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*Our new husbands are here: Households, gender and politics in a West African state from the slave trade to colonial rule*

**(Ohio, Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011, 273 pp., photographs, appendices, notes, bibl., index. ISBN: 978-0-8214-1983-0)**

**Emily L Osborn**

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For a very long time in Africa in general and in West Africa in particular, historical accounts of statecraft have been presented as the preserve of males. Emily Lynn Osborn brings a breath of fresh air in her book by showing clearly the roles that both men and women played in the formation and maintenance of the state of Bates. Taking advice presumably from Joan Scott, Osborn uses gender successfully to write the history of Bates, showing how the maleness of elites such as Abdurabamane and the femaleness of individuals such as Maramagbe affected events leading to the formation of the state of Bates.

On the first page of the introductory chapter, Osborn explains the aim of her book as an examination of the relationship of households to statecraft in the Milo River Valley from the seventeenth century to the early twentieth century. Throughout the book, Osborn successfully describes how the changing forms of relations and roles of the household and the state of Bates led to different

administrative policies in the Milo River Valley.

Using marriage and motherhood to describe the growing significance of households in state formation up to the mid-eighteenth century, Osborn provides a detailed, illuminating and insightful historical account of the founding of the state of Bates. The nature of the relationship between households and the state allowed women to influence political processes in their roles as mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters. Osborne's intention at this point is to show the influence of households as centres of political production and reproduction in the formative years of Bates. Osborn then traces the source of the gradual erosion and the ultimate demise of the influence and authority of women on the role of households in state formation.

In Chapter three, Osborn paints a clear picture of the changing mode of the household in relation to state making. She observes that up to the early nineteenth century, the household was perceived as a political resource essential in the making and maintenance of the state of Bates. But from the mid-nineteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century, warfare replaced the household. In her words, "With warfare and militarization, the household ceased to be the building block of statecraft, but rather an expression of it" (p.75).

In this way, Osborn successfully shows how state formation mechanisms were modified in the mid-nineteenth century. This led to the reformation of Bates into a centralized and organized state with a huge army. The profound contribution to statecraft by the households and the women was made possible by the fact that initially Bates' male elites did not strengthen their polity through warfare and slavery. Instead, they used their households as building blocks for making and maintaining the state. As this scenario changed through warfare and the slave trade, the reliance of Bates' rulers on the household diminished significantly.

The size and strength of the army of the state of Bates became a crucial determining factor. In an era where warfare was used to make and maintain the state instead of peaceful alliances and strategic marriages, the influence of women in state formation was grossly undermined. In addition to showing with outstanding clarity how the role of households changed, Osborn demonstrates ably the changing mechanisms of household making and maintenance.

In part two of the book, she uses her investigation of the relationship of the household and the state to address lacunae in the literature on the colonial state in Africa. For example, Osborn offers an exciting comparative analysis of household and state making approaches used by the African rulers up to the 1890s and those used by the French colonial rulers from the 1890s to the early twentieth century. She laments the fact that the masculinist bureaucratic regime, created by the French rulers, obscured complex relations between women's roles and statecraft. Her focus here is on the separation of the social sphere from the political sphere and the reconstruction of gender roles and politics through the creation of households composed of "autonomous men and dependent women" (p. 177). This new social order rendered women completely irrelevant to politics.

The manner in which Osborne presents the history of the Milo River Valley shows beyond doubt that much still needs to be told about how such historical processes contribute to the making of African history.

*The demographics of empire: The colonial order and the creation of knowledge*

**(Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2010, 292 pp., appendices, index. ISBN: 139780821419335)**

**Karl Ittmann, Dennis D Cordell and Gregory H Maddox**

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This book is a useful set of conversations on demography in Africa over the past one hundred and fifty years. One Elder, Dennis D. Cordell, opens the conversations and another Elder, Patrick Manning, closes the exchange of ideas. Cordell locates research on demography in a rich and fascinating historiographical discussion of orthodox African history. He forcefully and systematically takes the discussion of African demography into the fields of postmodernist and postcolonial studies. He reviews his own and other systematic studies of African populations to justify an historical examination of demography. Cordell makes a valid appeal for more studies on the African

population, and Manning's chapter is an instant response.

