

REVIEWS

Plural Medicine, Tradition and Modernity, 1800-2000. Edited by Waltraud Ernst. London: Routledge. 2002. xiii + 253 pp. ISBN 0-415-23122-1.

Healing Traditions: African Medicine, Cultural Exchange, and Competition in South Africa. By Karen E. Flint. Athens: Ohio University Press and Scottsville: University of KwaZulu Natal Press. 2008. xiv + 274 pp. ISBN 978-1-86914-170-7.

During the last decade there has been a shift in the way people view alternative systems of healing, which can be gleaned from the proliferation of shops specialising in alternative healing in mainstream malls and the popularity of yoga and tai-chi as ancient therapies to help ‘balance’ the stresses of modern lifestyles. Whereas earlier ‘traditional’, ‘indigenous’, ‘folk’ medicines were unequivocally perceived as ‘unscientific’, ‘backward’ and ‘primitive’, increasingly they are seen as positive alternatives and complements to biomedicine offering ‘holistic’ and ‘natural’ treatments. However, the appeal of alternative systems of healing has not been absolute; the negative connotations of ‘traditional’ medicine have not disappeared. Rather a tension has emerged around how indigenous medicines are viewed which is captured in its most acute form in the debates in various countries about sanctioning and regulating alternative medical systems and practitioners. The emergence of these debates coupled with mounting legal cases against international pharmaceutical companies seeking to patent aspects of ‘indigenous’ and ‘traditional’ medical knowledge has encouraged historians of medicine to investigate the domain of ‘traditional’ therapeutics. Moreover, the mix-and-match approach of health-seekers has thrown into relief medical pluralism, i.e. the co-existence of different medical systems in various societies.

Karen Flint’s *Healing Traditions: African Medicine, Cultural Exchange, and Competition in South Africa, 1820–1948* and Waltraud Ernst’s edited collection *Plural Medicine, Tradition and Modernity, 1800–2000* are two works that deal with some of the issues around traditional medicines and how these systems have developed over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Both these books challenge the view of indigenous bodies of knowledge as static, unscientific and irrational and argue that they are instead dynamic and continually evolving through their interaction with other medical systems. Flint examines ‘African’ therapeutics over a period of almost 130 years (from pre-colonial times to post-apartheid) in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, using a rich array of sources including travelogues, memoirs, government records, newspapers, oral traditions of Africans recorded in the early twentieth century as well as personal interviews with healers. She argues that what is understood as African medicine today is different from

how it was perceived at different points in history, for while it has retained some central beliefs ‘indigenous’ medicine has been, and continues to be, influenced by non-African medicines, practices and practitioners. The contributors to *Plural Medicine* make similar claims with regards to ‘traditional’ medicines in India, Africa and New Zealand by analysing the interaction of ‘traditional’ medicines with biomedicine under and since colonial rule. Both works effectively blur the boundaries between ‘traditional’ medicine and biomedicine, showing the degree of exchange and appropriation between them and highlighting the plurality of medical practice.

Healing Traditions considers how in early encounters between Africans and white colonists there was room for exchange between the two cultures as African medicine helped save many Europeans who did not have experience with local illnesses, while the medical expertise of missionaries facilitated the setting up of mission stations. During these interactions European medical practitioners adopted practices and remedies from African medicine and respected African healers. Similarly African healers incorporated European remedies and certain medicines into their therapeutic practice (93-127). Flint argues that it was only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that biomedicine distanced itself from ‘indigenous’ medicine, which was rendered as ‘primitive’ and ‘unscientific’ as part of the change in colonial strategy as well as in order to compete with existing medical systems. As a result of this distance the domain of African medicine came to be circumscribed and defined by the absence of Western medical practices and substances. Thus ‘traditional’ medicine in the African context was straitjacketed and the artificially constructed boundaries between it and Western medicine came to be policed by the colonial and later by the apartheid government.

Under the colonial and apartheid regimes cultural boundaries were policed not only between the whites and locals, but also between the different non-white groups such as Africans and Indians. One of the most important contributions of Flint’s study is the uncovering of the long history of exchange between African and Indian therapeutics prior to their strict delineation as separate and distinct bodies of knowledge in the late nineteenth century – Indians adopted African medical practices, used African herbs and also took part in the medicinal trade of the region; and African healers adopted Indian substances into the local pharmacopoeia. Flint reveals that before 1891 there were many Indians who practised as *inyangas* (African herbalists). But after the 1891 legislation whereby *inyangas* had to obtain licences to practise they were denied licences on the ground that only Africans could be *inyangas*, regardless of the degree of assimilation of Indians in African society. However, the policing of boundaries between non-white cultures was less vigilant than of those between white and non-white cultures and hence exchange between these two medical discourses continued. *Muthi* (indigenous medicines) shops owned by Indians are an example of this continued interaction – in addition to stocking African herbs and remedies these shops also stock Ayurvedic medicines, Indian home remedies, etc.

What is interesting to note, however, is how while at one level legislation intended to segregate did indeed prevent cultural exchange between African and Indian medical systems, at another level it inadvertently facilitated it. For exam-

ple, the Group Areas Act prevented Africans from having commercial enterprises in towns and cities whereas Indians could set up shop closer to urban centres and transportation hubs. Flint argues that this explains the rise of Indian *muthi* shops in Natal in the 1930s and 1940s.

By throwing into relief the fluidity of African therapeutics and the porous nature of seemingly culturally-specific healing practices, Flint challenges the established understanding of different medical systems as hermetically sealed, mutually exclusive and culturally bounded. In so doing she undermines the notion of strict and clear boundaries between the different races and communities in South Africa and shows the multicultural origins of 'indigenous' medicine – i.e. the plural cultural heritage of African medicine. For example, she shows that 'Indian *inyangas* were and are not only the holders of so-called African indigenous medical knowledge but its shapers and contributors as well', thereby questioning exactly how African 'African indigenous medicine' actually is (182).

Since cultural boundaries are fundamentally porous, cultural practices and ideas are adopted, appropriated and modified in societies where different communities live together, even when there is seemingly strict policing of cultural boundaries. The outcome according to Flint is 'a polycultural amalgam that blends together various strands of influence, creating new and sometimes unexpected patterns in the cultural fabric' (17).

This exchange between seemingly separate medical cultures is the main theme explored by most of the contributors to *Plural Medicine* with the express aim of highlighting the constructed nature of 'tradition'. In his chapter on Indian indigenous pharmaceuticals Maarten Bode focuses on the manner in which large Indian pharmaceutical companies package Ayurvedic and Unani treatments: not only are the product forms 'modern' (pills, capsules, syringes, etc.), the aggressive marketing strategies also draw on biomedical discourses and the language of science (e.g. laboratory-tested). Bode argues that the producers of Indian pharmaceuticals are actively engaged in redefining its contours as science is added to culture. The boundaries of biomedical practice in India are also being constantly negotiated as allopathic physicians straddle their formal training with their 'faith in the medical beliefs of their forefathers' and prescribe allopathic drugs alongside Ayurvedic and Unani medicines (98).

