

## 'Snapshots of repression and resistance' [Review] Richard Pithouse (2016) Writing the decline: on the struggle for South Africa's democracy

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## Book Reviews

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## Boekresensies

### A unique look at Cape colonial society

**Borris Gorrelik, *An Entirely Different World: Russian Visitors to the Cape, 1797–1870***

Van Riebeeck Society Press, Cape Town, 2015

177 pp

ISBN 978-0-9814264-6-4

R220.00

This new addition to the Van Riebeeck Society's collection is one that tells the story of the early Cape colonial narrative in a particularly unique fashion – through the eyes of a relatively under-represented group of European travellers. Although Russian visitors to the Cape do not take centre stage in the historic narrative, many made their way around the treacherous Cape Point. Until the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, Russian ships had to travel halfway around the globe to reach Russia's eastern domains. For this voyage one of two alternative routes could be followed, around Cape Horn or around the Cape of Good Hope. Many made the journey around the southern tip of Africa and during these travels stopped at the Cape of Good Hope to take in new supplies and make repairs. It was during these stopovers that some of the most interesting Russian accounts of the Cape were jotted down and these unique insights were preserved for posterity. Now these accounts have finally been translated and are available both to lay reader and scholar.

The volume spans a period of 73 years that saw significant political changes at the Cape. The period covered includes the first British occupation, the brief Batavian rule and the subsequent second British occupation – an occurrence that would forever change the political and social landscape of the Cape of Good Hope. What is particularly unique is that the account included in this volume looks at the Cape through the eyes of visitors who had no particular political interest in the Cape Colony or southern Africa at the time. No political agendas or cultural biases are evident in the descriptions of the experiences of these travellers. This is exactly what makes this volume such a useful read. In comparison to Dutch and English writers of the same period, the observers had little interest in who held possession of the Cape of Good Hope – that being for the exception of Vasily Golovnin (p 17), who was unfortunately caught up in a precarious situation during a stopover at the Cape. Therefore, it appears that these accounts are less prejudiced and culturally biased, giving the reader a particular insight into what the Cape was like during this 73-year period.

Despite their lack of political interest, one gets the distinct impression from their writing that these Russian travellers found their visit to the Cape of personal significance. Cape Town was not simply a means to an end but an opportunity for exploration in itself. Before disembarking, these visitors read extensively about the Cape; accounts by fellow Russians and those of foreign visitors were enjoyed with interest and served to inform their writing even more. From these translations the reader gains the impression of an inextinguishable desire to learn more about a singularly different place. So different that Alexey Vysheslavitsev wrote: "Here I am at the Cape of Good Hope. So far away from you! It is an entirely different world, as if I have come to live on the moon" (p 114).

The visitors' accounts compiled are intelligent and observant, reflecting flexibility in their own opinions about the Cape and its inhabitants. Often these opinions coincided with those of earlier travellers and in others it was the complete opposite. A golden thread running through the varied accounts is that the Cape had a particular effect and provoked an emotional response in many of these foreign visitors. After months at sea, the Cape seemed idyllic to the travel-weary. In many of the accounts included in the volume the writers make reference to their relief and excitement at spotting the coast they had heard and read about. Vasily Golovin wrote later of his arrival at the Cape: "It is hardly possible to imagine a more magnificent picture than the sight of these shores as they presented themselves to us" (p 13). Often, upon arrival on the shore, they would relish this strangely different yet equally familiar territory.

Perhaps one of the endearing features of their reflections on their stays at the Cape was the impact of the local population. A number of the writers refer to their experiences with the Dutch colonists living at the Cape. These visitors were in agreement that many of the colonists were particularly hospitable towards foreign guests – even if they arrived unannounced and without previous acquaintance. Yuri Lisyansky, for example, refers to a certain Mr Becker in gracious terms, writing of him:

Mr Becker, its owner, received us very warmly. Not only did he try to treat his unexpected guests to a meal and beds but also gave us a chance, thanks to his conversation, to spend an extremely merry evening (p 6).

The impact the hospitality and beauty of the Cape had on these visitors permeates all the accounts included in the volume. These characteristics of the Cape Colony bound humanity together across race, gender, country of origin and even time. Despite the span of time during which these Russian travellers visited the Cape of Good Hope, they hold true to the same testament. They left the Cape with a sense of affection, even loss in certain cases. Goncharov, who visited the Cape in 1853, wrote in poetic terms typical to his profession as a novelist. His words express the deep affection which he had for this foreign, and yet strangely familiar, landscape when he wrote:

I had thought I was already completely incapable of poetic memories, and yet just the name "Stellenbosch" has stirred so many pleasant feelings in me: as if I am

seeing the immense tree-lined street abutting on a church; the picturesque mountain behind it, the Dutch family, our hosts, and everything else (p 55).

Gustav Blok, who visited the Cape in 1841, summed up both his own experience and those of his compatriots when he wrote that at his departure from the Cape of Good Hope, “we had parted as good friends” (p 51). This is a thoroughly useful book for anyone interested in the colonial world of the Cape of Good Hope and is perhaps one of the least biased accounts of the lives and characters of the place over the course of the period covered.

*Liza-Mari Oberholzer*  
*University of Johannesburg*

### **Back to the old Transvaal**

#### **T.V. Bulpin, *Storm over the Transvaal***

Protea Book House, Pretoria, 2015

416 pp

ISBN 978-1-4853-0414-2 (printed book); 978-1-4853-0415-9 (e-book)

R275.00

Thomas Victor ("T.V.") Bulpin (1918-1999), the well-known and prolific South African author, wrote nearly thirty books and more than two thousand articles and other publications, mostly on South African hunting, travel and history. Among his well-known “classics” are books, such as *Lost Trails on the Lowveld* (first published in 1950); *The Ivory Trail* (1954); *Islands in a Forgotten Sea* (1959); *The Hunter is Death* (1962); *Natal and the Zulu Country* (1966); *The Great Trek* (1968); *Illustrated Guide to Southern Africa* (1980) and *Tavern of the Seas: The Story of Cape Town, Robben Island and the Cape Peninsula* (published posthumously, 2003). Since 2010, several of Bulpin’s well-known books have been republished by Protea Book House in Pretoria – the latest being *Storm over the Transvaal* (which was first published in 1955 by Howard Timmins in Cape Town).

*Storm over the Transvaal* takes the reader back to the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR; i.e. South African Republic, as the Transvaal was then known) from the years 1884 (when the London Convention was signed and the ZAR regained independence in the wake of the Transvaal War of Independence of 1880 to 1881) to 1899 (when, on 9 October, on the eve of the Anglo-Boer War of 1899 to 1902, the Boers issued an ultimatum to Great Britain, demanding, inter alia, the withdrawal of all the British forces that had been massing on the Transvaal’s borders). For obvious reasons, the British government rejected the demand as stipulated in the ultimatum, and the war that broke out on 11 October 1899 would, after a protracted struggle, lead to the demise of the old Transvaal (as well as that of the Orange Free State Boer republic). The years 1884 to 1899 was indeed a period which covers a singularly lurid stretch of South Africa’s past, and in particular the history of the Transvaal Boer republic. Bulpin covers these events in 22 chapters, indicating why and how in due course the intrigue,

corruption and double-crossing in an Afrikaner republic built up like the gathering clouds of an African thunderstorm, eventually leading to the grim climax of the Anglo-Boer War – a conflict which would cast a dark cloud over the history of twentieth-century South Africa.

In chapter one “The road to fortune”, Bulpin describes the establishment of Barberton as a gold-mining town, as well as how several other towns were established in the ZAR. In “Changing years” (ch two), he introduces the reader to leading Transvaal personalities, such as President Paul Kruger, J.W. Leyds, Fred Struben and several others. “The eastern line”, i.e. the railway that was built to provide the ZAR with an outlet to the sea, albeit via what was then Portuguese East Africa (Mozambique), is discussed in chapter three. The discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand in 1886, changed the history of the Transvaal (and southern Africa) forever, and Bulpin justifiably devotes a number of chapters to this issue; for example, “The ridge of white waters” (chapter four) and “Johannesburg” (chapter five). Gold was also discovered at several other locations in the ZAR, where towns then sprang up, only to become “Ghost towns” (chapter six) once all the available gold had been mined. Of course, with the discovery of gold came “The fortune-hunters” (chapter seven), including outlaws, prostitutes and tricksters.

How did the Afrikaner-dominated ZAR deal with the new situation? Their parliament, “The old Volksraad” (chapter eight) was divided between the conservatives led by Kruger, and the “liberals” led by General Piet Joubert. Soon, the political fault line grew between those who would do anything to preserve the old order, and those who were prepared to negotiate a transition to a new dispensation. In the meantime, the ZAR also had to deal with its neighbour “Swaziland” (chapter nine). Many Transvaalers settled on farms in Swaziland, thanks to “The concessionaires” (chapter ten) and the negotiations with the Swazi chief, Mdandeni (chapter 11).