Manning presents a broad sweep of changes in African population since 1850. He takes 1950 as a bench mark for exploring trends and factors that shaped the population of Africa before and after that date. His chapter is an excellent example of what historians claim is unique to their discipline, namely, that the passage of time and regular interrogations improve an understanding of human experience. I was so impressed by the chapters of Cordell and Manning that I wish to close my reflection on them with a metaphor for the whole book. Cordell's and Manning's chapters are like the succulent covers of a mango. The flesh between the covers and the seed has sweet tasting juice and encourages preserving the seed to plant another good mango tree. The book is demography made simple. It is rewarding to read, and creates the expectation that research on African demography will grow and become central to African colonial and postcolonial studies.

Demography is a study of many interconnected responses to changes within human populations. All the European colonial governments in Africa formulated policies on managing African populations during the early phases of colonial rule. Knowing the numbers was useful for formulating policies on taxation, recruitment of labour, and eventually the systematic establishment of formal colonial rule. Gervais and Mandé explain that the French believed that counting their colonised people was an important step to acquire and impose sovereign power.

Many policies followed the systematic subordination of Africans. Cinnamon examines this subordination systematically in Gabon (and neighbourhood) in a critical study of oral testimonies and written documents. I was fascinated by how Cinnamon aided understanding by recognizing African native (indigenous) explanations of social relations. Cinnamon discusses the dislocating and disorienting effects of French intervention in African polities, but demonstrates also the enduring continuity of African memories and social values. McCurdy recognises similar values and practices in her study of disease, reproduction and German Government policies in Ujiji, in western Tanzania. McCurdy's discussion of the depressing experiences of women is an eye-opener to the range of diseases that prevailed in many parts of Africa during the nineteenth century.

Turshen's chapter complements McCurdy's view of women as integral to demographic studies in Africa. Turshen recognizes a long-established fact that women were objects of public or religious policy of governments that manipulated social reproduction. Managing women was an essential component of colonial policies on population. Colonial administrations' control over women was critical in the strategy of re-organising reproduction and the mobilization of labour in sub-Saharan Africa. Turshen offers a refreshing study of the legal practices and control of women during the colonial era. She shows, in part, how patriarchal values in African societies were transferred to the colonial laws that controlled African women. The colonial officials relied on missionaries, African chiefs and male migrant labour for evidence to manipulate the role of women in social reproduction. Turshen does not recognise matrilineality in many African countries, especially the middle-belt of Africa. Anyway, colonial legal systems also ignored matrilineal social practices with the result that women were the worst losers.

The worst loser in this book, however, is African indigenous knowledge systems. This point could be better explained using the straw-man approach. I should therefore indicate briefly that the contributions are well-written because they are based on solid research that has been carried out over a long period. All the authors also master related and relevant literature. Yet, none of them systematically examines indigenous or African attitudes to the size and composition of families. McCurdy, in particular, raised my expectations of a systematic discussion on how Africans in Ujiji managed disease or environmental afflictions based on local social practices and medicine. Moreover, there are reciprocal relations between clans and communities that have implications for African demographic knowledge. The concern I am addressing becomes more serious when we realize that there is no chapter on the nomads, such as the Masai or Bushmen (who have a variety of names in Southern Africa).

The omissions that I have mentioned may nonetheless be added to the research agenda that this book has begun. This is a good text on general or regional and thematic discourses on Africa over the past one hundred and fifty years. It is an excellent text for special seminar courses. The authors demonstrate the virtue of collaborative research, which must have characterized the wonderful workshop in November 2002 from which the chapters emanated. *The Demographics of Empire* is an excellent example of collaboration and mentorship, and an important addition to African history.

*Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika van voortye tot vandag*

**(Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 2012, 640 pp. ISBN: 978-0-624-05466-5)**

**F Pretorius**

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Hierdie uitgebreide oorsigwerk oor die Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis is geskryf in opdrag van die Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns. By 'n simposium van die Akademie se Geskiedeniskommissie in 2006 is kommer daaroor uitgespreek dat, veral op skoolvlak, die klem in die Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis gelê word op die versetgeskiedenis van die land. Soos in die inleiding verklaar word, was daar vroeër 'n Afrikanersentriese benadering, waarin "helde- en lydensoomblikke in die Afrikaner se geskiedenis as die enigste ware geskiedenis" van die land voorgestel is, maar nou het die pendulum te veel na die ander kant geswaai. Dit het die behoefte laat ontstaan na 'n omvattende geskiedenis "wat sou probeer om die pendulum na die middel te stuur ter wille van versoening en wedersydse begrip onder die verskillende kulturele en politieke groepe" (pp. 9-10).

Dat "struggle"-geskiedenis tans in skoolonderrig sterk beklemtoon word, is sekerlik korrek, maar die stelling dat "swart verset die sentrale tema in die geskiedskrywing geword het" (p. 9), dus ook in akademiese geskiedskrywing, kan bevraagteken word. Daar het in die afgelope tyd verskeie studies verskyn wat handel oor aspekte van versetgeskiedenis, en daar sal seker nog heelwat meer gelewer word, maar dit beteken nie dat die meeste historici aan Suid-Afrikaanse universiteite tans met hierdie soort geskiedskrywing besig is nie. Daar is eerder 'n beweging weg van politieke geskiedenis, na sosiale, ekonomiese en omgewingsgeskiedenis. In die jongste wetenskaplike sintesewerke oor die Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis, dié van Giliomee en Mbenga (2007), wat in Afrikaans en Engels verskyn het, en Ross (tweede uitgawe 2008), waarvan daar Engelse en Nederlandse weergawes is, word die "struggle"geskiedenis nie in besonder beklemtoon nie. In dié opsig lyk dit nie dringend noodsaaklik om die "pendulum te swaai" nie. As die boek veral bedoel is vir Afrikaanssprekende skoliere, onderwysers en algemene lesers is

hierdie nuwe sintesewerk beslis te verwelkom. Dit is egter, anders as die werk van Giliomee en Mbenga, sonder illustrasies en nie baie aantreklik gemaak vir gebruik deur skoliere en algemene lesers nie. Dit is wel 'n veel uitgebreider werk as die ander twee oorsigte en kan in die behoeftes voldoen van diegene wat op soek is na meer agtergrondsinligting en wat wyer oor die geskiedenis wil lees.

In historiese sintesewerke word navorsing wat in studies oor besondere aspekte van die geskiedenis gedoen is, saamgevat. Sulke werke bevat dikwels geen voetnote nie, maar daar is dan meesal 'n volledige lys van die studies wat gebruik is om die boek saam te stel. Daar word nie in die boek verduidelik watter beginsel gevolg is by die samestelling van die bibliografie (pp. 602-611) nie. Die aantal werke wat per hoofstuk gelys word, is meesal sowat tien of twaalf en dit sluit beknopte studies soos artikels in die *Suid-Afrikaanse Biografiese Woordeboek* in. Uit die inhoud van die hoofstukke kan afgelei word dat die skrywers meer bronne gebruik het as dié wat in die bibliografie aangedui word. Moontlik is die bibliografie eerder bedoel vir diegene wat meer oor 'n onderwerp wil lees. Maar waarom dan nie maar die hele *Biografiese Woordeboek*, met sy honderde artikels, vermeld nie? Boeke wat dikwels beskou word as van die belangste werke wat deur Afrikaanse historici gelewer is ontbreek, soos PJ van der Merwe se boeke oor die veeboerpioniers, AN Pelzer en FA van Jaarsveld se werke oor die vroeë Boererepublieke en Van Jaarsveld se studie oor die ontstaan van Afrikanernasionalisme. Dit is veral kommerwekkend dat 'n groot aantal resente substansiële bydraes tot die geskiedskrywing oor Suid-Afrika in die periode voor 1900 nie genoem word nie, soos die werke van A Biewenga, C Bundy, R Elphick, M Legassick, J Peires, N Penn, R Ross, K Schoeman en G Schutte. 'n Mens kan net hoop dat 'n hersiene uitgawe 'n verbeterde bronnelys sal bevat.

