

## REVIEWS

*The Rise of Conservation in South Africa: Settlers, Livestock and the Environment, 1770-1950.* By WILLIAM BEINART. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. xxiv + 402pp. ISBN 0-19-926151-2.

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In this ambitious and painstaking book, Beinart explores the complex relations between people, the environment and colonial identity in the pastoral Cape. He sees his book as a contribution primarily to the agrarian historiography of South Africa. Agrarian history has fallen from grace in recent times, as have socio-economic themes generally. Nevertheless, in its central preoccupations with the material base of colonial society, the relations between colonisers and the natural environment, it carries us into under-explored territory. The assertion of control over nature and its resources was central to the structures of power and domination in colonial society, and the book's strength is that it makes us look at the rural past with new eyes.

Beinart's main thesis is that historians, centrally concerned with mineral discoveries and the impact of industrialism on rural production, have greatly underestimated the continuing significance of pastoralism in the forging of white South African identity right up into the twentieth century. The arable bias in our historiography, whether it be the slave economy of the early Western Cape, or the 'maize revolution' of the later highveld, has distracted us from the evident fact that South Africa has always been pre-eminently a pastoral country. Relations with animals and the veld have shaped the South African experience to a far greater extent than we have acknowledged. Beinart points out that in the history of European exploitation of the rest of the globe, the tropics and the plantation system have enjoyed far greater attention than the temperate and more arid regions, and the land-extensive pastoral economies of the southern hemisphere in particular. Beinart seeks to fill the gap with a book that, we cannot help thinking, should have been written years ago.

Beinart is not inclined to be modish. He is a historian's historian, undeflected by fads and fashions. A diligent and careful scholar is at work here, amassing his data from an astonishing range of sources and presenting it in a rich and informed text. Many years in the making, the book is a product of extraordinarily wide-ranging industry and curiosity. But it is in some ways quite old-fashioned history, in which the Africans themselves play a shadowy background role. The people we meet here in the main are elite white men – experts, scientists, improvers, progressives, investors. Social relations are less important than vegetation, livestock, parasites and technology. If we live in a post-revisionist age, the book sometimes has a distinctly pre-revisionist feel to it.

Central to Beinart's story is an understanding of how colonial knowledge developed not simply out of metropolitan imposition, but out of the give-and-take

of real interaction with a complex and often baffling local environment. South Africa was no *tabula rasa*; a thriving pastoral economy predated white settlement, and colonists liberally borrowed from indigenous knowledge and practices. Beinart demonstrates this with a fascinating dissection of explorers' and settlers' writings. Taking issue with those who see the metropolitan gaze as essentially one-way traffic, Beinart sees western science as a fluid, open field, never monolithic or static, but receptive to local insights and local experience. The very concepts of metropole and periphery, one might suggest, do not adequately encompass this reality. Visitors like Sparrman and Burchell, far from imposing a controlling, exploitative understanding of local realities, were genuinely interested in learning from all they met, including very importantly the dispossessed Khoi who served as guides, teachers and drivers. A syncretic, creolised culture characterised the trekboer frontier. Europeans introduced horses, firearms, wagons, and plant and animal species; and they adopted indigenous methods of livestock management and imbibed vernacular knowledge of local plants, pastures and wildlife. The practices of transhumance, veld burning, and kraaling at night to ward against predators, were all local adaptations practised by indigenous people.

The British settlers who arrived in large numbers from 1820 were also quickly humbled by the environment. Bringing notions of civilisation and order and determined to appropriate resources for rational uses, they soon were brought to an appreciation of the intractable nature of their new homes, and were obliged to abandon their preconceptions. The most successful British settlers became large-scale sheep farmers, relying increasingly on imported merinos, but subject to the same environmental constraints and local knowledge as those who settled the land before them. Beinart points out how in colonial nomenclature, the urge to replicate a sense of home and empire was balanced by the need to come to terms with existing naming practices that could not be expunged. The settlers were remoulded by their environment rather than the other way around.

A succession of thematic chapters take up the ways in which colonists in the Cape, officials and scientists as well as farmers, grappled with the problems of the natural environment, its use and misuse, and with the productivity of farming enterprise. Botany was the first field of knowledge that was brought to bear on the essential task of maintaining a viable pastoral economy in the peculiar natural conditions of the Cape interior. The Cape was an important laboratory for the development of botanical science from the eighteenth century. Botanical knowledge, Beinart tells us, was intimately bound up with colonial expansion. Colonists profoundly affected the environment, not least through the introduction of new species, but also because economic activities from earliest days greatly modified vegetation, soil and fertility. The problems of overstocking, erosion and desertification were recognised early in the Dutch period. Sparrman in the 1770s understood the destructive consequences of trekboer methods. Nomadism or (more accurately) transhumance was the enemy of civilisation in the minds of officials; and many at the time and later (such as the Stockenströms) envisaged a more settled, more rational and more conservation-minded farming practice.

By the mid-nineteenth century, within a few decades of the first large-scale introduction of merino sheep with their hugely prized wool for export, concerns

about the degradation of resources expressed earlier were being given scientific content. It was clear that pasturage was being exhausted and species diversity was being lost. The main focus of public concern was the apparent drying out of the land. Drought was the catchword, but it represented not so much climate change, as a declining capacity of the land to hold and utilise water. Denudation led to erosion and run-off, the spread of dongas and gullies, the loss of topsoil and the drying up of springs. The necessary correctives, those in the know argued, included forestation, water storage and irrigation, and more rational stock management techniques. In 1862 a Select Committee on Irrigation under J.C. Molteno, the first of many such investigations, set out the challenges. Tree planting and forest conservation were proclaimed to be as important as building dams and digging boreholes in checking desiccation and degradation of the land.

Beinart introduces us to a variety of men who thought and wrote about these crucial issues, such as William Harvey and Ludwig Pappé, early botanists, Henry Hall, engineer and cartographer, Dr. W.G. Atherstone, Grahamstown doctor and polymath. There are the ubiquitous Rubidges, progressive Graaff-Reinet farmers whose family archives Beinart has mined exhaustively. John Croumbie Brown, ex-missionary, appointed first Colonial Botanist in 1862, took up the cudgels against the tradition of veld burning, designed to improve grazing by spurring nutritious new growth of sweet grasses, but which, like overgrazing, eliminated plant species, destroyed the soil, and led to water run-off and desiccation. Many such men thought that with irrigation and reclamation, the dry land of the Karoo could be planted with crops for man and beast alike.

From the 1870s attention turned to animal diseases, and veterinary science became a central focus of interest. The first Colonial Veterinary Surgeon William Branford was appointed in 1876, and a Stock Diseases Commission sat in 1877. Again, the emphasis was on overstocking, erosion, and the impaired nutrition resulting from the spread of unpalatable plant species. Veterinary knowledge also focused on livestock management, particularly seasonal transhumance and the practice of nightly kraaling of animals. Nightly kraaling brought animals into close contact in unhygienic conditions, contributing greatly to the spread of disease. Sheep were weakened by the long daily trek to and from pastures, which also destroyed the vegetation along the routes. Fenced paddocks were the veterinarians' panacea, facilitating rotational grazing and the depositing of manure and seeds evenly across the veld. Seasonal transhumance or trekking over long distances was another practice that was condemned. A Contagious Diseases Act of 1881 gave the government power to restrict animal movements to combat epizootics. Scab in sheep was the main target of the reformers. The Scab Commission (1892-4) was perhaps the most far-reaching and exhaustive investigation in the history of the Colony, and one that unleashed huge controversy from those who rejected its main recommendation of compulsory regulation. Restrictions on stock movement and the dipping of animals were the main ingredients in the fight against disease.

If the practice of kraaling was to be done away with, the predators that threatened them also needed to be dealt with. Jackal elimination was thus also a priority. Jackals adapted particularly well to the new environmental regime brought into being by colonial farming, and became parasites on economic activ-

ity. Bounties were given to encourage their slaughter. Elimination of jackals went hand in hand with the fencing of farms and camps. The one required the other, and both were essential for veld conservation and productivity. Beginning in the 1890s, vermin-proof fencing transformed the country and its farming practices. These campaigns went into high gear under the Union Department of Agriculture after 1910. The elimination of prickly pear, imported from Meso-America, whose disadvantages as an invader species prone to rapid spread outweighed its benefits as feed in the view of reformers, was also pursued diligently in the years after Union.

All those who spoke and wrote about these things saw the provision of fodder crops as crucial in promoting the health of animals and protecting the natural veld. In the brief ostrich boom that affected large parts of the Cape interior from the late nineteenth century, it seemed as if the dream of a transformed pastoral economy might be realised. The profits to be made out of feathers led to the widespread use of cultivated pastures, and lucerne in particular was grown under irrigation on land that had never been used for cultivation before. At the same time water conservation became a priority and a financial possibility for improving farmers. Borehole drilling was pursued on a large scale. After the turn of the century colonial governments took up irrigation as a state responsibility, drawing on the experience of officials like F.E. Kanthack in India and elsewhere. The Union government provided irrigation loans and initiated dam-building projects. Irrigation was a key to social as well as economic progress – either for purposes of peopling land with immigrant settlers, or for purposes of rehabilitating poor and displaced Afrikaners. But the decline in the ostrich industry meant that the extent of irrigated land in the Cape declined just as state involvement was expanding. Dreams of smaller farms and closer settlement in the drier regions of the Cape came to nought except for irrigable land close to perennial rivers.

