony. The Angolan Bushmen sought and found refuge across the border in South West Africa.

The Flechas were about to re-enter a new perplexing phase of the African war. Their confusion was mirrored in the distorted loyalties of the men who were now about to fight and die for South Africa. The Bushmen, who had recently fought for the Portuguese colonialists, found themselves abandoned when their former paymasters beat a hasty retreat to the safety of Portugal. They found few friends in the black African population surrounding them. Rather than suffer the revenge that was surely forthcoming, they made for the relative safety across the border into Caprivi and the welcoming hands of the SADF. Their distrust of black Africans according to Steenkamp, “was so great that even in later years, in spite of the SADF’s efforts to change their attitude, they were reluctant to go on a patrol unless it was led by a

white officer...”<sup>1</sup> Adding to the confusion was that formerly intractable enemies of 14 years were now allies and it took some effort to convince the Bushmen that they would now be fighting side by side with their long-standing foes, the FNLA and UNITA, against the MPLA.

At one level the book tells of the remarkable exploits of a band of disparate soldiers who were flung headlong into an ill-prepared conflict. Linford was an accomplished, orthodox soldier who found himself commanding an unconventional army during an operation that demanded a grasp of unconventional methods to be successful. The ever ingenious Linford took the opportunity to conduct the necessary training for his men while they were deep inside enemy held territory. His resolve is testament to a leadership style that thrives on adversity and sees opportunity rather than succumbing to seemingly insurmountable odds. The obvious military acumen of Linford, together with the resourcefulness and courage of the men he commanded, allowed them to reach the outskirts of Luanda, although heavily outnumbered and ill-equipped for such a major task. The narrative surrounding the adventures of this small band of warriors is compelling and the obstacles they encountered and surmounted along the way makes for a fascinating study of what is militarily possible, even in the face of enormous odds.

At another level, this is the story of an unfortunate group of indigenous people who were trapped by surrounding warring factions, and who had little option but to choose a side. If one is to believe Linford, then the unfortunate Bushmen were first forced to choose the Portuguese and then the South Africans in order to survive. Linford sees the South Africans as the Bushmen’s saviours, the heroes who came to their rescue when the Flechas were fleeing the murderous Angolan liberation movements. He seldom questions the ideological motives and consequent policies that underpinned the war, nor its devastating effect on the people caught up in the conflict. He does not question the price of a safe refuge in South West Africa when the Bushmen, once again, offered their services against the insurgents under the banner of the SADF. When South Africa gave up South West Africa for independence, the Bushmen were again betrayed only to be shunned by a post-apartheid democratic South African government.

Autobiographies of this kind amount to primary sources, and as such, they occupy a special niche in the Border War historiography. They contain valuable insights gleaned only by witnesses of the actual events as they unfolded. However, first-hand accounts have limitations beyond the obvious restriction of viewing the proceedings through a keyhole. Autobiographies can be highly subjective and subject to emotion, nostalgia, justification, exaggeration and a myriad of other influences that render the narrative as a less than perfect reflection of the past. Primary sources by their nature are full of prejudice and errors and it is best not to rely on them as the last word but rather to seek corroboration and clarity and indeed correction, from

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1. W. Steenkamp, *Border Strike! South Africa into Angola, 1975–1980* (Just Done Productions, Durban, 2006), p 50.

other sources. It is useful to understand the purpose for which the book is written, because often, perhaps even unwittingly, the author pens his story to serve his own purpose rather than that of history. Books such as these, together with other primary documents, will provide the foundations on which historians will be able to build their research and produce more objective material via rigorous research. Their task will be to extract the many layers of evidence contained in the book. Some of it, the witting or the intentional message of the author, but more interestingly and valuable, his unwitting or unintentional meaning. It is this which reveals the character, beliefs, attitudes and values of the author and the principles and customs of the society he and his soldiers hailed from.