Volgens die lys op pp. 612-615 is , saam met die redakteur wat ook een van die hoofstukke geskryf het, 23 skrywers verantwoordelik vir die 29 hoofstukke waaruit die boek bestaan. Die meeste van hulle is bekende vakhistorici. Enkeles van hulle het nie veel meer as 'n paragraaf bygedra nie, maar daarteenoor is daar sewe historici (Johan de Villiers, Jan Visagie, Jackie Grobler, Wessel Visser, Grietjie Verhoef, Hermann Giliomee en David Scher) wat twee of meer hoofstukke geskryf het. Die internasionaal bekende en baie produktiewe Hermann Giliomee het ses hoofstukke gelewer. Die meerderheid van die skrywers is Afrikaanstalig en is of was verbonde aan Afrikaanse universiteite, maar enkele Engelstalige historici het ook aan die

boek meegewerk. Die kwessie van die verteenwoordigendheid van die hele Suid-Afrikaanse bevolking in, onder meer, akademiese projekte is tans 'n sensitiewe saak en daarom moet vermeld word dat geen van die skrywers tot die swart of bruin bevolkingsgroepe behoort nie. Dit is nie vreemd nie, aangesien die persentasie gevestigde historici wat uit hierdie bevolkingsgroepe kom nog maar taamlik klein is.

Hoofstuk 1, oor Suid-Afrika se “oerverlede”, is geskryf deur die argeoloog Andrie Meyer, en begin met die oorsprong van die heelal en die vorming van die aarde. Dit is gewoon, aangesien in oorsigwerke oor die geskiedenis, ook die wêreldgeskiedenis, meesal nie verder teruggegaan word as die eerste mense nie. Die gedeelte wat handel oor die geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika voor 1652 beslaan slegs agt bladsye. Dit is dus maar 'n baie beknopte oorsig en dit is jammer dat die voorbeeld van HJ van Aswegen, wat in sy *Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika voor 1854* meer as vyftig bladsye aan die vroeë geskiedenis wy, nie nagevolg is nie. Verder kan alles wat voor 1652 gebeur het miskien nog as voortyde bestempel word, maar beslis nie as die land se oerverlede nie.

Ook die geskiedenis van die tydperk 1652 tot 1806 word baie oorsigtelik behandel, in sowat dertig bladsye. Bowendien, soos van 'n werk waaraan verskillende skrywers meewerk verwag kan word en in hierdie boek dikwels voorkom, is daar heelwat oorvleueling tussen hoofstukke, in hierdie geval die algemene hoofstuk deur Johan de Villiers en die een deur Robert Shell, wat spesifiek oor die slawe handel. Die vernaamste ontwikkelinge word wel kortliks behandel, maar oor die agtiende-eeuse uitbreiding van die Kaapkolonie en die rol wat die trekboere daarin gespeel het, word baie min vermeld (ook al word dit weer kortliks aangeraak in 'n latere hoofstuk, op pp. 105-106). Dit is 'n onderwerp waaraan in ouer Afrikaanse oorsigwerke soos dié van Muller en Van der Walt, Wiid en Geyer 'n aparte hoofstuk gewy is. Elphick en Giliomee se *The shaping of South African society, 1652-1840* (wat, terloops, ook in die bibliografie ontbreek), toon goed aan watter belangrike rol die ontwikkelinge in die Kompanjietydperk in die vorming van die huidige Suid-Afrikaanse samelewing gespeel het. In hierdie periode het onder meer die Afrikaanse taal (waarom die werksaamhede van die Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie immers wentel) sy beslag gekry en lê die wortels van die splitsing van die Afrikaanstalige bevolking in blanke en bruin mense. In 'n geskiedewerk wat gerig is op Afrikaanssprekendes behoort dié periode daarom nie afgeskeep te word nie. Dit is ironies dat die boek op hierdie wyse aansluit by ouer Engelstalige historici wat geglo het dat die eintlike geskiedenis van Suid-

