

The War for South Africa
The Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902

**(Cape Town, Tafelberg, 2010, pp. 352, maps, endnotes, bibl.,
index. ISBN: 978-0-624-04809-1)**

Bill Nasson

Elizabeth van Heyningen
Department of Historical Studies
University of Cape Town

Bill Nasson is already known for his *The South African War 1899-1902*, published in 1999 at the time of the centenary of the war. Since then there have been a flurry of works on specialist aspects of the conflict but no major reconsideration of the campaign as a whole. But much else has changed, in South Africa and globally, and this volume is conceived and framed rather differently from its predecessor. Only about half the book is about the battles and these are often dealt with briskly and concisely. There are none of Thomas Pakenham's grand set pieces or the "stupefying detail" found in some military histories.

The war for South Africa is set against the backdrop of the American invasion of Iraq. Nasson is alert to the similarities between these two wars, a hundred years apart. In their origins and conduct both were "clothed in deception" (p.18) in anticipation of a quick end and the desire of a great imperial power for control of vital mineral resources.

In his introduction Nasson points out that this war was transitional, "an agrarian conflict with a distinctly industrial radiation" (p. 17). This is a point worth contemplating for the tension between the old and the new permeated the clash throughout, both within and without republican society, from the contrast between the military methods of the older patriarchs and the more ruthless younger commanders like Botha and Smuts to combat, at once, a "traditional countryside war of movement" and one which was dependent

on the railway, electronic communication, aerial observation and modern firearms. In other respects, too, this was a “war of modernity” (p. 28) with echoes of the suffering and destruction of the great industrial campaigns of the twentieth century. As in the Algerian case, the notorious concentration camps were regarded by the imperialists as a means of educating country people whose way of life seemed worse than antiquated, actively dangerous in their flouting of “modern” public health practices.

One of the difficulties in dealing with this war is that the first period, with its set battles, is much easier to describe than the elusive guerrilla war. Most historians, like Pakenham, tend to concentrate on the first year but Nasson has dealt a little more even-handedly with the two parts. He has not, however, devoted much attention to the Cape invasions and such folk heroes as Gideon Scheepers receive no mention. The strength of this book, then, lies less in the military history than in Nasson’s understanding of the broader context.

Nasson is, for instance, alert to the gendered aspects although he deals with it lightly. Wartime attitudes, he points out, were often shaped by gender (p. 281). Thus, at the end, when the land was devastated and families incarcerated, what remained to the men was “to be men”; those who did not stay in the fight were not fully men (p. 246). Women like Hendrina Joubert and Hester Cronjé were doing more than carrying domesticity to the front. They were identifying actively with the republican war effort (p. 111). As one would expect from a historian who has dealt extensively with the participation of blacks, their part is treated with judicious intelligence. His discussion of the role of the *agterryers*, for instance, gives full weight to their essential role in the field, when “war is a form of work” (p. 86).

Much of the book contemplates the meaning of the war in a modern South Africa in which Afrikaners have lost the political independence for which they had been fighting. Nasson concludes that the war remains of historical significance. The last two chapters, particularly, are devoted to a consideration of the impact of the conflict since 1902, taking into account many of the recent debates. Nasson is less concerned with the role of the war in the making of Afrikaner nationalism than with its role in the making of the new South Africa. He is well aware of African, and Afrikaner, ambivalence about the meaning of the war, noting the tendency of Afrikaner writers like Antje Krog to see the war as a “hinge” of national reconciliation. He is sceptical, however, that its peace was a lost opportunity, agreeing with the argument that the alternative outcome of counterfactual history is likely to be the same as the

one that took place (p. 299). And he gives short shrift to the suggestion that blacks were merely common victims of suffering. They were also active agents, collaborating with the British, serving the Boers and acting independently; commemoration has tended to hide this from full recognition, he suggests.

References are provided both in the form of footnotes and in an annotated select bibliography in which Nasson's shrewd comments are a delight. Thus Tabitha Jackson's *The White Man's War* offers a rounded view "which may be too round" (p. 340). Above all, Nasson is known for his distinctive style and this book is a pleasure to read, with its ironic humour and elegant, concise turn of phrase.