This pluralism in the practice of medicine on the part of healers is not exclusive to India. In her article on traditional healing in Swaziland, Ria Reis shows how in modern-day Swaziland the syncretic behaviour of health-seekers has induced many practitioners to incorporate a wide array of practices including biomedical, 'traditional' and 'new age', thereby blurring the boundaries between traditional and modern medicine. She shows that it is not only biomedicine that incorporates aspects of local medicine but in fact that 'Swazi healing easily (also) incorporates biomedicine into the traditional idiom of illness and healing' in such a way that it is not possible to think of medical pluralism in Swaziland as two distinct medical systems existing next to each other between which patients choose.

While the mix-and-match approach of practitioners of medicines ('Western' as well as 'traditional') is crucial to understanding how ideas and practices are exchanged and appropriated between different medical cultures, the role of medical

auxiliaries and intermediaries is also significant and is largely under-researched. Hence Anne Digby and Helen Sweet's chapter on nurses in twentieth-century Africa is a valuable addition to the book as they highlight the crucial role played by bio-medically trained African nurses in the interaction between Western-trained doctors in mission hospitals and local patients. Digby and Sweet show that though African nurses were trained in mission hospitals in the hope that they would help displace indigenous medical practices by convincing local communities of the benefits of Western medicine', in actuality they operated as 'cultural brokers' who reconciled their role as 'standard bearers of Western medicine' with their belief in 'traditional' systems of healing. So while in the hospital setting, where nurses were closely monitored, they did work to displace and undermine indigenous beliefs by biomedical practices, this was not the case in more remote outpatient clinics where supervision was limited. There nurses had more autonomy and developed a medically plural approach advising patients on the range of options between Western and indigenous medicine.

Thus the divide between tradition and modernity is rendered superficial when we consider the degree to which practitioners and subordinates borrow and incorporate practices from other medical systems into their own. In his chapter on Chinese medicine in *Plural Medicine*, Volker Scheid uses the example of Professor Rong, a physician and teacher of Chinese medicine, whose practice draws on the biomedical research of his students to promote his traditional formulas. As a result 'elements of a traditional practice are transformed by being connected to modern ones imported from the West' (145). Scheid makes the very interesting suggestion that it may be more useful not just to think of pluralism between distinct and different medical systems but to understand medical practice as inherently plural.

David Arnold and Sumit Sarkar also highlight the limitations of the tradition-modernity binary in the Indian context by considering how homoeopathy with its Western origins came to be accepted and assimilated in nineteenth-century Bengal and was framed as an 'almost indigenous form of medicine' especially in middle- and lower middle-class Indian households. Moreover, the dichotomy between Western and indigenous is problematic as it creates a romanticised image of indigenous medicine that homogenises it, masks the differentiation and diversity within it, and de-historicises it. As Ernst points out in her introductory chapter, what is categorised as any 'traditional' medical system today is 'the result of negotiations between main protagonists at any one time, namely authors of medical treatises, promulgators of medical lore, practitioners, state authorities, cultural communities, patients, and the public' as well as the result of interactions with other medical systems over time (7).

A closer look at what are seen as indigenous medical systems reveals that what is seen as 'traditional' was in fact a reconstruction and reformulation of medical systems in order to compete with the increasing dominance of biomedicine under colonial rule or as part of anti-colonial and nationalist projects. Scheid's chapter on Chinese medicine illustrates this well as he argues that traditional Chinese medicine is seen inside as well as outside China as an ancient and authentic medical practice. However, what is seen as traditional Chinese medicine today is actually a practice that was revived and refashioned in accordance with Western

principles of scientificity and heavily promoted by the Communist state in China since the late 1950s. Claudia Liebeskind makes a similar claim regarding Unani (Islamic) medicine in India. She argues that Unani medicine underwent considerable change under colonial rule; nationalist ambitions informed its revival as a ‘rational and ‘scientific’ body of knowledge in order to contest the hegemony of state-supported Western medicine. Scheid’s and Liebeskind’s chapters are especially useful in challenging the oft-held idea of traditional medical systems as age-old, unchanged and unchanging bodies of knowledge that operate outside the sphere of politics. Both these chapters firmly locate the revival of indigenous medicines in India and China within the politics of forging national identities to resist and contest domination.

Another important contribution is Kate Reed’s chapter on medical pluralism among South Asian women in Britain. She considers how space, context and diasporic networks contribute to the different ways in which ‘traditional’ medicine is perceived and hence what it constitutes in different settings. Using the case of British Asian mothers in Leicester, she shows how their ability to draw on alternative forms of healing through diasporic networks along with their use of Western health products renders distinguishing between Western and non-Western medical discourses at the level of practice very difficult.

The overarching question that both the books under review pose is: what is traditional about traditional medicine? They highlight the fluidity of ‘traditional’ medicinal systems and argue that ‘traditional’ medicines are not static and timeless but dynamic and constantly evolving in response to political, economic and social circumstances. In doing so, the aim of the books is not to go to the other extreme, empty the category of ‘traditional’ and render it completely useless. Instead they show how, contrary to the common understanding of ‘tradition’ as timeless and fixed, the category is flexible, subject to change and has been strategically deployed to contest hegemony and domination. For instance Flint shows how the label of ‘traditional’ worked as a means of asserting power both by white legislators who use it to limit the purview of non-biomedical healers and by the healers themselves to claim authenticity and legitimacy in South Africa.

In exploring the manner in which traditional medicines have been framed, reformulated and reconstituted in different contexts, the contributors to *Plural Medicine* seek, firstly, to move away from the dichotomising discourse of tradition and modernity (or Western and non-Western) and, secondly, to show that medical systems are inherently ‘multi-faceted, forever in flux and never purely delineated’ (4). While most of the chapters effectively draw attention to the superficiality of the divide between ‘traditional’ medicine and biomedicine, their focus on the interactions between Western and non-Western medical systems as opposed to, for instance, the exchanges between different ‘traditional’ medical systems, does at some level prop up the precise binary that they seek to undermine.

Healing Traditions, on the other hand, not only questions the separation between biomedical and non-biomedical knowledge but also argues that there was considerable exchange between different non-Western medicines such as the African and Indian systems of healing. By considering the interactions between African, European and Indian medical systems, Flint reveals that traditions and

practices which are seemingly specific to a culture are actually the result of interactions between cultures. In so doing she moves beyond breaking down the tradition-modernity binary which has become an almost commonplace exercise among historians since the publication of Terence Ranger and Eric Hobsbawm's *Invention of Tradition* in 1983.