Afrika begin met die koms van die Britte in 1806. Dit is algemene praktyk dat die vroeëre geskiedenis in oorsigwerke (en in geskiedenisonderrig) minder aandag kry as die latere, maar deur meer as vyfhonderd bladsye te skryf oor die 205 jaar na 1806 en slegs dertig bladsye oor die 154 jaar daarvoor kom die aanspraak dat die boek ‘n geheelbeeld van die Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis “van voortye tot vandag” probeer gee in gedrang.

Die hoofstuk oor die slawe deur Shell is oorgeneem uit die werk van Giliomee en Mbenga. As die uitgewer en die redakteur van die boek ook ‘n ooreenkoms aangeaan het met Van Aswegen (en sy uitgewer) en gedeeltes van sy werk, in hersiene vorm, in die eerste deel van die boek gebruik het, sou hierdie deel waarskynlik beter daaruit gesien het as wat tans die geval is.

Uit voorgaande blyk reeds dat die swaartepunt van die boek lê in die twintigste-eeuse geskiedenis (en die twaalf jaar daarna) waaroor byna 400 bladsye handel, maar die hoofstukke oor die negentiende eeu bied darem ‘n redelik omvattende oorsig. Daar is tog ‘n oneweredigheid in die aandag wat besondere ontwikkelinge en gebeure ontvang. Daar is byvoorbeeld twee deeglike hoofstukke oor die Groot Trek, waarvan een net oor die oorsake handel, maar die ontwikkelinge in die twee Boererepublieke en die twee kolonies in die tydperk 1840 tot 1900 word baie meer oorsigtelik bespreek. Die Britse anneksasie van die Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek, die Eerste Vryheidsoorlog en die vredesluiting daarna word byvoorbeeld in vier bladsye behandel. Verskeie historici sou waarskynlik saamstem met die stelling dat hierdie onderwerp net soveel aandag verdien as die oorsake van die Groot Trek. Dit is veral verblydend dat, anders as in ouer Afrikaanse oorsigwerke, die geskiedenis van die Griekwas behandel word en heelwat geskryf word oor die Mfecane en die ontwikkeling van swart state.

In die hoofstukke oor die twintigste eeu word die vernaamste politieke en ekonomiese ontwikkelinge deeglik behandel. Daar word baie aandag gegee aan Afrikanernasionalisme en apartheid, maar ook aan swart politieke ontwaking en verset. Die hoofstuk “Apartheid: ‘n ander blik”, geskryf deur Giliomee, wyk af van die ander deurdat dit nie ‘n oorsig gee van besondere ontwikkelinge nie, maar bepaalde vrae oor die apartheidstelsel probeer beantwoord, soos of Suid-Afrika ekonomies beter sou gevaar het sonder apartheid. Dit kan verhelderend wees om sulke vrae te stel, maar dit is uiteindelik onmoontlik om te bepaal wat sou gebeur het as ‘n ander beleid gevolg is as die een wat wel gevolg is. Dit is dan ook die hoofstuk waaroor daar waarskynlik veral meningsverskille onder historici sal bestaan en die insluiting daarvan kan die

indruk wek dat die boek 'n verskuilde apologie vir apartheid probeer wees. Dit sou miskien beter gewees het om die hoofstuk weg te laat en sommige van die afdelings by ander hoofstukke in te werk. Om eietydse geskiedenis te skryf, stel 'n besondere uitdaging aan die historikus, en Japie Brits en Jan-Jan Joubert moet gelukkigewens word omdat hulle daarin geslaag het om die politieke en ekonomiese ontwikkelinge in die periode 1994-2011 goed saam te vat.