A paradoxical outcome of the successes against disease, predators and drought was that livestock numbers shot up in the early decades of the twentieth century, and the pressures on the veld were such that during the great drought of the 1930s millions of sheep died. The lessons of controlled grazing still had to be learned.

Beinart provides a chapter on the life and career of H.S. du Toit, Union government official and technocrat, apostle of dry-farming methods, whose main claim to this attention, apart from the fact that he chaired the seminal Drought Commission in 1920-3, lies in the fact that he left a large cache of private papers in the possession of his son. Du Toit was a pioneer of the extension services, and espoused progressive farming as central to the Afrikaner nationalist project. The Drought Commission was a key document in the critique of farming practices and the enunciation of conservationist discourse, summarising the key themes of the previous half-century or more. It was suffused with assumptions about the links between conservation, nation building and self-determination. Another chapter examines the farming practice of Sidney Rubidge on the family farm Wellwood near Graaff-Reinet in the first half of the twentieth century.

Of course, resistance was apparent too. Afrikaner farmers rebelled against interventions in their practices and insisted on their own superior knowledge of lo-

cal conditions. They regarded their time-honoured methods of animal management as superior. They understood that expertise was a political weapon, and science a means of control and expropriation. Indeed, the fight over animal disease, like the fight over responses to infectious disease in humans, was a fight for class as well as racial hegemony. Those who were dispossessed and reduced to penury in the modernisation of agriculture were those most dependent on the old methods, those who ranged across the land most freely, whose sense of land ownership obeyed an older ethic, and who saw in the enterprise of outsiders a challenge they could not meet. The drawing of boundaries and the assertion of restrictive rights over property entailed the closing down of opportunities that had sustained large numbers of rural people hitherto. Armies of herders lost work, and tenants and bywoners became redundant, at the same time as railways were closing down transport as a major rural enterprise for the poor. These social developments and the demographic shifts they caused were well detailed, for example, by district magistrates in the Annual Reports of the Department of Justice, which Beinart has not used. Here we enter territory that Beinart largely ignores. This is not a social history, and it could be argued that his sidestepping of the issue of social change impoverishes the book as a whole.

In a chapter that departs from the main focus of the rest of the book, Beinart returns to his earlier concerns with the politics and economics of betterment schemes in the Ciskei and Transkei. His point is that environmental regulation in African areas did not grow centrally out of ideological imperatives concerned with labour supplies and segregation, but out of a technicist commitment to productivity and upliftment, which had its roots in earlier debates about conservation in the colonial sphere more broadly. The concerns with overstocking and soil erosion in African areas were an extension of the concerns that had preoccupied colonial minds from early days. Of course, we know that regulation of African settlement and farming practices evoked sustained and often violent resistance. But Beinart's focus is on the official mind rather than the recipients of their ministrations. Russell Thornton, first Director of Agriculture in the Department of Agriculture from 1929, pushed for drastic stock reduction measures and clashed with the magistracy used to slower, less confrontational methods. By the 1940s malnutrition, a concern of mining companies as well as officialdom, added urgency to the state's interventions. Concentration of the homesteads into villages, the consolidation of fields, the fencing of pasturage all represented a major challenge to African cultural practices and methods. Planning was increasingly centralised and unilateral. Officials were concerned to combat inequality too, which threatened to leave increasing numbers of families without resources. The political context in which officials operated by the 1950s was one that mandated that population density could not be relieved by urbanisation, which in the end massively complicated their task and probably doomed it to failure.

Finally, Beinart brings the story up to the present, suggesting that environmental conditions stabilised and even improved in the latter half of the twentieth century (at least in white farming areas), discounting much anti-apartheid rhetoric that enumerated impending ecological catastrophe as one of the legacies of apartheid. The Great African Desert remains one of the myths of modern times.

Beinart is not interested in shaking the academic firmament. This is a proudly parochial book, which contributes only tangentially to the great intellectual debates that grip historians today. It hearkens in some ways to an older historiography of the white dominions. It is difficult to imagine anyone based in a post-1994 South African university writing this book. Africanists in particular might see it as a book that turns the clock back somewhat, failing the challenge of integrating South Africa more fully into a continental perspective. Some of the chapters are wearisome in their detailed examination of dry biological or zoological detail. Beinart has clearly become fascinated with the minutiae of farming practice and agricultural science. But for the historian for whom people are more interesting than the reproductive strategies of different varieties of opuntia, or the relative merits of cactoblastis and cochineal in biological control strategies, there are many pages in this book one might gladly forget.

None of this is intended as a criticism. The book must stand on its own terms as a valuable and original contribution to South African historiography. It throws a searchlight on neglected areas of our past, and is uncompromising in its pursuit of its objectives. Its somewhat prosaic title does its range less than justice. It makes a strong case for the importance of the pastoral economy and conservationist ideology in the construction of a colonial identity and a sense of white nationhood in South African history. The book is a model of close and exhaustive scholarship, a labour of love that never loses a sense of the larger perspective.

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*Social History and African Environments*. By WILLIAM BEINART and JOANN MCGREGOR, eds., Oxford, Cape Town and Athens: James Currey, David Philip and Ohio University Press, 2003. xii + 275pp. ISBN 0-85255-950-X and 0-8214-1538-7.

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This new collection joins several others that include South African material that have been published over recent years in environmental history. Along with an entire issue of the *Journal of Southern African Studies* and various stray published articles, including one by this reviewer, the papers in this collection were produced for a large conference held at Oxford in 1999. Its publication is intended to showcase the state of play in this area of enquiry.

Discussion in this review of the various papers included seems appropriate but also enables this reviewer to make some comments on the shape of environmental history in Africa. One caveat, acknowledged in the thoughtful introduction, is that the conference itself focused heavily on southern, central and eastern Africa. There is nothing in this book on the Horn of Africa, the north or the west of Africa. A second, also acknowledged, is the relatively limited contribution so far on the part of natural scientists to the debates suggested between these covers although changes in perceptions of biology play their role behind the scenes. This collection contains contributions to the history of ideas, certainly, but only to a limited extent through the work of Helen Tilley, addresses the history of science.

I do not detect in this collection any sense of overriding paradigm or passionately held ideas that would take environmental history forwards in Africa. Much of the finest environmental history written elsewhere, notably on North America, has really concerned the transformations imposed by capitalism, both in the form of settler intrusion and modern corporate manipulation, affecting the landscape. These can be massively comprehensive changes to the material life of humans as well as other creatures. They can also be of importance in affecting culture and mentality and as such represent an important chapter in intellectual history. Africa has considerable scope for discussing settler intrusions but rather less for large-scale corporate-sponsored changes. Even where mega-dam projects have been completed, they have impacted, perhaps disastrously, against peasant communities that survive, albeit wounded by the encounter. Africa could nonetheless be the site of radical green perspectives on the world but none of the authors represented here betrays any sign of such an orientation.

African history, and this collection is historically orientated, tends to be dominated by an anti-colonial perspective that has always concerned itself with justice towards the disempowered. As Beinart and McGregor suggest themselves, environmental history can be seen as a fresh shoot within a larger social history project rather than a field that will take on its own very distinctive life. If this volume reflects the state of the art, environmental raw material is largely being used to comment on other issues. Beinart was prominently associated some years ago with what was termed 'agrarian history'; this phase of southern African historiography made an important contribution to the study of economic, social and

political changes and especially the confrontation of settler agrarian systems with earlier ones. However, it was essentially a phase rather than a field marked out and carried forward systematically. Its participants have happily developed since on less strictly agrarian paths. This volume suggests that late twentieth century environmental history in Africa might well go the same way.

If we turn to particular contributors, perhaps the first mention should go to veteran Africanist Terence Ranger, who has always been absorbed with the history of belief systems and especially of Christianity in Africa. Here he posits pre-Christian beliefs as environmental or 'eco-religion' in a chapter mainly concerned with the place of women in the rituals connected with these beliefs. Ranger believes that there is little substance in the notion of some kind of more women-friendly earth culture that preceded male domination. The ancestors revered in pre-colonial Zimbabwe were definitely male as were rural property rights. However, he points to the important role individual women played as oracles and in ritual roles attested in many localities. I am more comfortable with this point than with the broader and more or less undefined concept of eco-religion. I think students of African belief systems will require more debate and engagement here.

JoAnn McGregor, also mainly focused on Zimbabwean material, considers how the Zambezi River leaves a deep defining mark, both as a source of life and nurture and as the cause of major dangers, for Tonga speakers. The more ritualised concepts are losing their meaning, however, as many Tonga live far from the Zambezi today and earn their living in different ways. Nonetheless, the river continues to impact on a largely desecralised discourse, now suffused with the impact of intruders to the valley and changes such as the construction of the Kariba dam: "It pains us to see others use the lake freely when we re the owners."

There is also a third Zimbabwe-based contribution of relevance here by Innocent Pikirayi. Pikirayi makes a useful historical corrective: he pours some cold water on the glib archaeological use of environmental factors to explain the abandonment of Great Zimbabwe. Archaeologists are often natural materialists given the nature of their modus operandi and they are often overly quick to deduce historical events in what they deduce from their fragmented findings. Pikirayi points out that what documentary [Portuguese] evidence exists of pre-Ndebele statecraft in south-central Africa all suggests that major spatial shifts of states had to do with political and economic factors. They were never simply responses to drought or soil exhaustion: these are fantasies on the part of those looking for quick and easy explanations. Africans interacted in complex ways with the environment in past centuries that cannot be understood so simply.