In her introduction to *Plural Medicine* Ernst notes that medical historians have been slow to make use of anthropological insights into non-Western cultures, and calls for more studies of non-Western medical systems that cut across and draw on different academic methodologies. Published just six years later, Flint's book is the ideal realisation of this call as it is a well-researched, anthropologically informed study of the 'historic interconnectivity of present-day cultures' (17).

Historical investigations like these two books are especially relevant for us today as governments across the world are veering towards recognising and regulating 'indigenous' knowledge but are unaware of the historical connections between cultures which have actually shaped what appear to be age-old traditions of a specific culture. The importance of these works is further underscored when we consider the growth of the heritage industry, which in its attempt to recognise indigenous practices and preserve 'traditions' may inadvertently be constraining the dynamism and permeability of cultures and reinforcing the tradition-modernity binary. Both of these books are not only important contributions to the field of medical history but are also useful to scholars interested in studying the divide between cultures and knowledge systems.

Amna Khalid

*Department of Historical Studies
University of Cape Town*

Zulu Identities: Being Zulu, Past and Present. Edited by Benedict Carton, John Laband and Jabulani Sithole. Scottsville, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2009. xxxiii + 633 pp. ISBN 978-1-86914- 046-5.

Zulu Identities interrogates assumptions about identity and extends revisionist scholarship on Zulu history and identity. Divided into six overlapping sections and comprising over fifty chapters with contributions by as many authors, the book ‘explores the cultural alchemy of *ubuZulu bethu*, an idiom ... that captures the shared narratives, hybrid expressions and contradictory meanings of “our Zuluness”’ (4). Although historians outnumber other contributors, the editors have deliberately sought an inter-disciplinary approach that explores Zuluness in a variety of sites, both the obvious and the obscure. Equally important, the editors targeted isiZulu-speaking intellectuals for their insiders’ insights. As Jabulani Sithole, an historian and one of the editors, notes in the preface the intention was to encourage debate and inquiry on a subject that has until recently been neglected for various intellectual and political reasons.

The volume is informed by a broad post-colonial approach which foregrounds culture as an analytical tool as well as class analysis. To varying degrees, the book challenges ‘hoary assumptions of “Zulucentrism”, which reified Shaka kaSenzangakhona and his legacies ...’ (4). In this view, rather than fixed or primordial, identities are historically constructed and subject to intense contestation. Although some of the work and contributors would already be familiar to most readers and the quality of the chapters varies, its collection in a single volume is a significant and timely contribution to ongoing debates about identity. As some contributors have noted, in spite of a growing body of academic work suggesting otherwise, dislodging popular notions about Zulu identity will require as much labour as, if not more labour than, the hard ideological work invested in constructing and nurturing them.

In Chapter 2 Mbongiseni Buthelezi, a post-colonial critic, grapples with the meanings of Zulu identity by challenging Shaka’s legacy and the Inkatha Freedom Party’s ethnic nationalism. Relying on literary criticism and revisionist historical scholarship, Buthelezi teases from ‘the fragments of Phungashe’s *izibongo*’ the muted voices and suppressed memories of clans forcibly incorporated into the Zulu kingdom (27). Rather than simply relying on his insider’s supposed advantages, Buthelezi confronts the intellectual challenges of producing competing narratives that do not simply reproduce the histories and identities they seek to question. By interrogating Shaka’s *izibongo* and legacy, Buthelezi is far from dismissing the importance of Zulu identity. Instead he suggests that we adopt a more critical examination of its meaning. Indeed, both Dingani Mthethwa and Cheryl Walker show similar dynamics to those highlighted in Buthelezi’s chapter. Rather than a collective Zulu identity, both authors stress local, clan identities and histories in the lives of Tembe and Bhangazi people in post-apartheid South Africa.

In Chapter 3 John Wright, a leading revisionist historian, reviews the growing scholarship of the last three decades challenging conventional notions of Zulu identity. Against the popular view of a fixed and primordial Zulu identity traceable to the formation of the Zulu kingdom, Wright suggests a more recent and historical process. And once formed this identity has continued to change and has been subject to contestation over time. Wright's contribution provides the context within which to understand Buthelezi's take on the debate. Taken together, these authors provide a broad framework to contextualise the remainder of the book.

In the subsequent sections and chapters, contributors have extended the debate on Zulu identity over time. In the second section, for instance, contributors consider the foundations of Zulu identities from the earliest times to the 1800s. Archaeologist Gavin Whitelaw surveys the identities of precolonial farmers in the region over a period of 1600 years and explores how these provided the 'cultural package' for Nguni farmers in subsequent years.

Several chapters consider stereotypes and myths and their implications for Zulu identity. In Chapter 6 John Wright updates a critique of the mfecane by deconstructing 'the making of the stereotype of Shaka and his Zulu warriors as destroyers of southern Africa' (69). What is especially valuable about Wright's contribution is his insistence on the importance of 'interplay between black and white observers' rather than on 'separate, racially defined origins' in the creation of images of Shaka (69). Dan Wylie, Jeremy Martens and John Laband focus on the construction of varieties of white colonial myths of Shaka and the Zulu more generally. In spite of their differences, these authors suggest that these stereotypes are fundamental to understanding the construction of fixed Zulu identity.

The gender relations of societies preceding the Zulu kingdom are critical for any understanding of subsequent identities as a growing body of scholarship attests. In Chapter 10 historian Sifiso Ndlovu largely rejects the 'gender contestation' or 'women's oppression' models advanced by feminist scholarship, because they misrepresent the realities of Zulu society. Based on the experiences of prominent women, and especially Regent Queen Mnkabayi kaJama, Ndlovu argues instead that a 'gender co-operation model' is more appropriate. He concludes that Zulu women were not excluded from 'traditional networks of authority' (111). While valuable, Ndlovu's conception of 'women's power' appears an intellectual dead-end. It is not clear that the Regent Queen is representative of all royals, much less the experiences of ordinary and non-Zulu women. Is the participation in authority the same thing as gender relations and their attendant ideologies? Moreover, even if it is not an academic construction, surely the 'gender co-operation model' is a construction that requires some understanding beyond its self-generated conception.

In the remaining sections of the book, other contributors explore the meanings of Zuluness in several ways. Sifiso Ndlovu analyses how intellectuals like B.W. Vilakazi and S. Nyembezi rehabilitated Dingane's image from a variety of 'disparaging historical stereotypes'. Jabulani Sithole explores competing perspectives of the Battle of Ncome and the legacy of King Dingane both within

the African National Congress and in relation to Inkatha. Nsizwa Dlamini examines Inkatha's strategic rehabilitation of Dingane after years of neglect and dismissal in relation to a bid to stop the proposed Ingwavuma land deal and post-apartheid efforts to celebrate Dingane's legacy. In the contestations of Dingane's legacy, these authors suggest that identities were being constructed.

