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*Cultural memory and early civilization: Writing, remembrance and  
political imagination*

**(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, First English edition, 2011,  
319 pp., index. ISBN: 978-0-521-18802-9)**

**Jan Assmann**

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This is a book that has to be read many times, and digested slowly. Much of the information needs to be assimilated and thoroughly processed, but the effort required is extremely rewarding. There is no doubt that this is a seminal work on ancient civilization. Egyptologist, Jan Assmann, is a prolific and prodigious scholar. In this work, he focuses on Israel, Egypt, and Greece, drawing on his extensive knowledge and research to examine the implications that history and writing had on these civilizations. He ranges from the concept of memory through to the political changes that the new technology of writing brought about. The book is impeccably researched and referenced, with many footnotes that provide even more insights for the reader.

The book is divided into two parts, the first being the contextualisation or theoretical framework of the topic, and the second being case studies used to illustrate the theoretical framework. The depth of information provided in the first part of the book lays an excellent foundation for the case studies.

Assmann emphasizes the relationship between memory and culture, and argues that the two are closely intertwined. In the first part of the book, he sets out to describe and discuss the relationship between the two. He identifies early civilisations and shows how the approach to their histories governed the manner in which citizens perceived society at the time, as well as the rest of the world did once the information became part of “Western Civilization”. He notes that “memory culture is universal” (p.16) but that differing approaches to memory define societies. In other words, the significance of the past in human consciousness is vital to all societies, but different cultures deal with documentation and preservation in such a way that cultural identity is defined and maintained.

Assmann explores the concepts of collective memory in depth and provides insights that assist the reader in making sense of the current social context. He uses Maurice Halbwachs’ concept of “memoire collective” (p. 21) to explain and illustrate his message, but does not hesitate to disagree with some of his ideas. He believes that although his work was ground-breaking, there are flaws that can be recognised only once an appropriate period has passed. An important aspect that he examines is the difference between history and mythology in the context of religious practice. The long-term consequences of this differentiation enables the reader to gain insights into the impact of secularisation in the modern world.

He distils from Halbwachs’ framework an approach that he calls “socio-constructivist” (p. 33), which is more accessible in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. He also differentiates between “communicated” and “cultural” memory using a table to contrast and contextualise the concepts, making them more readily understandable. He then moves on to written culture, the development of writing, and how societies’ attitudes to writing governed the way in which they developed. Cultural continuity depends on the written word (script), whose nature governed the manner in which societies changed. The Egyptian hieroglyphics, which are both text and image, provide a radically different representation of the written word from the Greek alphabet, which depends solely on letters that are used to create words and meaning.

These insights explain how and why cultures and their different forms of writing and communication produced differences in societies' self-understanding. Attitudes to writing and communicated information, namely "canon" and "interpretation" (p. 78) influenced the ways in which civilizations developed. The political complexities of these civilizations are explained in detail to identify profound differences in their approach to government.

In the second part of the book, Assmann successfully uses case studies to inform and illustrate these ideas. He starts with Ancient Egypt where his knowledge and expertise is obvious. At times, the content can be rather dense and more than one reading is required. Nonetheless, the facts are informative and capture the imagination.

The next case study is that of Israel, where the tension between canonisation and interpretation is extended. The point that culture is maintained through strict adherence to the biblical text as well as self-imposed isolation of the group is not new, but is presented in a manner that provides the reader with insights into the nature of religion. The third case differentiates between the spirit and the letter of the law. This led to more flexibility in society, but also strengthens the case for individual difference as a new dimension of "humanness". These ideas pave the way for the fourth case study, which addresses the development of Greek philosophy and government. While this is more familiar territory, it still challenges the reader to reassess many ideas and clichés.

In each chapter there are diagrams that prove very useful in making the complex ideas more accessible. There are also a number of helpful summaries in the book that keep track of the multifaceted concepts. This is a work that I would highly recommend to any person interested in the history of humanity, both spiritual and secular, as it takes one on an extremely interesting journey into the past from which parallels with modern society can be drawn.

*Portrait of a Slave Society: The Cape of Good Hope, 1717-1795*

(Pretoria: Protea Book House, 2012, 1, 339 pp., illus., index,  
bibliography. ISBN: 978-1-86919-749-0)

**Karel Schoeman**

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Karel Schoeman's *Early Slavery at the Cape of Good Hope, 1652-1717* (hereafter, *Early Slavery*) was published in 2007. This was followed by *Portrait of a Slave Society: The Cape of Good Hope, 1717-1795* (hereafter, *Portrait of a Slave Society*) in 2012. Schoeman states in his foreword to *Early Slavery*: "Awareness of and interest in slavery at the Cape Colony is steadily increasing, but most of the work that has been done on this subject is in Dutch or Afrikaans, and there are only five general surveys in English,<sup>1</sup> of which the most accessible to the general reader, *Those in Bondage* by Victor de Kock, was published in 1950." This is a slight sneer to all those who came after de Kock, who is regarded as an anecdotalist and is often criticised for his use of unreferenced material. Nevertheless, Schoeman's diligent study credits, especially in his endnotes, Anna Böeseken's *Slaves and Freeblacks* (1977), Robert Ross's *Cape of Torments* (1983), Nigel Worden's *Slavery in Dutch South Africa* (1985) and Robert Shell's *Children of Bondage* (1994). *Portrait of a Slave Society* also makes pertinent references to the secondary works of Wayne Dooling, Gerald Groenewald, Hans Friedrich Heese, Suzanne Newton-King and Nigel Penn, among others.