*Islands in a forgotten sea: A history of the Seychelles, Mauritius,
Réunion and Madagascar*

(Pretoria, Protea Book House, 2010, pp. 448, map, metric table, table of place names, list of sources, index. ISBN: 978-1-86919-332-4)

TV Bulpin

Nicholas Southey
Department of History
University of South Africa

TV Bulpin, who died in 1999, enjoys a deserved reputation as the doyen of twentieth-century South African travel writers. As a young man, he earned a living through his keen photographic and cinematographic interests, but from the early 1950s he became a prolific writer and publisher, and produced many hundreds of pamphlets, booklets and articles in addition to his 29 books during a long and successful career. The main focus of this prodigious output dealt with southern Africa south of the Zambezi River; *Islands in a forgotten sea* is Bulpin's only major publication on an area outside the mainland subcontinent.

The book was first published in 1958 by Howard Timmins, and a second edition appeared in 1969, under the Books of Africa label, Bulpin's own publishing house. It has been out of print for a long time, and Protea Book House presumably took a decision that a new edition would appeal to interested readers who seek well-informed material on the region, as well as visitors and tourists to the islands of the western Indian Ocean.

New editions of books invariably offer revisions and updates of an earlier text. This third edition of *Islands in a forgotten sea*, however, is unaltered from the two earlier editions, which is scarcely surprising given that the author has been deceased for over a decade. The only differences are that the few somewhat garish and clichéd photographs have been dropped, as have the numerous and much more appealing line drawings that appeared throughout the second edition. One marked improvement, however, is in the index, which is greatly expanded and hence significantly more worthwhile than the former rudimentary versions. This is certainly a welcome improvement.

Essentially, therefore, a text created in the late 1950s has been presented to a modern readership, and it is naturally reflective of the state of writing on Africa and the world during that period. While not entirely neglectful of the histories of indigenous peoples, Bulpin's book is essentially an account of the activities of Europeans in Madagascar, the Seychelles, the Comores and the Mascarenhas (Mauritius, Réunion and Rodrigues) island groups. Its focus is therefore overwhelmingly on the era of European conquest, trade and settlement between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. This naturally included extensive interaction between Europeans and local people, but all the same, European actions in western Indian Ocean settings do dominate the text. Coverage of the region's history before the seventeenth century is scanty, while Bulpin barely touches on the twentieth century at all – for him, history ends at the end of the nineteenth century. The sweeping general subtitle of the book, “a history of...”, could therefore be deemed somewhat misleading, both because of its concentration on European actions and of its coverage in time.

It also needs to be noted that *Islands in a forgotten sea* belongs to a somewhat florid genre of travel writing, which, though an enduring tradition, will not have universal appeal in the early twenty-first century. Readers are introduced to the Sea of Zanj in the first chapter, the Arab name for the western Indian Ocean, meaning “Sea of the Blacks”, and there is more than a suggestion of the dark and enigmatic Africa stereotyped by many European writers in what

follows. It is a “fabulous” sea, a “sea of legends”, a “mysterious wilderness of water”, containing “dreamlike jungles” of coral reefs around “lost” islands, whose formation was a “spectacle” that was “truly fit for the eyes of the gods” (pp. 11–15, *passim*). This provided a setting for “legend” and “restless adventure”, “romance” and “mystery”, “myth” and “quaintness”, “strange tribes” and “exotic” behaviour (pp. 12–27, *passim*). Such descriptions and characterisations, though possessing remarkable durability in some popular writing, have generally fallen into disuse in more serious works.

Despite these limitations, Bulpin’s study of the western Indian Ocean has considerable merit, and there are two main reasons which make the re-publication of *Islands in a forgotten sea* worthwhile. First, his extensive research and command of detail demand great respect. He has immersed himself in the histories, memoirs and travel accounts of the region, as well as various official records. His source list is extensive – though serious scholars will be frustrated by the absence of full data (indeed, the publisher could have used the opportunity to tidy the list and to bring it in line with contemporary citation practice). Bulpin is particularly secure in the English and French material, and has taken rather less trouble with Portuguese and Dutch sources; all the same, the source list reflects wide reading and familiarity with nineteenth and twentieth-century published literature on the region.