A number of contributors analyse Zulu identities in the context of British imperialism and colonial rule more generally. Historian Jeff Guy traces the changing meaning of *iziqu* from its imperial appropriation by Baden Powell and its use in the Boy Scouts. The different experiences of the *amakholwa* feature prominently in the analysis of Zulu identities. Paul la Housse de Lalouvière, for example, focuses on how *amakholwa* intellectuals of the Zulu Institute in Johannesburg constructed a cosmopolitan identity that in turn re-imagined the Zulu nation and the attendant nationalist politics in early industrial South Africa. While Zulu identity was central to these urban *kholwa* males, Thomas McClendon argues that, by contrast, gender and generation and other 'localized identities of lineage and chiefdom were more central to rural dynamics than issues of Zuluness' (281). These contributions again challenge the notion of singular or fixed 'Zulu' identity, emphasising instead the ever-changing and contested nature of identity formation.

The Inkatha Freedom Party's version of nationalism and its future prospects provide other avenues to explore and understand Zulu identities. Thembisa Waetjen, an historian, and Gerard Maré, a sociologist, for example, declare the death of Inkatha's version of Zulu nationalism. Similarly, Laurence Piper, a political scientist, writes the obituary of Zulu nationalism based on local and national election results between 1994 and 2000. Instead of the centrality of ethnicity in politics, Piper stresses the rural–urban split to explain political developments in KwaZulu-Natal. For Waetjen and Maré the cause of death is the transformative effects of international events, while for Piper it is Inkatha's failure to build popular nationalism. In this regard, historians Philip Bonner and Vusi Ndima dismiss the role of ethnicity as an explanation for the East Rand violence of the 1990s. They stress increasing levels of poverty, rising stock theft, trade union rivalries and the taxi violence rather than the conventional ethnic explanations.

Other chapters explore Zulu identities in different contexts through culture, preservation, healing, music, heritage, HIV/AIDS and socialisation. Geographer Shirley Brooks, for instance, shows how white rangers and tourists relied on essentialist notions of Zulu identity and 'Shaka's royal hunting grounds' to advance preservation, while excluding isiZulu-speaking guards. Jonny Steinberg, political scientist and award-winning writer, dismisses Alan Paton's 'romantic Zulu tribalism' in *Cry, the Beloved Country* and offers a contrasting picture featuring more complex histories devoid of a fixed 'traditional culture' (464). In an essay on heritage, Nsizwa Dlamini looks at the public resistance the *Sisonke* exhibition encountered in trying to confront local and international stereotypes of a homogeneous Zulu identity.

Socialisation is another avenue for the exploration of identities. Thenjiwe Magwaza explores from a gender studies perspective the socialisation of young

women through *umemulo* and suggests that in spite of colonial disruptions, urbanisation and industrialisation, its core features remain ‘traditional’. By contrast, Tessa Marcus argues that contemporary virginity testing is a shallow and reinvented custom in the wake of the HIV/AIDS plague and social breakdown. These two chapters in particular reveal the potential for explicit dialogue and debate that could have taken place but sadly did not in spite of the editors’ wishes. Mxolisi Mchunu, educational and research officer, suggests that domestic service and ‘the kitchen suit’ have replaced initiation rituals and *amabutho* as markers of modern Zulu manhood in the wake of the erosion of Zulu independence.

Although the book largely succeeds in its stated goals, a few things are noteworthy. While valuable, Peter Alegi’s account of football among the *amakholwa* appears to reproduce a version of the Zulu warrior stereotype. This is but one example. There are instances where the term ‘traditional’ is used as if it is fixed or unchanging. In the absence of any explanations in these cases, there is a missed opportunity to interrogate Zuluness in the context of wider South African or continental African identities. Unless we do this, we are likely to reinforce the popular views about Zulu identity and burden it with an exceptionalism it hardly needs.

My few reservations aside, it should be clear that I regard Carton, Laband and Sithole’s *Zulu Identities: Being Zulu, Past and Present* as a highly significant book. For the specialist it provides a refreshing review of recent scholarship. For the non-specialist, it is a good introduction to a vibrant literature. It will surely initiate further debate and deepen our understanding of the complexity of Zulu identities.

Maanda Mulaudzi

*Department of Historical Studies
University of Cape Town*

Street Blues. The Experiences of a Reluctant Policeman by Andrew Brown. Zebra Press, Cape Town, 2008. ISBN 978-1-77022-032-4.

Gangs, Politics and Dignity in Cape Town by Steffen Jensen. James Currey, Oxford, Wits University Press, Johannesburg, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2008. ISBN 978-1-84701-103-9.

Thin Blue, the Unwritten Rules of Policing in South Africa by Jonny Steinberg. Jonathan Ball Publishers Ltd, Jeppestown, 2008. ISBN 978-1-86842-303-3.

These three recent books have in common the question how men and women in post-apartheid South Africa face a violent environment and how they build a sense of order. These stories are related to a specific urban environment (in or around Cape Town and Johannesburg) in which violent crime has a long history, except in white suburbs where violent crime according to Andrew Brown, Jonny Steinberg and others is mainly a post-apartheid concern. These authors draw on a long, albeit very diverse, experience of engaging with a violent world: as a reservist and a police insider operating in the suburbs of Cape Town (Andrew Brown); as a journalist and academic patrolling with constables in Johannesburg's townships and suburbs (Jonny Steinberg); as an academic and ethnographer in the Cape Town coloured township of Heideveld (Steffen Jensen). These books are fascinating because not only are they based on other people's accounts (even if they also rely on secondary sources and interviews), but because the core material is a thick description of what the authors have experienced in their everyday involvement with a community or with a group of professionals (mainly policemen and gangsters). As such they represent incredibly rich ethnographical accounts of everyday violence and policing in post-apartheid South Africa. Instead of being a vision from officials, it is an engagement with the everyday practices of people's lives. The main protagonists are policemen, community leaders, reservists, gang members, patrollers, victims, most of the time voiceless people, many of whom prefer to remain anonymous and whose accounts help understand the place of violence in everyday life and the role performed by security professionals. The three books are, however, too different to be summarised together: they deal with different issues, they have different ambitions, methodologies and approaches that need to be looked at before coming back to common issues.