Turning to the colonial era, the relevant selections in this collection largely fit with a well-developed literature which pours scorn on the pretensions and pseudo-scientific expertise of colonialists and exposes the self-centred nature of settler plans, often carried out in such a way as to devastate the life chances of vastly larger African populations. Colonial administrations in the post-World War II period often promoted innovations that placed onerous labour obligations on sections of the population and sometimes flew in the face of African common sense about cultivation. John McCracken, the distinguished historian of Malawi, provides us with a classic example (compare with Steven Feierman's equally ex-



cellent *Peasant Intellectuals* on the Usambara mountain residents of Tanzania) of the dubious enforcement of terrace creation ('bundings'<sup>1</sup>) to ward off soil erosion in northern Nyasaland. A particularly foolish administrator believed that the locals 'marvel at their past stupidity and praise what has been done for them.' Given an enterprising local radical, politicised as a migrant worker in South Africa, the soil erosion rules became a rallying cry for African nationalism and a major source of the agitation that would lead to the creation of an independent Malawi.

Such political entrepreneurs as the Malawian Flax Musopole were not, however, to be found everywhere. There was no real equivalent on the arid plains of Ugogo in central Tanzania. However, as Ingrid Yngstrom shows, colonial follies were not absent there. Indeed the 'Gogo' inhabitants of Ugogo were probably more or less a colonial invention as a distinct 'tribe'. Development-minded administrators never understood how and why the inhabitants of this inhospitable region chose to mix pastoral, agricultural and cash-orientated activities in order to survive in a barren landscape nor, obviously, did they provide much real help in allowing them to access a better life.

Equally puzzling to Europeans - and white South Africans - was the way Ovambo people in the Namibian-Angolan borderlands related to local useful trees. The Ovambo had no special attachment to trees or forests per se but they considered very important the useful trees such as the baobab and the marula which grew in their territory. Through diffusing seed and fruit, these trees became a notable feature of the changing landscape where the Ovambo expanded into new territory, moving southwards in Namibia early in the colonial period. The somewhat flexible attitude to ownership that this entailed also perplexed authorities. There is here a striking parallel to equivalent situations in West Africa, notably in the history of oil palm cultivation. By contrast with McCracken, whose lively narrative sits on some very telling surviving colonial records, Emmanuel Kreike, the historian of this activity, has had to ferret out the story from extensive local interviews with Ovambo peasants.

In fact innovation in the colonial period was omnipresent in Africa and operated in a complex field of pressures. Nor was it without precedents. Karen Middleton considers how a brief and abortive seventeenth century French colonial phase at Fort Dauphin in south-eastern Madagascar led to the widespread cultivation and use of the American prickly pear. The pear was taken up as an immensely useful innovation especially by the Antandroy people. Cattle cultivation expanded massively in all likelihood as a result and connected the Antandroy into important Indian Ocean trade patterns. Moreover, the shrub was widely used as a defense mechanism by villagers. However, the 'spiny desert' of southern Madagascar certainly is older than prickly pear and provided a model for how the Antandroy and others could make use of this innovation. And the pear also has a deeply noxious side. It clearly is an intrusive plant with potentially devastating effects on other parts of the southern Madagascan biota, a well-known feature from studies in many countries. As pure environmental history, I would give Middleton the prize for offering the most thoughtful and far-reaching contribution of the volume, in fact.

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1. This delightfully colonial word, derived from the Raj in India, is not used very often today in African terminology.

A somewhat surprising feature of this volume is the presence of two writers who tend to defend the colonial enterprise - at least environmentally. On the one hand, Helen Tilley is impressed with the range of expertise and judgment available to Lord Hailey and his famous African Survey in the middle 1930s as well as their 'tone of moderation'; she tries to counter the image of colonial planners and rulers as environmental bullies and bumblers. No doubt many of today's developmental formulations have roots that stretch this far back, not that that is exactly unproblematic as a comment on past or present.

Was colonial innovation all bad? Not according to Grace Carswell, who finds that ridging in south-western Uganda, in heavily populated Kigezi, was effective and appreciated as well as more or less in line with older ideas about intensive farming. Kigezi was a model shown to visitors and by contrast to northern Malawi, there was no come-uppance. A school of thought after World War II wished to respond to 'overpopulation' by transporting large numbers of peasants to other parts of Uganda. That would have stirred up some action ...but it fortunately never occurred. Will views like those of Tilley and Carswell (far more qualified) that run against the Africanist vein become more important again in time?

Finally, Beinart and McGregor include several chapters which can be classified essentially as part of the history of ideas, in which the environment plays a varying significant role. There can be no denying that ideas about Nature are powerful in moving people and in tying in self-definitions that feed nationalist ideologies. Recent attempts to pull down a rather unseemly bust of Paul Kruger in Kruger National Park remind us of Jane Carruthers' now classic study of the Park and the way in which it was named in order to garner support amongst Afrikaners. Perhaps a wise management today would find a suitably iconic ANC figure ideal for a new name to rope in a new elite. Sandra Swart presents this nature-linked patriotism as the motive explaining why many Afrikaners especially rallied behind the writer Eugene Marais when he accused the famous Belgian playwright Maurice Maeterlinck of plagiarism. In fact, other writers as well as Marais had the idea of considering an insect swarm as a single living organism but for some, Marais' stature as an original was a cause worth defending in the name of national pride in local scientific achievement.

David Bunn reminds us of how white South Africans once perceived the Kruger National Park. Initially the frisson of a campfire by the train tracks was enough of the wild to satisfy most, although there were early demands to clear the park of any association with living African cultivators and pastoralists. They were not part of what white tourists, who often initially liked to sling their guns into their cars, wished to observe. Later the idea of heading for the bush, losing oneself in the wilderness, took over as the dominant motif with photography the approved non-lethal activity. Undoubtedly this reflected the growing urbanisation and suburbanisation of white South African daily life and belongs more to the history of leisure than the environment. This shift went together with a growing emphasis on scientific management of the park as a new intellectual discipline of sorts - park management - was born.

I am not sure if dogs belong to environmental history more than parakeets or potted plants in the kitchen window, but Robert Gordon reminds us of how char-

acteristic a feature of colonial life they were. Highly valued by native Namibians, they were notoriously taxed by the state, causing the Bondelswarts Rebellion and its bloody repression in one area. For white settlers, Fido was a source of physical security and an aid in farm tasks. For the colonial administrator, as Gordon reminds us, the faithful pooch provided an unqualified welcome source of affection by contrast to the rather tenuous relations he would often experience with the human population he ordered around.

Finally Jane Carruthers herself contributes an article on our second largest national park, Kalahari Gemsbok. Here she focuses on the claims of San people to the park and how they have been met, using comparisons with Aboriginal claims in Australia. Carruthers concludes by suggesting that the ANC seeks to resolve rival claims by bringing everyone to the tourism trough ... nature as a source of hard currency solving otherwise knotty problems of human conflict over resource use. She suggests that this may not prove to be as easy a task as it sounds.

A final critical note. Why is only McCracken provided with a map? It would have been invaluable in illustrating other contributions as well.

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This book is, essentially, a guide to a number of rock art sites at a farm called Warmhoek on the Jan Dissels River near the town of Clanwilliam in the Cederberg district of the western Cape. It has its origin in the Living Landscape Project, the brainchild of John Parkington, Professor of Archaeology at the University of Cape Town. The project's aim is to share the archaeological knowledge of the area, gained through decades of work by archaeologists largely connected with the Archaeology Department of the University of Cape Town, with a wider audience. The most important component of this audience is the local community and, in order to reach it effectively, a research and education centre was established in Clanwilliam at the old primary school. For several years groups of school children have been introduced to the human past of the surrounding landscape by taking part in a variety of activities, ranging from dramatic enactments of San stories to excursions to rock art sites. An extensive, computerized data base of information containing thousands of digital images of rock art is available for reference, as well as a library of books and articles on local history and pre-history. In addition, the centre serves as a training institution for local field guides and heritage custodians. It also produces publications, into which category the book under review falls.

*The Mantis, the Eland and the Hunter* is written in a clear, direct, and accessible manner. Yet this is no child's guide. Apart from providing a detailed discussion of specific rock art sites, it also serves as a general introduction to the interpretation of southern African rock art and encapsulates Parkington's distinctive ideas on the subject. The author does not condescend to his readers in interpreting the meaning of the paintings under discussion. A brief introduction explains that the key to understanding the paintings is to be found in two major sources of information: the archive of stories, myths and personal histories collected from the /Xam of Bushmanland by Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd in the late nineteenth century and the detailed ethnographic record of Kalahari foragers which has been collected by anthropologists over many years. Though these two sources are remote in time and place from the artists who executed the Cederberg rock art, they contain information about a way of seeing the world which, arguably, was shared by southern African hunter-gatherer societies over centuries.

This, at least, is the assumption behind much of the recent work on interpreting southern African rock art, pioneered by scholars such as David Lewis-Williams and Thomas Dowson. Using the Bleek-Lloyd material and Kalahari ethnography as a 'Rosetta Stone', archaeologists have felt emboldened to offer an interpretation of the images of animals, men, women and assorted blobs, lines and markings painted or chiseled on rock surfaces throughout the African continent. For the most part such interpretations follow Lewis-Williams's suggestion that (in the words of Parkington), 'the rock paintings and engravings are largely informed by the experiences and activities of shamans, whilst in a state of altered consciousness.' Parkington does not deny that some paintings seem to depict entry into a

trance-like state, or to be about the experience of altered consciousness, but he argues for a reading of the paintings that allows for the recognition of other contexts of explanation. His central concerns are neatly captured by the title of his book.

