## REVIEWS

*The Nation's Bounty: The Xhosa Poetry of Nontsizi Mgqwetho*. Edited and translated by JEFF OPLAND Johannesburg: Wits University Press. 2007 *xxx* + 478p. ISBN 978 1866 144518.

Opland has once again, as he has done in, for instance, *Izwi Labantu*<sup>1</sup> successfully mined and brought to the surface literary works that have for a long time remained hidden from the light of day. The special contribution he makes is bringing literary works written in isiXhosa into academia and thus, in a way, challenges the comfort zone of those who specialise in South African studies but make no effort to learn the indigenous languages.

In her foreword to the book Isabel Hofmeyr discusses the appropriateness of the title, *The Nation's Bounty*, for the collection of one hundred and three poems written by a siXhosa-speaking woman, Nontsizi Mgqwetho, during the 1920s. The richness, complexity, profusion and elusiveness, are some of the elements that for a long time to come will challenge literary scholars, historians, theologians, specialists in gender studies and others.

Both Hofmeyr and Opland make special mention of Mgqwetho's contribution as a woman *imbongi*. Both commentators touch on the hurdles Mgqwetho would have had to overcome to be an *imbongi*. Their argument is based on the premise that the world of amaXhosa poetry was always dominated by men. Granted, Opland admits that Xhosa women did have scope to perform as *iimbongi* as they sang *iziduko*, clan praises, during family ceremonies. In fact Opland addresses the same issue when he interviews Ncamashe in another work.<sup>2</sup>

The image of an oppressed voiceless African woman is very well-developed in academic writings. It is posited within the binary thinking that places males and females in opposing camps. When such order is broken, it is a challenge to understand what appears to be anomalous. Mgqwetho as an African woman *imbongi* poses such an anomaly.

Within African knowledge systems there are provisions for 'transgression' of assumed social boundaries. Those with special gifts and abilities are given recognition and are accorded space to be. In many ways Mgqwetho is a prime example of a gifted woman: she can be classified as *uyathwasa* or *unentwaso* and is thus granted a wide audience and recognition. Firstly, she breaks into the male-dominated world of the western trained literati. On this point I want to argue that even the observation about male domination is more of colonial-Christian influence than African thinking. If schooling was perceived to be a male monopoly by Afri-

<sup>1</sup> Jeff Opland and P.T. Mtuze, Izwi Labantu (CapeTown: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Jeff Opland, Xhosa Poets and Poetry (Cape Town: David Philip, 1998), 10.

cans one has to explain why there was always a majority of girls in school registers when missionaries first opened schools.

Mgqwetho's stance of adopting 'different personae', as Hofmeyr puts it, or her use of multiple voices as both male and female, should be understood in the context of an androgynous character that the 'gifted' are allowed to adopt.

A proper analysis of Mgqwetho as *imbongi*, historian, preacher and public commentator must thus be undertaken within an understanding of a Xhosa woman whose special gifts are acknowledged by editors, and the general reading public. Mgqwetho's acceptance and recognition by the African community can be deduced from the fact that for about ten years she enjoys the 'poetic licence' of *imbongi* as she tackles contentious topics, like drunkenness, immorality, religiosity, licentiousness and even cowardice. At times victims of her caustic pen are mentioned by name. Tyelinzima Gatyeni is made fun of for being a sixty-year-old whose brains do not function properly (193). She continues in this vein and ends up making a pun from her victim's name, '*Xa ilitye linzima ligatyeni*' (195). In the poem, 'Imbongikazi No "Abantu-batho" she attacks a certain Mvabaza and likens him to a cow whose milk has dried up, '*uyimazi ebisi luncinane*'. In the same poem she is more forthright as she asks Mvabaza, '*Nguban owakubeka ukuba ube yinkokheli*?' (27).

Mgqwetho's use of clan names like hers, Chizama, her mother's, Cete and others like Radebe and Gatyeni as well as her repeated reference to current and historical figures and events in the African world deepen the complexity of her *izibongo*. Her 'hom', in another she is *igqira*, a diviner, 'Siyavuma'. Even the use, as is prevalent in African poetry, of conventional themes and formulae can make understanding of the texts impossible to a reader unfamiliar with that world. Opland, through the copious notes he provides, helps the reader to get into the world of Mgqwetho.

Another style that keeps coming up in the texts is repetition. Opland raises this point as a possible concern for readers. Mgqwetho's repetitive style, however, is not due to fatigue or laziness. She is operating within the oral formulaic tradition. It is a pervading characteristic in African poetry: that a performance or creation in its uniqueness is still embedded within traditionally known themes or formulae <sup>3</sup> There is creativity within the re-use of formulaic phrases as they are used in different contexts. On this matter Opland rightly invites readers to 'forego western predispositions and receive the poems' (*xxviii*).