Brown's book is the story of a white reservist entering the South African Police Service (SAPS) in 1999 to serve his country after decades of white oppression. Rather than a description of the South African police world, his account is a set of stories which take place in the white and coloured southern suburbs of Cape Town. The author soon evokes the sympathy of the reader, as he not only performs his duties free, like other reservists in the country and the world, but because he portrays himself as the kind of anti-hero who is far from usual in official reports or crime novels: constant fear is more present than acts of bravado,

responsibilities are stressful and poorly rewarded, the police's daily activities are exhausting and dangerous in a country where violence has permeated the entire society. He succeeds in describing the ordinary and often dirty work of the lower ranks of the police service whose reservists have neither real professional skills nor specific training. Probably what came as a surprise in a country which has set up so many police branches is the diversity of work conducted by Brown beyond the usual routine of patrolling and bureaucratic work. These include operating first-aid to victims of road accidents and of violent crime, fighting against fire in shack settlements and suburban villas around Table Mountain, participating in anti-riot squads during the 2008 xenophobic attacks, counselling victims of housebreaking and domestic violence, and so on. The author clearly assumes his subjectivities: he wants to rehabilitate the work done by ordinary constables despite the lack of resources. Specialists of state policing will probably like the author's freedom of speech (Brown left the SAPS a few years ago) and its critical tone on the incoherence and inconsistencies of police services (the reluctance of many policemen to enter first the crime scene, the poor cooperation between sectors, the difficulty of getting promotion from the lower ranks). Social scientists and sociologists will probably find the book too descriptive. Brown has written this first nonfiction book as if it was fiction, going into many anecdotal examples which most often do not help to understand the situation on the spot. In selecting the more catching stories of his ten-year experience (some of them being especially dramatic), the author has privileged the extraordinary over the routine. For example, he describes his intervention during the 2008 xenophobic attack in the squatter camp of Imizamo Yethu, but he leaves the reader to infer what was at stake here and in other South African townships and what did the police did to stop these attacks.

The author has clearly assumed a position: he tells us his personal history and he is not an academic (there is no reference to academic work). But the two approaches cannot be easily divided. In other words, some of his generalisations may sometimes be seen as shortcomings. As a reservist of ten years, the author claims to have unusual ideas of what is the South African criminal world, but we do not know what is 'the' normative vision of crime and if there is any. He also suggests that 'the zero-tolerance approach' is inadequate for post-apartheid South Africa as the notion of 'order' is too closely linked to what the apartheid police did for decades: but we are not too sure if this specific approach is prevalent among the rank and file of the police. This book could have contributed significantly to the academic debate, but unfortunately the author fails to address the major challenges faced by the ordinary police station: the strong divide between officers and constables, between reservists and non-reservists, the prevalence (or instead the decline?) of racial stereotypes within police ranks, and the cooperation (or lack of cooperation?) between the police and community organisations, which became one of the priorities for rebuilding the legitimacy of the SAPS after 1994.

In that sense, Brown's story is very different from Steinberg's account of everyday policing in different townships and suburbs of Johannesburg: the reader is taken through one of the oldest black areas (Alexandra) and a few townships in the West and the East Rand, to a wealthy Jewish neighbourhood in north-eastern

Johannesburg. Instead of going into an ethnographic account of these various places, the author prefers to follow up the routine of police professionals (constables, captains, inspectors, community leaders involved in neighbourhood policing). Steinberg's contribution is radically different from Brown's as the former contends that the major problem of the South African police is the lack of consent of the general population to be policed. Two major reasons are advanced: first, the police were never forgiven for their role under apartheid; and second, they are among a large category of township people who aspire to find a place in the growing black middle class but, as they do not earn enough to get there, they are especially prone to corruption (22-23). Most of the stories in the book gravitate around these two major trends.

Thus unlike Brown's book, the apartheid legacy appears particularly central in Steinberg's work. Post-apartheid police cannot easily get rid of their past. As mentioned by the author, only the state can detect violent crime with competence and impartiality, but that is precisely what had been missing for generations of township life (99). The author is very convincing when dealing with daily routine in some specific neighbourhoods. Patrolling Alexandra became possible around 1999 only because former ANC members and community leaders set up a patrol group and invited back the police they had forced out of the township during the 1970s and the 1980s. Even though joint police and community patrols are now common in the township, Steinberg clearly explains that lonely constables do not feel comfortable in policing public space by night as they never know if they will have the support of the community. Police found that they had authority only when entering private homes, most of the time to rescue women victims of domestic violence. I will come back to the issue of corruption later on, but Steinberg's account is a well-written and illuminating book based on participatory observation and long-time engagement with the South African penal system.

Jensen's book is very similar in content (as the author deals with violence, crime and policing), but looks like a classical and well-researched academic book based on a rich ethnographic account of a single poor coloured township on the Cape Flats (Heideveld). It traces the ways township people sought to maintain dignity and how officials have tried to maintain professionalism in the execution of their duties in the face of hardship and danger. The author explores general processes of social exclusion based, in part, on derogatory stereotypes, and traces how people stake their claim to dignity (11). At the centre of the book is an abstraction of a working-class coloured man who is the embodiment of danger and crime in Cape Town (3). This danger is associated with the *skollie*, an Afrikaans generic word which means someone who refuses to work for a living. A *skollie* is typically a poor, coloured male: a stereotype built over decades by colonial and apartheid officials and internalised by coloured people themselves. After an opening historical chapter on the production of coloured subjects by colonial and apartheid officials, the author uses the situation in Heideveld in the late 1990s to explore many topics and directions: the creation and local perceptions of gangs, local government actions to win back the township, encounters between the police and township residents, women's aspiration to respectability and dignity, and masculine imperatives of leadership, protection and discipline.

The chapters on the multiple worlds of gangsters are probably the most interesting as the author successfully contests the reification of the existence of the gang (prevalent in much academic research on gangs) in tracing the complicated individual histories of its 'members'. There is a lengthy discussion on how to define a gang: as mentioned by the author, it is exceptionally difficult to stabilise gangs as objective entities as young men clearly operate outside the gangs as well and women participate in practices pertaining to gangs (98). Instead, there is the contested claim of being a gang member. Most of the time, what from the outside could be constructed as gangs are loose groups of friends which only harden and territorialise during conflict. The author is convincing when dealing with state policing on the Cape Flats. He found analogous points with Steinberg's account, such as similar difficulties in ruling communities that do not want to be policed, contestation over police harassment of certain categories of people (street corner kids or young boys). The daily routine in the local police station provides a vivid account of the way policemen make distinctions between *kak* cases and relevant police work. The chapter on the politics of respectability among women gives fascinating and contradictory accounts of how women are caught between dominant notions of respectability and the realities of violent everyday life. There are less convincing chapters, however. Those on dissociating state policing (chapter 5) and the community involvements in policing (chapter 7) are probably not that relevant as state policing and community policing are not such neat categories as this divide suggests. More importantly, to consider the politics of protection as a 'male affair' or expressing a 'masculine imperative to protect' proves to be wrong, especially on the Cape Flats. In Manenberg, a township close to Heideveld as well as in middle- and working-class areas of Mitchells Plain, women actively participate in neighbourhood watches and sometimes they are even the majority of the members. There are historical flaws too: instead of considering neighbourhood watches in the Cape Flats as a 2000 phenomenon (189), it is a much older practice (from the 1970s and 1980s) which was common in white and coloured areas and whose history might better be thought of as cyclical rather than linear.