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### **An unconvincing memoir**

#### **Dirk Mudge, *All the Way to an Independent Namibia***

Protea Book House, Pretoria, 2016

511pp

ISBN 978-1-48530-456-2

R395.00

Although a brief, but perceptive biography of Dirk Mudge, based on considerable research, appeared in Afrikaans in 1999,<sup>2</sup> it was good to hear that Mudge, the most important internal leader in the process leading to Namibia's independence, had followed other Namibian politicians and written his memoirs. First published in Afrikaans in 2015, these now appear in an English translation, with a Preface by Piet Croucamp. Though some of his Preface makes no sense, one can agree with Croucamp that Mudge "contributed more than most to leading those on the inside into a brave new world called democracy" (p 15). Unfortunately, *All the Way to an Independent Namibia* badly needed an editor to eliminate repetition and confusion and improve Mudge's highly descriptive, often rambling style.<sup>3</sup> In his account of his life, which he interweaves with potted history, he includes material from motions, debates and speeches, often quoting them and making some chapters almost unreadable. More

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2. A.J. van Wyk, *Dirk Mudge: Reenmaker van die Namib* (J.L. van Schaik, Pretoria, 1999), reviewed in *Historia*, 45, 1 (May 2000). For a revealing interview with Mudge conducted by Tor Sellstrom in 1995, see <http://www.liberationafrica.se/intervstories/interviews/mudge/?by-name=1>

3. For example, he says his career in politics began in 1955 and then almost immediately afterwards, in 1960 (pp 22–23); he goes on to tell us that he was a party organiser for the 1955 election (p 67) and won election to the Legislative Assembly in 1961 (p 69). He writes that the "rebellion" [sic] at Sharpeville "set the world on fire" (p 70), and that "in those days SWAPO was not a banned organisation..." (p 114), yet later tells us that it was never banned. Crocker was not Reagan's Deputy Chairman of Foreign Affairs (p 356); and the figures Mudge gives for UNTAG are incorrect (p 393).



importantly, he does not sift what is significant from what is not, fails to offer much in the way of self-critical reflection on his life and his relationships with others, and, in my view, claims too much for his own role, and that of other internal leaders, in the processes leading to independence.<sup>4</sup>

In writing about his support for Verwoerdian separate development in the 1960s, Mudge says he believed that Verwoerd “wanted to give everything to the black people he wished for himself” (p 115, also p 23) and failed to see that separate development “couldn’t work in practice” (p 23; cf. 126). At one point he does admit that he is “not too proud” of his political past (p 239), which included being an active member of the Broederbond until 1977. He showed political courage in breaking with the more extreme racist whites in the South West Africa National Party, and being willing to work with Clemens Kapuuo and, subsequently, other black leaders. For this he was denounced by his Dutch Reformed Church (p 333) and it was not without reason that Franz Josef Strauss of Bavaria sent him a bullet-proof Mercedes Benz, though he found the vehicle unsuitable for use in Namibia and abandoned it for an ordinary car (p 255). Yet for a work written from 2012 (the year, he tells us, that he began writing, when he was 84 years old), his memoirs appear out of tune with present-day Namibian realities and unintentionally reveal the limits of his break with his racist past. Although he prides himself on his colour-blindness, he writes of those not white as “these people” (e.g. p 181) and retains, for example, the term “SWAPO terrorists” (e.g. pp 111, 185, 202, 252).<sup>5</sup> Kapuuo apart, whom he calls “the epitome of a black nationalist” (p 149), he has nothing good to say of his political opponents until he comes to his long chapter on the writing of Namibia’s constitution.

In the first half of the book, after describing his family background, Mudge has interesting passages, on, say, the emergence of the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) in 1977 and he provides new information, for those interested, on the internecine infighting in the white politics of the 1970s. His visit to the United Nations in 1973 opened his eyes to the international community’s hostility to South Africa’s rule of Namibia, and he claims that on his return he persuaded Vorster to accept the idea of granting independence to Namibia via a conference of ethnic representatives, which became the Turnhalle. This he refers to as “the beginning of the peace and independence process” (p 157). He is misleading about the fate of the Turnhalle, suggesting that the Western Contact Group accepted the proposals it drafted (p 261), and is not candid, say, about where the funding for the DTA in the 1978 election came from (at least in part from the South African government, one assumes). He shows much naiveté when he writes of the role of the South African Defence Force (SADF). Essentially reproducing the SADF line on Cassinga, he goes on to mention, bizarrely and only in passing, that General Dimo Hamaambo, allegedly shown to have been responsible for Kapuuo’s assassination in documents found at Cassinga, had confessed to this when on a hunting trip on Mudge’s farm (p

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4. Speakers at the launch of the Afrikaans edition in Windhoek went even further in their claims that he helped bring democracy to Namibia. See W. Menges, “Mudge gets Credit for Namibia’s Democracy”, *The Namibian*, 29 May 2015, p 3.

