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*Cape lives of the eighteenth century*

**(Pretoria, Protea Book House, 2011, 676 pp., bibl., index. ISBN: 978-1-86919-484-0)**

**Karel Schoeman**

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This volume is one of a number that Karel Schoeman has published recently on the Cape in the VOC era, mainly in Afrikaans. His objectives are twofold: to provide an understanding of the eighteenth-century Cape world through a series of biographies and to write for a general readership. Schoeman is not an academic and, while his research is wide-ranging, he does not attempt to engage with academic debates. On the other hand, he is one of South Africa's most gifted writers and this is a remarkable volume. He brings to the work, not only his literary gifts, but a wonderfully comfortable familiarity with the period and the sources. Nor has he ignored recent research; on the contrary, his secondary reading draws on the work of historians like Nigel Worden, Gerald Groenewald and Nigel Penn, and he has made extensive use of the internet.

The book is far more than a series of biographies. Each individual is a peg on which to hang an exploration of his or her world. Schoeman has deliberately chosen representative individuals and they range from a small

number of prominent figures like Robert Jacob Gordon, to a far larger group of frontiersmen and women, minor officials, slaves and, in order to examine the distant eastern frontier, Rharhabe. As he moves through the period, he notes the way in which the relatively fluid racial lines of the earlier part of the century hardened. As he observes in the chapter on Jacoba Alida Campher and Willem van Wijk, the Cape in the early eighteenth century was not a world of gabled houses and gracious living. It was, rather, inhabited by North European immigrants, poor and often illiterate, who married local coloured women and struggled to establish themselves in a pioneering environment. Some made it but most did not. Some might find acceptance in the more affluent social world but, by the end of the century, the stain of colour was regarded as reprehensible.

Much of Schoeman's interest lies in the frontier, first in the north and later towards the eastern Cape. The chapter on Campher and van Wijk, for instance, looks at the Olifants River region. The chapter hinges on the court records of Campher who appeared before the Court of Justice in Cape Town to declare that her brother-in-law, van Wijk, had seduced her in the course of a journey to Cape Town from the Olifants River. To tell this story, Schoeman examined genealogies, probate inventories and resolutions of the Council of Policy, building up a picture of the northern frontier over a period of seventeen years.

He ranges through an account of the events surrounding the French deserter, Etienne Barbier, to a description of the raids against the Khoikhoi. Van Wijk's world, he concludes, was one of 'raiding, warfare, random violence and general lawlessness' (p.135). Campher was descended from a German immigrant and, possibly, on her mother's side, from former slaves. German immigrants feature frequently in these biographies and one of Schoeman's strengths is his awareness of the European world from which these people came. The clan also included children born out of wedlock. He goes on:

This then was the family background of the Campher sisters, children of a father who according to the strictly racial standards of a later era was half 'non-white' and a mother who was a quarter coloured. In their own day, such criteria would still have been largely irrelevant, however: what would have mattered was that the members of both families ... had been baptised, and that they formed part of the local farming and slave-owning community, however small the scale.

One such snippet gives very little sense of the richness of this very substantial volume. For me, however, one of the pleasures is Schoeman's engagement

with his sources. Using an account book, for instance, he explores the working of large Cape household towards the end of the VOC period (the biographies are always firmly grounded in place and time). The entries range from payments to the family doctor and for spices, reminding us of the eastern influence on Cape cuisine, to clothing bought for slaves, in this case apparently relatively well treated since there is also expenditure on schooling. Repeatedly Schoeman uses these sources and his own sensitive pen to give a glimpse of a world which, he fully recognises, is difficult to recapture today.

What one finds in this casual incident, ... is people leading isolated and monotonous lives, with too much time for aimless conversation and irresponsible gossip during the protracted visits they paid to one another, and also too much time for brooding subsequently over what had been said or implied (p. 524).

Or, elsewhere:

It was a world of candlelight and smoky fires, of gossip and neighbourliness and attendance at church on Sundays, and social visits where the men smoked heavily while the women drank innumerable cups of tea. Above all, it was a world dominated completely by the VOC, by the bells that rang throughout the day to define the activities of its servants and slaves in the Castle, the Hospital and the Slave Lodge, by the drummers and pipers at the Castle sounding the tattoo at the end of the day, and a cannon announcing the arrival and departure of its ships on their way to the Netherlands and the East (p. 456).