Despite these shortcomings, these books add substantial empirical data to the growing literature on post-apartheid policing and violence. Four other issues have been tackled partially (the historicity of violence, police corruption, racial stereotypes and state involvement in defining crime) and need further investigation.

First, there is a permanent and understandable hesitation in explaining the predominance of violence and crime in today's South Africa as being either a transition issue or a legacy of the past. On the one hand, Steinberg, Jensen and many others seem to consider that violence is inherited from colonial and apartheid times and that policing South Africa remains most of the time poorly adapted to the new democratic context. As Steinberg mentions, 'where a population is reluctant to give its consent to being policed, you police it by outnumbering it'. This was prevalent during the apartheid period and is still evident in many places today. The fact that South Africa is one of the countries in the world where there are more policemen and reservists per inhabitant indicates that the problem is not, contrary to Brown's testimony, of a police force that is understaffed. On the other

hand, Jensen does not really depart from the idea that rising crime levels and political transition seem to have accompanied one another (10). This assertion is too general to be valid: crime and violence are too historically rooted in specific local and national environments to be linked to world 'democratic transitions'.

The second issue is police corruption. There is no trace of it in Brown's account but this may be linked to the fact that the author wants to limit his criticism of the police. According to Steinberg, there is widespread corruption among constables and this largely explains their lack of authority in the townships. Police constables are also seen as patrons participating in clientele relationships: they have girlfriends in their jurisdiction, which is an indication that policemen redistribute, in a very specific way, part of their salaries to the community. In Jensen's book, townships residents share a widespread perception that the police are corrupt. The problem with these accounts is that they repeat stereotypes about the police (which may be true) without bringing forward new evidence (although there is an interesting account of the modus operandi of shift officers in Heideveld by Jensen). Steinberg's account is based on the experiences of a few constables. It is difficult to generalise to the police service as a whole. As such, all these statements fail to bring a clear understanding of the way police corruption operates on a daily basis.

Third, there is a central argument in Jensen's book about the abstract coloured man and the *skollie*. But if racial stereotypes are too strongly rooted to die out in post-apartheid South Africa, does this discourse not help reproducing the very category the author wants to deconstruct. Jensen asserts that *skollies* were different from the African *tsotsis* because it was derogatory to be a *skollie* (while it was not to be a *tsotsi*). But the African *tsotsis* and the white Ducktails were also a product of state officials and academics, who identified specific social and racial maladies attached to these groups. Similarly, African youth cultures were, according to Jensen, closely related to the mining industry and its single-sex hostel environments, which were associated with the anti-apartheid struggle of the 1970s and 1980s, while coloured gangs were not (16). But Clive Glaser and David Goodhew have clearly shown that *tsotsis* were associated not only with this environment but with a very common township life, while Gary Kynoch has indicated that Russians gangs' involvement in the struggle was much more ambivalent than has been assumed. Without equivalent historical research on coloured gangs during the 1970s and 1980s, it is hard to come to a conclusion on the differences between coloured gangs and African gangs.

Eventually, Jensen is much more convincing when he considers the unequal impact of apartheid government policies in dealing with crime and delinquency. He argues that 'whereas the violence against Africans manifested itself in the unequal encounter between a grotesquely racist police and activists, the violence against coloureds was located in social welfare offices and prisons' (39). He clearly shows, following Steinberg and Pinnock, that prison was one of the most important elements in the perpetuation of gangs in coloured communities. He also mentions that prison gangs and street gangs were not separate entities; rather they animated one another in intricate ways (86). This is probably one of the more interesting directions to be taken by historians, sociologists and anthropologists

in the near future. Previous studies of the specific youth or crime subcultures have proved to be of limited use as it is very difficult to identify cultural practices exclusive to one group. Jensen, although referring sometimes to these subcultural studies, has demonstrated that no cultural practices can be identified as specific to the gang. Moving beyond this approach, a recent academic trend in studies of crime and violence has looked at what is central in the definition of a criminal group: its incrimination. In other words, the way various state departments have come to deal with different racial groups, classes and gender in South Africa in the last decades is decisive in understanding the way crime and violence came to be defined, produced and reproduced in this country. At the heart of the historical process leading to everyday crime and violence in South Africa lies the role of the state, but this has not been sufficiently looked at in the various studies on crime in South Africa. According to Gary Kynoch, massive incarceration is a central element in explaining why South African urban violence was so exceptional in the continent before the 1970s.¹ Steinberg's and Jensen's book are contributions to this trend, but there is still a need for more systematic investigation both in history and in the social sciences.

Laurent Fourchard

Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques

Centre d'Etude d'Afrique Noire

Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Bordeaux

¹ G. Kynoch, 'Urban violence in colonial Africa: A case for South African exceptionalism', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 35 (2009), 629-645.

Selling Sex in Cape Town: Sex Work and Human Trafficking in a South African City. By Chandre Gould. Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies. 2008. 216 pp. ISBN 978-1-920114-31-2.

Sugargirls and Seamen. By Henry Trotter. Johannesburg: Jacana Media. 2008. 232 pp. ISBN 978-177009-5755.

The two books under review may be on the same topic, namely prostitution, but they are a study in the vagaries of interpretation. Where one titillates and tantalises with pages of lash-batting descriptions of women enmeshed in the world of prostitution, the other gives bluntly and without varnish a grim statistically-driven vision of sex selling. Where one attempts, apparently, to lather the miserable existences under description in a language of double entendres and racy descriptive passages, the other plods plainly through the painful first-hand accounts of the brutalisation and drug addiction experienced by most women selling sex in Cape Town. Indeed, Henry Trotter's *Sugar Girls and Seamen* (yes, given the density of double entendres lopped at us throughout the book, that title is undoubtedly meant to generate a titter) and Chandré Gould's (in collaboration with Nicolé Fick) *Selling Sex in Cape Town* make uneasy bed fellows in a review. Yet, arguably, their very contrariness helps to clarify their worth, for Gould's book demands serious reading whereas Trotter's book, to quote Barbara L. Sayers, 'is not a book to be put down lightly. It is one to be thrown across a room with great force.'

Whilst Trotter's book concerns itself with framing prostitution as a medium for spreading culture ('and legs' he wittily reminds us), the Gould book sets out to establish how extensively human trafficking feeds into the sex industry in Cape Town. This very illustrative distinction between the two books is an excellent departure point for understanding their frankly worryingly diverse interpretations of the same subject matter.