In chapter 12, “Approaching storms”, Bulpin indicates how Uitlander dissatisfaction with the ZAR government gradually grew from about 1890. The fact that Rhodesia (present-day Zimbabwe) came under British control in due course is discussed in “The Rhodesian trail” (chapter 13). This increased nervousness in Transvaal Boer ranks, and brought ever more “Worries and troubles” (chapter 14) in the course of the 1890s, including “War with the [local black] tribes” (chapter 15). “The restless years” (chapter 16) continues with “The Jameson Raid” (chapter 17), an event of crucial significance. In the “Aftermath” (chapter 18) of the Raid, the ZAR – and in due course also its southern sister Afrikaner republic, the Orange Free State – started to prepare for a possible war with Great Britain. The “Gathering clouds” (chapter 19) of war, could no longer be ignored.

In “Rumblings of the storm” (chapter 20), Bulpin continues his narrative of political developments, intrigue and court cases in the ZAR, interweaving it with snippets of other information, not necessarily of much historical significance, but making further interesting reading. In the penultimate chapter (“Distractions”) Bulpin provides a review of several issues in 1898 which ensure that “Life in the Transvaal in

[that year] could hardly have been dull” (p 369). This culminates in the final chapter (“Ultimatum”) in which the last stretch of the road to war is explained. The book contains 163 sketches by C.T. Astley Maberly, as well as a (somewhat crude) map. (Protea Book House really could have included a more professional map.) There is also an index (pp 409–416).

In his remarkably engaging style of writing, T.V. Bulpin in *Storm over the Transvaal* tells the turbulent story of the Transvaal in the years 1884 to 1899, transporting the reader back to a rugged country where gold seemed to take central stage in all matters. It is not a scholarly publication or an academic work in the traditional sense of the word, nor are there any footnote or endnote references. On pp 407 and 408 a list of “Detailed written sources of information on the Transvaal” is provided, and Bulpin also thanks “all those people of the Transvaal and Swaziland who provided suggestions and information for inclusion in this book” (p 407).

Bulpin reminds us that the “old” history of a “white” state is still of importance to us today. Thus, for example, the fascinating story of the Witwatersrand with its gold-mines and Uitlander workers, provides an often amusing background to a history of events of such importance that they are still of vital interest to all South Africans today. Consequently, it is laudable that from time to time older history books are republished so as to expose a new generation of readers to times gone by. Nicol Stassen of Protea Book House deserves praise that he has republished several of Bulpin’s (and other, even older) books, and has given them a second lease of life. As with all his other publications, T.V. Bulpin’s *Storm over the Transvaal* is not, in the first place, a scholarly book written for academics, but it is well-researched, includes a wealth of detail and anecdote, and deserves to be read by as wide an audience as possible. Hopefully, it will indeed introduce a new and younger generation of readers from all cultural groups to a fascinating era in our shared history.

*André Wessels*  
*University of the Free State*

### **A major contribution to twentieth century South African history**

**Milton Shain, *A Perfect Storm: Antisemitism in South Africa, 1930–1948***

Johnathan Ball Publishers, Johannesburg and Cape Town, 2015

389 pp

ISBN 978-1-86842-701-7

R282.00

Milton Shain is without a doubt one of South Africa’s best historians. He needs no introduction and made a lasting contribution to Jewish Studies in South African history through a long and prosperous career. I first encountered his scholarship when I read his book, *The Roots of Anti-Semitism in South Africa*, published in 1994. This book also won the UCT book prize in 1996, and not without merit. I was again reminded of his erudite ability to identify a historical tendency and trace its trajectory within diverse

and intersecting discourses of the past when I read his latest book, *A Perfect Storm: Antisemitism in South Africa, 1930-1948*.

Again, the focus is on antisemitism – that pervasive and perennial historical phenomenon which also made its tainted mark on South African history. This time Shain's book goes further than the anti-Semitic roots he traced from the late nineteenth century to the 1930s in his previous publication. *A Perfect Storm* takes us to the time where the discussion of antisemitism moved from the margins of South African political discourse to the centre stage. Central to the book is the analysis of the wide range of contingencies that enabled the radical right to exert such an influence on the white population. These contingencies also explain the National Party's – especially D.F. Malan's – flirtation with the radical right and use of the "Jewish question" for political mobilisation; and offer an explanation for the legislation against Jewish immigration implemented by a United Party that succumbed to pressure from the Nationalists. Shain further explores why calls were ongoing in terms of limiting Jews' involvement in commerce and the professions and why European Fascism was so seductive to certain sections of the South African population during this time.

In a compelling narrative style Shain explores these issues throughout the seven chapters of the book. In the political discourse the evolution of the "Jewish question" between 1930 and 1948 began with the 1930 Quota Act, a tactic to halt the immigration of Eastern European Jews. D.F. Malan introduced the Bill, but both the English and Afrikaans speaking sections of the population welcomed the initiative. English merchants appreciated the prospect of less competition and Afrikaners felt that an influx of Jews would be a powerful and alien element blocking their advancement, and adding to South Africa's racial problems. Shain rightly points out that nativist inclinations also influenced Malan. *Völkish* theories that conflated culture and race eventually became emphasised even more as his rhetoric developed into overt antisemitism during the late 1930s motivated by the influx of Jews fleeing Germany; pressures from the radical right; and political opportunism.

Shain explains that this legislation was introduced against the backdrop of decades of anti-Jewish stereotyping, but Malan was also tapping into the crisis facing dislocated "poor whites" who were victims of structural change and a political time bomb that was easy to target for ethnic mobilisation and populist promises. The Quota Act, targeting an "unassimilable" minority, was just the beginning of an escalating anti-Jewish mood. The economic crisis, together with the rise of National Socialism in Germany, impacted domestic politics – also via the route of Nazi activity/propaganda in South West Africa. This saw the launch of the Greyshirts under Louis Theodore Weichardt and the Blackshirts founded by Hermanus Wessels and Chris Havemann. The Greyshirts and Blackshirts exemplified the radical right and were responsible for the most deranged antisemitism during the 1930s. Of note is the extraordinarily detailed account Shain gives of the infamous Greyshirt Trial of 1934. It was the first case in which a court ruled that *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was a forgery.

Shain discusses the politics of the radical right in considerable detail against the wider South African political discourse. Throughout South Africa, meetings and gatherings were organised by the shirt-movements. Anti-Semitic speeches, accusations against Jews, and printed propaganda also abounded. In several instances things became ugly. Shain explains that the shirt-movements filled a political vacuum created in South African politics during the early part of 1934. Although South Africa left the gold standard, there was still an economic crisis and the newly-formed Hertzog-Smuts coalition provided little hope for malcontents. Huge disparities in wealth existed between Afrikaners and English-speakers and it was easy to displace anger onto the Jew. Anti-Jewish activities and meetings became a norm. Weichardt and others offered simple solutions for complex problems and appealed to the mentioned malcontents. Shain explains that the radical right was not a major political force, but its message resonated widely and mainstream political parties took it seriously. This led to the “Jewish question” moving to the centre of South African politics with especially the Purified Nationalists taking up the challenge.

*A Perfect Storm* sheds new light on the importance of the “Jewish question” for our understanding of South African political history during the 1930s and beyond. Shain traces the shifts in thought among the Nationalists from the introduction of the Quota Act to the implementation of the Aliens Act of 1937 in masterly fashion. Throughout his book the contingencies causing this shift are evident. After the introduction of the Quota Act, Malan tried to calm the Jewish community’s concerns and avoided singling out Jews after Fusion. However, three years later the political landscape shifted. Shain details how the pressures and challenges of the radical right were mounting amid increasing German-Jewish immigration resulting from the persecution of Jews in Germany. Young Afrikaner intellectuals, driven by the same *völkisch* ideas as evidenced by Malan, added gravitas to the anti-immigrant outcry with the arrival of *The Stuttgart* in 1936 – a German liner chartered by Jewish organisations abroad, with 537 German-Jewish refugees on board.

After this incident, Malan and the National Party began to show their true colours and Shain shows how the Malanites were clearly cognisant of the political gain to be derived from Jew-baiting. Malan began to target the Jews publicly and introduced an Immigration and Naturalisation bill which led to the Aliens Act that would make it very difficult for Jews to enter South Africa. Anti-Jewish rhetoric did not dissipate after the introduction of this legislation, with Malan even calling for a “Nordic front”. Furthermore, this set the tone for the National Party’s campaign during the general election of 1938. Shain mentions that after the election anti-Jewish rhetoric cooled somewhat, but the celebration of the Voortrekker centenary rekindled the exclusivist *völkish* sentiments, leading to the resurgence of the “Jewish question”. He also analyses the radicalisation of Afrikaner nationalism after the outbreak of the Second World War (a “British-Jewish” war). He identifies the anti-Semitic tendencies displayed by the movements which exemplified the Afrikaners’ flirtation with Fascism during the war years, namely the Nuwe Orde and the Ossewa-Brandwag. The book sheds new light on the OB’s anti-Semitism particularly.