According to San folklore the Mantis, /kaggen, made the eland. He used to favour this beautiful animal by bringing it gifts of honey and rubbing it down with fragrant buchu. Mantis's jealous family (which included some voracious meerkats) butchered the eland, much to its creator's distress, and thereby inaugurated the division between human hunters and animal prey. Much of the rock art, Parkington believes, is concerned with the symbolism and significance of this fundamental dichotomy. Hunting, killing and eating the creators' favourite creature are acts of transgression. They are also acts of releasing, and appropriating, the eland's special spiritual power, its *n/um*. Men must ask /kaggen's permission to do so. Only a man (not a woman) may kill an eland and it is, in fact, by killing an eland and sharing, or eating, its succulent meat that a boy becomes a man and may become a husband. By metaphoric extension women are like eland, prey to be hunted by men. A girl is said to have 'shot an eland' when she first menstruates. In the Kalahari she is then secluded and older women dance the eland bull dance to welcome her into the herd. Rock art is thus not only about the relationship between humans and animals, it is also about the proper roles and relationships of the sexes. It is highly likely that many of the group scenes so typical of southern African rock art are depictions of rites of passage rituals, ceremonies whereby the children of the 'people of the eland' became adults.

With this network of metaphor and symbolism as a conceptual grid Parkington walks us, through the pages of his book, from one rock art site to another on the Warmhoek trail. He is a humorous, gentle and perceptive guide. Each site is illustrated by a number of photographs that situate the rock face or cave wall in their immediate surroundings, provide a general overview of the art and select or enlarge particular details that are important to the accompanying written discussion. An impressive aspect of Parkington's approach is the meticulous attention he pays to the detail of the paintings. Not all of the paintings are well preserved. In some cases the eye has to be trained to see the faint time-eroded lines and colours of a vanished tradition. Parkington's approach is also intensely gender sensitive. Since a great deal of the art is about gender roles, the masculinity or femininity of the figures is often of crucial significance in interpreting the meaning of a painting. Describing such features, however, is not without its challenges, as may be seen from the following quotation: 'The assumption that they (figures under discussion) were once clearly women comes from the heavyset legs and rather bulky, somewhat shapeless calves. Without intending to be insensitive, these are the characteristics of painted human figures with breasts.'

The Warmhoek property also contains the ruins of a farmhouse and some paintings, or daubings, from more recent times. The guide discusses these residues sensitively, so as to instil in the onlooker a curiosity about the historic, as well as the distant, past. In this, and in other ways, we are encouraged to see the landscape as a palimpsest of different, impermanent, human visitations. Sadly lacking in the book is a map of the trail itself, which shows the relationship of the sites to each other, to the river, to the hills and to the landscape as a whole. I can only imagine

that such a map has been omitted in order to protect the sites from future unwelcome human visitations. It is highly unlikely, however, that anyone who actually reads and absorbs the contents of this wonderful little book would ever be less than reverential towards the art which it describes and the society which produced it.

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*South Africa's Environmental History: Cases and Comparisons.* By STEPHEN DOVERS, RUTH EDGECOMBE AND BILL GUEST, eds., Cape Town and Athens, Ohio: David Philip and Ohio University Press, 2003. 326 pp. ISBN 0-86486-492-2 and 0-8214-1498-4

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This review makes no claim to comprehensiveness and, like any other piece of writing, is (in my case, unashamedly) subjective. The edited collection under review presents seventeen articles by sixteen contributors - William Beinart features twice - and rather than plodding through it author by author, I will make some critical general remarks and then dwell a while on the three articles that I found most interesting.

My introductory critical comments relate mainly to the scope and shape of the collection. Perhaps as a product of the book having only appeared six or seven years after the conference out of which it grew - sadly, I assume, as a result of the death of Ruth Edgecombe to whom the book is dedicated and whom the co-editors identify as the major moving force behind the edition - the overall coherence of the volume is not what it might have been. It is divided into three parts: an introductory overview of the field of environmental history in southern Africa by Jane Carruthers, followed by eleven case studies with some bias towards Natal, and five general comparative essays. The point, the introduction emphasises, is to showcase research in a relatively new and growing field of study, and particular emphasis is placed on the diverse and interdisciplinary nature of the contributions. Without having any quibble with promoting interdisciplinarity, I did wonder on reading the volume exactly how much the disciplines actually engaged with one other as the contributions read, with few exceptions, as so many discrete pieces of research that, in practice, yield very limited insight across disciplines for all the self-announced importance of this in theory.

I was also disappointed by the limited number of what one might call 'general common themes' across the case studies. The very choice of contributions in any edited collection is presumably prompted (at least in part) by their ability to address such common themes, however interdisciplinary the sample. The case studies scarcely seem to do that and I did not find Carruthers' introductory overview, afforded a section all of its own in the collection, particularly illuminating on this score. Aside from the fact that many or most of the articles were first aired in the form of papers around a radiator in a chilly conference hall in Pietermaritzburg in 1996, what general contributions do they offer to the growing field? In the two or three pages devoted to drawing them together somehow - admittedly an invidious task - the introduction touches on the themes of environmental activism (in relation to the articles by Elna Kotze and Georgina Thompson on Wakkerstroom and St. Lucia), African adaptation or alleged lack of adaptation to encroaching colonialism (in the respective articles by Nancy Jacobs on Kuruman and John Lambert on rural Natal), imports of various kinds (the prickly pear in the case of Lance van Sittert, windmills and fences in the case of Sean Archer, and Harald Witt's wattles and eucalypts), deeper environmental reasons for political conflict (William Beinart on

Pondoland and Jabulani Sithole on Pinetown) and then an urban study (Beverley Ellis) and something on the grassland biome (John McAllister). And that's it. Call me picky, but across two hundred pages this seems somewhat limited and tenuous. Is there no other more connected story that these articles have to tell about the history of the environment and human interaction with it in South Africa? If not, and it may be that there isn't, then why were these particular papers chosen to fit together into a single volume?

I would also have liked more introductory probing and reflection about the themes set out in the introduction, few as they are. In the case of the Jacobs and Lambert articles, for example, which do indeed tell comparable stories of transition and crisis in mid-late nineteenth century rural contexts, I wondered why some Africans (Tswana) were so adept at adapting (as Jacobs plausibly argues) while others (Zulus) were, allegedly and allegedly like Hobsbawm's peasants, so conservative and wary of change and innovation. Lambert's story of the progression from a shifting precolonial homestead economy pattern to its crisis under colonial pressure struck me as both depressingly deterministic and implausibly static. His own evidence of very substantial increases in maize production or of switches to migrant labour unsettles the stereotype of inward-looking peasants that he presents. I also wondered on what grounds Lambert's article, like Sithole's, actually qualifies as 'environmental history'. For aside from the introductory geographical overview, the most eloquently written of the sections, it read to me like nothing so much as an older political economy-driven narrative. If the field of environmental history is, as Beinart and Coates phrase it, 'a dialogue' between the natural world and humans, surely it also requires that the natural world take centre stage.

As regards silences, I would agree with the comments of both Caruthers and Beinart that 'African knowledge' is the glaring gap. The volume only really begins in the 1820s. While both Jacobs and Lambert do deal with the pre-colonial period, they describe these early regional economies in a somewhat outmoded anthropological style. As Beinart points out, southern Africanists probably have more favourable sources to work in this regard than their counterparts working on other regions of Africa. These come in the form of dense and often perceptive travel accounts, missionary records and the writings of colonial officials. So why have environmental historians been so slow to take up the challenge of exploring African knowledge by reading such materials against (or perhaps even sometimes with) the grain?

I would now like to turn to the three articles that I most enjoyed. The surprise package for me was undoubtedly J.R. McNeill's sweeping comparative essay exploring what the literature on South America has to offer South African environmental history. As befits the author of four books, one of which recently won an award, the style is smooth and confident, but what impresses most is McNeill's command of knowledge across centuries and countries. Despite the discrepancies of scale - a continent as against a region - his comparative framework raises a host of fascinating general questions. The discrepancies of scale themselves are thought-provoking. He claims, for example, that at least fifteen million indigenous people were killed by disease within a century-and-a-half of European arrival in South America - 80-90% of the entire population between 1500 and 1650. Does



this suggest that in comparative terms at least, the emphasis in the local literature on the 'ravages of smallpox' among the indigenous peoples of the Cape might be overstated. What are the more exact implications of what, in such a comparative frame may even be regarded as a staggering rate of survival?

Most absorbing is his section tracing the careers of diverse imports from citrus fruits, bananas, apples, grapes and pears to coffee, sugar cane and wheat (aside from pigs, sheep or goats, all unknown before European arrival). The inter-continental and intracontinental routes followed by particular products over long time periods is, for me, one of the most fascinating topics in global environmental history. On a more specific note, McNeill questions why the horse, which was taken up so energetically throughout South America (and in the Western African savannah belt), played such a 'curiously limited role' among indigenous peoples in southern Africa. His case may be overstated, as groups like the Griqua and Sotho certainly did make use of horses, but the overall point remains worthy of exploration.