The structure of *Portrait of a Slave Society* is similar to *Early Slavery*. The opening chapters of *Portrait of a Slave Society* situate 18<sup>th</sup> century Cape slave society within the colonial "world" of the *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC). Schoeman makes appropriate comparisons in the opening two chapters between the Cape, the VOC's Batavian headquarters, Ceylon, India and the *Vereenigde West Indische Compagnie's* (VWIC) possession in Surinam.

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<sup>1</sup> It would be fair to say that the more comprehensive and academically sound works on slavery during the Dutch era are, in fact, written in English. The primary records are almost exclusively in Dutch.

He describes the separation of VOC and VWIC's trading interest, which turned the Cape authorities to Madagascar and the East for its supply of slaves in the latter part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Schoeman devotes lengthy chapters on slavery in Table Valley (present day Cape Town), the Stellenbosch and Drakenstein districts, the Boland and the colony's eastern frontier. He explores various themes of slavery including work, violence, sexuality and resistance within his geographical framework. Each theme is generally discussed in a linear time-frame roughly ranging from 1717 to 1795, with discussions of the periods before 1717 and after 1795. Schoeman would have avoided repetition had he structured his chapters thematically, like Nigel Worden did in *Slavery in Dutch South Africa*, than repeat his themes (of violence, sexuality, slave occupations etc.) with every geographical area under discussion. Schoeman explains his preference for thematic discussion on page 513: "Just as the eighteenth century was no static period, neither was the world of Cape slaves during these hundred years, even though historians of slavery are inclined to treat the entire time from 1652 to 1795 as a solid, immovable wedge labelled 'slavery'." Which historians are guilty of this? We are not told. Schoeman definitely has a preference for the period after 1750. The chapters on urban and rural slavery are followed by three slave biographies and the final chapter, "The turning point," looks at changing attitudes towards the institution of slavery by slaves and slave owners at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Sir John Barrow completed *Sketches of the Political and Commercial History of the Cape of Good Hope*, on behalf of George, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl Macartney, in advance of the first British Occupation of the Cape, on 17 December 1796.<sup>2</sup> English versions of the writings of OF Mentzel, JS Stavorinus, CP Thunberg and François Le Vaillant were made available to Barrow as well as dispatches on Cape affairs "received by Mr Dundas." Macartney's comments are pencilled in the margins. *Portrait of a Slave Society* reminds me of Barrow's fact-finding tract. Barrow's matter-of-fact report contains figures for grain production and population, as well as descriptions of slavery at the Cape. Unlike Barrow's more general survey, Schoeman focuses exclusively on slavery. Schoeman makes a concerted effort to represent the voiceless slaves whose sketchy biographies appear between the lines of the archival record and the writings of European travellers. *Portrait of a Slave Society* makes a significant contribution to the literature on Cape slavery by re-drawing our attention to important primary sources like the *Resolusies*, the probate inventories and the criminal trials of

<sup>2</sup> This report, BL MS 61, is housed in the Oppenheimer Collection at the Brenthurst Library in Parktown, Johannesburg.

*Trials of Slavery*. Schoeman's survey of the secondary literature is good and his scholarship is also up to date.