5. In one place they are “freedom fighters”, see Mudge, *All the Way*, p 186.

264)! He writes that the SADF saved “our country from the ravages of war” (p 22), makes the astonishing claim that he only knew of SADF military operations in Angola after independence (pp 300, 360) and says nothing of the increasing militarisation of the north, or of the SADF role there. “At the end of the war”, he writes, “even researchers confirmed that the SA Defence Force consistently handled military activities with great secrecy” (p 111).

It is not only the role of the SADF that he claims ignorance of. Though he says that the DTA was ready to fight an election against SWAPO, he writes of how the DTA chose to make an issue of the UN recognising SWAPO as the “sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people” at the Geneva Conference of January 1981, despite being told that the UN Security Council would not recognise such a General Assembly resolution. Mudge shows no remorse for effectively helping to sabotage the Geneva Conference, which he never wanted to attend. He effectively points out the pettiness of the way he was treated by P.W. Botha on many occasions, and the absurdity of the South African government’s refusal to allow the internal Namibian governments to remove racial and ethnic laws. He still cannot really understand why Botha “tried to derail” the DTA (p 356). He is probably right to put this down to fear of the far right in South Africa in the early 1980s, but why the South African government continued on such a tack until 1989 remains difficult to explain. Mudge was effectively excluded from the important international negotiations on Namibia in 1988, only hearing of the key Geneva Protocol of August that year through the media (p 386), but he survived and was able to take a leading role in writing the Namibian constitution in late 1989/early 1990, on which he writes at length.

But how significant was his role in bringing about a democratic, multi-party independent Namibia? “Local political initiatives”, he writes “ultimately played a decisive role in finding a political solution”, and this, he says, is “not recognised by historians in South Africa” (p 389). While such initiatives should not be downplayed, his book fails to persuade this reviewer that they were indeed “decisive”.

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### **Work of great value to heritage studies**

**Derek R. Peterson, Kodzo Gavua and Ciraj Rassool (eds), *The Politics of Heritage in Africa: Economies, Histories, and Infrastructures***  
Cambridge University Press, New York, 2015  
291 pp  
ISBN 978-1-107-55230-2  
R450.00

In a manner reminiscent of some applied sciences, the discipline of Heritage Studies took off with its back against the wall. Whereas History left a long established record

in its trail, with historians having practised their craft since ancient times, Heritage Studies is a latecomer to academic study. As such, ignorance on the role of Heritage Studies abounds. In a 2005 publication, the historian, R.W. Johnson, considered the discipline of Heritage Studies as a child of the post-1994 South African dispensation when, according to him “a strange new bastard subject was born, Heritage Studies, whose content suggested it was mainly useful for training tourist guides”.<sup>6</sup>

It is true that Tourism, an academic discipline in its own right, relates to Heritage Studies, in the same way that Tourism also concerns History. Apart from the obvious observation that can be made between Heritage Studies and History, namely that they are both concerned with the past, these two disciplines are by definition highly interdisciplinary. *The Politics of Heritage in Africa: Economies, Histories and Infrastructures* brings together 13 essays that illustrate the rich scope of Heritage Studies against the backdrop of political developments on the continent. Historically, heritage resources management had a strong focus on the built environment. However, since the development of the first formal heritage legislation in France in the aftermath of the French Revolution, heritage practitioners also came to the realisation that apart from the role that heritage plays in identity and historical knowledge, heritage resources management also relates intimately to issues such as economic development and tourism.

While *The Politics of Heritage in Africa* gives the reader a sense of the general, broad scope of Heritage Studies, a great part of the material in this collection is concerned with historical developments that are relevant for heritage resources management. Interwoven into the management of heritage resources are issues of identity, with the best modern day South African example perhaps the #RhodesMustFall movement, which sparked a national debate in South Africa and gave prominence to how heritage resources should be managed. *The Politics of Heritage in Africa* explores the interrelated topics of identity and heritage consistently throughout the book, with the focus squarely on post-colonial Africa, where African independence met with decades of cultural disruptions due to colonialism and the loss of identity.