Shain's analysis of how and why the "Jewish question" moved from the margins to the centre of political discourse is of importance when ideology is under consideration. Shain argues that the key to understanding antisemitism in South Africa during this era lies in the *völkish* Afrikaner Christian Nationalism in which antisemitism became integral during the late 1930s. Nationalists saw the Jews as a race apart – the product of a mind-set that viewed individuals as members of organic communities. They were immutably unassimilable and the Nationalists argued that they would further complicate South Africa's "racial question". Shain's analysis thus shows how the "Jewish question" was dealt with and how it paralleled and even presaged apartheid ideology. Malan features prominently in *A Perfect Storm* and Shain emphasises that Malan's stance towards the Jews is a complex one. Influenced by European Romanticism and nativist tendencies, Malan frequently identified the Jews as an additional racial problem and his opportunism in this regard suggests, according to Shain, a personal pandering to widespread anti-Semitic sentiment. Shain does however acknowledge that Malan turned away from the "Jewish question" after the Second World War. Eventually, the upwardly mobile Afrikaner ceased to confront the Jew as a "threat".

It is impossible to do full justice to the rich detail of this landmark study of the interwar period. Shain considers historical events from several perspectives throughout the book, lending further explanatory power to the arguments he makes. Furthermore, he leaves no stone unturned – *A Perfect Storm* is based on an immense amount of secondary and primary material including government documents, private papers, church records, formal Jewish records, a great number of newspapers and memoirs. His excellent use of newspapers and periodicals captures the public discourse and a liberal use of direct quotations further emphasises the *zeitgeist*. This book is a major contribution to twentieth-century South African history.

*Charl Blignaut*  
*North West University*

### **The forgotten campaign – operational disconnect or opportunity missed?**

#### **Andrew Stewart, *The First Victory: The Second World War and the East Africa Campaign***

Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2016

328 pp

ISBN 978-0-3002-0855-9

R500.00

At the outbreak of the Second World War, the Union Defence Force (UDF) had to undergo a rapid transformation from an ageing peacetime defence force to one that could project its offensive power across the African subcontinent. The formation of the 1st South African Division during 1940 and the subsequent deployment of South African troops to the East African theatre as part of the East Africa Force, afforded the UDF the opportunity to test its military capabilities under operational conditions

against the Italian threat in Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) and Italian Somaliland (Somalia). The Allied offensives in East Africa began with the successful attack on El Wak on 16 December 1940, in which some South African troops received their baptism of fire. The combat experience gained by the South African troops at El Wak proved paramount, because it was the first instance in which the UDF was able to gauge its fighting efficiency and hence evaluate concepts such as force design, doctrine, military innovation and the operational employment of troops, to name but a few. The Allied success at El Wak was the impetus needed for the beginning of offensive operations in the East African theatre before the arrival of the rainy season. Between January and April 1941, the East Africa Force launched a series of successful attacks across Abyssinia and Italian Somaliland, culminating in the capture of Addis Ababa and the penultimate battle of Amba Alagi. In a mere fifty-three days, Allied troops advanced more than 2 700 kilometres from the Kenyan frontier to Addis Ababa, occupying some 580 000 square kilometres and capturing more than 50 000 prisoners. At the time, it was described as a military record, with offensive operations carried out at a pace seldom surpassed in history. The South African troops played a vital role in securing the first campaign victory of the war, and often acted as the vanguard during offensive operations across the theatre.

Andrew Stewart, a reader in Conflict and Diplomacy with the Defence Studies Department of King's College, London, provides a fresh perspective on the Allied operations in the East African theatre during the Second World War in his 2016 treatise *The First Victory: The Second World War and the East Africa Campaign*. Stewart's book is one of the most detailed and complete accounts to appear on this campaign, one that has been largely forgotten in the annals of history due to the parallel military operations in North Africa, Russia, Greece and Crete that have tended to overshadow it. Indeed, this "forgotten campaign",

has almost entirely been overlooked despite being a perfect episode of the Second World War to study, with its incredible military engagements [...] fascinating personalities and human stories which bring alive the nature and character of war" (pp xii–xiii).

The book comprises ten key chapters in which Stewart provides an unparalleled analysis of the military operations in the East African theatre during the war, particularly at the strategic and operational levels of war. Of particular interest are the chapters devoted to setting the strategic stage for the campaign, as well as those that address the military operations in British Somaliland and Sudan. These chapters reinforce the strategic and symbiotic relationship that existed between the East and North African theatres of the war, as well as the mutually dependent offensive pincers from Sudan and Kenya, which for the most part are often overlooked in the available South African historiographical works on this war.<sup>1</sup>

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1. See for instance, N. Orpen, *South African Forces in World War 2, Volume 1: East Africa and Abyssinian Campaigns* (Purnell, Cape Town, 1968); H.J. Martin and N. Orpen, *South African Forces World War 2, Volume 7, South Africa at War: Military and Industrial Organization and Operations in Connection with the Conduct of the War, 1939–1945*

When judged from a South African perspective, the book is somewhat of a mixed bag. Stewart's discussion on the political meddling of the South African prime minister, General J.C. Smuts, during the planning of the campaign and in securing the deployment of South African troops to the theatre, is unsurpassed. Furthermore, these are matters that the available South African sources on the war fail to address adequately. Stewart then brushes aside the offensive operations of the 1st South African Division in a mere paragraph, while the offensive exploits of Brig. D.H. Pienaar and his 1st South African Infantry Brigade through Italian Somaliland and central Abyssinia as part of the 11th and 12th African Divisions, receive considerably more attention. This is rather unfortunate because the bulk of South African troops in the theatre were in fact, deployed with the 1st South African Division. Stewart does, however, laud the South African fording of the Juba River, and describes it as one of the most significant events not only of the campaign but of the entire war fought in Africa, maintaining that the successful crossing of the Juba River hastened the advance on Addis Ababa by a number of months. In the conclusion of his book, Stewart also refers to the significant role played by the South Africans during the campaign. In particular, he mentions the military materiel supplied by the UDF to the Allied war effort in East Africa and argues that it was the high level of mechanisation of the South African forces that allowed for the campaign to be fought at a speed previously unsurpassed. These matters, in my view, are not adequately addressed in the book and require further investigation.

Broadly speaking, the book is well researched and is underpinned by a myriad of private papers and primary archival material from archives around the world. These sources are supplemented by a broad range of historiographical works. Stewart was able to gain access to valuable archival material housed in the United Kingdom, Kenya, Australia, Sudan and South Africa. However, when focusing on the research he conducted in South Africa, there are a number of salient points that are problematic. First, in the acknowledgements section of his book, Stewart erroneously refers to the Department of Defence (DOD) Documentation Centre (Military Archives) as being located in the South African National Records and Archives Service in. These are in fact two different archival repositories, with the latter officially known as the National Archives and Records Service of South Africa. The DOD Documentation Centre, on the other hand, is the custodian of all archival records generated by the department since its inception in 1912. This means that future researchers will be unable to engage with the South African archival sources cited by Stewart should they try to find Defence Department records at the National Archives and Records Service of South Africa. Second, one gains the impression that Stewart and the researcher who copied the work

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(Purnell, Cape Town, 1979); J. Ambrose Brown, *The War of a Hundred Days: Springboks in Somalia and Abyssinia, 1940-41* (Ashanti, Johannesburg, 1990); C. Birkby, *Uncle George: The Boer Boyhood, Letters and Battles of Lieutenant-General George Edwin Brink* (Jonathan Ball, Johannesburg, 1987); J.S.M. Simpson, *South Africa Fights* (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1941); H. Klein, *Springboks in Armour: The South African Armoured Cars in World War II* (Purnell & Sons, Johannesburg, 1965); C. Birkby, *Springbok Victory* (Libertas Publications, Cape Town, 1941); A.M. Pollock, *Pienaar of Alamein: The Life Story of a Great South African Soldier* (Cape Times Limited, Cape Town, 1943).

for him in Pretoria did not receive the best historical advice from the staff in the reading room at the DOD Documentation Centre. This is a real pity because Stewart and his researcher were merely directed to the Union War Histories archival group, whereas the majority of documents dealing with the South African, and inter-alia Allied, operations in the East African theatre are in fact located in the World War II War Diaries; Chief of the General Staff (War); Deputy Chief of the General Staff; and Divisional Documents archival groups. This meant that Stewart did not explore the valuable archival material on the South African operations in the theatre throughout the 1940–1941 period. Lastly, the author has failed to engage with some of the most recent South African academic works that have appeared on the East African campaign and instead takes recourse to a number of articles published in the *Military History Journal* of the South African Military History Society. These articles, regrettably, are neither academic, nor peer-reviewed.

In general, however, Stewart's book is a welcome addition to the burgeoning literature on the Second World War and provides a fresh perspective on one of the often forgotten campaigns of the war. It is in all likelihood the most complete account of the East African campaign to date, despite some of the snags mentioned above. Stewart's *The First Victory: The Second World War and the East Africa Campaign* is highly recommended to all those interested in the Allied campaign in East Africa, the South African participation in the Second World War, and the wider milieu of war and society. It can definitely be considered for inclusion in university course material on the war. The final word on the nature, extent and significance of the South African involvement in the East African campaign is yet to be written, and enterprising academics and students alike would do well to engage with the vast amount of untapped archival sources at the DOD Documentation Centre that deals with this particular military campaign.