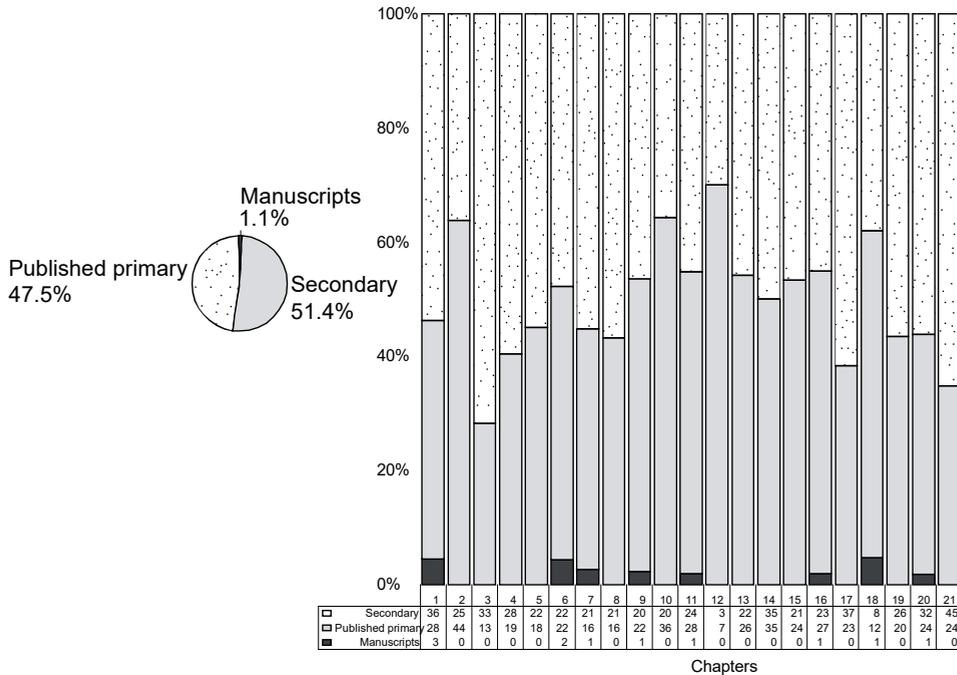
Many of the introductory paragraphs of chapters, for example that of the freeburghers, are written with the panache of a novelist, adding to the readability of this *magnum opus*. Schoeman's knowledge of Cape history is deep and his attention to detail is impressive. His indexes, which he has generously placed in the public domain, are legendary. While his footnotes acknowledge his sources, they do not always convey the extent to which he is dependent on the works of other historians. *Portrait of a Slave Society* is punctuated with insightful and delightful observations on Dutch words and their use in Cape colonial society (Schoeman has compiled an impressive lexicon of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century Dutch words and phrases). Schoeman's discussions on the *mandoors* ("slave overseers", p. 195), *knechten* (hired white labourers, p. 662) and the meaning of the word *cagies* comes to mind (p. 622). His discussion of *vangeld* ("catching money"), *slotgeld* ("imprisoning money") and *losgeld* ("release money") further attests to the depth of his lexicographic skills and knowledge (p. 559). For instance, he discusses the origins of the word *amok*—its use in historical sources and also its use in the *Woordeboek der Nederlandsche taal* (p. 983). Schoeman's knowledge of Dutch is supported by his fluency in German and French—permitting him *entrée* into the original writings of contemporaries like F Le Vaillant and OF Mentzel.

Schoeman draws from a wide range of sources, particularly the published *Resolusies* of the Council of Policy (the council that governed the Cape for most of the VOC rule), the published *Plakkaatboeken* (Dutch colonial proclamations), the probate inventories (inventories of deceased estates now published electronically) and the published writings of contemporary writers (e.g. O.F. Mentzel, Carl Peter Thunberg, Baron Carl Friedrich von Wurmb, Willem Stephanus van Ryneveldt and Lady Anne Barnard). *Portrait of a Slave Society* is well-researched and immaculately referenced. Most of Schoeman's primary sources have been published online or in book form. As a senior librarian in the old South African Library,<sup>3</sup> he would be most familiar with this formidable literature. His piecing together of disparate published primary sources into a fairly coherent narrative is welcome—especially for the uninformed reader. His creative use of the published *Resolusies* stands out in reference to passing French slave traffic during the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. His use of the published probate inventories and Worden and

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3 Now the National Library of South Africa (Cape Town Campus).

Groenewald's *Trials of Slavery*, apart from shedding light on the remoter regions of the colony, does little more than embellish the arguments and selections of the existing secondary literature. *Portrait of a Slave Society* is valuable as an anecdotal compendium of slave life at the Cape during the 18<sup>th</sup> century but his use of unpublished sources is disappointing (See graphic below).



*Portrait of a Slave Society* is a lengthy commentary on slavery in the Cape during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Schoeman's biographies of the VOC slave traders or *kommiesies*—Hans Harmz, Cornelis Andriesz, FG Holtzappel, Constant van Nuldt Onkruijdt, Dirk Westerhoff, GF Goetz, Nicolaas Leij, Oloff Leij, and Francois Renier Duminy—are revealing. More so, because the slave trading activities of these individuals are conveniently omitted from their entries in the *Dictionaries of South African Biography*. Schoeman describes several Company-sponsored slave voyages in *Early Slavery*, e.g. the *Voorhout* (1676 and 1677), then writes: "It is not necessary to dwell on these individual expeditions, though that of the *Eemland* in 1682 deserves more than passing attention *because of the fact that a revolt broke out amongst the slaves on board*" [my emphasis].<sup>4</sup> More could be said about these voyages. There are over twenty logbooks for Company-sponsored slave voyages between 1674 and

<sup>4</sup> *Early Slavery*, p. 118.