Second, Bulpin possesses impressive narrative skills, which of course are central to his success as a writer. Although his style will not be to every reader’s tastes, he recounts the history of the colonial powers and their various successes and many failures in a vivid and engaging fashion. He is an engaged and passionate narrator, who relishes the cut and thrust of history. He is unsurprisingly not deeply concerned about process and underlying motive, and much more interested in human actions and folly (of which countless examples are recounted here). Thus, the endeavours of various seamen, governors, merchants, settlers, missionaries and pirates are recorded, often in explicit detail as the author relishes unusual, irrational or eccentric behaviour and actions.

Arguably, the most frustrating feature of this book is its absence of footnotes or endnotes, being a product as it is of a less rigorous age. All the same, I have used earlier editions of this book with great profit in the preparation of lectures on the Indian Ocean region, and I welcome its reissue. At a time when Indian Ocean studies and transnational concerns have become prominent, the book should appeal to historians and scholars, particularly if it is taken

on its own terms (indeed, I wonder if Bulpin would today characterise this as a “forgotten sea” given the upsurge in study of the area). The volume’s 448 pages possess considerable substance, and ought not to be haughtily ignored or dismissed as mere popular journalism.

The book’s main appeal will probably lie with those with a general rather than an academic interest in the area. Bulpin produced at least part of the book “in a tiny bungalow beside a moonlit beach on the island of Mauritius” (p. 25), and *Islands in a forgotten sea* is perhaps best enjoyed in relaxed circumstances under a palm tree on a tropical beach, rather than studied with a critical eye under artificial lights in the confined spaces of a research library.

*Healing the Herds: Disease, Livestock Economies and the
Globalization of Veterinary Medicine*

**(Athens, Ohio, Ohio University Press, 2010, pp. 299,
glossary, bibl., index. ISBN: 1- 9780821-4148840)**

Karen Brown & Daniel Gilfoyle

Lize-Marié van der Watt

Department of History

University of Stellenbosch

The Ohio University Press Series in History and Ecology publishes history books that can and should be read by scholars from a number of disciplines. The works are known to be accessible, but with enough specialist information for subject experts. *Healing the Herds: Disease, Livestock Economies and the Globalization of Veterinary Medicine* follows this pattern. Edited by Southern African environmental historians Karen Brown and Daniel Gilfoyle, it contains thirteen chapters that explore the interrelationships between livestock economies, veterinary science, disease and the environment. The book is based on a selection of papers presented at a conference, and the goal is to add to and further develop the historiography of veterinary disease.

One of the challenges of editing such books is to ensure a measure of thematic and stylistic coherence. In terms of the themes there is a very useful and thorough introduction. It clearly traces the themes along which the chapters are roughly organised. First, there is the impact of professionalisation as supported by a better understanding of disease etiologies and more efficient treatments. This is followed by chapters on the consequences of global trade for the spread of pathogens. Similarly, the transport of livestock to alien environments, which exposes them to new sources of infections, is discussed. Finally, the relationship between colonialism and veterinary service is examined. Naturally, these themes tend to overlap in some chapters. Daniel Doeppers (Chapter six), for example, draws on the rinderpest epidemic in the Philippines from 1886-1941 to demonstrate how pathogens moved between the different ports of Southeast Asia. He also links the response to rinderpest with the colonial history of the Philippines. Domesticated bovines were a recently introduced species in the Philippines, and were used for traction rather than a source of meat. By the 1890s, as the number of Spanish and the Mestizo-elite increased, so did the demand for beef.