*Evert Kleynhans*  
*Stellenbosch University*

### **A deft combination of art and scholarship in exploring migrant journeys**

**Peter Delius, Laura Phillips and Fiona Rankin-Smith (eds), *A Long Way Home: Migrant Worker Worlds 1800–2014***

Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 2014

280 pp

ISBN 978-1-86814-767-0

R490.00

Migrant labour in southern Africa has long been an area of study for scholars. However what sets apart *A Long Way Home: Migrant Worker Worlds 1800–2014* from other works of its kind, is its reliance on both art and scholarly essays to provide a unique historiography of the migrant labour system in southern Africa. Inspiration for the book was drawn from an exhibition at the Wits Art Museum titled "Ngezinyawo – Migrant Journeys" which was curated by one of the editors, Fiona Rankin-Smith. This

book thus deviates from the current historical scholarship on migrant labour by combining a deft mix of artwork, photographs and scholarly pieces, offering a collection of 18 chapters and more than 90 works of art and photographs, which seek to add to the existing body of knowledge on the history of migrant labour by depicting the “agency and humanity in thought, action and expression” of migrant labourers, extending across a period of 300 years (p 2).

In the introduction to the text, editors, Peter Delius and Laura Phillips highlight how integral the migrant labour system was to building the modern industrial economy in South Africa. In fact, migrant labour coupled with the system of government that legislated discrimination and difference based on “race”, formed the basis of the South African economy. Delius and Phillips proceed to argue that migrant labour in South Africa was not the worst system of labour when compared to other forms around the world, however, they nevertheless acknowledge the inherently destructive nature of the migrant labour system, pointing to its devastating legacy which continues to be a significant hindrance to socio-economic advancement in the country presently. In addition, it is a system that remains firmly entrenched in post-apartheid South Africa.

All the artwork and photographs in the various chapters of this text are important in providing a holistic understanding of the agency of migrant labourers and their families. In chapter one, Fiona Rankin-Smith provides a thematic overview of migrant journeys as featured in the exhibition at the Wits Arts Museum. She furnishes a narrative of the forms of expression of migrants through various mediums. This chapter offers a prelude, preparing the reader for the artwork, and essays that follow.

While the editors should be commended for including a broad range of high quality contributions in this compendium, I shall highlight a few chapters which, in my view, stand out. Firstly, Jock McCulloch offers a thought provoking chapter on occupational diseases on the gold mines in South Africa, revealing the stark reality of the devastation caused by the migrant labour system. He provides a fascinating glimpse into not only the racialised labour processes on the mines, but also the differential treatment for disease offered to black and white workers. He informs us that the mining industry repatriated black miners who were ill and dying from silicosis to avoid providing compensation, while white miners who suffered with silicosis were treated in hospitals. Many repatriated miners did not survive the journey home, dying en route. This chapter provides a tragic account of not only the failure of medical surveillance on the mines, but the continuation and promotion of the industrial economy through these human rights violations, which he argues were “suggestive of a coherent policy” systematically designed to provide financial benefit to the industry (p 113).

Another stand-out contribution in this text is titled “Migrants: vanguard of the workers’ struggles?” by Noor Nieftagodien. This chapter provides a comprehensive account of the role played by migrants in the formation of black trade unions and the impact, as the title suggests, on workers’ rights in general. Nieftagodien weaves a narrative that takes the reader on the struggle journey of the workers, culminating in the Marikana

massacre of 2012. The photographs in this chapter are valuable additions which serve to deepen our intellectual knowledge of the challenges faced by migrant labourers over the course of history.

While reference to the Marikana massacre is made in many of the chapters, it is in the final chapter by Micah Reddy that this tragedy is unpacked in a way that reveals the intersection of the social, political, and economic aspects that gave rise to the wage strike at the Lonmin mine and resulted in the killing of striking workers. While Reddy skilfully dissects the root causes that led to this catastrophe by providing a much needed human interest angle, the final photograph in this chapter (Figure 18.1, p 259), that of the 34 wooden crosses where the miners were killed, provides an apt conclusion to this book, and a stark reminder that while migrants for over 300 years were able to “assert and express their humanity” (p 2), they are nevertheless still viewed as mere bodies of labour with all traces of their humanity removed.

A critique of this volume, which is an otherwise stellar contribution to migrant labour history in South Africa, is the omission of the importation of indentured labourers from India, starting from 1860, to work on the sugarcane plantations and coal mines of Natal. Even though recruitment of indentured labour from India was halted in 1911, the *system* of indentured labour nevertheless continued in Natal until at least 1934. The experience and trajectories of these migrant workers, as in the case of the Chinese migrant workers (chapter 8), would have been a useful addition to this volume, and would have contributed to a larger discussion on the “changing race politics” in the country (p 3). For instance, one of the reasons for the immediate repatriation of Chinese migrants, not mentioned in this text, after their term of indenture was over, was to avoid the “problem” that was created as a result of the indentured labourers from India staying on after they had served out their indenture. This fear of “other nations” settling in the country was rampant during this time, and these years were characterised by the changing perceptions of who was considered acceptable to belong to the nation, and who was not.

Having said this, this volume undoubtedly makes a worthwhile contribution to the body of historical literature on migrant labour in South Africa, and as such should be prescribed reading for scholars of history and sociology alike. This collection of essays, artwork, and photography further extends the analyses of migrant labour by including an examination of the agency of workers and their families. While there are chapters that provide scholarly weight to this collection, the book is nevertheless accessible enough to capture the wider public imagination, and would thus appeal to a much broader readership who are interested in expanding their understanding of not only South African labour history, but also of contemporary struggles faced by migrant workers.

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## Innovative work on colonial Congo

### **Nancy Rose Hunt, *A Nervous State: Violence, Remedies, and Reverie in Colonial Congo***

Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2016

353 pp

ISBN 978-0-8223-5965-4

\$26.95

*A Nervous State: Violence, Remedies, and Reverie in Colonial Congo* provides a fascinating re-reading of the history of the Congo in general and medical history in Central Africa in particular. Specifically, the book examines the everyday experiences of the Congolese on the one hand and the colonial officials, priests, nuns, medical doctors, etc. on the other, between 1885 and 1960. In all this, violence was central to the system that sustained the Congo Free State and its successor the Congo State. Scholars have demonstrated the long history of violence deployed on the Congolese by the colonisers. The gruesome accounts of colonial brutality – cutting off of human hands, rape and war – have led to the story of Congo being associated with searing violence and horror. Without denying or underplaying the significance of violence in sustaining the colonial subjugation of the Congolese, Nancy Rose Hunt shifts the angle of analysis by focusing on the narratives that place emphasis on the history of a nervous colonial state.

For Hunt, colonies were nervous places – spaces on the edge (p 5). The colonisers, always on the edge, restless and nervous, employed and deployed policing and biomedical practices to control people, bodies, ideas and social movements deemed a threat to the colonial state. Within this tumultuous and violent colonial world, colonial powers, local practices and ordinary women and men clashed. While the colonial state deployed violence on the Congolese, it was not all powerful. As Hunt notes, the fact that the Congolese adapted creatively to the colonial milieu through, amongst others, therapeutic experimentality, is a testament to the limits of the nervous state's capability to control its colonial subjects (p 238). As much as the book is about violence, it is also about the securitisation of the Congo, bio-politics, the limits of carceral technologies and how ordinary Congolese tapped into their culture and therapeutic healing systems to come to terms with colonialism.

The book is divided into six chapters. Chapter One uses a broad evidentiary base to re-read Leopold's Congo. The author consults classic works by humanitarians such as E.D. Morel's book, *Red Rubber: The Story of Rubber Slave Trade Flourishing on the Congo in the Year of Grace 1906* (1906); and Mark Twain's *King Leopold's Soliloquy: A Defense of His Congo Rule* (1905). Hunt also turns to Joseph Conrad's work, *Heart of Darkness* (1899); and the famous *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (1998) by Adam Hochschild. Her archival material is impressive and includes the journal of Baron Francis Dhamis and photographs from Alice Harris. The photographs give a visual exposé of the brutality of the rubber economy under Leopold. The question of the African voice is also central. As Hunt

notes, the Congolese themselves “did speak and write during the times of the wars and abuse ... they testified before a Commission of Enquiry” (p 30). Furthermore, besides using evidence from the commission, she also consulted a series of essays – 170 of them. The essays were part of a writing competition in which Congolese students, teachers, clerks and chiefs took to pen to re-tell the stories and memories from their elders about the early years of colonialism (pp 48–49). These were stories of war, brutality, and violence in various forms, including sexual violence. As Hunt notes:

Their texts suggest distress as well as remembering after duress. Stories of cut off hands, detached feet, and removed ears abound, as do whole baskets piled high with smoked human hands. Tswambe recalled sentries forcing people into transgressive, sexual violence against their own kin...” (p 49).