1785 at the National Archives in Cape Town and the Nationaal Archief in the Hague. Nearly two thirds of the logbooks remain, constituting a uniform and comprehensive source for the history of VOC slave trading between the Cape and Madagascar (and, to a lesser degree, the east coast of Africa). Though Schoeman makes only fleeting reference to these logbooks in *Early Slavery*, their omission does not disturb the flow of his narrative. Schoeman pays more attention to the VOC's slave voyages during the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in *Portrait of a Slave Society*. He highlights Hemmy's three voyages on the *Brak* in 1740, 1741 and 1742 (pp. 127-31) and a later voyage on the *Zon* in 1775, fully edited by Robert Ross. Descriptions of the Cape-Madagascar slave trade are provided through the voyages of the *Leidsman* (1715), *Schuilenberg* (1756), *Zon* (1769), and *Snelheid* (1773). Schoeman's descriptions of these voyages is not as self-contained as Armstrong and Westra's work on the *Leidsman's* logbooks. The VOC logbooks, however, only deal with the Company's slave trade to the Lodge. There is no systematic discussion of the slave trade from returning India ships, particularly from foreign nations. This chapter would have benefitted from a graph or a table showing how the sources are tied together.

The concerns of senior VOC official Egbertus Bergh and Secunde J.J. Rhenius's report to the Heeren XVII (1789) concerning the profiteering of the Company's slave traders is a welcome addition to the history of slave importation in the last years of VOC rule (pp. 154-6). Schoeman's description of the VOC's 1767 ban on the importation of eastern slaves to the Cape elaborates on the existing literature. His later explanation of the ban should not have been repeated on pages 894-95, but included in his earlier discussion on the subject from pages 282-87. Schoeman recognises the potential of the *Resolusies* as an historical source in his description of passing French slave traffic at the Cape in the 1770s. His description of the disembarkation and victualling of slaves from *Le Jardinier* in 1774 is a good example of this. Schoeman's explanation of VOC Commissioners SC Nederburgh and SH Frijkenius's reforms of 1791 fleshes out Worden and Armstrong's curt observations in their chapter "The slaves" in Elphick and Giliomee's *The Shaping of South African Society*. The Commissioners visited the Cape to determine the extent of the Cape's financial woes and to apply fiscal reforms where they could. Again, Schoeman could have described these "drastic economies" in isolation, rather than scatter them throughout *Portrait of a Slave Society* (pp. 241, 248, 260, and 1044). On page 313, Schoeman describes the connection between the Commissioners reforms and the

Council of Policy's endorsement of private slave trading in some detail with his discussion of the *Dankbare Afrikaan* (1793) and the *Eliza* (1795). These spotlighted episodes are useful, of course, but one hankers after an overview.

Schoeman's description of slave auctions, based largely on secondary literature, in Chapter 15, is easy to follow. He makes the valid point that auctions of large numbers of slaves only began to take place during the 1780s, which is suggestive of a change in the internal slave market during the rise in French slave traffic that took place after the privatisation of French maritime trade in 1769. Chapter 19—detailing the coercion of the Khoes into unfree labour during the 1770s and the introduction of so-called *bastaard* apprenticeship in 1775—is more balanced in its use of case studies. Schoeman makes several references to Viljoen's work on the subject, but does not say much about Candy Malherbe's writings or other writings on the *inboekstelsel* system. *Portrait of a Slave Society* would be an easier read if more of its chapters were structured like this.

Schoeman could have dealt with the labour shortage of 1797, given his wide reading of secondary writings (p. 710). A uniform and systematic chapter on slave violence would be easier to follow than the plethora of similar incidents we are presented with in the different geographic locations of the colony (e.g. the breaking of slaves on the cross on page 109). Chapter 11, "The Table Valley: The Slaves and Their Leisure" is inappropriately titled, since it deals more with the subculture of slave drunkenness, crime and violence than "leisure." Most of Schoeman's key themes—violence, the voicelessness of slaves in Cape society and the development of racial consciousness—are not analysed with academic rigour despite an impressive secondary literature.

The section describing the VOC's trading outpost at Delagoa Bay from 1721 to 1731, structured around Dan Sleight's research in *Die buiteposte: VOC-buiteposte onder Kaapse bestuur, 1652-1795*, is lucid and engaging. So too is his use, on page 938, of the *plakkaaten* (Dutch colonial laws). The VOC administrative hierarchy, from lowly *veldkornetten* to Governor, is well explained by Schoeman, though his descriptions of the Fiscal's role and responsibilities in relation to slaves are unnecessarily repetitive (pp. 230, 232, 238, 476-77, and 941).

These functions would have been better described when the Fiscal W.S. van Ryneveldt's "Replies" (1797) and "Description" of the Cape colony (1805) were introduced. Van Ryneveldt's biographical details are only given on

page 939, yet his writings are interspersed throughout the book. Schoeman makes many references to Van Ryneveldt's well-known "Replies" to Governor Macartney's questions on the slave trade and slavery at the Cape, yet he does not pay much regard to Van Ryneveldt's personal participation within the slave society. Van Ryneveldt owned a large number of slaves at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He also wielded considerable power over the lives of the Company's slaves and the so-called *caffer* police force in his capacity as Fiscal.