IsiXhosa that *imbongi* uses reveals her cosmopolitan world in Johannesburg. It contains the many languages spoken in that region which include Afrikaans, English, siZulu, and others. This does not detract from the beauty of *izibongo* that Mgqwetho creates and pens. She weaves a poetic tapestry of exquisite beauty as she deftly glides between western and African traditions. She writes in stanzas of equal length that are comfortable to the eye. The rhyming, tightened up from text

<sup>3</sup> R. Finnegan, The Oral and Beyond: Doing Things with Words in Africa (Oxford: James Currey, 2007), 96-113.

number 33 onwards, also enhances the pausing and sounds at the end of lines. She, however, does not forego the favourite African style of playing with words, 'Lemk izwe nezizwe'(61), or 'Wugqwetele umgqwetto' (77), or 'Nto kamaxeke, Nabo abafazi bezizinxekenxeke' (275) Nor does she give up on old poetic phrases that connect her to broader Xhosa poetry. When she says, 'Ugaga luhamba luGongqoza lukhwezi xesi uNdana koVece uXesi Magqagala' (3), she could have well been performing for the long deceased Nkosi Sandile.

Opland provides a broad discussion of the backdrop from which Mgqwetho wrote her poetry. He cites the period after the First World War as having been a time of social unrest. He further makes reference to the growing industrialisation because of the re-discovery of minerals and the rapidly mushrooming cities with unsettled communities into which *imbongi* moved. Opland also attributes Mgqwetho's repeated references to biblical excerpts to the influence of *Manyano*, a women's prayer union. *Imbongi's* knowledge of the Bible is truly phenomenal. Nevertheless, it is the way Mgqwetho uses biblical texts to back up her political, protest and defiant statements that needs to be especially noted. Mgqwetho uses the same Bible that was brought in to conquer Africa, 'Zay 'ikonxa iAfrika nga-makhamandela nange Bhaibhile' (241) to set the continent and its people free.

Opland does not give adequate attention to Mgqwetho's overall theme in her works. *Imbongikazi* is calling for unity among African people and for the liberation of Africa from foreigners who have overrun her with unacceptable teachings. Mgqwethos's Africanist *izibongo* echo earlier calls made through poems and hymns by the likes of Tiyo Soga and later, Sontonga's *Nkosi Sikelel' I Africa* of 1904, and Rubusana's *Zemk'iinkomo Magwala Ndini!*. In fact, Hofmeyr does make reference to the end of nineteenth and early twentieth Centuries pan-Africanist discourse which Mgqwetho entered through her works. Indeed, Mgqwetho's poetry succeeds in enlightening the reader on the political philosophy that was termed 'The African Liberation Movement' by H.I.E. Dhlomo, an African intellectual of the day <sup>4</sup>.

Masilela contends that it was through the paper *Umteteli Wa Bantu* that intellectuals of the 1920s like RV Selope Thema, Selby Msimang, and others propagated their thinking on 'New Africanism'<sup>5</sup> that was opposed to the government's oppressive policies. On the other hand Opland cites *Umteteleli Wa Bantu* as having been a paper that was founded by the South African Chamber of Mines to oppose *Abantu-Batho* (*xxv*). Analysts need to probe into the paradox of a paper that was supposedly founded at the instigation of 'conservative' Africans to oppose the 'radical' *Abantu-Batho* and yet became the platform for Africanist and anti-colonialist calls as evidenced through *imbongikazi's izibongo*.

Mgqwetho did not only bemoan the loss of land, lack of direction and selfrespect among Africans. She accused Europeans of being the thieves who were responsible for loss suffered by Africa. From her poems one learns that other causes of African suffering were poll tax and passes (text 54, 253-255). But there are

<sup>4</sup> Ntongela Masilela, The Cultural Modernity of H.I.E. Dhlomo (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World, 2007), 46

<sup>5</sup> N. Masilela, Cultural Modernity, 44.

inexplicable silences on contemporary events in the collection under discussion. Mgqwetho makes no reference to the 1922 workers' uprising and ruthless suppression. She does not mention the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union which reached its peak as a mass movement between 1923 and 1928. It is in only a few texts that reference is made to workers. In '*Umanyano! Basebenzi Abantsundu!!*', *imbongi* calls for unity among workers. Could it be that Mgqwetho's works were censored?

Opland has bravely embarked on the mammoth task of translating *izibongo* into English, thus making them available to a wider audience. He claims to have been assisted by Ntantala and Mtuze, respected writers and first language speakers of isiXhosa. A lot of hard work has gone through the translation of one hundred and three poems sometimes expressed through obscure words and phrases. This is further complicated by the fact that isiXhosa is a flowery language that makes ample use of figurative expressions, particularly in *izibongo*. There are some excerpts that have retained both meaning and figurative expression, even in translation. Paragraph 20 in *Umanyano Basebenzi Abantsundu!!* (103) is one such example

Umanyano nje lwenene lungamandla	unity's strength indeed
Mz'wamaneneondliwe ngamanene	A nation of nobles nurtured by nobles
Obawo bafungwa nango sebeleni	Even sucklings respect their fathers
Taru basebenzi bendonga ze Afrika	Peace, diggers in Africa's ditches