In several chapters, the book also illustrates that a history of livestock disease is not just about pathogens and vaccines, and that it can also illuminate broader issues. Dominik Hünninger (Chapter four), in one of the very few chapters on pre-19th century, cleverly traces the changes and continuities in legislation during times of cattle plague in early 18th century Germany. In the process, he also writes an innovative narrative of early modern state formation and the political language of legitimisation.

Locations around the world are traversed in the different chapters, from the Far East to Africa via some island states. This can be potentially perplexing because the reader may not be as familiar with the history of say, Trinidad and Tobago (Chapter nine) as Niger (Chapter thirteen), and may thus miss some of the nuances. Occasionally, chapters assume a detailed knowledge of the different districts when tracing the geographical trajectories of the diseases. Chapters one and five contain sketch maps of the countries/and or areas referred to. Similar maps in other chapters would have been helpful.

That being said, it is because of the wide variety of historical and environmental contexts that are covered in the book that it succeeds in tracking how livestock economies, veterinary science, disease and the environment interlink in a *globalised* setting. The physical mobility of livestock, their owners and pathogens are key ideas in all the chapters. Not always present,

but arguably as important, is how the mobility of knowledge and ideas about livestock disease impacted on its history. *How* the state and/or veterinarians sought to transfer knowledge to farmers (or indeed elicit knowledge from farmers) is rarely discussed beyond mentioning policies. In some chapters, however, investigating the transfer of knowledge is a secondary point. Abigail Woods, on British veterinarians and dairy farmers during World War Two (Chapter three), partially attends to factors that made dairy farmers “accept” veterinarians and how the veterinarians came to achieve “expert” status.

The wide array of locations also leads to a verisimilitude of source material. African histories rely especially on non-traditional sources. Lotte Hughes’ perspicacious use of oral histories illustrates that East Coast Fever (ECF) played a central role in the second forced removal of Maasai in British East Africa (Kenya). She puts forward a new and convincing, yet not deterministic, hypothesis. Using the *actor-network theory*, Saveriou Krätli (Chapter thirteen) makes an incisive study of veterinary publications to track the sources of animal-science knowledge on the Bororo zebu – breed. Not all the authors use their sources so creatively. Peter Koolmees (Chapter one), for instance, in his overview of epizootics in the Netherlands relies heavily on recent secondary literature, with a corresponding lack of a nuanced analysis. The thinness is exacerbated by the scope of the chapter - from 1713 to 2002 (!).

One of the most interesting chapters in terms of method is that of Ann Greene (Chapter two) on veterinarians and their professional identity in Gilded Age America. She uses the concept of ecology, specifically its emphasis on place and relationship, as the scaffolding to show how “horse-doctors” in Philadelphia became “veterinarians.” The “internationality” of the book is also reflected in the variety of writing styles. Although it is generally well-edited, there are chapters such as that of Martine Barwegen (Chapter five) in which the (second-language) cadence is slightly jarring. This could distract the reader from the actual content of the chapter.

In its endeavour to enhance the history of veterinary medicine and its relations with society and the economy, *Healing the Herds* mostly succeeds. Its scholarship can serve as a useful introduction to the writing of veterinary and agricultural history. The chapters reveal numerous themes, methods and narratives in the field. Moreover, the editors take great pains to point out the lacunae in the book. In the introduction, mention is made of the vast potential for tracing the epistemology of veterinary science - how scientific knowledge is acquired or constructed.

The conclusion by Brown lists more absences. The most glaring of these is the role of women and the absence of Latin America as well as Russia. Also, little attention is paid to the relationship between animal and human health more broadly. Brown mentions the topic of rabies as an example of which she herself is a scholar. The relationship between livestock and humans more generally can also be explored further. There are exceptions (Hughes for instance mentions the cultural value of cattle for the Maasai), but by far most of the chapters merely refer to livestock in terms of economic livelihood.

There are also some absent species. In the light of the avian flu scare, Brown refers to poultry as a neglected candidate for historical study. The same can be said of swine-flu and pigs, the factory farming of which is often a cause of public protest. To conclude, although *Healing the Herds* is a curator's egg in places, it is a stimulating publication. In a positive way, it shows how much can still be done.