In the case of both mining and deforestation, it is the relative rapidity of transition in southern Africa that raises interesting questions. In the much more densely forested South America, 60% of deforestation had already occurred by 1900 and the history of migrant labour from the Andes to Peru in numbers of 10-15,000 goes all the way back to the 1590s! What are the implications of the fact that these transitions were so rapid in southern Africa? This is, of course, something that revisionist histories on mining have certainly addressed, though not (as far as I am aware) in a way that puts the environment in the centre of the frame.

In the case of William Beinart's investigation of southern Africa in continental perspective, it was again the questions that his article raised that gave me pause. In the case of say hunting, one of those well-researched areas where Beinart feels there is still much to do, he encourages us to think about some big questions: 'Which species were favoured for consumption and trade? Which, aside from jackals, weathered the storm? Was animal behaviour itself significant in shaping this history? Can we write the history of wild animals - rather than simply what was done to them?' He also calls for enquiry into 'the skills and languages that evolved in hunting, including those of tracking and everyday zoology, as well as the equipment, technology and social forms.' Likewise I was interested in his call for closer scrutiny of the origins of conservationist discourse, for a study that goes beyond the Scots and looks at the role played by English and Swedish travellers or frontier officials. Afrikaner knowledge of the environment - whether in the eighteenth century or subsequently - is certainly a noticeable omission in the existing literature. (One of the only exceptions being Sandra Swart's recent article on the popular science of Eugene Marias). The overall emphasis of the article though is to draw attention to what Africanists elsewhere have to offer the local scholarship and to call for more attention to be paid to African knowledge, though here I would have liked a more detailed delineation of the themes Beinart feels are particularly worthy of exploration.

The third noteworthy contribution is Van Sittert's piece on the prickly pear. This article has an absorbing story to tell. Most intriguing is the speculation as to how the fruit got to the Eastern Cape in the first place - and it seems to have been from west to east via South America, Spain and Atlantic islands to the Indies,

then back from east to west on board a Dutch East India vessel travelling to Cape Town, and forward again in a west-east direction from the south-western districts to the eastern parts of the Cape Colony some time in the early eighteenth century!! Like McNeill's story of fruit, or say Philip Curtin's account of the spread of sugar plantations in *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex*, the focus on a single crop allows for a heady global narrative spanning centuries and deliciously diverse parts of the globe. The account of how the prickly pear then spread during the second half of the nineteenth century can be pieced together between the lines: a drought in 1859 was said to set off its expansion and some time during the 1870s it 'surfed' from Cradock down the Fish River. Van Sittert is eloquent on the agents of transmission - whether water or animal gut - and at his alliterative best on the dense settler discourse about the plant during the 1890s and 1900s, mainly hostile but also in significant pockets sympathetic. He describes, for example, how 'panic over the pear' was propagated 'in freely mixed moral, medical and military metaphors', eventually prompting the colonial state to attempt to eliminate the plants chemically.

Fittingly though, and in keeping with the rest of the volume, the silence here is African knowledge. There is much evidence to suggest that Africans were strongly associated with the plant in settler imagination and in fact, as both cultivators and vendors. How do we read from the dense thicket of defensive settler discourse into the history of African uses, knowledge and adaptation? It is this kind of question, it seems to me, that remains the major challenge to this edited collection and the study of environmental history in southern Africa.

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*Contested Landscapes: Movement, Exile and Place.* By BARBARA BENDER AND MARGOT WINER, eds. Oxford and New York: Berg, 2001. xvi + 372pp. ISBN 1859734677.

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This collection stems from the Landscape Symposium held at the World Archaeological Congress in Cape Town in 1999. One of the most sustained and successful parts of the conference, it extended over three days, bringing together contributors from many parts of the world and from several disciplines who explored the cultural and social constructions of landscape. The volume contains twenty of these papers (including a few which were written after WAC) as well as some of the discussants' comments and the authors' responses to them.

Historians have been slower than many to examine the ways in which ideas about landscape are constructed. Simon Schama, as in so many fields, has perhaps done most to popularise the notion that nature and human perception are 'indivisible' and historically conditioned in *Landscape and Memory* (1995), a book which surprisingly receives little attention in this collection. But it moves beyond Schama in several key ways. For one, its roots in the WAC conference means that it challenges the notion of landscape as a Western 'way of seeing', and rather highlights issues of dislocation, exile and diaspora across the globe. Its disciplinary range is wider, including anthropological and sociological case studies, textual (visual and written) analyses and a focus on material culture which reflects its archaeological birthplace. It is perhaps self-evident to say that there is something here for everyone. What is there for the Cape historian and reader of *Kronos*?

The first issue permeates every chapter: landscape is not to be taken for granted or essentialised. Different writers deal with this in different ways, not all of them equally acceptable to historians. The richest contributions demonstrate how perceptions of landscape are socially and historically contextualised. For example, Nicholas Saunders analyses the changing ways in which the Somme trenches have been viewed and constructed as farmland, memorial site, national soil and tourist centre by contending interest groups since 1918 and Aidan O'Sullivan analyses the conflicting ideas about appropriate use of the land during the English conquest of Ireland. Others are less sensitive to historical context: Caroline Humphrey contrasts Chinese and Mongol views of land in ways which give little weight to change over time, a problem I also found with some of the anthropological case studies (for example of Aboriginal perceptions in Northern Queensland or contesting ecologists and farmers in England's New Forest).

But the historian does have much to learn from the methods of non-historians in this volume. Eleanor Casella shows how the architecture and spatial organisation of Ross 'Female Factory', a penitentiary in Tasmania, shaped forms of resistance and convict sexuality, while Tom Selwyn analyses the significance of road building in the construction of Israeli and Palestinian spatial identities - a contribution which gives a new meaning to Bush's 'road map' plans. Margie Orford and Heike Becker use Owambo women's stories to reflect on their experience of spatial exile, Jessica Dubow analyses Cape traveller accounts and an opening se-

ries of Cuito photographs speaks without words of the appropriation of a colonial architecture in the post-war decimation of the urban landscape. One surprising gap is visual histories, given the key role that art has played in constructing notions of 'landscape' in both western, Asian and Aboriginal painting traditions.

The editors have grouped the collection together around two themes – 'Contested Landscapes' and 'Landscapes of Movement and Exile'. A thread that runs through both sections is the construction of heritage, and the role that differing ways of perceiving land and landscape play in the constructions of national and diasporic identities. The symbolic role of landscape is paramount in, for example, Beverley Butler's comments on the representations of Egypt among Second World War European writers, Africanist historians and Egyptian nationalists, Paul Basu's reflections on the experience of visiting Scotland by Canadians of Scottish descent, and the representations of neolithic Ireland in modern Irish tourism and heritage plans. But the ways in which the past is used as a resource in the present is a pervasive theme of most of the book and sometimes in less obvious ways. Roxane Caftanzoglou uses a case study of the Anafiotika community located at the foot of the Acropolis, believed to be a remnant of Ottoman Athens, to depict contested contemporary views of place. Marzia Balazani describes the (very) public walk through the Rajasthan desert of the Rajput of Jodhpur, a figure claiming the landscape to bolster his political role and to recall the powers of his predecessors. Penelope Harvey's ethnographic study of commerce and landscape in the Peruvian Andes reflects on the heritage resources available in the post-colonial context.

So there is much to be learnt from comparative studies. Three contributions focus on South Africa and (reflecting the Cape Town location of WAC?) on the Cape. Jessica Dubow examines the types of perceptual practice of visitors and travellers in the nineteenth-century Cape. Making the important argument that their journeyings (often by foot or ox-waggon) marked a new 'close way of seeing' rather than an 'imperial gaze', she challenges much of the prevailing view of colonial travel writing. However, as Nick Shepherd points out in his discussant comments, there is an ahistorical mixing in Dubow's chapter of very different contexts. I also found that the argument is as yet unsubstantiated by analysis of specific writing - it appears as if the waggon comes before the oxen.

Margot Winer uses style variations in the vernacular architecture of Salem to suggest a typology of Eastern Cape settler identities, from initial 'coping' to greater permanence, affluence and, in the war period of the late 1830s, fear. Her argument that colonial power in the Eastern Cape was created and maintained through material expression, and that such power is still visible, has a resonance for the cultural constructions of landscape throughout South Africa, and indeed in all post-colonial societies.

Anna Bohlin examines the notion of 'special place' in relation to Kalk Bay. Her argument is that the prevalent notion that Kalk Bay avoided the worst manifestations of apartheid is a myth, and she cites examples of forced removals to counter such claims. What is missing here is the perhaps more interesting question of why and how such a myth has evolved - and Nick Sheperd's personal reflections on his experience of living in Kalk Bay testify to its enduring strength even among hardened academics.

As in many contributions to this book, Bohlin's chapter reads as the start of a research project rather than the finished product, perhaps a reflection of its conference roots, perhaps a result of the word limitations imposed by the editors and (presumably) publisher. That is not in itself a bad thing - as the editors state in justifying their inclusion of discussant comments and author responses to them, 'we wanted the book, like the landscapes we talk about, to be both open-ended and untidy.' Nick Shepherd complains of the dangers of over-interpreting and of theorising before researching, and there are signs of this in some of the contributions. But a reading of the collection is certainly a major stimulus to new ideas and ways of research.

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*Wildlife and Warfare: The Life of James Stevenson-Hamilton.* By JANE CARRUTHERS. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2001. 244pp. ISBN 0869809865.