There are a number of instances of weak and inept translation. Often the editor and translator gives a literal translation and meaning is subsequently lost. In *isibongo* 20, the title is '*Ingwe idla ngamabala*'. The translation should be, 'The leopard's spots are its pride' and not 'Spots feed the leopard'. In *isibongo* 15, '*Zatsha! Inkomo Nomazakuzaku*' in the line '*Zik'afuleni nizibize ngamagama'* (93), the translation, 'Strengthen them, call them by name' (92) is the exact opposite of the meaning. The translation should be 'Curse them and call them by name'. Mgqwetho has a set of phrases that she uses in different contexts. The phrase, '*Yingwe yetunzi'* (85) should not necessarily make reference to a leopard. The phrase suggests opposition. In the context under discussion it may be better to say, 'A prophet is an enemy of darkness'. The translation is an area that the editor and translator might wish to give further attention in improving this, our bounty.

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*Claim to the County : The Archive of Lucy Lloyd and Wilhelm Bleek.* Edited by PIPPA SKOTNES. Auckland Park: Jacana; Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007. 392 pp, including DVD. ISBN: 978 177009 3379.

Pippa Skotnes has produced another lavish publication accompanied by a DVD with previously unpublished notebooks of Bleek and Lloyd. 'This book', she asserts, 'is the result of a twenty-year love affair with the archive'(41). Following the pattern set with her Miscast: Negotiating the Presence of the Bushmen (1996), the latest book also aspires to be an art object in its own right. The material of the archive is reproduced and stylized, preserving its aura and singularity. In the spirit of Neil Bennun's The Broken String: The Last Words of an Extinct People (2004), the main effect of looking through this text is a sense of belatedness, as the archive signals spots of time from a bygone era. Lives that have passed away, the Bleek family and their San informants, haunt each elaborately composed page depicting incidental drawings and scribbles. Thus the book is testimony also to the printing and design processes now available that make a level of detail possible, one that once would have been the preserve of illuminated manuscripts. The dust jacket tells us that Claim to the Country is part of a LLAREC project, supported by the Andrew W Mellon Foundation, De Beers, and Scan Shop. As an indication that this is a book to be *looked at* rather than *read* the contents page only appears on page twenty-five.

After Skotnes's introduction and opening essay (to which we will return), John Parkington (who also appeared in *Miscast*) gives the standard historical sketch of the San with pictures of various landscapes. He concludes with the claim that //Kabbo's remarks on illustrations of cave paintings are' intensely metaphorical [....] The almost unbiquitous use of metaphor permeates both the written and the painted or engraved documents'(89). Readers familiar with scholarship on the San will recognize this attribution of tropism. Indeed Bleek's own Bushman researches would be unthinkable without the attribution of metaphor, for it is the capacity for mythology and metaphor that sets the 'Bushmen'above the prosaic *Bâ-ntu*. In other words, the attribution of tropism is not only part of an ethno-semiology that needs to be explored rather than regurgitated, it forms a tap root to a central component of a tradition of thought that leads back to Aristotle's *Poetics*. Bleek's contribution to racial thinking is itself unthinkable outside of this problematic.

Nigel Penn (who also appeared in *Miscast*) delivers what to me is the most interesting essay in the book. He discusses the origins of British policy toward the San toward the close of the eighteenth century, the ferocity of resistance to the colonists, the tensions between the forms of pacification and incorporation envisaged by the colonial government and the Northern Cape frontier settlers, and the final years of the Sak River Mission to the San. Penn shows that this did not rule out attempts at co-existence premised on 'civilizing the San', i.e., inculcating in them an appreciation of private property, and turning them into independent pastoralists. A story of complex interaction emerges that includes the work of the missionaries among the San, and the ultimate realization that they were dependent on the gov-

ernment and its functionaries for protection, thus complicating the usual narrative of genocide. The interplay between personal rivalry, hunting rights, patronage and spiritual redemption are fascinatingly captured in Penn's contribution. In contrast to the Khoikhoi, the San rejected the Christian message when it 'encouraged a sedentary life-style, or a life devoted to the production of exchange commodities, or a life of service as a bondsman in someone else's employment, or even the adoption of a postoralist lifestyle [....] The wind would eventually blow the San away completely, but they died unconverted' (104-105). Penn continues:

It cannot be said that the /Xam of Bushmanland were pleased at the prospect of the missionaries' return. Indeed, some of the Sak River /Xam who, according to Kircherer have expressed 'a great desire for our return', mischievously gave them false information that considerable rain had fallen in the wilderness. After three days without water this was discovered to be a lie and the large flocks and herds of the Christians were in distress. Nor was this all, for when the first spring was reached, it was found to have been poisoned with serpents' heads (106).