Daniel Herwitz, in an essay titled “Heritage and Legacy in the South African State and University” explores the unfolding of post-apartheid South Africa and the role of heritage in national discourses. The essay serves as a brief, but compelling introduction to the specific case study which follows. In their essay, Gary Minkley and Phindezwa Mnyaka deliver a nuanced historical picture of the establishment of the Duncan Village Massacre Memorial. The memorial was erected in Port Elizabeth in remembrance of approximately 31 people who were killed by the state security forces in 1985 at a time when apartheid violence was rampant. However, soon after its establishment, the memorial was vandalised by local residents and criticised as being a complete misrepresentation of the Duncan Village Massacre; they claimed

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6. R.W. Johnson, *South Africa: The First Man, the Last Nation*, Johnathan Ball Publishers Cape Town, 2005, p xiii

that the massacre was represented in the memorial by a figure more reminiscent of colonial stereotypes of Zulu warriors than residents of Duncan Village in 1985.

Museums play a central role in the preservation of heritage, and *The Politics of Heritage in Africa* also touches on this theme. In the essay “Fences, Signs, and Property: Heritage, Development, and the Making of a Location in Lwandle”, by Leslie Witz and Noëleen Murray, the focus falls on the development of the Lwandle Museum in Cape Town. Again, while the essay stresses heritage resources management, much of the text is written as a history of the development of the museum. This essay illustrates the powerful effect that heritage resources management can have on community development, and is one of the highlights of the book.

Any study of post-colonial Africa would of course be incomplete without considering Ghana, which was the first African state to gain independence in Africa in the aftermath of the Second World War (1939–1945). On the front cover of *The Politics of Heritage in Africa* is a large photograph of the decapitated statue of Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana’s first post-colonial president, and in Kodzo Gavua’s essay, “Monuments and Negotiations of Power in Ghana”, the author elaborates on the incident. The destruction and vandalising of heritage resources is perhaps almost as old as the heritage resources themselves. As communities change and self-perceptions transform and sometimes grow obsolete, so heritage resources are contested and challenged. The destruction of royal heritage in France was, after all, the issue that gave rise to the first formal attempts to legally protect heritage resources.

A number of contributions in this new publication explore issues on intangible heritage. These essays discuss diverse topics such as language, linguistics, music, cinema and belief systems, and the prominent role these types of heritage have on political developments in Africa. Two critical pieces from a South African perspective need to be singled out. One is by Ciraj Rassool, who explores the complex issue of human remains in an essay entitled “Human Remains, the Disciplines of the Dead, and the South African Memorial Complex”. The other is “Heritage vs Heritage: Reaching for Pre-Zulu Identities in Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa”, authored by Mbongiseni Buthelezi. This essay is important for the way it paints a nuanced picture of a much stereotyped South African identity – that of the Zulu people.

*The Politics of Heritage in Africa* is a sterling contribution to scholarship. While it is a book theorising on issues surrounding tangible and intangible heritage resources management, the book in many ways also serves as a history, documenting some of the important developments in the heritage sector. With the critical shortage of research in the discipline of Heritage Studies, *The Politics of Heritage in Africa* fills an intellectual gap and will be of great value to all scholars and others interested in the history and heritage-related fields of study.

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**Reflections on a continent torn between yesterday and tomorrow**

**Kevin Bloom and Richard Poplak, *Continental Shift: A Journey into Africa's Changing Fortunes***

Jonathan Ball Publishers, Johannesburg and Cape Town, 2016

419 pp

ISBN 9781868424283

R272.00

This book by two well-respected South African journalists is, in many ways, a coming-of-age retelling of an intricate and unexpected journey through a continent that is itself experiencing some growing pains. A write-up of a project that spans nine years and 10 countries (Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, South Sudan and Central African Republic) this “biography” of an adolescent Africa has evidently battled through a number of existential crises before taking on the form that is presented to the reader in this publication almost a decade after its inception. Told with all the verve that one would expect of travel-writing, the authors invite the reader to join a confounding trip through a continent that is as much at odds with itself and its guests, as it is with the rest of the world. Yet, these identity crises – documented and preserved in this collection of stories, anecdotes and conversations that say more on one page than many academic theses – are also the book’s greatest contribution to an ever-expanding body of literature on Africa and its contested potential for growth in the near future.