Every chapter ranges widely, including much genealogical information on the network of alliances that formed Cape society, to contingent personalities and events. The result is a series of fascinating and often unexpected glimpses into this small but complex world. Schoeman brings freshness even to the studies of people, like Gordon, on whom there is already a substantial literature.

If I have a quarrel with this volume it is in the absences. There are no maps, desperately needed, and no illustrations despite frequent references to portraits. The dustcover has to suffice. The index, too, is unsatisfactory for it does not include the range of connections that are part of the value of this book. It is a pity for this book is a fine introduction to the eighteenth-century Cape, and beyond.

*A cameo from the past: The prehistory and early history of the  
Kruger National Park*

**(Pretoria: Protea Book House, 2012, 757 pp., map, table, bibl., index.  
ISBN 978-1-86919-195-5)**

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South African National Parks (SANParks) is the leading conservation authority in Africa. With 3 751 113 hectares of land under its control, the 21 national parks play host to one of Southern Africa's most valuable living heritage features – the unique fauna and flora of the region. It is a heritage that is not merely that of the people of South Africa, but indeed that of mankind, and protecting this heritage is everybody's business, or at least, it should be.

The history of game parks are, as this book clearly demonstrates, not merely the history of animals and their conservation. The overriding emphasis is on the relation between human activity and the natural environment. It is a subject on which the general historian is, one would suspect, not too well informed. It is true that environmental history has not received the attention it deserves in curricula. It is good that this is changing, but for those overwhelmed at where to start, *A cameo from the past* may just be what you are looking for.

What is most important in this study is the way in which various disciplines are consulted to narrate the prehistory and early history of the Kruger National Park. In some ways, this makes the text challenging to read. Yet the result is that one feels enriched, and left with a sense of wonder about the magnitude of this heritage that is South Africa's natural beauty and diversity.

This sense of being overwhelmed is enhanced by the sheer amount of factual information. If there is perhaps one strong point of criticism, it is that the text has some of the qualities of an encyclopaedia. While one is provided with ample facts, the old accusation that history is "just one thing after the other" might surface here for some. But despite the possibility that the volume of information might overwhelm the reader, there is adequate interpretation of

these facts. The fact that the authors went to great lengths to unearth the insights of various disciplines also minimizes this challenge, as their contextual insights assist with interpretation.

Aiding the reader further is the large number of images accompanying this work. Although it would certainly have been far less costly without them, they are of paramount importance to interpret the text. It is often the case with history books that one is left wondering if photographs of well-known politicians are indeed necessary. But in the case of *A cameo from the past*, the pictorial information more often than not enhances the reading experience. Added to these are the important maps included in the back. These are not merely of historical importance, but will assist a modern visitor to the area.

In terms of content, the bulk of the book is concerned with the settlers' activities in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Amongst these, the stories of colourful personalities often tell a different tale than what we are so often led to believe about South Africa's past. While there were times of bloodshed and conflict, there are also stories of bravery and brotherhood that seem so distant from what South Africa would become in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially in the eyes of the international community. Some of the content is so moving that it could serve as inspiration for historical novels. What forms a central theme, however, is the way in which the politics of the area shaped the development of the Kruger National Park, and for those interested in the Anglo-Boer war, there is an entire chapter on this topic and how it relates to the development of the Park.

As the title suggests, however, an ample part of the text is dedicated to the prehistory of the Kruger National Park, and tells a tale of the magnitude of early human settlement – a subject about which many South Africans know too little. Trade and mining were common to the early settlers of the area, and as discoveries are made, our knowledge of these 'first' South Africans is becoming more detailed.

All of this forms a prelude to what can be described as the climax of *A cameo from the past*, which is the formation of the Kruger National Park. Again, this is narrated in great detail. The authors do not shy away from grim realities and lessons learned the hard way, and give us insights into how South Africa developed into one of the leaders in conservation.

Despite its overwhelming detail, *A cameo from the past* can be considered as a work that succeeds in its stated aims. It is an important contribution, and is recommended to anyone interested in wildlife, the Kruger National Park, and the politics of South Africa. Because it is very well-illustrated, it can even serve as a wonderful “coffee table” book, hopefully cultivating an awareness and love for nature, as well as history.