Significant to note is that while the stories were of violence, they also show how the Congolese turned to vernacular therapies and refuge spaces to fight back against colonial brutalities. Thus, alongside the stories of machetes and guns, were also stories about a therapeutic charm called *Ikokota* or *bote* – “a human made mixture of trees and plants, hair, nails, blood, and fragments of objects...” (p 49). While these protective charms did not save lives, they nonetheless gave the Congolese a sense of invulnerability at the height of colonial violence. Equally important were the stories of the *nganda* – refuge spaces that at times accommodated whole villages. The *nganda* were not new; they were spaces the Congolese had used from time immemorial. By the interwar years, they were being used by the Congolese as a second home to hide from colonial officials such as tax collectors (p 56). Hunt notes that what one extrapolates by re-reading the documents is not only a story of violence and death, and the story should not be reduced to that alone. The narrative of everyday experience in colonial Congo must also emphasise a history of survival in the wake of colonial brutality.

The other chapters examine the myriad ways in which state power was at loggerheads with local wills. The case of Maria Nkoi in the second chapter is emblematic of such efforts. This religious healer was perceived as a security threat to the nervous state at a time of international and local upheaval – a result of the First World War. Maria Nkoi claimed the “Germani” (Germans) would help her to drive out the Belgians. Thus she caused a fear of rebellion and inspired an armed insurrection (p 23). She also spoke against copal labour and the state’s biosecurity measures against sleeping sickness. Her movement, which Hunt labels a “therapeutic insurgency”, “fractured a nervous state while the size of her crowds produced primitivist dread in security agents” (p 23). There is no doubt that this influential healer wracked the nerves of the Belgians and other whites. That is why the state deployed violence to contain and suppress Maria Nkoi’s therapeutic insurgency.

Chapter Three moves into the 1930s, examining how the global economic depression of the 1930s fed into the nervousness about infertility and low birth rates, prompting medical doctors to make tours and speak about reproductive challenges (p 96). The fourth chapter continues with the theme of infertility by, amongst other things, exploring the intrusive nature of gynaecological examinations and how the



women and men of Congo turned to vernacular therapies. The chapter also complicates medical history in a number of ways. Specifically, it examines the intersection of bio-politics and the securitisation of the Congo. In doing this, Hunt places emphasis on another therapeutic system, the Likili, “an initiatory, mobile charm and healing association” (p 36). The symbol of the Likili was a flywhisk – an instrument meant to sweep away old charms, calamities and biomedicine. Just as the earlier therapeutic movement, the nervous state considered the Likili a rebellious movement and they did all they could to subdue it.

The fifth chapter looks at two interesting spaces: a penal colony and a fertility clinic located in the former Abir rubber concession. The chapter brings together the complex relations between bio-politics and the carceral machinery of the state. The chapter notes that by the 1950s, in the Befale territory there were two competing institutional programmes, one on security and another on fertility. The carceral and the clinical partly intersected, with the penal colony aimed at containing counter insurgency and the clinic aimed at improving the health of the locals. The presence of each institution, “long aimed at remedies to the reproductive (the disappearing and the sterile) and to the insurgent, defiant, and evasive” (p 168). Both spaces, the clinic and the penal colony, reveal the deployment of state power, control and disciplinary mechanisms, with the clinic “investigating and treating bodies and maladies...” (p 68) and the penal colony “confining and lashing persons...” (p 168). The two spaces expose a modernist, nervous colonial state in the high noon of decolonisation. While the fifth chapter focuses on discipline and control of the Congolese, motion is the theme of the last chapter. This motion was not only physical mobility – the movement of people – but also the travelling of ideas, medicines and bodily movements such as dances. The chapter opens space for analysing the social lives of Congolese women and men.

In *A Nervous State*, Hunt weaves together key concepts that connect disparate yet interrelated nodes of a complex history of the Congo. It is not only the story of a paranoid colonial state and its officials, the security and bio-political measures employed to police, control and contain Africans, but also of the creative ways the Congolese adapted to colonial rule. Indeed, it opens up an avenue to analyse the national mood and the paranoia that ensued on the part of colonials and even African chiefs. The state’s nervousness compelled authorities to deploy carceral technologies to police and control therapeutic movements. Equally important are the concepts of shrunken milieu and plasticity. These enable Hunt to analyse the experiences of the locals and how they dealt with the violence of colonisation. Another important concept revolves around what she terms therapeutic insurgency. Not only does privileging therapeutic insurgency allow her to examine the securitisation of the Congo, but it also allows Hunt to explore how the Congolese tapped into their cultural repertoires and healing practices to challenge and negotiate the various forms of colonial violence. Like other scholars who have worked on the Congo, she acknowledges the traumatic violence that ensued with colonisation, but the novelty of her work revolves around the employment of these concepts to examine the often neglected narratives of anxiety, motion and healing amongst others.

This is a well-researched, thoroughly engaging and innovative book on colonial Congo. Interdisciplinary in her methods, Hunt consults a broad range of sources – from archival, oral history and ethnography – to weave an intricate narrative of violence, remedies and reverie in the heart of central Africa. *A Nervous State* makes a significant contribution to a number of areas – history of the Congo and medical humanities as examples. This book is highly recommended for historians of colonial Congo, specifically those interested in a novel and fresh reading of the intersection between violence and everyday life in colonial Congo. While other studies on the Congo have placed emphasis on the violence of the colonial project, Hunt also persuades us to appreciate the ingenuity of the Congolese during the colonial period. Medical historians and medical anthropologists will find this work invaluable, especially for the innovative way in which Nancy Rose Hunt forces scholars of colonial medicine to rethink the connections between vernacular therapeutic movements, securitisation and colonial biomedical practices in central Africa.

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### **A praiseworthy biography**

**Gavin Cooper, *Under Devil's Peak: The Life and Times of Wilfrid Cooper, an Advocate in the Age of Apartheid***

Burnet Media, Kenilworth, 2016

307 pp

ISBN 978-1-928230-36-6

R239.00

Although the judiciary forms a critical branch in the process of governance as an independent arbitrator, it remains in many ways an inaccessible system for ordinary citizens, with its legalistic jargon and endlessly complicated processes. Public interest in legal processes continues to flourish, however, with recent high profile court cases such as the Oscar Pistorius trial and the technological developments such as social media combining to make headlines on a scale never seen before. In recent years, a growing number of publications do, however, capture the complex processes of the judiciary in a more consumer friendly manner, yet without the poor aftertaste of sensationalism. *Under Devil's Peak* falls squarely into this position.

While *Under Devil's Peak* can be said to be a biography in the vein of “the life and times”, it is the focus on the legal career of Wilfrid Cooper that forms the bulk of the publication. During his career as an advocate, Wilfrid Cooper was involved in several high profile cases, a number of which involved prominent political figures of twentieth-century South Africa. Gavin Cooper’s presentation of his father’s life is approached by separating Advocate Cooper’s personal life from his court cases. The chapters dealing with his personal life tend to be much shorter than the chapters dealing with his work as an advocate.

Chapters dealing with biographical details of Wilfrid Cooper's life go back to when he was a youngster on the South African "platteland" in the towns of Klaver and Malmesbury, and later in Wynberg, where he completed his secondary schooling. Wilfrid's childhood seemingly "nurtured" a love of the countryside which endured into the later stages in his life and at times even influenced his decisions on which cases he would accept, so as to be exposed to small town South Africa again. Unbeknown to Wilfrid, during his secondary schooling at the Wynberg Boys' High School, he walked the same halls as a man who would later change his whole life – Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd. From Wynberg Boys' High, Wilfrid proceeded to the University of Stellenbosch, once again following in the footsteps of Verwoerd while a resident of Huis Dagbreek. While at Stellenbosch University, Wilfrid Cooper became a founding member of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) branch at the university, and thus became unfavourable in the eyes of Afrikaner Nationalists. However, despite his political activism, Cooper graduated from the University of Stellenbosch and took up a position as messenger in the upper house of parliament, the senate, in 1948. Cooper's career would soon take off.

By 1964 Advocate Cooper had worked on a number of cases when his first major political trial began. The author goes to great lengths to sketch a background to every case. This detail will be very valuable to readers less familiar with South African history, but rather time-consuming for those to whom these details are well known. Advocate Cooper's first major political trial involved Stephanie Kemp and the African Resistance Movement, an organisation with its roots in the Liberal Party which led a campaign of sabotage of government property in protest to the policy of apartheid.

The murder of Hendrik Verwoerd was an event that arguably changed the whole course of the country. In *Under Devil's Peak*, it is described as "the trial of the century" and "Wilfrid's most famous case". The year 2016 marked 50 years since the assassination of Verwoerd, and interest in events surrounding Verwoerd's death continue to draw a wide range of scholars. Gavin Cooper dedicates 31 pages to the defence of Demitrio Tsafendas by Advocate Cooper, carefully detailing the proceedings and the outcome of the trial. Despite the judge's conclusions, the assassination of Verwoerd continues to be a highly debated and significant event and will no doubt draw many interested scholars to this publication for fresh insights.