The relatively benevolent attitude of the British authorities was followed by the arrival of the Batavian Republic (1803-1806) and years of drought. The plight of the San was bound up with other attempts at pacification and various treaties, but the colonial frontier closed around the San of the northern Cape, trapping them in the barren heart of Bushmanland where they fought throughout the nineteenth century to preserve their way of life.

John Wright revisits his 1971 Bushman Raiders of the Drakensberg 1840-1870, and supplements it with an account of the interaction between the San and other indigenous groups. Anthony Traill explores the sociolinguistic conditions which lead to the death of /Xam in a reprint of an essay that first appeared in Miscast. Repetition is a marked feature of *Claim to the Country*, and the reader will decide whether or not it is to be forgiven. Of more interest is Anne Solomon's look at the San rock art and the testimony afforded by Joseph Orpen's 'A glimpse of the Maluti Bushmen' that appeared in the Cape Monthy Magazine of 1874. Orpen conveys the views of his Lesotho San informant, Qing, who was familiar with the practice of rock painting in the Drakensberg. Taking up Bleek's idea that Qing's comments echoed the views of his own San informants (particularly Dia!kwain) concerning rock art, Solomon argues that the imagery and its interpretations evidence a shared cosmology. Various interpretations of various images are read to support the idea that the San-speaking peoples shared a common vision of the world, 'but it is the /Xam stories and accounts of their customary ways that bring their universe, as they thought and experienced it, to life for contemporary readers' (155). The contribution of Lewis-Williams to the interpretation of San art is summarized a follows: rock art is not a record of everyday life, simple decoration or functional aid to survival but a visual embodiment of 'San life-themes as diverse as female initiation, hunting, 'medicine men', the rain, divination and divinity'(156). Ultimately, for Lewis-Williams, they are tied to shamanism and trance experiences and the 'rock images and their forms are linked to visual experiences allegedly common to all modern humans in altered states, the common denominator being that no matter when or what our cultural background our brains are "hard-wired" in identical ways that unite human visual experience' (156). Solomon, however, disputes what she terms the shamanistic model and argues that representations of the /Xam sorcerers rarely present them as living shamans but most often as spirits and supernatural beings. The lesson to be drawn is that the information supplied by Bleek and Lloyd's informants should not be applied to every aspect of all rock art: such information is a lens rather than a template.

For me, the low point of the collection is Roger Hewitt's account of his discovery of the value of the Bleek and Lloyd collection, embroidered with photographs of his own correspondence. Doubtless as Skotnes attests 'Roger Hewitt is the person to whom we owe our greatest debt for his recovery of Bleek and Lloyd's notebooks from the obscurity in which they had lain in the University of Cape Town library ' (Skotnes, 'Introduction', *Claim to the Country: The Archive of Lucy Lloyd and Wilhelm Bleek*, 48). The fact that Hewitt has 'generously donated his early correspondence with the University of Cape Town, thus expanding the archive itself ' (48), raises questions about the relation between scholarship on the archive and the archive itself that I would like to return to shortly. Hewitt's essay is followed by more poetic variations from Stephen Watson, as per his *Return of the Moon: Versions from the /Xam* (1991)

David Lewis-Williams (also in Miscast) ends the sequence of essays with a personal tribute to the Bleeks and Lloyd: 'In the early 1970s //kabob, Dia!kwain and the others cast a spell over me. Paging through Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd's verbatim records of their conversations with /Xam San people, I found that page after manuscript page glowed with the radiance of long-gone personalities '(178). The tone of piety continues:' [t]he sheer volume of the work and the devout scholarship of Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd leave the modern researcher humbled' (180). Lewis-Williams repeats the story of the South African motto and its link to the Bleek and Lloyd archive 'an ancient language and belief system that speaks to us of our deep past and, especially in the new motto, of an expanding, diversity-embracing future'(181). This is followed by excerpts and reproductions from the archive, including letters, prefaced by biographical portraits of Bleek, Lloyd, Jemima (Bleek's wife), and Dorothea (his daughter)which gathers together previous work by Skotnes herself, Janette Deacon and Thomas A. Dowson, and Sigrid Schmidt among others. Andrew Bank's Bushmen in a Victorian World: The Remarkable Story of the Bleek-Lloyd Collection of Bushman Folklore (2006) makes this kind of summary redundant. Let us turn to the beginning of the book.

In her introductory essay, 'The legacy of Bleek and Lloyd', Skotnes notes in passing that the choice of /Xam in the national motto 'points to still unresolved preconceptions about race and cultural purity' (72). This usefully touches on the challenge of rethinking the colonial archive. She offers the following comment on Thabo Mbeki's choice of /Xam for the national motto: 'The president's choice, though appropriate and resonant in many ways, is also a choice that allows for the recognition of the aboriginal status of the Bushmen while at the same time rendering them extinct by identifying them as the /Xam. In doing so he does not endanger the project of land restitution to those whose African ancestors were amongst the first settlers in South Africa' (73). While this observation is, in my opinion correct, the last sentence touches on a whole sequence of critical issues that are difficult to ignore.