Dit lyk nie of enige van die skrywers uitgaan van die materialistiese beskouing, wat tans nog onder verskeie Suid-Afrikaanse historici voorkom, dat alle ontwikkelinge na ekonomiese faktore herlei kan word nie. Dit beteken egter nie dat daar nie 'n noue verband tussen ekonomiese en politieke faktore is nie. Hoewel hierdie verband wel telkens aangetoon word, beteken die skeiding van politieke en ekonomiese geskiedenis in verskillende hoofstukke dat die belangrike ontwikkelingslyne nie altyd goed na vore kom nie. Dit hang daarmee saam dat sosiale en kulturele geskiedenis nie die aandag kry wat dit verdien nie. Die verstedelikingsproses het byvoorbeeld gelei tot ingrypende veranderinge in die lewenswyse van al die bevolkingsgroepe. Hierdie veranderinge word nie in die boek duidelik aangetoon nie. Die historikus moet uiteindelik probeer verklaar waarom die samelewing in Suid-Afrika vandag bepaalde kenmerke het en iemand wat die boek gelees het moet aan die einde beter verstaan waarom die samelewing waarin hy leef juis so daaruit sien. Wat dit betref, ontbreek daar kardinale inligting. Dit is lofwaardig dat daar 'n hoofstuk ingesluit is oor die Afrikaanse kerke, maar dit is jammer dat daar nie meer geskryf is oor die Engelse kerke en veral oor die invloed van kerk en sending op die bruin en swart bevolking nie. Die kerke het immers 'n sleutelrol gespeel in die (gedeeltelike) akkulturasie en verwestering van die inheemse inwoners. John Lambert behandel in sy hoofstuk oor die Engelstalige Suid-Afrikaners ook nie die invloed wat die Britse kultuur en leefwyse op die land gehad het nie. Die ontwikkeling van die Afrikaanse kultuur word wel in verskeie hoofstukke aangeraak, maar kom nie werklik in die boek tot sy reg nie. Aan die ander kant is die insluiting van 'n hoofstuk oor omgewingsgeskiedenis van heelwat waarde deurdat die invloed van omgewingsfaktore op die ontwikkeling van die samelewing daarin belig word. Veral in dié opsig word in hierdie boek verbeter op die vroeëre oorsigwerke, wat net so min as hierdie boek genoegsaam aandag gee aan sosiale en kulturele geskiedenis.

In sy geheel gesien is die werk van Fransjohan Pretorius en sy medewerkers 'n belangrike toevoeging tot die oorsigwerke wat daar oor die Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis bestaan. As versamelwerk met hoofstukke deur verskillende skrywers vorm dit nie so 'n goed samehangende eenheid soos die resente oorsigte van Davenport en Saunders, Thompson en Ross nie. Dit is egter, met uitsondering van *The Cambridge History of South Africa* (wat ook 'n versamelwerk is), die omvattendste sintesewerk wat sedert 2000 verskyn het en beslis die omvattendste werk in Afrikaans sedert die laaste uitgawe van Muller se *500 jaar Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis* in 1980. Dit is ook die eerste sintesewerk om 'n oorsig van die geskiedenis tot 2011 te bied. Van die meeste oorsigwerke het daar verskeie hersiene uitgawes verskyn. As die boek gereeld deeglik hersien word en daarby gepoog word om van die ernstigste leemtes uit te skakel, kan dit nog vir baie jare 'n standaardwerk oor die Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis wees.