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The environmental historian Jane Carruthers has contributed substantially, with a number of publications, to both the academic record and the transformation initiatives regarding wildlife conservation in Southern Africa, with particular emphasis on the Kruger National Park. Her biography of James Stevenson-Hamilton, first warden of the Kruger Park, drawing on many years of privileged access to Stevenson-Hamilton family records in Lanarkshire, Scotland, is a fascinating study of a period life-history and an intriguing addition to the literature on the history of conservation. The book also carries a degree of symbolic importance, being an exemplary study of a peculiar mixture of late nineteenth-century high Tory colonial adventure, Union reconstruction within the context of the British empire, and emergent Afrikaner nationalism in the 1920s, reminding us of the relatively recent establishment of major features of South African public and environmental culture. As we head towards a number of centenaries of events that were both colonial and (in their context) partially anti-colonial, it seems of more than academic interest to grasp the full trajectory and extent of the brief twentieth century and the making of a South African public sphere, and the kinds of personal agency that were entailed in this.

Recent publication of material from the 1920s and 1930s, such as the long-unpublished English novels of C. Louis Leipoldt, points us towards a sensible grasp of the contradictions within the political order alongside the establishment of values, practices, and institutions which might (from the broadest view) be argued to have transcended these contradictions. Transformation in the area of nature conservation, land reform, and the restoration of the patrimony of black communities, are key issues at present, the former evinced by the work of the World Wildlife Fund and its identification of a number of World Heritage sites in South Africa. The recent decision by the management of the Kruger Park, published in the media, to remove from their prominent positions the busts of Paul Kruger, his nephew the Minister of Lands Piet Grobler, and Stevenson-Hamilton himself, depends on approval from the South African Heritage Resources Agency. The decision raises questions regarding the links between history and memory, monuments-practice, and the symbolic order in South Africa. From an immediate perspective there are strong arguments to rename and refashion the cultural topography of the country, and a study such as Carruthers' biography of Stevenson-Hamilton should bring a kind of forensic insight to these arguments. We realize, reading Carruthers, how arbitrary the naming of the park was, and this being so, how ephemeral are these concerns; we also realize, from her text, the immense worth of the achievement of Stevenson-Hamilton, and his sustained focus on the environmental issues rather than the politically symbolic. His achievement is worth remembrance; and Carruthers' book will certainly do so whether or not a bust or portrait is removed.

Stevenson-Hamilton was of a landed Tory Scottish aristocracy. As Carruthers indicates, family name and memory, and the continuity of the family

house and lands, were dear to Stevenson-Hamilton. Yet in the old Eastern Transvaal lowveld what counted most for him was not name and family virtue but the essentials of game protection. Again, however, there is a Tory preoccupation at the root of his love for wildlife and landscape. The last quarter of the nineteenth and the first quarter of the twentieth century offered immense scope, in Africa, to the privileged adventurer. The social fabric, the public imaginary, and even the symbolic order of the early Union of South Africa owed a great deal to a caste of independent-minded patricians who used this new nation-state as a canvas on which to realize their own vision of the world. Some, like Herbert Baker and his colleagues, developed a national architectural idiom. Others used their mining fortunes to finance universities, schools, libraries, art galleries, and settlement schemes. An image of the new land as proving-ground for a latter-day informed Toryism can be traced in the life and work of strong-minded individuals such as Captain Ewart Grogan, Sir Harry Johnston, or Frederick Courtenay Selous, to name but a few. The figure of the military man, from an upper middle-class or aristocratic landed family, trained in public school and Sandhurst traditions, is ubiquitous throughout the British Empire in the later nineteenth century. Single and devoted to 'sport' and exploration, with one eye perhaps to the gaining of land for settlement schemes, but above all trained in observation of game and of the landscape and its topography, their descriptions had romantic, scientific and commercial appeal to the reader in Britain. James Stevenson-Hamilton's life and career are exemplary of this caste, and its role in the late Victorian and Edwardian British imperial world.

Stevenson-Hamilton published his own experiences in southern Africa, *Animal Life in Africa* (1912), *The Low-veld: Its Wild Life and its People* (1929), and *South African Eden* (1937), this last being a narrative of his life as warden of the Kruger Park. The purpose of these books (besides a number of articles for journals) was to draw attention to the needs of conservation, but they also made his name in South Africa and in England. Carruthers has already published a re-issue of *South African Eden* (1993) with a historical introduction, and this present biography is a detailed complement to Stevenson-Hamilton's own narrative, drawing on his very substantial and detailed record of journals and diaries.

Alongside naturalism and sport was an economic issue. As Carruthers points out, the 1880s and 1890s were a period of crisis for patrician landed families in Britain, with falling profits from agriculture, the rise of labour movements, and the deterioration of the countryside through the spread of industry and coal-mining. India, Burma, Canada, Australasia, and British Africa were thus sites for economic self-renewal. Fictional narratives such as Rider Haggard's *Alan Quatermain* and Buchan's *Prester John* (1910) echo these trends, with the protagonists heading for south-east Africa on a deliberate quest to make their fortune. Quatermain's explicit intention is to repair the weakened patrimony back home for the sake of his son's inheritance.

The story of James Stevenson-Hamilton is very similar. As the heir to an entailed estate in Lanarkshire, which had belonged to the Hamiltons for nearly five centuries, his social position was secure. The question of career was less evident, while the financial difficulties of maintaining Fairholm, the country house and landed estate, burdened his father. Stevenson-Hamilton entered the cavalry in

accordance with family tradition, but proved too much of an individualist for the conventions of late Victorian regimental life. His diaries record frequent despair about his prospects. His regiment was sent to Zululand in 1888 as reinforcements in the campaign against Dinizulu. His encounter with the Southern African landscape and wildlife was something of an epiphany, and after the regiment returned to England he joined a private expedition to Barotseland which was to be his proving ground. He went from there to South Africa in 1899 at the outset of the South African War, to rejoin his regiment in the advance on Pretoria, but once again fell foul of regimental hierarchies and practices.

At the end of the war he applied to Sir Godfrey Lagden, Commissioner for Native Affairs, for the post of Warden of the neglected Sabi Game Reserve, and thus entered into his life's work. When the First World War broke out he once again felt obliged to serve Britain and rejoined the British army, finding himself as a logistical officer in the Gallipoli campaign. After the withdrawal from this disaster he languished in the intrigue-laden atmosphere of Cairo, until he wangled a position in the depleted Sudanese civil service. He became a District Inspector in southern Sudan, in the Sudd, and brought his experiences of the Sabi and Singwitsi reserves to bear on questions of game preservation in this vast and remote area. He spent nearly three years there, and had a continuing commitment of conscience to the development of game preservation in the Sudan. He returned to his position of Warden of the Sabi-Singwitsi reserve, next encountering the new developments in South African politics with the ascendancy of the National Party, and the taking of power by the Pact government under the Nationalist J.B.M Hertzog. There were intricate long-standing struggles to consolidate the reserve, to protect it against white agricultural settlement and the interests of land companies, as well as against mining interests. Perhaps paradoxically, it was the rise of Afrikaner Nationalism that helped to secure the future of the reserve.

Jan Smuts, interested in fauna, flora and conservation, was Stevenson-Hamilton's strongest advocate, until with the change in government in 1924 it emerged that consolidation of the game reserves in the Eastern Transvaal was now also of distinct Nationalist symbolic importance. Thus the anti-imperial party led the move to raise the status of the reserve from provincial to national, and in 1926 it was proclaimed the Kruger National Park. Stevenson-Hamilton was retained as Warden, and at last, at the age of 60, his role and his future seemed assured. He married an Englishwoman thirty-five years his junior, at the age of 65, and settled down as husband, father, laird of Fairholm in Lanarkshire, and 'guardian spirit of the lowveld'. Throughout these years he felt the typical dual identity and dual sense of heritage of British-descended South Africans, often wondering where his allegiances truly lay. He retained a conscientious love for his family home in Scotland and revisited Fairholm in between his military and conservationist duties, claiming, however, that Britain had 'changed for the worst' in numerous ways, and that he was profoundly attached to the landscape of White River and the Sabi. Duty is a recurring issue in his life, and Carruthers makes it evident that this typical nineteenth-century virtue guided most of his choices and actions. There was duty to his family and to their estate, duty to the regiment, to his provincial and national employers, to the National Parks Board, to his own employees, and above all, and



more so as his life progressed, to the integrated ecology (the fauna and flora) of the Lowveld.

Stevenson-Hamilton was motivated by a strong sense of the aesthetic and by justice. His most distinctive characteristic, though, was difficulty with decision-making. Carruthers's biography is not intrusive. It allows the large volume of material available to her from Stevenson-Hamilton's diligent notebooks, diaries and journals to speak on his behalf, and that which speaks most audibly is his constant sense of anxiety when faced with the burden of important decisions. He seeks to hold in balance two very different lives, two very different legacies, to which he finds himself both heir and trustee. He laments in his early manhood the lack of clarity of purpose, of agency, in his life. He comes into his own as property owner by succession and as conservationist almost by accident. Until the end of his life he struggles with decisions about his purpose and place, preferring the individualist role of conscientious warden to working with officials on boards and committees. Like Robert Baden-Powell and others of his class and time, Stevenson-Hamilton led three distinct lives, as land-owner, soldier, and conservationist, and passed in mid-life from one career to the other. The biography is as much a fascinating study of high Victorian privilege, schooling (at Rugby), military life, and family responsibilities and burdens, as it is a fine-grained account of the rise of a holistic approach to conservation in South Africa. Again, the context of competing senses of South African identity, politics, and culture in the first three decades of the twentieth century is a compelling framework for Carruthers' study. Stevenson-Hamilton found the shifting political terrain uncongenial although he strove to avoid wrangles with the National Parks Board. As the century progressed the ageing individualist claimed to be of 'the wrong class' in Britain, and 'the wrong race' in South Africa. The narrative may thus be read as a case-study of the dynamics of social change alongside the imperative for (conservationist) continuity. Erik Erikson has written on the subject of 'psychohistory', or the ways in which the life of the individual subject intersects and coheres with broad trends. Stevenson-Hamilton's life and work are a lucid example of this intersection.