Schoeman (p. 10) expresses an aversion to the "dismaying" methods of academic historians who "tend all too often to think and to express themselves in terms of statistics, tables, graphs, discourses, arguments, debates, trends, patterns, nodes, networks, grids, spaces, landscapes, frontiers, hidden transcripts and registers of experience" in academic journal articles. This is a somewhat disparaging remark in the light of Schoeman's reliance on academic journal articles, surprising too when we consider that Anna J Böeseken used graphical apparatus as early as 1943.<sup>5</sup> Academic rigour and statistical analysis enable historians to understand the patterns and processes of history. Reliance on anecdotal events and circumstances results in the historian being led by his sources and the opinions and selections of others, rather than forming his or her own conclusions in a detached manner. Historians appear to be gullible when they use anecdotes as historical proof. More importantly, the reader, at one remove from the sources than the historian, is entirely at the mercy of the historian's poor judgment.

Historians have not developed a systematic technique to determine whether a common or rare event is being recorded and, most importantly, whether it is representative. It is fair, therefore, to accuse Schoeman of relentless cherry-picking in his 1300-page book – the same flaw we find in Victor de Kock's *Those in Bondage*. The privileging of anecdote over analysis gives rise to statements like: "On the whole it may probably be said that the condition of the slaves changed less between 1717 and 1795, the seventy-eight years covered by the present book, than over the subsequent thirty-nine years immediately preceding emancipation" (p. 10). I beg to differ. The Dutch and British periods were substantively different from one another in terms of what a slave society was and how the authorities dealt with the institution of slavery. Schoeman also attributes the low slave population from 1796 to 1806 to "a decline in the importation of slaves in the past decade." (p. 370). This statement gainsays everything else he says about slave importation to the

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<sup>5</sup> *Archives Year Book* 1943(2), p. 62.

Cape in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and constitutes a serious contradiction.

How many times do we encounter statements in *Portrait of a Slave Society* like, “the examples quoted...been chosen at random” (p. 259), “these chance data” (p. 565), and “random information” from the “inventories” (in the Boland) on page 621? Schoeman further explains at one point, that: “These chance data, spaced with remarkable symmetry in time, are mentioned for what they are worth, in the course of a book that hopes to convey something of colonial life at the Cape in the eighteenth century by merely listing data as far as possible, without necessarily trying to prove or demonstrate anything.” (p. 621). Declaring historical sources to be “random” is a scientistic (a false appeal to science) or worse, what Immanuel Kant described as an assertoric substitute for a more rigorous dialectic. “Random” has two common usages: one informal as in “the event was random,” i.e. unexpected; the other meaning is scientific and belongs to the science of statistics, meaning one number has the same chance of being chosen as the next. Schoeman’s “random” vignettes are a perfect example of this. The vignettes become the narrative and not merely the illustrative evidence. Schoeman makes reference to one particular slave’s life as a “fragmentary biography.” (p. 840). One “fragmentary” biography is one thing; a thousand pages of fragmentary biographies is another! We sometimes get the impression that we are looking at genealogical lists, which pay no regard to representivity or randomness in the scientific sense. The use of these “random” events strikes a false note, surprising for a person so sensitive to language.

Schoeman embellishes his narrative based on secondary literature with illustrative case studies and portraits from Nigel Worden and Gerald Groenewald’s faithfully transcribed, edited and translated *Trials of Slavery*. The crime records are a special type of source. Crime records do provide useful vignettes of slave life, like clothing, eating and drinking habits, but they exert a strong gravitational pull on historians, not always with good results. The criminal cases are mostly concerned with violence and extreme justice. Crime records involving slaves need to be understood in relation to other kinds of primary sources, since most Cape slaves were not criminals. It would be appropriate to compare criminal trials involving slaves to criminal trials involving Company employees like soldiers and sailors, for example.

Robert Shell’s thesis on the “creolisation” (i.e. the self-reproduction of the slave population) of the Cape slaves from about 1780 in *Children of Bondage* is a fine example of how a convincing argument can be developed from a

systematic analysis of primary source material. Schoeman, surprisingly, neither mentions nor challenges Shell's important argument. Schoeman revisits Böeseke, Heese and Shell's work on slave transactions, but looks at these studies in isolation and not in terms of the entire period of his book, e.g. Shell's analysis of slave transactions from 1701 to 1731 which looks at slave purchases amongst the free coloured community (p. 395).

Schoeman, in another instance, introduces another theory on the pronounced awareness of racial differences which had begun to become noticeable by the 1780s (pp. 409, 536, 679, 683, 774, and 886). He posits that the distinction between "heathens" and Christians existed before colour differences (which is given some attention in the "coda" of *Early Slavery*). This is hardly a new characterisation, and can be traced back to ID MacCrone.<sup>6</sup> This subject is examined extensively quantitatively and analytically in Elphick and Shell's "Intergroup Relations" in *Shaping of South African Society*. This argument is never dealt with at length or in a systematic manner—but is alluded to from time to time in *Portrait of a Slave Society* and presented as "new"! Schoeman's allusions to the concept of a "Baroque era" or the emergence of a "Cape Gentry" during the 18<sup>th</sup> century are, similarly, not supported by argument (pp. 971 and 1030).