*Written culture in a colonial context: Africa and the Americas, 1500-1900*

**(Cape Town: UCT Press, 2011, 364pp., index. ISBN: 978-1-91989-526-0)**

**Adrien Delmas and Nigel Penn**

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Attitudes to written culture can be contentious, and this book tackles the issues head-on from the foreword through to the detailed analyses by the contributors. The juxtaposition of Africa and the Americas informs the commonalities and highlights the differences very effectively. Tracing the expansion of the written word chronologically, this book addresses many different aspects and the multifaceted nature of the content makes it interesting and informative.

The importance of representation through means other than text was disregarded by the colonisers, to the detriment of many of the existing cultures. The understanding that such representation was significant serves as

the starting point of the book. The first section is insightful and informative and focuses on the issue of the nature of “literacy” and serves to remind the reader that literacy is contextual. Also, the changes in graphic representation by indigenous people in response to the exposure to other methods of creating images is addressed in an insightful manner and serves to describe the cultural changes that occurred as a consequence.

The fact that paper could convey messages from far-off lands reinforces the magical nature of written text. It served to maintain contact between people who were spread out all over the world. The recognition of the power of knowledge permeates the text. That the written word could also be used to control people is significant. This is addressed in various ways throughout the book. An instance of this is the recognition of the importance of record keeping by the VOC. The ships’ captains and fleet managers were expected to keep intricate and detailed records of voyages and navigation charts. These had to be submitted to the VOC authorities and were not allowed to be shared with anyone outside the VOC as they deemed such knowledge to be of extreme importance in terms of their competitive advantage. This throws an interesting light on the philosophy and ethos of the VOC.

In general, the keeping of travel records and the manner in which such records served to contribute to globalisation is a theme that, while not unexpected in the light of the purpose of colonisation, is dealt with in an interesting and insightful way. The status of records kept by travellers has advanced and is now recognised as a literary form. The power of the written word is further spotlighted by the relationship between literacy, colonialism and missionary work. The differences in the use of text by the Catholic and Protestant missionaries as well as the impact of these differences are examined. This serves to reinforce the cultural variations that are found in religious practices that have been adopted in Africa and the Americas. The manner in which text was used for the acculturation of indigenous people is an important theme.

The importance of storing information is addressed as it serves to reinforce and preserve either an existing culture or the “new” culture that is either imposed upon or adopted by indigenous people, and to serve as a record of the changes introduced by the colonists. The in-depth knowledge of each contributor is apparent and one can get caught up in any particular chapter. At times one has to refer back to previous chapters to keep the thread, as the many and varied topics can be confusing.

Nonetheless, this is a book that one can dip into at almost any point and find something interesting or thought-provoking. The fact that the fifteen chapters are grouped thematically does assist the reader in keeping the ideas together and I would suggest that rather than reading the book from cover to cover, each section should be read and digested before proceeding. There are some instances where the reason for the grouping is not entirely clear as some of the chapters could fit equally well into a different group. This being said, it does guide the reader through the text in the way that the editors intended and creates coherence.

The final essay on Ulysses in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies requires a much greater knowledge of Greek mythology than the average reader may have. The linking of the adventures of the Greek heroes to the philosophy and approach of the Spanish colonists is tenuous although it is a very interesting take on the differences in the cultural traditions of the Portuguese and the Spanish. However, it is not obvious that it makes any major contribution to the subject overall. Perhaps this can be ascribed to the lack of classical education in general in Southern Africa, which, while not the fault of the contributor does make one question the relevance for the average reader.

The reader can identify with aspects of the history of both continents but, as a South African, the chapters on South Africa are the easiest to relate to. The ease of reading these chapters contrasts with the challenge of reading others where the subject matter may be less familiar. Nonetheless, it is a challenge that is worthwhile as it is both rewarding and enriching.

As the subject matter of the book reaches far beyond the boundaries of writing and colonial history, I would not hesitate to recommend it to anyone interested in communication and culture in general.