In the choice of a title for her book, *The Archive of Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd. Claim to the Country*, Skotnes circles one of the central stakes of colonialist discourse. The identification of the Bushmen with the /Xam does not interfere with the restitution of the land to those 'whose African ancestors were amongst the first settlers in South Africa '; none other than Nguni speakers, Bleek's  $B\hat{a}$ -ntu speakers, black Africans in South African parlance. The claim that the president's choice of /Xam in no way endangers the claim to the land of the first settlers is haunted by the claim that black Africans are not indigenous to <u>South</u> Africa, and are themselves settlers (like whites) in relation to the San: '[a]round 2000 years ago, African farmers entered the north-eastern parts of the country [....] this intrusion was to bring hunter-gatherers into competition with a new economy' (62). Readers will know that the colonialist genealogy of this argument includes the work of George McCall Theal and George W. Stow.

In this instance, amidst recognition of the legitimacy of claims for restitution, the claim to the land is not negated but it is bound to the suggestion that the San could, as indigenes, endanger the project of land restitution (when in fact the San are part of that process). Comprehension of the San as autochthones rendering all other South Africans, black and white, as immigrants or settlers, arrivals or others, risks being diverted into a narrow and familiar channel that at one and same moment attenuates while endorsing the claim of the majority. What claim, in fact, do the vanished /Xam have to the country? The answer distills a host of sedimented and questionable interpretations: 'the archive is their claim to the country' (43).

However, I would caution that merely replacing the benign scene of transcription with the scenario of colonialist compulsion and exploitation, smouldering arch-violence, highlighting the dysymmetrical relations between Bleek and Lloyd and their informants, is unlikely to radically displace the role played by the archive and its interpreters. To comment dismissively, as Skotnes does, that 'much has been written in recent years that tries to downplay the idea of Wilhelm Bleek as a man ahead of his times, and emphasise his views on race and ethnicity' (61) certainly betrays a defensiveness that arouses the suspicion it would bury. To see in post-apartheid scholarship a secondary violence posing as reparatory and protective is merely to supply useful material for yet another ideological consolidation that does not radically alter the balance of power. Whether Bleek and Lloyd are held up as instituting and foreshadowing a moral relation between coloniser and colonised, or whether they are seen as instrumentalised by colonialist ideology, the result (in the present circumstances) is difficult to distinguish. In this discursive economy the exchange of positive and negative images does not necessarily present any challenge to the mechanics of marginalization. The task is to disentangle the figuration of the Bushmen that feeds into both alternatives.

Doubtless the reassembling and transmogrification of the Bushmen is still very much in process. Literary scholars are not alone in their susceptibility to the echo between the poetic Bushmen and Matthew Arnold's portrait of the Celts; the delicate melancholy, the tone of old, unhappy, far-off things, of lost causes and impossible loyalties: the style of the dream and the ideal, the opposite of getting and spending.<sup>1</sup> It is no accident that *Claim to the Country* ends with a version of Robert Graves's 'Song of Amergin', a Celtic poem translated by Lady Gregory. At a moment when a democratic South Africa has sought to free itself from a past mired in blood, indigeneity is called upon to play its part in grounding the nation. Perhaps this interest is traceable to the recognition that all cultures and states have their origin in an aggression of the *colonial* type, and that colonization rests at the heart of culture. The nostalgia for unity indicative of the topicality of Bleek and Lloyd's researches shows that the attempted withdrawal from autochthonic and homophyliac rootedness so distinctive of the struggle of democracy thrusts its roots into the security of autochthonous foundation and the stock or genius of filiation. Not only are the first people grasped as the last people in a rite of mourning the uprootedness of modernity that consolidates a pivotal gesture of the modern. The social bond of common humanity - the promissory force of fidelity to dead ancestors and the fraternal obligation to remember - takes the form of a testamentary bond secured by an originary patrimony, an androcentric anchor, whether figured as Bleek or his informants.

Bleek's garden at Mowbray merges into another garden, the garden of rhetoric that seeks to persuade, the garden of letters criticized by Socrates that, sown through a pen, serve as a treasury of reminders, a pleasing banquet that passes the time and avoids the uncomfortable rigour of dialectic.<sup>2</sup> The screen image or domestic shelter uncovered in the amber of the Bleek and Lloyd family archive recalls the *locus communis* or commonplace book popular in the Renaissance as mnemic aids and rhetoric cues. *Prosopopoeia*, the fiction of a voice-from-beyondthe-grave, is the central trope as the contingency of history is erased in thematic pathos (the dead prefigure our own mortality) and belonging. Pathos embalms the living who are reminded of their mortality via the latent threat that inhabits *proposopopeia*, for as we let the dead speak, the opposite is implied of the living. Assuming the mask of address, which does not require our presence to function, we, the living, are reminded of our own death. Despite the inequality between us we are all equal before the great leveller.