This hardcover book is handsomely bound and well-illustrated. John Mackenzie, the general editor of the Manchester University Press series 'Studies in Imperialism', has written a foreword which appreciates both Stevenson-Hamilton himself and Carruthers' 'timely' study of the man and of the roots of nature conservation in South Africa. Considering how frequently South Africa has been represented abroad (with a variety of implications, some of them peculiar and contentious) as a vast site for forms of 'natural history' and ecological romanticism, by writers as varied as Laurens van der Post and William Smith, in reading Carruthers' account of Stevenson-Hamilton's evolving early philosophy towards fauna and flora in their context, we can detect the significant roots of a holistic ecological discourse that, in many respects, has become a defining set of tropes for the land.

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Though environmental history is considered a relatively new sub-field of historiography, particularly in southern Africa, its development as a body of knowledge has a long history. In the natural sciences, it can be traced back to theories of evolution of landscapes, which were mainly concerned with how natural forces shape the physical environment. Subsequently, social factors were also appreciated. Notably, the scope and content of what might have been termed environmental history has changed with, or along, shifting environmental perspectives. Despite those shifts, the focal point of environmental history has been the concern with the historical explanations of the relations between society and nature. In recent years, emphasis has been placed on the reassessment of earlier explanations of landscapes. The reassessment was occasioned by new scientific findings, advancement in research methodologies and – more importantly – by the need to decolonise landscape narratives.

Generally, landscapes narratives ignored the contribution that humans have made in shaping what appeared to be natural environments. That arose in part from obsessions with the wilderness as places that had not been touched by humans – i.e. as remnants of pristine nature or a slice of paradise. And wilderness was to be preserved from human interference. Preservation implied that the wild places should be protected from the destructive human agent. In this context, it was therefore logical to dismiss the roles that humans played in the creation of those places in order to justify human exclusions. Where such roles were acknowledged, humans were seen as a destructive agent. And African environments became one of the most useful laboratories in which the destruction of the natural environment by humans was to be continuously demonstrated. There are many reasons why Africa became an easy choice. Principal among them was, and still is, the widely-held assumption that Africans are incapable of, or unable to, protect the natural environment around them – in part because they had been considered closer to nature than their western counterparts. Their poverty, too, has become a common explanation of their lack of concern for long-term environmental consequences. In recent years, poverty in Africa has been used to maintain that logic through arguments that seek to establish the link between poverty and environmental degradation. In other words, perceptions of Africans run parallel with those of the environments on which they live. Against this backdrop, McCann's book, *Green Land, Brown Land, Black Land*, seeks to question some of the assumptions that underpin(ned) explanations of African environments.

The objective of this book is twofold. First, the author seeks to reaffirm the relevance of environmental history to understanding Africa's past. As he puts it, 'Africa's environmental history is written on its landscape ... the shades and textures of its soils, forests, vegetation, and human settlements reflect [Africa's history] in a way more profound and ubiquitous than politics, economics, or even colonial rule.' By so saying, he reasserts environmental issues as a subject matter

of history. His concern with the field (of African history) is clearly articulated in the concluding remarks of chapter three where he maintains that, 'landscape history – what Africa looked like, when, and why – is also a part of human history with an aesthetic and not merely a pragmatic appeal. The role of climate, biodiversity, and the action of the soils, as well as the overall appearance of landscapes, should be both a subject of African history and a central component of how we define it.' Similar concerns for the place of 'the environment' in history have been raised in South Africa; viewing environmental issues as something of a lifeline for history at university level in particular.

The message here is that environmental history forms an integral part of African history. And both environmental and African history seeks to offer a corrective and anti-colonial approach to environmental landscapes.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, this is the fundamental leitmotif of McCann's book. The second objective of his book is therefore to strengthen the corrective perspective on both the making of African landscapes and on colonial accounts of those landscapes. He aligns his work with recent claims that African landscapes have been misread. Throughout the book, McCann argues that African landscapes are both historical and anthropogenic. One of the most important, but controversial, arguments of the book is the link between the rise and fall of African polities and their immediate physical environments. McCann's main argument is that environmental conditions allowed certain kinds of activities that profoundly shaped the character and geographic boundaries of African polities. The historical expansion of the Sahelian empires such as Mali and Songhay is ascribed to the sequencing of wet and dry periods. Climatic conditions variously influenced agricultural and trade frontiers, military interests and inter-state relations. The author refers to George Brooks's work to make the connections clear: 'the wet period brought a mixture of benefits and disadvantages for the Songhay empire. Trans-Saharan commerce flourished during this time and the Songhay empire was able to prevail over Berber groups and control trade routes further north than either Ghana or Mali had been able to penetrate.' Similarly, the fortunes of the Great Zimbabwe in southern Africa and Aksum in the horn of Africa were inextricably linked with environmental conditions prevailing at the time. 'The history of central Ghana', he reiterates, 'strongly reflects the engagement of human society with the vegetative cover of the Upper Guinea coast.' He concludes that, 'the vast majority of Africa's historical empire states (e.g. Mali, Meroe, Great Zimbabwe, Aksum) have overwhelmingly [centred] themselves firmly on savanna ecologies that allowed easy communication and production of annual cereal grains that are storable, transportable, and easily divisible as tributary revenues.'

Scholars of African politics may want to compare the rise and fall of pre- and post-colonial African polities. Such a comparison might shed some light on some of the perennial problems that African states faced since independence. An example that comes readily to mind is the impact that declining socio-economic conditions have had on the relations between state and society, and on the nature of the leadership that emerged. And how scarcity of environmental resources contrib-

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1. W. Beinart, 'African history and environmental history', *African Affairs*, vol.99, 2000.

uted to the trajectories of African polities in different time scales. In other words, we need to, and perhaps have to, establish the extent to which present-day socio-environmental conditions feed into the tapestry of the postcolony. Jeffrey Herbst has attempted to follow this clue, though like McCann, fell into the trap of environmentalism.<sup>2</sup> He claimed that ‘by examining both the environment that leaders had to confront and the institutions they created in light of their political calculations, the entire trajectory of state creation in Africa can be recovered.’

The association of environmental conditions and African empires brings environmental determinism to the forefront of the history of African states. And, begs the question of whether African polities were shaped by the physical conditions. The question is important in light of debates about environmental determinism – as a doctrine that human activities are controlled by the environment – and against the background of problems confronting the postcolony on the continent. Having invoked environmental determinism, the author had three theoretical positions from which he could choose to defend the thesis of his book. The first was to adopt the familiar ‘society-in-harmony-with nature’ mythology. Secondly, he could reaffirm the now discredited view of nature as a determinant of society’s fate. Thirdly, he could align his work with the view of humanity as a modifier of nature. It is interesting to note that McCann negotiated his position by carefully selecting those aspects of environmentalism that allow him to construct environmental possibilism as a middle ground. This is clear from his view that, ‘the real value of linking environment to historical process may lie in a more subtle, nuanced view of how environmental conditions set a context for social and historical interaction.’ As possibilists would have it, the environment has influence on human action, but humans can still make choices on how to relate to the environment.

The bulk of McCann’s book, particularly from chapter four onwards, is devoted to demonstrating how Africans made those choices and what the effects on the environment were. He draws examples from existing literature to claim that, ‘Africa’s landscapes show the cumulative effects of specific human tools: hand hoes, oxplows, axes, machetes, and human agents such as domestic livestock, fire, [and] crops.’ To him, these human tools are symbols of how Africans related to the environments on which they depended for their livelihood.

The examples are laid against the background of the hegemonic colonial meta-narrative of the African response to environmental conditions, which reified negative images. In that narrative, desertification, deforestation, soil erosion, reduction in wildlife resources, and so forth, came to symbolise the uncivilised behaviour of the African. And where ‘green fields’ existed, the African was assumed absent. Images of the African ‘cruelty to nature’ were constructed by colonial administration to justify coercion and paternalism. McCann correctly observed that ‘international policy ... placed Africa’s environmental crises of the 1970s at the door-step of Africans themselves.’ The author adopts an anti-colonial narrative to demonstrate that Africans’ relations with their environment were not as negative as we have been made to believe. This, he does, not to glorify the past, but rather to – in line with the principal objective of his book – to offer a corrective interpreta-

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2. J. Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control* (Princeton, 2000).

tion of African landscapes. To that end, McCann refers to the influential work of Peter Lamb in order to advance a counter-narrative that questions the human hand in the degradation of the Sahelian zone.

Similarly, he uses evidence from the soil scientist, Kate Showers, to assert the claim that colonial intervention, rather than Lesotho's farmers, account for the creation of dongas in Lesotho: 'the presence of dongas on Lesotho's landscape is a result of cumulative factors of physical geography, human strategies of production, and the historical conjuncture of these local issues with southern Africa's modern political economy.' The degradation of the environment *per se* is not in dispute. It is rather the meaning and direction of changes in the physical landscapes that need clarification. The direction of change is important not least because the dynamism of landscapes defies most of the simple, unilinear explanations that have hitherto been offered. There are multiple factors behind changes in the landscape! At issue is how and why we extrapolate the human – African – factor from a complex web of other factors, and how we determine which factor is more critical than others.