### *Armblanques*

(Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 2012, x + 200 pp. ISBN 978-0-624-05643-0)

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Die onderwerp “armblankes” is natuurlik nie nuut in die Suid-Afrikaanse historiografie nie en in hierdie opsig sluit Bottomley se werk aan by ‘n aantal gewigtige publikasies wat alreeds hierdie tema of aspekte daarvan histories ondersoek het, byvoorbeeld dié van Groskopf, Van Onselen, Beinart *et al*, Keegan, Morrel, Lange en Teppo, asook vele ander.<sup>1</sup> Bottomley se boek is ‘n verwerking van sy MA-graad aan die Universiteit van Cambridge oor die geografiese geskiedenis van armblankes in Suid-Afrika. Dis in Afrikaans in boekvorm deur Erika de Beer vertaal.

Die boek bestaan uit vyf hoofstukke, te wete “Die ontdekking van die armes”, “Die arm stad”, “Die arm volk”, “Die goeie blankes” en “Die moderne armes”. Veral die teoretiese vertrekpunte van hoofstuk een, waar die skrywer aspekte soos klassifikasie, koloniale stedelike beplanning en rasse-orde, witheidstudies,

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<sup>1</sup> Sien bv. JFW Groskopf, *Rural impoverishment and rural exodus: Report of the Carnegie Commission*, Pro Ecclesia, Stellenbosch, 1932; C van Onselen, *Studies in the social and economic history of the Witwatersrand 1886-1914, Vol. I: New Babylon* (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1982); W Beinart, et al (eds.), *Putting a plough to the ground. Accumulation and dispossession in rural South Africa, 1850-1930* (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1986); T Keegan, *Rural transformations in industrializing South Africa. The Southern Highveld to 1914* (Macmillan Press, Basingstoke, 1987); R Morrel (ed.), *White but poor: Essays on the history of the poor whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940* (Unisa, Pretoria, 1992); L Lange, *White, poor and angry: White working class families in Johannesburg* (Ashgate, Aldershot, 2003); A Teppo, *The making of a good white: A historical ethnography of the rehabilitation or poor whites in a suburb of Cape Town* (University of Helsinki, Helsinki, 2004).

armblankekommissies en eugense as bepalende faktore in die vorming van 'n armblankeklas analiseer, is van die sterk punte in die boek.

Daarna volg die skrywer die tradisionele armblanke narratief deur te verduidelik hoedat sosio-ekonomiese toestande op die platteland 'n blanke verskuiwing na die stede genoodsaak het en hoedat die arm-blanke verskynsel hom in stedelike krotbuurte gemanifesteer het. Hy kom tot die gevolgtrekking dat om die "armblankeprobleem" op te los, moes die staat eers die aard en omvang daarvan kon bepaal, om hulle as't ware te "ontdek" en te dokumenteer deur middel van kommissies. Hierdie kommissies het in hulle ondersoekproses die diskoers gevestig hoe die "probleem" gehanteer moes word aangesien die vestiging van 'n verenigde wit volk vereis het dat alle lede van daardie groep wit moes wees. Gevolglik het arm wittes deel geword van 'n volgehoue verbeelding van Afrikanerdom deur hulle lewenstandaarde te verhoog en die persepsie van die armes te verbeter.

Dis egter waar die skrywer poog om die hantering van die armblankeprobleem aan die hand van Afrikaner-nasionalisme te interpreteer dat hy begin klei trap. Bottomley trap in dieselfde slagat waarin menige Engelssprekende historikus beland wanneer hulle poog om Afrikaner-nasionalisme, Afrikaanse taal en kultuuraspekte en Afrikaner-politiek te ontleed en te verklaar. En dit is om Dan O'Meara se hoogaangeprese sosio-ekonomiese en politieke studie oor Afrikaners<sup>2</sup> klakkeloos en kritiekloos na te volg. Dis asof O'Meara se dikwels ongenuanseerde vertolking van 'n allesoorheersende Afrikaner kulturele entrepreneurselite, wat glo alles rondom die Afrikanerdom sou vorm, skeep, bestuur en beheer, 'n soort interpretasietemplaat vir diesulkes vorm. Die ou holruggeryde Broederbond is weer die stereotipiese Antjie Somers wat so 'n skadelike invloed op Afrikaner gehad het.