As Pippa Skotnes remarks, 'the archive supports an industry of academics' (61) and it is the nature of this narcissistic economy that needs to be explored. The depth of the problem is illustrated by the book's main epigraph which is a note from Lucy Lloyd to her sisters ('My own darlings [...]'), care of Wilhelm Bleek, 15 October, 1862. In the dedication to her own book Skotnes echoes this: 'This book is lovingly dedicated to Jules and to David, and to all my own darlings'. Indeed Bleek's researches and *Specimens of Bushman Folklore*, are inseparable from commemoration; as a reviewer noted of that text in 1911: 'Its speedy publication will be a pious work, due to the memory of Dr. Bleek, and not less due to that of a luckless race unable to adapt itself to civilisation, and therefore shattered by

<sup>1</sup> See Lionel Trilling, Matthew Arnold (New York: Merdian Books, 1955), 218.

<sup>2</sup> Plato, Phaedrus, trans. Harold North Fowler (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1982), 569.

the contact'.<sup>3</sup> The cover tells us that *Specimens* was authored 'by the Late W.H.I. Bleek and Lucy Lloyd'. . The aura of piety envelops both the archive and those who mine it as self-archiving academics graft their own work onto the remains of Bleek and Lloyd. The dead, of course, have no say in their co-option.

None of these criticisms will detract from the appeal of *Claim to the Country: The Archive of Lucy Lloyd and Wilhelm Bleek*, a book that knows its audience and the value of its brand.

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<sup>3</sup> E. Sidney Hartland, 'Review of Specimens of Bushman Folklore, by W.H.I. Bleek and Lucy Lloyd', Folklore Vol. 23 (2) (1911), 260. Hartland was also the author of English Fairy and Other Folk Tales (1890) and The Science of Fairy Tales: An Inquiry into Fairy Mythology (1891) among others.

Slave Trade with Madagascar: The Journals of the Cape Slaver Leijdsman, 1715. Edited by PIET WESTRA & JAMES ARMSTRONG (Cape Town: Africana Publishers, 2006) R.195 ISBN – 9780620373678

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Madagascar was a major source of slaves for the Dutch settlement in South Africa (1652-1795; 1803-6), notably for the *Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC), or Dutch East India Company at the Cape of Good Hope. While scholars such as Nigel Worden and Robert Shell have extensively studied the slave trade to, and slavery in, South Africa, there has been a dearth of studies of the slaving voyages to the Cape. In this context this book represents a significant contribution to slave studies of the region. In this finely printed and illustrated volume, Piet Westra and James Armstrong present, with a commentary, the original Dutch, and translated English version, of the journals and short commentaries written by Hendrik Frappé and Willem van der Lint, supercargo and assistant supercargo, respectively, of the *Leijdsman*, a 320 ton vessel that sailed from South Africa in June 1715 charged with the purchase of 300 adult male Malagasy slaves for the VOC settlement at the Cape. It traded on the southwest (St Augustin and Toliara) and northwest (Bombetoc) coasts of Madagascar and Anjouan (Ndzuwani / Nzwani) in the Comoro Islands.

Westra and Armstrong correctly underline in their introduction that, at the time of the Leijdsman's voyage, there was both European state rivalry and considerable European pirate activity in the western Indian Ocean - much of the latter launched from bases in Madagascar; and that Robert Drury, an English sailor who in 1703 was shipwrecked off the southern tip of Madagascar, has provided a detailed account of the next fifteen years of his life, much of it spent as a slave, amongst the Malagasy of the south and west of the island.<sup>1</sup> They further note the importance of disease. Malaria was a constant bane of Europeans, effectively preventing them from establishing a viable colony in Madagascar until the widespread adoption of quinine from the end of the nineteenth century. Indeed, ongoing research indicates the Leijdsman voyage occurred at the end of an extended period of natural disasters, starting in c.1708, that caused prolonged drought and famine in Madagascar. A smallpox epidemic that in 1713 hit South Africa appears in 1715 to have also badly hit the Comoros. The epidemic, which killed some 20 percent of resident slaves in Cape Town, created there an acute labour shortage which underscores the importance of the Leijdsman's mission. This was followed in 1715 by a strong ENSO (El Nino Southern Oscillation) effect. Such factors help explain the rampant insecurity in western Madagascar noted by Frappé and van der Lint, and the difficulty they had in procuring slaves: they ended up buying 200 instead of 300 slaves. Moreover, despite the exigencies of VOC demand for healthy young adult males, the Malagasy authorities insisted that the Dutch also accept boy and female slaves: females comprised 24 percent of the total number of slaves ultimately landed in Cape Town by the Leijdsman.

<sup>1</sup> Madagascar; or Robert Drury's Journal During Fifteen Years' Captivity on that Island (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1897), first published 1729.