Schoeman exhibits the novelist's sense of drama in his description of the *Landdros's* bias in favour of "white" owners (p. 943). His description of Table Valley's streets and buildings, based on Hans Heese's article "Die inwoners van Kaapstad in 1800",<sup>7</sup> complements his reconstruction of slave life from the probate inventories. The passage on the plight of the slaves during the British occupation in September 1795 should appeal to the general reader (pp. 574 and 583). These episodes are indicative of the impressive "portrait" Schoeman tries to evoke—though the portrait is prone to repetition. Marie Josephine Focus's touching story is an example of this. Her voice was one of the few individual slave voices to emerge out of the historical void of Cape slavery. It is of interest to scholars and lay readers alike. Her indictment of Sir John Truter's brutal treatment of her owns a unique place in the social history of the Cape. The story of Josephine Focus and Sir John Truter—like accounts through the eyes of slave owners like JN von Dessin, Hendrik Cloete and Johanna Nöthling—is more decorative than incisive. The banishment of the

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6 ID MacCrone, *Race attitudes in South Africa: Historical, experimental and psychological studies* (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1957).

7 HF Heese, "Die Inwoners van Kaapstad in 1800", *Kronos* 7 (1983), pp. 42-59.

Indonesian exile, Achmet Prince van Ternate, to cite him as one example of the same phenomenon, is mentioned on at least four occasions by Schoeman (pp. 401, 444, 516, and 958). The account of slave women gossiping about their mistress in the kitchen (calling her a “bitch”), conveys Schoeman’s intention to bring to life slave experience—but repetition of this “vignette,” at least three times, kills its dramatic and illustrative effect (pp. 855 and 882).

*Portrait of a Slave Society* is not an easy read. There are many eloquent passages and colourful “vignettes” in the book. The heavy use of examples becomes distracting, since they are seldom accompanied by supportive explanation. The description of Robert Jacob Gordon’s picnic party on Table Mountain, in 1777, is an example of a vignette of slave musicians and parasol-bearers clustered, in servitude, around their masters and mistresses (p. 459). See, for example, the account by the VOC officer Paravacini di Capelli of a woman in the far interior (in Nieuweveld, near Beaufort West) who violently declared to her slaves, “here I am absolute ruler” and “the Fiscal doesn’t know how to deal with you people as well as I do.” (pp. 782 and 785). There is also the anecdote of the priest who tried to impress his friends into being thankful to God for having not been born into slavery. Schoeman’s use of the probate inventories and the criminal trials of *Trials of Slavery* on the whole tends towards overkill. Schoeman’s repeated use of the phrase “vivid vignettes” is evidence of this stylistically awkward repetition (pp. 558, 712, 761, 826 (a ‘vivid idea’), 857, and 869). Again and again, we are offered “a vivid insight into the life” (p. 663) or “a concentrated, but extremely vivid idea” (p. 826). or a “vivid little vignette.” Repeated citation of “vignettes” fails to convince us, to use Schoeman’s own words, that “the most effective way of conveying some idea of the everyday reality of the slave-owning society at the Cape is probably by means of probate inventories, as has been illustrated in the course of this book.” (p. 737). Please note we are only 387 pages into the book at this point. By page 737, it appears that even Schoeman has also tired of the case studies of *Trials of Slavery* (which he says could be “multiplied over”), when he says: “All of these incidental cases of cruelty to slaves have been cited here not so much to prove anything, as merely by their monotonous repetition, with only minor variations, to give some idea of the constant undertone of violence in colonial society...” Robert Fogel and Stanley Engermann warned historians in 1976 about the dangers of imputing a trend from an anecdote: “The real question is whether such cases [of whipping] were common events that were rarely reported, or whether they were rare events that were

frequently reported.”<sup>8</sup> Historians relying on anecdotal evidence have no way of answering that question. The probate inventories and the criminal trials could have been better managed to make this portrait more accessible to the lay reader. Sometimes we are left feeling that the vignettes are the dominant text, and the narrative a lengthy footnote.

Schoeman often leaves the reader to second-guess his arguments through passive illustration in the form of anecdotes. Schoeman makes heavy use of Armstrong and Worden’s descriptions of the wheat and grain harvests in both *Early Slavery* and *Portrait of a Slave Society* and cites illustrative examples from Penn and Boucher’s *Britain at the Cape* at least three times in his footnotes. Schoeman quotes Carl Peter Thunberg and Hendrik Cloete at length on the wheat and wine harvests in *Portrait of a Slave Society*. These descriptions appear more anecdotal than analytical. The VOC slave trader Francois Duminy’s apparent humanitarianism is borrowed from Andrew Duminy, who found this in Lorraine Maritz’s MA thesis (p. 1049). François Duminy was requested by the Council of Policy to present them with a report on the slave trade shortly after his retirement from the slave trade. His response, written in 1788, discusses various aspects of the slave trade, including the mental and physical well-being of slaves aboard slave ships and causes of slave mortality. Duminy describes how kind treatment by the crew, regular recreation and dancing on the upper deck and the washing of the hold where the slaves were kept with vinegar would keep the slaves being transported healthy. These practices were also quite common practice on Transatlantic and Indian Ocean slave ships. It is not, therefore, appropriate to single out Duminy as humanitarian when he was, more likely than anything else, defending his loss of 150 slaves to dysentery on the *Meermin*’s last slave voyage.