Other notable trials in which Cooper played a leading role include defending Steve Biko and Jeremy Cronin. Furthermore, in 1976, he was involved in a trial held in Swakopmund which became known as the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) trial and he took the lead in a number of cases dealing with atrocities perpetrated by the apartheid government. His anti-apartheid stance over the years was probably behind his permanent appointment to the bench being delayed until 1989. Advocate Cooper also made notable contributions to scholarship with the publication of a book on *Motor Law* (1982) and particularly his book, co-authored with T.G. Schwär, on *Alcohol, Drugs and Road Traffic* (1979) which was described by the *South African Medical Journal* as "the standard and definitive reference book on the subject" (p 243).

What emerges as the most controversial aspect of this work is the inclusion of an epilogue titled, “The enigma of Demitrio Tsafendas”. The inclusion of this epilogue reaffirms the serious and far reaching implications of the assassination of Verwoerd, and how events surrounding his death continue to haunt researchers and interested parties. According to the author, Tsafendas should receive recognition at Freedom Park for the role he played in the liberation of South Africa. This drew criticism from one advocate, Gustaf Pienaar. In an article in *Rapport*, reflecting on the 50 years since the assassination of Hendrik Verwoerd, Pienaar describes Gavin Cooper’s suggestion as “problematic” and “insensitive towards the Verwoerd family”.<sup>2</sup>

Gavin Cooper is not a professional historian, although he has produced a praiseworthy account of Advocate Cooper’s career. This publication will be of value to a wide range of scholars, such as those interested in the history of South Africa’s legal system during apartheid, as well as the many individual cases in which Wilfrid Cooper played a role. As testimony to his commitment and character, the publication is particularly successful. Wilfrid Cooper died on 4 March 2004. His career can perhaps be best summarised in his own words: “I have never come across a person who was too bad to defend. I always remembered that the person in front of me was a human being and a product of society, a victim of circumstances over which he or she had no control” (p 257).

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### **The multiplicity and contradictions of modernisation highlighted**

**Peter J. Bloom, Stephan F. Miescher and Takyiwaa Manuh (eds), *Modernization as Spectacle in Africa***

Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2014

368 pp

ISBN 978-0-253-01225-8

\$35.00

In the wake of contemporary African states’ renewed investments in large-scale infrastructure and other spectacular projects, there is once again a growing interest in understanding the history of modernisation and modernity in Africa. This edited collection bridges the crucial years of late colonialism into roughly the first decade of independence to examine what it refers to as “modernization as spectacle” – the ways that modernisation and notions of modernity met in publically enacted institutions, policies, and projects. Approaching modernisation as a transnational, contested and ideologically driven project, the book tracks how seemingly disparate spheres and undertakings were linked by the ideas that underpinned the actual material and

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2. G. Pienaar, “Ek is Spyt oor wat Gebeur het: Dimitri Tsafendas”, *Rapport Weekliks*, 16 October 2016.

institutional instantiations of modernisation spectacles. Thereby, it provides a compelling understanding of the interplay between modernity and modernisation.

The book is divided into five sections – the origins and history of modernisation theory; media; infrastructure; education; and literature – however, to explore more succinctly how the book’s fifteen chapters talk to each other, this review will focus on how they are linked through their mutual interest in official understandings of modernisation, the quotidian understandings of modernity, and the remaking of subjects.

A central theme that runs through the book is the tensions between official instantiations of modernisation, and local negotiations (and sometimes rejections) of these. The actual structure of the book in many ways echoes this, with the first two chapters by Percy Hintzen and Andrew Apter providing an engaging overview of the history of modernisation policy in Africa and the intellectual genealogies of the idea of modernisation stretching back to Kant. If both of these chapters are largely Western and macro-focused, the rest of the book acts as response to them, providing insight into how these ideas were taken up and enacted by colonial states, post-independence governments, and “ordinary” Africans.

The section on infrastructure, with contributions from Gabrielle Hecht, Stephan Miescher, and Julia Tischler, brings these tensions to the fore. Each chapter focuses on the divergence between official conceptualisations and instantiations of modernity in the form of large infrastructural investments and the on-the-ground negotiations of these. Miescher explores the controversial resettlement of populations following the construction of the Akosombo Dam, and how historical narratives produced by those who experienced forced removals put state narratives into question. Tischler reveals how focusing on local negotiations of the construction of the Kariba Dam can reveal a complicated story of both uptake and rejection of competing modernisation claims. Hecht explores the tragic toxic effects of spectacle when she tracks how labourers working in uranium mines were exposed to excessive levels of radiation which emanated not only from their workplaces, but also from their homes, which had been built from radioactive rock. These chapters together provide a case for understanding modernisation as a ground-level phenomenon which is constantly being rethought and reconstituted through peoples’ lived experiences and their memories of these experiences. Modernisation and its message, they show, lie beyond the control of the state. The implicit suggestion then is that modernisation projects’ sedimented effects often take many years to become apparent, indicating a need for a constant revisiting of projects, theories and understandings of what modernisation was and how it is understood.

Central to the struggles traced in the chapters mentioned above were the contestations over what it meant to be a modern African subject and what measures should be taken to assist the emergence of a such a subject. The chapters by Jean Allman and Takyiwaa Manuh explore how Nkrumah’s conceptualisation of what it meant to be “modern” in independent Africa shaped the rise of educational institutions

in Ghana. Allman writes about Nkrumah's engagement with former Nazi pilot, Hanna Reitsch, to create Ghana's Gliding School, using this briefly lived experiment to think through the ideologies of youth and technology that underpinned Nkrumah's vision of the ideal future society. Manuh takes Nkrumah's investment in African unity to provide a history of the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana. This was an early attempt to provide the grounds for African academics to take the lead in creating research on Africa. Africans were meant to produce African-centred research and promote the formation of pan-African identification. The weakening of the institute over the years is reflective of the ongoing difficulties encountered in rupturing colonial practices of knowledge production.

The struggle over colonial control of representation and knowledge in the making of subjectivities is raised in the section on media, which explores the use by late colonial states of radio and film in their efforts to remake African subjects. Rosaleen Smyth and Aaron Windel show how the British colonial state conceptualised film as a pedagogical medium through which Africans would be remodelled by receiving instruction about how to "modernise" their practices. At the heart of these efforts was the struggle to understand and remake what was referred to by colonial officials as the "African mind". Bloom investigates this further in his chapter exploring how accent and voice used in radio addresses were central in asserting political hierarchy outside of formal political institutions. While these two chapters explore the colonial state's vantage point, another by Chikowero investigates the complexities of the use of radio towards such pedagogical and propaganda purposes in the context of Zimbabwe. He argues that Africans were often incredulous of the colonial media's claims, towards which they harboured a deep mistrust. The extent to which media was actually successful in remaking African subjectivities should therefore be questioned thoroughly.

Chikowero's challenge opens the door to fundamental questions about the political contestations that lie at the heart of arguments about the making of the modern African subject. The tropes of modernity and modernisation while promoted as liberatory, were equally used towards oppressive ends. Nate Plagemen explores this theme with care in his chapter on popular music in Nkrumah's Ghana. He shows with great insight how Nkrumah's state attempted to use music to bring into being Nkrumah's vision of the African "new man" even while these approaches were contested by the Ghanaian youth who railed against state-imposed notions of what the modern Ghanaian should be. Music, he shows, became a conduit for the imposition of an authoritarian state. In a similar fashion, Christina McMahon reads Césaire's *The Tragedy of King Christophe* (1963) as a critique of Senghor's authoritarian melding of negritude and modernisation theory in post-independence Senegal.

The question of how Africans related to the rest of the world was the tension at the heart of these politics, and the aforementioned authors investigate skilfully how discussions of modernity involved an anguished questioning of what it meant to be African and what the possibilities were for reasserting a genuine "Africanity" in the aftermath of colonial rule. The final two chapters by Nana Wilson Tagoe and Aida

Mbowa examine the politics of the strong plurality of ideas that existed about modernisation through exploring African literature. Tagoe tracks various author's understandings of modernity, while Mbowa investigates Ngugi's shifting notions of modernity over time. Both thereby reinforce yet again one of the key underlying points of the book – that while modernisation and development were central to the moment of early independence, there was not one version of these, and what we understand this moment to mean and modernity to mean, are constantly shifting.

In a moment in which the question of what an African modernity means is once again being pushed to centre stage, a collection that draws attention to the multiplicity and contradictions of modernisation in an earlier period of history is a welcome contribution. The book should be of interest to anyone engaging with contemporary questions of development, modernity, and political belonging in Africa, reminding scholars of the thoroughly transnational, contested, and historically changing meanings and experiences of modernisation.