Let us begin by considering the serious case at hand as evidenced in the pages of *Selling Sex in Cape Town*. The book is a product of research undertaken by the Crime, Justice and Politics Programme of the Institute for Security Studies. Funded by the Belgium Development Agency, and in collaboration with SWEAT (Sex Worker Education and Advocacy Taskforce), the aim of the study was to establish the prevalence of trafficked women and children involved in the sex industry in Cape Town. The particular locale of Cape Town was chosen by the researchers in order that they could limit their geographical sweep and in so doing deepen and focus their enquiry. With SWEAT's close involvement in the sex industry in Cape Town, the authors had extensive access to a range of sex workers, both brothel- and street-based, throughout the Cape Town area. Furthermore, Cape Town and Durban are known destinations for trafficked sex workers, because of their positioning as popular tourist destinations and in Cape Town's case, its reputation as the 'sex capital of South Africa' (3). The authors sensibly recognised that simply trailing

after possible cases of trafficked sex workers would produce a lopsided study, and focused instead on conducting a coherent study of the sex industry in Cape Town as a whole, for ‘it would not be possible to understand the conditions of trafficking victims if it did not contextualise them within the general working conditions across the industry’. (3)

The book reflects its origins as a formal research project, with a section mapping out its research methodology in detail. Chapters three and four, respectively ‘Snapshots of the Industry’ and ‘Working Conditions’, provide a kind of linguistic photo essay of the landscape of sex work in Cape Town and reflect the experiences of street-based workers, brothel workers, brothel owners and brothel managers through first-hand accounts. This panoptic view of the industry supplies a rich range of poignant personal narratives. Amidst these very human and individual voices are numerous graphs and statistical tables that generate a sense of scale and proportion in which to locate these narratives. So, for example, a table supplies us with the demographic breakdown of sex workers (Black 31%, White 14%, Coloured 54%, Indian 1%), another the demographic features of brothel-based sex workers (men, women, transgender, average age, average years in sex work, etc). Because these statistics are carefully interspersed between first-hand accounts of actual sex workers or auxiliaries involved in the industry, the humanity of the subjects is never forgotten, the brutality of these lives never lost in mere numbers. Chapters five and six cover the management and mismanagement of sex workers by the police and examine in detail the nature of clients including violence, vices and the demand for under-age girls. Chapters seven to ten investigate the role of trafficking in the Cape Town sex industry and the conclusions of the study.

The findings are interesting. The study reveals that in terms of the strict definition of trafficking, whereby the victim must be deceived as to his/her purpose, forced or induced into recruitment and then relocated for the purposes of sexual exploitation, there is almost no evidence of human trafficking in the Cape Town sex industry. However, the authors argue that within the vast and largely unregulated scope of the industry, there is much room for coercion, abuse and what they term ‘an extreme form of labour exploitation’. That these practices fall outside the strict definition of the United Nation protocols defining human trafficking should not, they argue, mean that such exploitation goes unacknowledged. They conclude emphatically: sex workers need access to the law and its protection.

Selling Sex in Cape Town is a serious study of prostitution and it includes an extensive section of recommendations for the South African Police, the National Prosecuting Authority, the Department of Health and the Department of Home Affairs. It is an invaluable handbook for NGOs working with vulnerable sectors of the population who are either actively involved in sex work, or dependent on people who are. It is also a policy document that should be recommended reading for lawmakers and law enforcers, as well as public health officials and practitioners. Students of social work, gender studies and medicine would also benefit from the book’s insightful and sensitive handling of its material. As befits a book aimed at policy development, there are no literary flourishes or soaring narratives. It is focused and to the point, with unvarnished language structured to inform and not to judge, finesse or caricature its subject matter. This muted tone suits the subject

matter, as the alternative offered by Trotter's spiced-up narrative in *Sugar Girls and Seamen* so patently illustrates.

Sugar Girls and Seamen is not, to be fair, overtly offered as an academic study. However, the blurb and Trotter's own descriptions of his motives and methodology clearly make the connection between this book and his Ph.D. dissertation for Yale University. Such august academic connections cannot be lost on a reader-ship who knows that Jacana is a serious publisher. Thus a thin academic varnish purports to lend credence to a narrative that then dissolves into a tawdry exercise in self-indulgence. Trotter's alleged aim is to illuminate the complex lives of sea-front prostitutes and recast them as 'sirens of globalisation, transient waifs into the global cultural intersection known as the dockside world' (6). This bloated academic language is used to describe what is essentially the same grim life of drug addiction and sexual exploitation that we encounter in *Selling Sex in Cape Town*. More disturbing are the alterations between Trotter's lofty linguistics and the more winking descriptions of the business at hand, such as 'after about eight minutes of rhythmic bucking, the officer reached the point of no return' (5), or 'As she laid herself down on the bed and parted her kimono, she sharpened a grin of satisfaction. She knew she would be well paid in the morning' (3) – this about 'Brandy the Geisha', whose mastery of Japanese seems a small reward for a life of repeated abuse and crushing poverty at home. It is this very 'flip', both in and be-tween tones, that so befuddles a reader of *Sugar Girls and Seamen*. Whilst Trotter trawls through biography upon biography of woe, revealing women whose lives as sex workers are almost always a result of poverty and abuse at home, he tells his stories in the style of a pulp fiction. In the concluding pages of the book, Trotter declares 'My hope is that this ethnographic exploration of dockside prostitution offers a better understanding of sex workers and their clients that will allow us to discuss prostitution intelligently and responsibly, no matter how we may feel about commercial romance' (226).

What this book rightly is, when disabused of its academic and debate-inspir-ing pretensions, is a bundle of yarns collected and disseminated by an author who self-consciously positions himself as the confidante of his subjects. His 'insider' status is to be found in the fact that he 'lived in the townships' (where he learned Afrikaans) and is married to a South African woman. Armed almost talismanically with these attributes, he sits in bars and listens to the stories of various women, whilst rejecting their repeated sexual advances with humour and gusto. Many of his informants are (rightfully) mistrustful of his apparently non-carnal advances, and quiz him suspiciously. The results of these forays, evidenced in the narratives presented in the book, are at times moving and even amusing, at other times sad and disturbing, as the stories of the sex workers are revealed. Whilst Trotter at-tempts at times to point to the agency of women who choose prostitution because they make so much more money than they would in traditional employment, he concludes gloomily that most of this money is spent on drugs and dazzling life-styles that end up in poverty and addiction (once the women are no longer attractive to prospective clients, or too riddled with disease or drugs to function). Thus, Trotter's 'findings' are uniformly grim and his 'sirens of globalisation' emerge, in spite of his narrative flourishes, as the same exploited sex workers of *Selling Sex*

in Cape Town. Had Trotter left his book as a collection of narratives, with a muted thread connecting them, he might have had something important to contribute to the literature on sex workers in South Africa. Indeed, and despite the centrality of his positioning in the narrative, it is the stories of the sex workers themselves that do whatever saving is to be done of this book. If the cloying puns and witty asides can be ignored, if the author could be pretended away, then his informants have stories to tell that are worth hearing, and deserve the empathy that Trotter himself claims to be providing (226).