In navolging van O'Meara maak Bottomley die volgende absurde stellings op p. 123: "Deur sulke skeppings [soos die FAK] het die Bond gehoop om Afrikaner-eenheid te bevorder en daardeur *'n volk te skeep waar daar nie een was nie en 'n verenigde geskiedenis te bedink*" (my kursivering)...In 'n groot mate is die kultuur van Afrikaners vandag *die produk van die Bond se beleid*" (my kursivering). Alhoewel Bottomley hier vir O'Meara aanhaal, wend hy geen poging aan om sy stellings krities te analiseer nie. Volgens hierdie stellings was die aard en wese van die Afrikaners sonder die Broederbond onmoontlik

2 D O'Meara, *Volkskapitalisme: Class, capital and ideology in the development of Afrikaner nationalism, 1934-1948*, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1983).

en sou dan by implikasie eers sedert 1918, toe die AB gestig is, werklik “in wording” kom slegs danksy daardie organisasie! Dit is ook neerbuigend teenoor armes asof hulle bloot willose wesens was met geen agentskap van hulle eie nie. Alhoewel Bottomley Giliomee se gesaghebbende werk oor die Afrikaners<sup>3</sup> geraadpleeg het, het hy klaarblyklik nie kennis geneem van laasgenoemde se breedvoerige verduideliking dat die Broederbond nie naastenby so magtig en magies was soos wat die O’Meara-navolgers klaarblyklik wil hê dit moet wees nie.

Ander problematiese aspekte van die boek lê by die Afrikaanse vertaling wat plek-plek uiters swak gedoen is en in vele gevalle tot direkte vertalings en erge anglisismes aanleiding gee. Om enkele voorbeelde te noem: “Van 1886 is die storie (i.p.v. verhaal) van Suid-Afrika die storie (i.p.v. verhaal) van goud”, p.26; “network” (i.p.v. netwerk), p.33; “verskillende tyde” (i.p.v. tye), p.39; “het dié heerskappye elke beskikbare ware ‘wittes’ benodig”, p.42; “middelste dekades van die twintigste eeu” (i.p.v. in die middel van die twintigste eeu) en “botsende poliglot”, p. 70, “armer kwartiere” (i.p.v. armer buurte) en “residentpoel van deskundige getuienis”, p.78; “Afrikaner-generaal” (i.p.v. Boeregeneraal), “Gekose Komitee oor Europese Werkloosheid”(i.p.v. Blanke Werkloosheid) en “opvatting van wit armoede” (i.p.v. opvatting oor), p.79; “gaping tussen hulle wat gebrekkig gevul word” en “nie-Europese werker”(i.p.v. nie-blanke werker), p. 80; “die kommissies is ook merkwaardig vir die mymeringe van professor”, p.82; “moontlik gemaak deur baie klein gewetensterftes”, p.108; “Hertzog, daardie blinde en ruimhartige nasionalis” (waar met blinde waarskynlik iets soos onverbiddelelike bedoel word), p.112, “ook Koos”(i.p.v. oom Koos), p.157 en “as sulks” (i.p.v. as sodanig), p.185.

Op p. 62 kom die volgende direkte vertaling voor wat totaal onsinnig en onbegryplik in Afrikaans is: “As tonele van potensiele maatskaplike onrus wat die koloniale verbeelding gedestabiliseer het, is die ligging van die stedelike armes, onder wie probleemgroepe soos misdadigers en prostitute, tipies omlyn. Dit was onvermydelik ‘n kru proses”. Op p.162 verwys die skrywer na ‘n oop gebied in die Wes-Kaapse armblankebuurt, Ruyterwacht, wat volgens hom aanvanklik as ‘n feesterrein vir volkspele en boeremarkte gebruik is en later in ‘n motorrenbaan omskep is. Hierdie inligting is net gedeeltelik korrek. Dit het as die Goodwoodse skouterrein ontwikkel waar die jaarlikse landboutentoonstelling van die Wes-Kaapse Landbou-unie tot ongeveer die einde van die twintigste eeu gehou is en waarna dit as die Grandwest-

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3 H Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a people* (University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville, 2003).

casinokompleks ontwikkel is. Vervolgens verklaar die skrywer op p.172 dat die vakbond Solidariteit in 1902 as die Mynwerkersunie gestig is. Die korrekte interpretasie is egter dat die Transvaal Miners' Association in 1902 gestig is, wat in 1913 tot die Suid-Afrikaanse Mynwerkersunie herdoop is en in 2002 weer 'n naamsverandering tot Solidariteit ondergaan het.