Despite the generally very poor physical condition of slaves in Madagascar, as noted by van der Lint in his 'Short description of the west-side of the island,' only 10.5 % of the slaves died between the time of purchase and their discharge from the *Leijdsman* in Cape Town. This compares with mortality rates on previous slaving voyages to Madagascar of 49.3% (1676), 18.8% (1683), 1.7% (1696-7), and 7.1% (1699) – or an average slave mortality for all five voyages of 16.5% - less than the average for the time for slave ships on the Middle Passage, but still high considering the comparatively shorter distances involved. As underscored by Westra and Armstrong, concern over slave mortality is reflected in VOC instructions that captains and crew pay considerable attention to the physical welfare of the slaves aboard ship: care was taken to ensure proper hygiene, nutrition and, where needed, medical care. Crews were also warned to guard against slaves jumping overboard – attempts at escape that frequently resulted in the slaves drowning.

Frappé and van der Lint provide fascinating insights into the way trade was conducted on the west coast of Madagascar in the absence of the Swahili who, by the late eighteenth century, had become entrenched intermediaries along most of the northwest coast. In the early eighteenth century European captains still had only approximate means of calculating distance and location. On approaching the Malagasy coast, they fired cannon to attract the attention of local sailors, mostly fishermen, from whom they took further directions – often persuading them to act as guides. For this encounter, as for later trading encounters, the Dutch ships carried interpreters: in the case of the Leijdsman, these were Dutchmen who had spent some years in Madagascar. However, local authorities on the west coast of Madagascar and in the Comoros generally spoke at least broken English which served as the lingua franca of foreign trade. The Malagasy authorities often vacated their own houses in order to accommodate European factors during the preliminary negotiations, and for the duration of trade permitted the Europeans to establish and guard stockades on the beach to house slaves and other merchandise. These were temporary buildings that the crew fired upon departure.

Slaves and cattle were generally bartered for muskets, balls, flints, gunpowder and specie (Spanish gold and silver). This was a result of strong local demand for firearms – understandable in times of acute political instability – which fuelled further instability and the trade in slaves. However, trade negotiations were protracted, and had to be lubricated by the mutual exchange of gifts: frequently from Europeans of muskets and alcohol – including wine in the case of the Cape traders – and from the Malagasy oxen and other provisions for the crews. The Malagasy authorities drove hard bargains, playing on European rivalry (including that of pirates), and insisting that the Europeans took women and young boys as well as adult males. They also closely inspected trade goods, notably muskets, rejecting the poorest and insisting on more favourable terms for defective but functional arms: Frappé and van der Lint were frankly embarrassed at the high percentage of defective muskets that had been loaded onto the *Leijdsman*.

Another notable feature of this volume are the additional Frappé and van der Lint's short (but highly informative) descriptions of Anjouan and the west coast of Madagascar. These add to the descriptions included in the trade journals. Anjouan, the population of which had recently been ravaged by disease, is described as poor, with dilapidated buildings, and dependent on Madagascar for provisions. Its population was totally Muslim, and the Dutchmen were disappointed not to be able to meet, or even come close to the womenfolk who were kept from their curious eyes, van der Lint claiming that 'they were always locked up on the arrival of a foreign ship.'

They reiterate that western Madagascar is politically fractious, and comment further on the difference between rich and poor, and men and women. The wealthy possessed many talismans, the most notable of which were crocodiles teeth, adorned with gold or silver. Slaves, presumably captives from the incessant internecine wars, were described as malnourished and desperate – which might help explain the high mortality of those slaves purchased by the Dutch. Women were described as largely responsible for cultivation and weaving, but were little better in status than chattel, for their husbands could at any moment expel or even sell them.

In sum, this is a very welcome volume, a significant source of historical material on Madagascar and the slave trade. Hopefully many more VOC trade journals currently in the archives will receive similar treatment and be made available to researchers and the wider public.

**Gwyn Campbell** *McGill University*  *The Extraordinary Khotso: Millionaire Medicine Man from Lusikisiki*. By FELIC-ITY WOOD with MICHAEL LEWIS (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), *xxvi* +324pp. Photographs. Bibliography. Index. R220. Paper.

This biography tells the story of Khotso Sethuntsa (1898-1972) a healer born in rural Lesotho who worked his way to Qacha's Nek and Kokstad, before eventually settling in Lusikisiki in the former Transkei under apartheid South Africa. Born into poverty, Khotso gained local and national attention for his supernatural powers and his wealth by the time he was in his late 20s. Engagingly written, Wood portrays Khotso as a person who lived large and told tall tales to enhance his reputation as a powerful healer, one whose powers he claimed were 'greater than god'. Such powers included controlling the weather, taming river snakes, providing herbs and advice for short term and long term wealth obtainment, as well as selling *bangalala* an herb used as a male sexual stimulant. Dubbed the 'millionaire medicine man', Khotso was known to flaunt his money, which was often carried in suitcases by his attendants who accompanied him on his many spending sprees. Stories circulated by and about Khutso were often accompanied by well-staged events, such as donating to charitable causes before large audiences or the press, or parading his many 'wives' in matching dresses at public gatherings held at his homes. While he owned a fleet of flashy cars, and a number of homes and farms, it became evident upon Khotso's death that the extent of his claimed wealth was, in fact, an illusion.