As could be expected, the reader is confronted in the pages of the book by an Africa that is both rich in natural resources, languages and traditions, and poor in effective politicians and good governance. This is a continent with capital cities that have benefited from enormous (mostly Chinese?) investment in infrastructure development, while the roads that connect these cities are often in such poor condition that they cannot be travelled (pp 1–2). It is a continent where large-scale industrialisation and skills development in civil society have contributed to an increase in income per capita of nearly two-thirds since 1998, while almost half its people live below the internationally accepted poverty line of \$1.25 per day (p 3). Most importantly, perhaps, the authors present an Africa that is simultaneously trapped in stereotypes imposed on it by well-intentioned peers, and holds within its grasp a destiny that it alone can define. As they put it:

As we languished in Bakavu, willing but unable to drive to the Promised Land in Goma, we were overcome by a familiar sensation. Africa was at a crossroads, and the world – more than at any point in history – was depending on her sense of direction (pp 3–4).

However, the value of this contribution to literature on African political economy extends beyond the usual “panoply of Western editorial obsessions” (p 4). While the authors’ sketches of morphing African villages, cities and cultures are fascinating in their own right, it is the internal conflicts and substantive questions

that the authors encounter throughout the journey that really captivate the reader. In a continent of paradoxes, the authors themselves are aware of their “otherness” as white, English-speaking, middle-class Jewish South Africans on a journey through an Africa to which their homeland only just belongs. Their position as outsider-insiders, or insider-outsiders, then becomes a metaphor for the exceedingly stereotyped, yet remarkably undefined, Africa whose essence Bloom and Poplak attempt to capture in their writing. *Continental Shift* contains no shortage of illustrations of the contradictions this continent plays home to, however, the authors’ description of the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa best encapsulates this enigma:

The Addis on the ground belonged to a different era than the Addis in the sky; elevators doubled as time machines ... The new African Union headquarters, built at a reported cost of \$200 million by the Chinese government ... rose 99.9 metres into the Ethiopian sky (pp 229–233).

Understandably, an adequate retelling of the authors’ impressions documenting the difference between *growth* and *development* on a continent whose “trajectory appeared ... decoupled from history, unattached from any [identifiable] continuum” (p 7) is a daunting task, and it shows. Like the authors, it is difficult for the reader to “tell the structure from the form” of this book, which is articulated in the authors’ perplexed summary of the final product as “a limited set of snapshots [that] proposes an answer to the question of Africa’s *what?*” (p 9). Whereas, however, this lack of structure could be seen as a shortcoming of the book, the structure *fits* the form of the story. As the authors remark, Africa is a continent that is returning to its destiny amid “a propulsive energy [and] a slow creeping chaos” (p 356) that represent both challenges and opportunities.

Ultimately, as one could ask of the book what it means to lay bare, *Continental Shift* forces the reader to (re)consider what exactly we expect of Africa. Is Africa “a balkanised non-place on the brink of dissolution, a rent-a-country governed by masters and miners and bankers in foreign capitals” (p 308)? Or, is it possible for Africa to redefine its destiny to become “not a place that copies models, but a place that serves as one” (p 129)? These questions are intimately linked to differing notions of what exactly the developed African state should look like. As Bloom and Poplak imply, even Africans cannot agree on a suitable definition of “development”. While South Africans are flocking from their country *en masse* in search of a “better life” in the industrialised nations of the Occident, Congolese officials encountered in Gombe tend to paint South Africa as a paradise for governance and service delivery – the epitome of freedom (p 196). Conversely, career diplomat and unofficial ambassador of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM), Lumumba Stanislaus-Kaw Di-Aping, rejects a developmental plan for South Sudan in the image of South Africa’s “scattered transformation plan”, arguing that “Lumumba wanted us to bear in mind ... the endemic kleptomania that had knocked South Africa’s own development vision off-course. Then, he wanted us to juxtapose it against ... the SPLM” (p 277).

These anecdotes from Bloom and Poplak’s travels through the continent serve to reiterate what much of the outside world chooses to ignore: “Africa is not a country” (p 345). Africa is a continent of “binaries and paradoxes, [of] roads and borders, borders and roads” (p 356). It is also a continent that is torn between its own fortunes: between diverse ethnicities, boundless resources and vast landmasses; a continent torn between yesterday and tomorrow, uncertain about what exactly to do today. What is certain, to the authors, is that “Africa [is] returning to herself” – poised to welcome onto its soil “two billion souls, maybe more ... by the middle of the century” (p 356).

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