Desnieteenstaande sy tekortkominge het die boek meriete vir historici wat in sosiale geskiedenis belangstel. Die laaste hoofstuk, getiteld "Moderne armes" bevat, soos die hoofstukopskrif lui, interessante nuwe inligting oor kontemporêre armlankes, alhoewel dit in wese op armlanke buurtes in die Kaapse Skiereiland fokus en nie 'n uitgebreide analise vir die oorsake van hierdie hernude armoede bied nie. Alles inaggenome, bring Bottomley se studie, benewens sy laaste hoofstuk, geen nuwe kennis ten opsigte van die interpretasies en narratiewe van die geskiedenis van armlankes na vore nie. Tog is sy samevoeging en bespreking van bestaande en nuwe insigte oor hierdie onderwerp goed in die publikasie verpak en is die werk 'n nuttige naslaanbron oor die geskiedenis van armlankes in Suid-Afrika.

*Re-imagining the Social in South Africa: Critique theory and post-apartheid society*

(Scottsville, UKZN, 2009, 308pp., index. ISBN: 978-1-86914-179-0)

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Mamphela Ramphela on 25 April 2013 stated at the Wits Origins Centre in Braamfontein, in her address entitled "Fear in South African politics", that people are afraid to speak out against the "ills and abuse by the government and the ruling party" (Ndaba, 2013). It is both salutary and depressing to note that the fear of the ruling party is one of the most prominent factors governing society today, four years after the publication of this book. Fear is a theme that runs through the collection of essays and various authors identify instances where the people are afraid, for various reasons, of the ruling party –

and which may explain the absence of the kind of discourse that was so much part of the “struggle”.

Intellectual criticism and discourse have been abandoned since the change of government in 1994. The authors explore this issue and provide many and varied opinions as to why this occurred. These range from the fact that “liberal” criticism is outdated and firmly based in the middle-class western context that has very little to do with the current problems faced by people who are dispossessed, and because traditional methods are of little use in post-colonial settings. The now- outmoded idea of praxis proposed by Habermas, namely that change can be brought about through recognising what is wrong with society and then changing it, is propagated and rejected. It is ironic that in post-apartheid South Africa the ideals of critical theory and praxis seem to some to be impossible.

Various schools of thought are represented, ranging from the conservative to the radical. The common thread is that the social reality of South Africa has changed and that there are those who believe that this is simply a reflection of post-colonial reality, and that western values of human rights and democracy cannot be applied here. The thoughts and modes of expression reflected in its multifaceted contents make this book interesting and informative. However, this is not an easy book to read. It is complex and, at times, turgid. Many of the philosophical and sociological arguments are long and convoluted. Nonetheless, the book succeeds in its purpose of covering various opinions, perspectives, and practices.

Government control of research in the humanities and the commodification of universities are recurring themes. A number of authors express dismay and disapproval at the manner in which university education is seen simply as training for employment, disregarding the contribution that the humanities and social sciences make. Chipkin points out that even research in the humanities is controlled by the ruling party. The HSRC under the new legislation, according to Chipkin (p. 64), “reflect the norms and values of the ANC in the field of research”. The change in attitude to the original purpose of university education and its effects on the humanities and social sciences are discussed at length, but suggestions on how to address the matter are not very satisfactory.

The idea of “intellectual power” is addressed by Olivier, who states that it is “but one variety ... [and] hardly sits well with other kinds of power, especially

in an economic and political guise”. It seems that this threat is one of the main reasons for the change in direction that universities have taken. The importance of the humanities and social sciences is stressed for the manner in which they can be used to bring about change, as well as in their relation to the physical sciences. The fact that one can no longer study the physical sciences without recognising and integrating the social sciences and humanities, and vice-versa, is stressed.

The human condition in post-colonial society is dealt with by a number of the authors who are of the opinion that it is untenable to impose solutions upon the dispossessed. They suggest that the dispossessed should be allowed to form their own methods of dealing with issues such as the lack of service delivery, and so on. Nonetheless, the disparity between those in power and the dispossessed cannot be ignored. The role of Christian values in the teaching of the humanities as a solution to commodification is discussed, and the prevailing notion that a university education is the path to high-salaried employment is challenged.

The most significant contribution is the chapter by Olivier. His philosophical standpoint offers a practical solution to the problems faced by universities and the threats to the humanities and the social sciences, quoting Hurst that “To know and not to do is not to know”. Olivier (p. 90) goes on to state that “human knowledge, when divorced from emancipatory action, is irredeemably vitiated”.

## **Reference**

B Ndaba, “Ramphela: Stop fearing ANC and authority”, IOL News [Online] 26 April 2009 (available at: <http://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/ramphela-stop-fearing-anc-and-authority-1.1506802#.UYJBzqCjUg8>, as accessed on 2 May 2013).