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### **Protest culture in post-apartheid South Africa**

**Jane Duncan, *Protest Nation: The Right to Protest in South Africa***

University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 2016

240 pp

ISBN 978-1-86914-323-7

R385.00

Many researchers and social science scholars have argued that since the advent of democracy in South Africa, or at least during President Zuma's administration, the country has become synonymous with public protests. Such protests are often related to service delivery concerns. Jane Duncan's *Protest Nation: The Right to Protest in South Africa* explores this issue. In understanding protest culture in South Africa, the first two chapters of the book elaborate extensively on the international trend which pertains to protest and state repression. Here, the author summarises the debates on the right to protest, as well as its limitations. The author notes that:

the focus of this book is on political repression as a constraining factor in South Africa's political system: if political repression increases, then the structures of political opportunity for protest voices to be heard are likely to close down, reducing protestors' chances of success (p 25).

This statement clearly shows that in one way or another, repression plays a significant role in the suppression of protests and protestors, thus leading to the interrogation of what is referred to as a democratic space. Chapter Two deals with understanding the right to protest in South Africa. Here the author articulates two broad theoretical approaches. The first one highlights protests as a reflection of the

broader expression of dissatisfaction by the poor. In the main, the protests are viewed as challenges to the state. The second one is a call for the African National Congress (ANC) to be accountable to the citizenry. In fact, these two approaches are complementary and depend on how the reader interprets these approaches.

Chapter Three focuses on the legislative and policy context for exercising the right to protest in South Africa. It sheds some light on how and why the country's approach to protests has shifted over time and provides an analysis on why local government specifically, has become a target for service delivery protests in South Africa. However, this approach fails to hold individuals to account to the public. In most cases, the elected community representatives use the ANC as a shield to avoid accountability as individuals, and expect the party to accept that collective responsibility when there are failures in providing services. Several legislative measures have been passed by the ANC government in order to institutionalise protests. In terms of such legislation, protestors are subjected to a variety of legislative processes that must be followed before a demonstration of protest can take place. This approach, in a sense, curtails the prospect of embarking on spontaneous protests. In this chapter the author argues that such institutionalisation runs the risk of dampening or even neutralising the transformative content of many protests.

Chapter Four reflects on the findings of studies on protests conducted in two municipalities, namely those in Mbombela and eThekweni. Given the volatility of these protests, the author explores whether or not democratic spaces for the right to protest have been closed down. Following the statistics from the South African Police Services (SAPS), it was clear that as compared to other municipalities around the country, Mbombela exhibited elements of unrest-related demonstrations. The author makes use of statistical graphs and analysis to justify this claim. The role played by the labour unions in fuelling the protests is also discussed in this chapter. For the eThekweni municipality, the author finds that despite all the notable protest actions, the records reflect a different picture. This could be due to poor record-keeping which is known to exist in the municipality. One tends to agree with the author that being home to organisations such as Abahlali baseMijondolo, eThekweni can in no way legitimately register low levels of protests. In Chapter Five, the author focuses on the cosmopolitan urban centres of Johannesburg and the Nelson Mandela Bay municipalities. The chapter explores the political shifts among protest actors in these media-rich cities, which potentially raises the cost of repression for the authorities. In cities such as these, there is a tendency to embark on service delivery protests without really having obtained permission to do so from the authorities. Indeed, in both Johannesburg and Port Elizabeth, non-alliance organisations dominate the protest space in relation to the alliance organisations.

The next chapter argues that in many of the protests, the social movements take centre stage. Here the focus is on two relatively small municipalities in the rural Eastern Cape, namely, Makana and Lukhanji. In Makana, for example, there is a very high level of unemployment. This status quo becomes an important springboard for mobilisation, with social movements propelling instability. In most cases, the



communities lament the lack of provision of services for which, in return, they fail to pay. On the other hand, Lukhanji did not have a major problem with violent protests. In most cases, the communities opted for peaceful protests despite having a 36.8% rate of unemployment. In this chapter the author succeeds in profiling the value of a social movement in the instigation of protests. In Chapter Seven the author examines the regulation of gatherings and protests in municipalities incorporating large rural areas in the Eastern and Western Cape. In the Eastern Cape, the Regional Executive Committee (REC) found that the protests were triggered by councillors who were found to be manipulating job opportunities. In some instances, there were even disagreements between the mayor, the municipal manager and the councillors. There was notable unevenness in the bureaucratic responses to the protests even in rural municipalities, suggesting that when some bureaucrats resort to repression, they do so on the basis of local factors alone, and not in response to a national imperative.

Chapter Eight highlights the major findings on the right to protest from activist interviews and focus groups. The interview data points to activists experiencing serious problems with exercising their right to protest. The chapter also explores municipal and police responses to protests and attempts made to protest through the lived experiences of community activists and their legal representatives. There is an emphasis on the bureaucratic obstacles which are often placed in the way of protestors. In many areas the Landless People's Movement, or trade unions, such as the Agricultural and Allied Workers Union (CSAAWU) have played a significant role in advancing the course of protest action. In some instances, it appears that demonstrations are fuelled by xenophobic attacks which tend to spread and even engulf the whole country.

The role of the police in the handling of protestors and their right to protest is scrutinised in Chapter Nine. Following the relevant legislation, any planned protest march has to be discussed with the police beforehand. A protest may be prohibited if the police provide credible information on oath that the protest presents an imminent threat to public safety. The police have the right to break up a protest march if the protest continues without permission and on many occasions this has led to confrontations. Chapter Ten discusses the role of the media in covering the protests. Four sites are sampled in this regard, namely, Rustenburg, Mbombela, Nelson Mandela Bay and the Blue Crane Route. The author argues that sometimes the media coverage of the protests is exaggerated and that this may fuel existing tensions among opposing groups, while negative media coverage and biased reporting may also promote instability. The final chapter provides a summary of all the preceding chapters by examining the overall trends of protest.

The author has succeeded in her attempts to explore the right to protest in South Africa through the lenses of municipal and police interactions and their response to community needs. She has used a variety of research data to produce a convincing narrative of protest action in South Africa. The depth of the book is also enhanced by data collection from a range of municipalities. There are some typing and spelling mistakes identified in the book; for example, Lehlonolo Majoro (p xi) and Lehlohonolo

(p 17). This apart, the publication succeeds in unlocking some of the neglected dimensions of protest culture in post-apartheid South Africa. It is recommended for historians and political scientists, as well as sociologists.

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### **Snapshots of repression and resistance**

**Richard Pithouse, *Writing the Decline: On the Struggle for South Africa's Democracy***

Jacana Media, Johannesburg, 2016

208 pp

ISBN 978-1-4314-2317-0

R240.00

Richard Pithouse's *Writing the Decline: On the Struggle for South Africa's Democracy* is a collection of essays detailing Pithouse's responses to a variety of political events in South Africa and, to a lesser extent, globally in the period from 2008 to 2015. The essays are short comment pieces previously published in newspapers and online in outlets such as the *Daily Maverick*, *Business Day* and the South African Civil Society Information Service. As Pithouse puts it, *Writing the Decline* is not an academic work; instead it responds to events "as they happened" and has been "hammered out on the anvil of the present" (p 1). Many of the events Pithouse responds to will be familiar to readers, even if they are only casually engaged with South African and global political developments, while those acquainted with Pithouse's academic work and activism will recognise many of the themes, foci and arguments he pursues in *Writing the Decline*.

Centrally, Pithouse argues that in South Africa there has been "escalating repression by both the ruling party and the state, and the emergence of new modes of potentially emancipatory popular politics organised outside liberal institutions" (p 3). With regard to the latter (and, at times, as subject to the former), the shack dwellers' movement Abahlali baseMjondolo is frequently discussed in the volume (in, for instance, Chapters 1, 2, 11, 23, 24, 25, 32 and 40). Indeed, even where the Abahlali movement is not mentioned, struggles relating to shack settlements, land occupations, housing and evictions are key themes, returned to again and again in the essays collected here. This is unsurprising given, on the one hand, the central importance of land and housing as sites of activism, struggle and repression in South Africa (and elsewhere), and on the other hand, Pithouse's longstanding close association with Abahlali baseMjondolo.<sup>3</sup> This relationship is, however, never explicitly acknowledged or discussed in the book. A longer, more detailed theoretical and empirical exploration of social movement praxis and the various roles of (and, at times contentious,

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3. See, for example, N.C. Gibson, *Fanonian Practices in South Africa: From Steve Biko to Abahlali baseMjondolo* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp 175–176.

relationships between)<sup>4</sup> scholars, activists and scholar-activists in building the kind of emancipatory politics Pithouse calls for would be welcome. However, this would be a very different kind of book to *Writing the Decline*.