Despite the many fanciful feats attributed to Khotso, Wood portrays him as someone who made rational choices based on the social, economic and political realities of the period in which he lived. For instance, the social and economic insecurity of the rural areas combined with the seemingly inexplicable power and wealth of whites and certain blacks lent itself towards supernatural explanations and solutions. A wealthy polygamist healer like Khotso who made promises to help farmers protect their crops, to bring customers into shops, or to treat infertility was not only living proof of his power but was eagerly sought out. One of the more intriguing choices made by Khotso, shortly after the implementation of apartheid, was his claim to channel the spirit of Paul Kruger. Within his home Khotso not only set up a room dedicated to this former president of the South African Republic (1883-1900), but had concrete busts made of Kruger and his wife. He also wore a Kruger badge on his jacket, hosted a public celebration on Kruger's Day, and donated money for the preservation of Kruger's house in Pretoria. Khotso deliberately catered to the new apartheid power structure, supporting and hosting both national white and local Bantustan politicians in his home. Wood views such alliances - supernatural and real - as Khotso's attempt to win favour in a politically tumultuous period, and also as a way of demonstrating his own power to the local community. Likewise, white politicians used Khotso as an example to 'prove' that apartheid and separate development could work. Khotso's move to Lusikisiki coincided with the Pondoland Revolt in which locals, reacting to the implementation of the Bantu Authorities Act, openly protested and targeted government collaborators. Khotso's decision to align himself with such hated elements of the community thus makes for a particularly interesting contrast to the decisions of other local actors.

While this book began as a doctoral dissertation and Wood has written a number of journal articles on the subject, she is not explicit about its aims and purpose. Instead, she writes a straightforward narrative of Khotso's life clearly intended for a popular South African audience. What analysis is present is largely embedded within the text itself. Given Wood's background in literature it is not surprising that much of this analysis is of a literary, rather than a historical, persuasion. Her text is replete with comparisons of Khotso and his stories to the archetypal trickster figure found in African folktales. While historical context is given, this book is no *The Seed is Mine*, van Onselen's 1997 biography of a South African sharecropper, Kas Maine, that not only illustrated this historic system of sharecropping but is a wider story about rural South Africa. While there is much evidence in this book that supports work that has been written about healers - particularly with regards to Khotso as a borderland figure - it is not well grounded in that historiography. Rather, Wood focuses more on the uniqueness of Khotso's story, not a wider story about traditional medicine in rural South Africa.

What is probably most impressive about Wood's work, however, is her synthesis of numerous and largely sensational newspaper articles written about Khotso over the years with local oral histories. Together, Felicity Wood, Michael Lewis and Sylvia Tloti interviewed over 73 individuals who either were Khotso's family members, or worked with him, or consulted him for cures and luck, or attended events at one of his homes. Wood's narrative takes the caricature of Khotso portrayed in the press and fleshes him out into a more complicated man. Furthermore she brings her interviewees' voices into the text, thereby adding a richness to the story. Indeed, this book shows the importance and utility of oral accounts in reconstructing a history that otherwise generated little archival material. One of the recurrent problems with oral histories, however, is that interviewees often jump around in time without specific reference to periodization, making it difficult to chart the chronology of Khoto's story or to place events in the proper historical time frame. This book, while organized chronologically, nevertheless mirrors some of the timeless quality found in the oral histories. Archival sources, besides birth and death certificates, are not consulted. Their inclusion may have added some interesting questions to the story that was told. For instance, according to archival sources, Khotso applied for a gun license in 1961 shortly after he had moved to Lusikisiki. This information brings into question the notion that he relied mainly on supernatural stories for protection: perhaps the Pondoland revolt had a more disturbing impact on him than he let on in the press or to his family.

As a historian and university lecturer who focuses on health and healing in Southern Africa, I found this book engaging and well written and am sure that it will find a receptive audience. Nevertheless, I would like to make a plea for a shorted second edition that includes a more comprehensive and analytical introduction. Given that there are many repetitive parts of the book, shortening it would be easy and make it more likely to be adopted by either African literature or oral history classes, while still appealing to a popular audience. The book provides a window into a unique place and time in South African history, and students can use the text not only to analyse oral histories, but gender relations, the ways in which women exercise power, and how one man attempted to make the social and economic insecurity of the rural areas, as well as a system of segregation, work to his advantage. A more academically rigorous introduction could highlight the various advantages and challenges of using oral histories, better situate Khotso in a wider historiography of healing in Southern Africa, and set up an analysis for understanding why Khotso Sethuntsa presented such an enigma for the period in which he lived. Finally, I would also encourage the press in future to place dates on all photographs and to include a timeline of major events. It is sometimes difficult to follow the text as people and places are mentioned or quoted before they have been thoroughly introduced.

## **Karen Flint**

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