Schoeman’s cover illustration depicts Captain Hendrik Storm, commander of the Cape garrison, with his son and daughter and his domestic slaves, with Table Mountain looming in the background (pp. 376 and 652). The widely used portrait, belonging to the Stellenbosch Museum, was painted by an anonymous artist c.1762. It is described by Schoeman on pages 376 and 377. Schoeman singles out the portrait as “unique” for its time because it provides, “visual information not only on the way of life of senior officials around the middle of the century, but also on their slaves.” (p. 376). His choice of cover is suggestive of the Cape gentry. There are fifteen black-and-

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8 RW Fogel and SL Engerman, *Time on the cross: The economics of American Negro slavery* (Boston, Little, Brown, 1974), pp. 131-132.

white illustrations in the middle of the book (pp. 608 and 609).<sup>9</sup> Schoeman's choice of illustrations is puzzling given his dismissal of historical comparisons between Cape rural slavery and North American plantation slavery. Only two of the illustrations fall within the period 1717 to 1795 (the rest were all rendered well after 1795)—and most are not from the Cape. Illustration 3 is a picture of an English transatlantic slaver c.1780, and illustration 12 is “a dance by slaves from West Africa on a North American plantation during the late eighteenth century.” Only four of the fifteen illustrations chosen by Schoeman are of the Cape. But these are taken from the period “after” 1795. Illustrations 7, 8 and 9 depict slaves in urban Cape Town during British rule and are dated 1824, 1834 and 1832 respectively. Lady Anne Barnard's portrait of a young slave woman, Teresa, at Ganzekraal (near present-day Darling) is the only picture that has any direct relation to Schoeman's period and subject, and it was drawn in 1799. The other illustrations of slaves aboard transatlantic slave ships (British, American and Danish), slaves bearing a palanquin in a Brazilian street and punishments being meted out to North American and Brazilian slaves were neither produced in the 18<sup>th</sup> century nor at the Cape. In short, Schoeman's illustrations have little to do with his subject and appear as an afterthought perhaps prompted by an anxious publisher (See figure 1). A list of illustrations does not feature in the front-matter.

This is even more noticeable considering Schoeman's repeated criticisms (“facile comparisons of Cape slavery with that of the Caribbean and North America” – p. 601) of comparative history between the Cape and places outside of the VOC colonies. One cannot run with the hare and hunt with the hounds.

Figure 1: What has this demeaning illustration of a convict and the Cape Town jail, dated 1832, to do with 18th century slavery?



Source: *Portrait of a Slave Society*, illustration no. 9, pp. 608-609.

<sup>9</sup> Sources are credited on p. 1219.

*Portrait of a Slave Society* is comprehensive in a populist sense. It should draw readers to the more significant writings of Anna J Böeseken, Wayne Dooling, Susan Newton-King, Robert Shell, and Nigel Worden. *Portrait of a Slave Society's* fresh use of published Dutch sources should prove useful to the history-reading public. Schoeman loses the professional historian, however, with his over-reliance on illustrative vignettes, sparse explanatory narrative, and the evasive eschewing of all quantitative analysis, historical change, and historical argumentation.

*New perspectives on the Anglo-Boer War / Nuwe perspektiewe op die Anglo-Boereoorlog*

**(Bloemfontein, War museum of the Boer Republics, ca 2013, 274 pp.  
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Hierdie tweetalige publikasie is 'n keur van agt bydraes (waarvan sommige in Afrikaans en ander in Engels). Al die bydraes is gebied deur ekspert navorsers wat al in eie reg bekendheid verwerf het deur individueel oor fasette van die Anglo-Boereoorlog te publiseer. Hulle is RAS Atwood, André Wessels, Jaco de Bruin, Johan Henning, Johan Hattingh, Elizabeth van Heyningen, AWG Raath en Peter Donaldson. *Nuwe perspektiewe op die Anglo-Boereoorlog* handel oor 'n wye reeks van onderwerpe wat op die oog af nie noodwendig 'n verbandhoudende eenheid in tema vorm nie, maar weliswaar verbind word deur dieselfde tydgleuf en dieselfde Oorlog.

Die eerste hoofstuk deur RAS Atwood handel oor die alombekende Sir Redvers Buller as Britse bevelvoerder tydens die Anglo-Boereoorlog. Atwood se bydrae kenmerk 'n besondere aanslag en prikkelende leeswerk. Onder meer word spesifiek gewys op die rol van Buller as bevelvoerder van die Britse

Artillerie. Die byna fanatiese wyse waarop Buller die Britse soldate in die Oorlog bestuur het, is beklemtoon. Dit het sy kwota sukses opgelewer na 'n aanvanklike reeks neerslae.