Presented in chronological order, there is something diary-like to the collection. This sense is exacerbated by the brevity of most of the chapters. Rather than elaborating or expanding upon the analysis of an event, building an argument with each chapter moving further towards an overarching conclusion to the book, each essay is self-contained, briefly setting out an argument and conclusions regarding the event to which it is responding. This is a necessary consequence of collecting essays of this kind in a substantially similar form to which they originally appeared in newspapers and online, and has both positive and negative effects on the book. Taken as a whole, the book can feel repetitive. Pithouse's arguments regarding predatory and authoritarian capture of the African National Congress (ANC), the increasing conflation of the ANC with the South African nation and state, failures of much of the left and non-governmental organisations in relation to popular mobilisation outside their control, and the need for emancipatory, meaningfully democratic politics to take account of poor people's ability to think, act and participate, are stated and re-stated numerous times throughout *Writing the Decline's* 42 chapters. While this can produce frustration, and the desire for a longer and deeper exploration of the arguments, other effects are also produced by the book's form. Reading the short-form essays back-to-back gives not only a sense of repetition but also a sense of relentlessness. Events continue to happen regardless of how long is spent on in-depth analysis of each individual situation. In this regard the book is most effective – and most affecting – in Pithouse's accounts of and responses to violence and repression faced by social movement activists, protesters and, at times, uninvolved passers-by. Chapters 3, 7, 10, 15, 19, 24, 25, 27, 30, 31, 40 and 41 all focus significantly on this and give a sense of the degree to which violence is a routine experience for many in South Africa (and beyond).

An endorsement of the book from Eusebius McKaiser claims that *Writing the Decline* "refus[es] to fall into the South African temptation of parochial analysis" (p i). This claim is for the most part borne out. Whilst the book is clearly, from its subtitle onwards, primarily concerned with South Africa, this focus is not myopic. Essays in the collection respond to events across the world, from Palestine to Uganda, India, Europe and the Americas. Discussion of Jacob Zuma's rise to power in the ANC and South African presidency, the controversy over Brett Murray's *Spear* painting and the Marikana massacre sit alongside reflections on Occupy Wall Street, the London riots of 2011 and Chelsea Manning's whistleblowing. Frequently, links and comparisons are made between events, responses to these and the ways in which they might be understood in context. Homophobia, xenophobia, racism, and gender-based and sexual violence are not presented as uniquely South African problems even as their specifically South African manifestations are discussed.

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4. See, for example, B. Mdlalose, "The Rise and Fall of Abahlali baseMjondolo, a South African Social Movement", *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies*, 41, 3 (2014), pp 345–353.

Whilst *Writing the Decline* is not a scholarly monograph, and its form precludes lengthy exploration of theory, references to Frantz Fanon, Karl Marx, Toussaint L' Ouverture, Mahmoud Mamdani, Aimé Césaire and others – along with pointed criticism of the likes of John Locke and John Stuart Mill – nevertheless pepper the text, giving an indication of the wider intellectual and political paradigms into which the book might be placed. Readers are likely to find the book most useful if they approach it bearing in mind what it is rather than what it might otherwise have been. Those looking for a detailed theoretical response to the contemporary political conjuncture will not find it here. Nor will readers find a specific programme for action, manifesto, recipe or formula for social change. Rather, *Writing the Decline* provides snapshots of particular moments in recent history and immediate – although politically engaged and theoretically informed – reactions to these.

One of the advantages of presenting these essays together is the ease with which it is possible to observe continuity, change and recurrence in the shapes of the political events examined, and in Pithouse's responses to these. It is perhaps worth noting, for instance, what seems to be a subtle contrast between the summing up Pithouse provides in the book's introduction, that it "offers no *a priori* optimism about the future" (p 4) and that "building and sustaining an emancipatory politics will ... confront a very hard road" (p 5) with the occasionally more hopeful tone of some of the early (and earlier written) chapters in the book. In Chapter 13, written in October 2011, reflecting on Occupy Wall Street, Pithouse notes that "a new politics, a new willingness to resist" emerges with "no guarantees" but called for young people in South Africa to "make common cause with the rebellion of the poor" (pp 68–69). By Chapter 38, written in May 2015, Pithouse's caveat is more cautious. He notes that protest in South Africa "is diverse, dynamic and unstable", adding that "of course, it carries within it elements that are both potentially emancipatory and reactionary" (p 179). His calls for "building popular organisations" (p 179) remain, but the language of a "rebellion of the poor" is no longer present.

It might have been interesting to provide more new commentary in the book (only the introduction is new), expanding upon and providing context for each for the chapters, or reflecting, with the benefit of hindsight, on the themes and events they address. This would, however, change the nature of the volume significantly. Taking the book as it stands, *Writing the Decline* is a compelling, if frustrating, account of recent years viewed through an analytical lens which at once insists upon the critical, disastrous severity of present conditions and upon – if not actually existing optimism – the *potential* for a more optimistic future to be built.

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**An exciting and stimulating read**

**Peter Vale, Lawrence Hamilton and Estelle H. Prinsloo (eds), *Intellectual Traditions in South Africa: Ideas, Individuals and Institutions***

University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Scottsville, 2014

364 pp

ISBN 978-1-86914-258-2

R349.00

This volume fills a dearth of scholarship in the under-researched, yet extremely relevant, scholarly space of intellectual histories in South Africa. Neatly organised in three parts, Vale, Hamilton and Prinsloo expertly manoeuvre the reader through the intellectual cross-currents of South Africa's history by pointing us to instances of agency, discovery, recovery and ultimately of re-imagining, by connecting us with a contentious past and inscribing an equally unstable present. This volume foregrounds multidisciplinary in a refreshingly novel and unexpected way as it also engages with South African history. It does so by using numerous disciplinary lenses that transcend the whole spectrum of humanities and social sciences to create an exciting and stimulating read, which simultaneously incites and begs further scholarly exploration. The mix of disciplinary traditions may explain this, but the chapters are not steeped in any disciplinary apparel. In fact, the writers disrupt conventions and norms because the chapters are written to satisfy a differentiated audience that comprises methodological purists, theoretical disciples and generalists. This is a major advantage of this collection because it is not only accessible to this differentiated audience but also allows them, despite their perceived differences, an opportunity to not only peer into but also engage with each other's realities.

The first part is structured around the following intellectual traditions: liberalism, Marxism and the Afrikaner tradition, underpinned with a section on positivism. These dense theoretical traditions are neatly mapped and teased out for relevance to the South African socio-political ecology. The interpretive outcome of these analytical strands is the framing of South Africa's socio-political ecology in a rich theoretical foundation. The analytic window provided by this first part provides a rich explanatory and descriptive value to any loyal student of the philosophical history and theoretical explanations of the South African story, albeit just one among many stories. The chapter on positivism reaffirms the enlightenment logic of nation-state as rooted in a quest for progress. In fact, this chapter on positivism forms numerous intellectual connections with the theoretical strands because it offers an imagination of the nation-state during many phases in the evolution of South Africa.

The second part of the collection rightly articulates what maybe loosely regarded as the age-old tension between identities and belonging. The chapters engage critically with this tension by framing it within the variegated discourse that defines the assumed intra-homogeneity of the African National Congress (ANC), the engagements with Pan-Africanism and the influences of Gandhi and the Black Consciousness Movement in Africa and particularly in South Africa. The collection of

chapters in this section provide numerous instances in the role of spirituality and religion to not only the identity of a people but also how that shapes a nation's destiny. It is fascinating for any student of politics, political sociology and political history that the ANC as a key political agent in the political landscape of South Africa has always been an internally fractured behemoth capable of papering over its divisions. This is an important analytical point in Part Two as it resonates with the contemporary public spats which this key player on South Africa's political landscape has experienced. The trend of disagreement and the strategies of re-emergence and papering over the cracks are important scholarly inquiries into the ANC's emergence and re-emergence through history. Part Two is also important because it provides a crisp discussion of the nexus between liberation theology and the Black Consciousness Movement. The essential theme running through this section is the connection between politics and religion, especially how religion is intimately linked to the political fortunes of South Africa's existence.

The third part of the collection is connected to the second and offers fascinating insights into Christian, Jewish, Hindu and Islamic intellectual traditions in South Africa. The theme of emancipation and religion is highlighted. The overarching role of religion in not only shaping the political destiny of South Africa but implanting the early seeds of social cohesion was crucial. The chapters in this section spotlight numerous anti-apartheid heroes and heroines who emerged from different religious backgrounds.

While the volume is ultimately part of South African historiography, it is however not a historical narrative confined to the South African space; in fact, it is an intriguing analysis that intimately connects South Africa's narrative to global, socio-political and historical shifts. South Africa's history is therefore not isolated from global changes, in fact, South Africa is positioned as a key beneficiary and player in defining the core ideas of the world. The depth of this volume not only fills a dearth of scholarly investigation into the intellectual stimuli that have shaped South Africa, but also creates rich caveats for scholarly enquiry. The collection interrupts established narratives on the political, communal and religious traditions of South Africa and at the same time gives voice to the subaltern whose agency had not been fully acknowledged.

Intellectual traditions in South Africa open an analytical window into the historiography on South African society by enhancing society's self-understanding. This collection will incentivise new and old scholars, new and old researchers and history enthusiasts to develop fresh and dynamic insights into this emerging field. The book provides an accessible route into the troubling and troubled discussion on the essence of being South African. It is a worthy read for anyone grappling with the realities that the nation of South Africa is currently encountering.

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