Furthermore, McCann deployed existing case study material to show the positive influences Africans have had on their physical surroundings. He prefaced the debate by referring to John Iliffe's provocative description of Africa's people as 'the frontiersmen of mankind ... who have colonized an especially hostile region of the world on behalf of the entire human race. That has been their chief contribution to history.' In practice, the Aksumite had effective water management systems and West Africans in the Kissidougou Prefecture contributed to the development of the impressive forest/savanna mosaic. These, of course, are some of the groundbreaking studies that have gained international recognition. McCann's use of case studies such as these throughout the book has strengthened his argument, but has also undermined the intellectual punch of the book. In my view, this blemishes McCann's contribution to the debate. For those familiar with the case studies he refers to – degradation in the Machakos, the Sahel, and Lesotho; the human-induced forests of West Africa; the socio-economic conditions of the Asante empire – the book becomes less interesting. As a consequence of these case studies, the thesis of the book has unnecessarily been recycled. And the manner in which the theme has been rehearsed leaves the reader wondering whether s/he is not reading the same sentence over and over again. More crucially, the book brings environmentalism through the backdoor. These weaknesses aside, McCann succeeded in making the case for environmental history as an integral part of African history, and has sustained the thrust of corrective history. Perhaps the reconstruction of African landscapes would be useful in rebuilding the image of Africa and its people.

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According to Wilmsen, the history of the Kalahari as written ‘reads like a kaleidoscope of unconnected slide shows thrown up on segregated screen.’<sup>1</sup> He argues that dialectical relationships are often ignored in favour of particularism with the focus on one particular group or one particular point in time. Nancy Jacobs’ book counters Wilmsen’s criticisms of historical accounts on all fronts. First, Jacobs’ historical account moves beyond particularism by focusing on the *interactions* between state, missionaries, indigenous populations and dominant groups over time. Second, her analysis moves beyond dialectical relations to look at the networks of interactions and the complexities of relations between different groups, but also between these groups and the environment. Jacobs’ approach focuses Wilmsen’s ‘kaleidoscope’ on the *connections* between the ‘slides and screens’ to give a seamless socio-environmental analysis of the Kuruman region.

Jacobs takes Kuruman, on the edge of the Kalahari, as the case study focus for this book and explores the environmental dynamic in the history of rural black South Africans from this point. The book is organised around three overlapping themes that chronologically entwine the social and environmental history of the region: the frontier, the colonial and the segregationist periods. Through these themes Jacobs illustrates how the relations between people and the environment changed through political, cultural and economic forces.

In part one, Jacobs explores the ‘zones of contact’ between different societies and the negotiation of territory (environmental, political and cultural) within the defined ‘frontiers’. Within these negotiations, discourses of power and patriarchy were played out, though the subordinate were able to find respite from domination in environmental niches. It is through this type of integrated analysis that Jacobs highlights how power, politics and the environment intersect across difference scales and between different groups of people.

In the second section, Jacobs aims to explore the colonial environmental history of the region, placing emphasis on the role of the state in mediating different people’s relationships with the environment. This section analyses the changing role of migrant wage labour and the influence these changes had on social relations and land-based livelihoods. The final section of the book considered the period when segregationist policy further changed people’s relations with the environment, or the nonhuman world as Jacobs prefers. She explores the control of people and landscape through a nuanced analysis of forced removals, coercive conservation and, most notoriously, the state’s killing of donkeys in the region. This latter example takes on poignant symbolism throughout the book as a reminder of how power, injustice and the environment intersect in people’s everyday lives.

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1. E.N. Wilmsen, *Land Filled with Flies. A Political Economy of the Kalahari* (Chicago, 1989), 7.

Jacobs takes as her departure point for this book a quote from C. S. Lewis: 'What we call Man's power over Nature turns out to be a power exercised by some men over other men with nature as its instrument.' Putting the gender bias of the quote aside, it gets to the heart of what Jacobs is trying to do. This book is not concerned with describing how people use the environment or what they do to make it 'better' or 'worse'. Rather, it seeks to understand how power and politics can be played out in such a way as to exert influence over how people interact with their environment, what opportunities are or are not available to them, and how they interpret and understand change in the world (human and nonhuman) around them. The environment does not provide a backdrop for this analysis: its dynamics are central and critical in Jacobs' interpretation of the political economy of this region.

For the remainder of this review I discuss some key themes that emerge from the book. The themes chosen reflect issues that I found of particular interest, and no doubt reflect my own interests in the area, rather than necessarily the emphases of the book. In particular I am interested in how contemporary debates surrounding sustainable livelihoods and political ecology (largely absent from the book) provide clear synergies with the arguments laid out in the book. As such I suggest that some constructive parallels can be drawn between historical and contemporary understandings of environment, power and injustice in the Kalahari.

Jacobs places great emphasis on the need to understand the ecological component of the environment and integrates this into her historical analysis. Rather than taking the environment as a static backdrop upon which power and politics are played out, Jacobs looks to the nonhuman world and focuses on the *relations* between human and nonhuman, between people and the environment. This approach makes for an extremely integrated text that allows the dynamic of the environment to be placed centrally within the historical analysis.

The nature of Kalahari savanna ecosystems means that temporal and spatial variability are normal characteristics of vegetation at any snapshot of time. Two principal factors contribute to this variability: animals and climate. Such systems have been described as disequilibrium, or as nonequilibrium systems, with the recognition in the 1980s and 1990s of this trait often described as representing a paradigm shift in ecological thinking. Jacobs is fully aware that the interactions between grazing and browsing animals and vegetation are complex in savanna systems. Intense grazing can also lead to excessive removal of the most palatable species (usually perennial grasses). This reduces ground cover, but ultimately opens the way for less palatable and faster establishing annual grasses to gain a foothold, and, in many situations in the Kalahari, for shrub and bush species to become dominant. However, while many rangeland scientists view these changes in vegetation composition as negative (i.e. as degradation), Jacobs' work reveals some of the alternative interpretations of the environmental variability held by the local black populations. Through a critical reflection of local interpretations of change alongside nonequilibrium scientific views of change, she manages to go beyond the juxtaposing of one view against another to provide an insightful discussion of these 'retrospectives'.

A key theme that therefore emerges in this book is that of local and scien-

tific knowledge about the environment and the recognition that these knowledges are fluid and dynamic, yet sometimes contradictory. As such, Jacobs accepts that all forms of knowledge are hybrid, and that one form of knowledge should not be privileged over another. This approach provides a relevant framework for better understanding the dynamics of vegetation change in drylands, as well as enhancing our understanding of sustainability and the persistence of change within rangelands. Jacobs pulls out these discrepancies particularly well in the discussion of the Betterment programmes and donkey massacre that were justified by arguments for efficient and modern farming practices (chapter 8). She also draws out the divergent perspectives of different groups (missionaries, state, local populations) and how their different interpretations and actions surrounding events shape both the political ecology and moral economy of the region.

Given the focus of the book on changing power relations and interactions with the environment since the 'frontier' period, an implicit theme within the book is that of adaptation to change, be it environmental, political or social. Jacobs skilfully weaves her analysis across these themes, and through her chronology. She illustrates how people cope with change and her work has resonances with a broader literature looking at how we can understand adaptation, and what enables or inhibits people's responses, i.e. what determines their capacity to adapt. While Jacobs says little on the difficulty of unpicking and identifying what drives change within different spheres of the Kalahari environment, she does establish parallel sets of narratives that enable the reader to make their own interpretations. Using rich archival and interview material, Jacobs' accounts and explanations are real, tangible and easy to follow. This style of narrative makes for a very well integrated book that weaves themes and arguments neatly and clearly, illustrating them with vivid accounts from the past.

The Kalahari today is a system often characterised as undergoing marked environmental and social changes due to the overwhelming dominance of cattle production. This picture does not capture, however, the spatial variability and complexity of current natural resource-based livelihoods in the region as a whole, nor the variable interpretation of 'changes' in the environmental system. For while cattle production does widely occur today, research identifies marked variability in the composition of natural-resource based activities across the region due to position along the dryland climate gradient in the Kalahari, different land histories during the colonial and pre/post colonial periods and complex state-originated interventions. This work on contemporary livelihood dynamics today has been much enhanced by historical accounts such as those by Jacobs on the changing political economy of the region. Though the 'sustainable livelihoods' approach is more readily associated with contemporary development policy, its foundations rest on principles that sit closely with those providing the historical accounts of the lives of people in dryland regions.

Jacobs' history of Kuruman illustrates that the simplifications and impositions by the state came at the cost of indigenous adaptations to the environment. As such she takes as a key theme in her analysis, the explorations of power and inequality as played out in the environment. She continually reminds us that the environment in her analysis refers to 'interactions between people and the nonhu-



man realm surrounding them' and reiterates that 'these biophysical entities and forces interact with each other as well as with people.' Her approach to power and inequality draws on work such as that by Scott, providing a powerful analysis of state interactions with the indigenous populations. She justifies this by stating that because the state exercised power on behalf of a dominant group, its impact on people's relations with the environment is profound. She thus shows how the state provided the greatest hindrance to people's capacity to adapt and maintain viable livelihoods, though at the same time, the 'harsh' environment also provided some with refuge and sustenance, despite the power politics.

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