Andre Wessels se bydrae in hoofstuk twee is werklik prysenswaardig. Hy slaag gemaklik daarin om moeilike fasette van oorlogvoering op 'n gemaklik-leesbare wyse te beskryf en die leser te boei met sy suksesvolle benadering tot 'n magdom van teoretiese inligting. Wat oorlogvoering behels, asook vorme van oorlogvoering, is behendig hanteer. Hierdie verwaarloosde aspek ten opsigte van die Anglo-Boereoorlog kry nuwe betekenis.

Hoofstuk drie is 'n spanpoging deur Jaco de Bruin, Andre Wessels en Johan Henning. Die kollig val op die Britse proklamasies in 1900 toe die boeremagte by Paardeberg en Brandwaterkom tot oorgawe gedwing is. Die invloed van proklamasies op die moraal van die Boeremagte was besonder dramaties. Die hoofstuk gee die leser insig in die ongewoon moeilike omstandighede waarin baie Boeremag-lede hulself bevind het. Vir die Boeremagte was dit 'n (onwelkome) geleentheid om die wapen neer te lê. wat soms nie besef word nie, en deur die skrywers uitgelig word, is dat hierdie proklamasies die moraal van die Britse soldate versterk het. In hierdie hoofstuk word in hoofsaak gekonsentreer op die redes wat aanleiding sou gee tot die beëindiging van die Oorlog.

Die vierde hoofstuk deur Johan Hattingh en André Wessels wy uit oor die Britse blokhuse, en sluit sinvol aan by die hoofstuk oor strategie en taktiek. Die bou van 'n indrukwekkende netwerk van blokhuse was een van die metodes wat die Britse soldate ingestel het om as teenvoeter vir die manhaftige Boeremagte te dien. 'n Verduideliking van hoe blokhuse aangewend is, en strategies-takties gebruik is tydens die Oorlog is baie prikkelend en bekwaam hanteer.

'n Boek oor die Anglo-Boereoorlog sou onvolledig wees sonder 'n bespreking van die Konsentrasiekampe. As kundige op hierdie terrein slaag Elizabeth van Heyningen uitstekend daarin om verruimend en prikkelend hieroor te skryf. Haar stewige navorsing en ophelderende insig oor die onderwerp, sal die leser boei. Die dood van soveel ingekerkerde gevalle in konsentrasiekampe is en bly maar 'n tragedie. Dit was die uitvloeisel van 'n onverbiddelike beleid deur die Britse magte om die Boere teen alle koste tot 'n val te bring.

In hoofstuk sewe laat val Andries Raath die kollig op 'n onderhoudende beskrywing van die militêre optrede van generaal JH de la Rey voor en tydens die slag van Ysterspruit. Myns insiens verteenwoordig hierdie hoofstuk die hoogtepunt van die boek. Die leser word hier blootgestel aan die gebeure van 'n baie prominente slag tydens die Anglo-Boereoorlog. Hierdie beskrywing dien as voorbeeld van verskeie veldslae wat tydens dié Oorlog voltrek is. Dat Raath ook 'n goed deurdagte krygshistoriese evaluering van die veldslag maak, dra verder by tot die waarde van publikasie in sy geheel as kosbare bron vir die nagraadse student wat in krygsgeskiedenis spesialiseer.

*Nuwe perspektiewe op die Anglo-Boereoorlog* is afgesluit met 'n prikkelende bespreking deur Peter Donaldson van hoe die werke van twee afsonderlike redakteurs neerslag gevind het in die saamstel van 'n volledige eietydse relaas aangaande die Anglo-Boereoorlog. 'n Kritiese beskrywing is aangebied van hoe Leo Amery en Frederick Maurice se standaard werke oor die oorlog, naamlik *The Times History of the War in South Africa, 1899-1902* en *The History of the War in South Africa, 1899-1902* 'n kosbare bydrae gelewer het tot latere geskiedskrywing oor die Anglo-Boereoorlog.

*Nuwe perspektiewe op die Anglo-Boereoorlog* sal byval vind by enige persoon wat belangstel in die geskiedenis en gebeure tydens hierdie spesifieke Oorlog. Die publikasie is sodanig verpak dat dit ook onder die algemene leserspubliek byval sal vind. Die hoë gehalte skryfwerk komplimenteer die boek, en oorskadu die kleiner steurings (soos verskillende verwysings- en voetnootstyle) wat dalk met 'n hersiene uitgawe uitgeskakel kan word om groter eenheid te beklemtoon en minder individualiteit te bevorder. 'n Behoorlik-inleidende asook samevattende hoofstuk ontbreek, wat toelaat dat die leser sal bly wonder vir watter doel die publikasie verskyn het, en waarom juis hierdie temakeuses as nuwe perspektiewe aangebied is.