However convincing the academic language might be, a woman's mastery of Taiwanese does not necessarily qualify her as an exchange point of global culture if all the usual risks of sex work come with that exchange: disease, drug addiction, violence and death. Trotter, though never shying away from the misery of his subjects, seems too fond of his notions of cultural exchange. His outright statement that in this book he does not discuss policy (226) that might alleviate the plight of sex workers seems a poor pre-emptive apology, especially in a book marketed for a popular audience. In this, the praise lavished upon *Sugar Girls and Seamen* by the South African broadsheets at its time of publication is also mystifying: perhaps a case of commerce conquering conscience once again.

Lauren van Vuuren

Department of Historical Studies

University of Cape Town

The Lie of the Land: Representations of the South African Landscape by Michael Godby with essays by Cheryl Walker, Sandra Klopper and Brett Bennett. Pinewood Studios, Cape Town, 2010. 136 pp. Illustrations. ISBN 978-1-874-81743-7.

This book was published to accompany the exhibition at the Iziko Michaelis Collection in the Old Town House in Cape Town between June and September 2010. As such it may be considered as a catalogue, but it is in fact a stand-alone publication, containing some of the best writing to date about theorising the South African landscape as well as a magnificent collection of visual representations of the landscape.

Professor Michael Godby, who curated the exhibition and edited the book, starts from the premise, in his introduction, that 'landscape does not exist independent of modes of representation, in other words, landscape has no definite existence without human imagination. Another way of putting this seemingly startling assertion is to point out that landscape has a history, and that since it appears different at different times in that history – or is seen differently by different groups of people – then the apparently solid, objective form of landscape simply melts away.' Landscape does indeed have a history, and one of the things that the exhibition did was to trace the evolution of different types of landscape representation during the course of South Africa's history. Thus, some of the earliest pictures selected were attempts to capture or control the landscape for the colonial project. Works of cartography – also representations – strove to impose borders or boundaries whilst claiming possession of the demarcated territory; pictures of exploration suggested that the landscape was becoming tamed or discovered whilst works of pastoral beauty suggested that the wilderness (which is itself an imaginative concept) had been domesticated or made picturesque by the civilising eye of the civilised beholder.

Whilst the pictures in the exhibition were framed or contextualised by textual commentary on the gallery walls, the pictures in the book have the explanatory force of interpretative essays to help explain them. Cheryl Walker's essay reminds us to be careful of seeing South African history in terms of the 'master narrative' that these early colonial landscapes evoke. This 'master narrative' is one of the removal, or alienation, of the indigenous people of South Africa from the land. As Walker points out, the expectation of many is that the injustices of the past can be rectified by a return to the land. This, she argues, is misguided, for there were other forces transforming the landscape. We now live in a non-agrarian society and very little will be achieved by attempting to re-create a predominantly rural, or farming, society. Nostalgia is no cure.

Some of the works on display, and in the book, reflect the complexity of the changing nature of the South African landscape. It was transformed not just by colonial battles or invasions, important though these were, but by mining, industrialisation, road and mountain pass construction, the development of market-oriented

agriculture and urbanisation. As Walker reminds us, the South African landscape is one that has been scarred by segregation and racialised settlement patterns. The land bears these marks, but the scars were not given by simple blows.

Sandra Klopper's essay is a study of how certain landscapes become repositories for individual and collective memories – sacred and charged with symbolic meaning. In African societies, for instance, the burial grounds of kings become focal points for the collective memory of an entire people. A fascinating feature of Sandra Klopper's essay is that she shows how, in recent times, the landscape has been criss-crossed by the movement of migrant labourers. In ways which are reminiscent of Bruce Chatwin's *Songlines*, the songs of migrant workers connect with points of the landscape and evoke memories of home as well as the experience of alienation. Of relevance here is Simon Schama's observation, contained in his book *Landscape and History*: 'Although we are accustomed to separate nature and human perception into two realms, they are, in fact, indivisible. Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is a work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock.'

Dirk Klopper's subtle and sensitive essay focuses on landscape in the work of J.M. Coetzee. To compress his argument, brutally, his title 'An Unsettled Habitation' says it best. Coetzee's relationship with the land, like that of so many of the brilliant artists that feature in the exhibition, is uneasy, ambiguous, unrequited. Klopper insists that imaginative responses to the land are complicated, diverse and individual. He also reminds us how many extraordinary writers about landscape we have in South Africa – not only painters and photographers. As South Africans we love this land. But does the land love us? That is the central question posed by our relationship with this beloved country.

The last essay in the book is by Brett Bennett, and it is on the relationship between landscape and environmental history in South Africa. It is vital to remind ourselves that each landscape has a specific environmental determinant, made from particular soils, rocks, grasses, plants, trees, flowers and fruits. These change over time. Natural agents change them and human agencies change them. There is no 'pure' South African landscape, Bennett rightly observes, because neither nature nor human agency is static. We should acknowledge that our beliefs about nature are the product of a long, complex environmental history, says Bennett, 'a history that can be recognized in the landscapes that surround us'.

All of these ideas, and more, are contained within the works of art that are published here. We should be extremely grateful to Professor Godby for assembling so many wonderful works together in one place and for contextualising them so beautifully in a relatively inexpensive catalogue. These are truly world-class artworks that confirm that South African artists are second to none. The works also confirm that we live in a country with landscapes second to none. This is not simply a subjective view. A similar point was made recently in another book on the South African landscape, *Washed by the Sun: Landscape and the Making of White South Africa*, by Jeremy Foster. Foster writes that although he has travelled widely, 'few landscapes I encountered – no matter how distinctive their scenic quality – seemed to evoke such a strong affective response in me'. Why is this? Why does this ashen-purple-coloured land move us so? Why did Laurens van der

Post find our mountains so melancholy? The reason, perhaps, is that if landscape is made both by history and by the maker of history, then nowhere else on earth has had so long and sad a history as South Africa. This is both the cradle of mankind and the grave of the earth's genetically oldest people – the Khoisan. Nowhere else on earth is so saturated with memories – some lost, some recoverable and some still to be imagined. The past is all around us in South Africa, in the landscape, and because it is not really past it can be evoked, in the landscape, by all who choose to interrogate it.

Nigel Penn

*Department of Historical Studies
University of Cape Town*