

Book Reviews and Notices

PAULINA DLAMINI: SERVANT OF TWO KINGS

compiled by H. FILTER. Edited by S. BOURQUIN

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'NOT EITHER AN EXPERIMENTAL DOLL': THE SEPARATE WORLDS OF THREE SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN

edited by SHULA MARKS

Killie Campbell Africana Library Publications, Number 2. University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg and Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban, 1987. R17,50

It is rare in South African history that the voices of black women have been heard. The Killie Campbell Africana Library, in collaboration with the University of Natal Press has boldly launched its new series with not one, but two, exciting books loudly proclaiming the experience of black women at two different, but crucial times in our history. They are to be congratulated.

Paulina Dlamini's life story is unique in the published annals of Natal and Zulu history, for it is the record of the reminiscences of a woman who served in Cetshwayo's *umuzi* (homestead) as a member of his private regiment of female servants and concubines, the *isigodlo* women. It gives a personal, and female perspective on life in the royal *umuzi* which can be found nowhere else.

The story was compiled by the Reverend Heinrich Filter, a missionary of the Lutheran Church, who had met Paulina Dlamini later in her life, after she had been converted to Christianity and become a missionary herself. Over several years he recorded conversations he had had with her, and towards the end of her very long life (c. 1856-1942), in 1939, when she was in her early eighties, he brought her to his mission station at Nazareth to complete her story. The story is in narrative form, and as the editor has pointed out, Filter used literary licence in giving some of the characters direct speech.

The notes of his conversations with Paulina were in the form of key words and brief sentences, thus one must be aware that the story is shaped by Filter's narrative choices. Moreover, the narrative was written in German, from discussions held in Zulu. The editor, Mr S. Bourquin, has performed the difficult task of translating the story into English, with remarkable sensitivity to the meaning of the original Zulu notes.

Paulina, or Nomguqo as she was named, was the daughter of Prince Sikhunyane Dlamini Nkosi, grandson of Sobhuza, king of the Swazis, taken

hostage by Dingane's regiments, and absorbed into the Buthelezi clan as a 'bondsmen'. He became a messenger of the new King Mpande, and as a tax collector was able to build his fortune. Paulina was the offspring of his fifth and chief wife, a member of one of Mpande's female regiments and daughter of a prominent member of the Khumalo clan.

Paulina's story begins with her life 'as a pagan member of the Zulu royal establishment', where service to her father was replaced by service to the king. Pride in being selected for the king's *isigodlo* was tinged with the pain at being forced to leave home forever. What comes through the narrative is that women in Zulu society had virtually no choices. Their lives were arranged for them with no consultation at all. We are given a glimpse of how women were recruited into the *isigodlo*, and the elaborate preparations which accompanied their absorption into the royal household. This does not mean they were perpetually unhappy, and one gets a sense that life in the *isigodlo* was pleasant in the company of other women, although strictly circumscribed, and also busy. The *isigodlo* women were indeed the servants of the king, as Paulina explained, 'Our duties were to plant and to harvest, to fetch water and firewood and perform all household tasks'.

The *isigodlo* women were also the king's concubines. Paulina's Victorian and Christian morality forbids her to talk openly about sexual practices and celebrations in the royal homestead. She admits, however, that at the time 'these gave us much joy and pleasure'. As an example she quotes the celebrations of the First Fruits and the puberty ceremonies for each member of the *isigodlo*.

The first part of Paulina's story, in which she describes daily life in the king's *umuzi* is, perhaps, the most interesting part of her narrative. The details of Cetshwayo's personal power, the ease with which he was able to decide upon the life or death of members of his household, are uniquely revealing. One begins to see how control was exerted over his enormous household.

After Mpande's death, Cetshwayo built a new royal *umzui* at Ondini. Paulina describes in detail the significance of the divisions in the *umuzi*, with the *isigodlo esimnyama* (black *isigodlo*) reserved for the king's hut, those of his wives and mother, and the elite *isigodlo* women. The *isigodlo esimhlophe*, (white *isigodlo*) housed the royal children and the rest of the *isigodlo* girls. Each section was fenced off from the other, and rights of entry strictly limited.

Fascinating is the story of the nation's *inkatha*, a coil of grass wide enough for the king to squat on, wrapped in cloth, symbolising the unity of the nation and the values associated with the king's ancestors. The *inkatha* was believed to have magic powers emanating from it which influenced the king's armies, and harnessed the support of the dead ancestors as their spirits became a footrest for the king's feet.

Much of Paulina's narrative describes different aspects of belief in magic and spirits. Snakes, for instance, were believed to be the spirits of the ancestors and animals were sacrificed to appease them. She acknowledges that as a Christian she would have turned her back on these things, but there still exists something of a magic belief when she proclaims 'I would know that Satan was operating through those snakes'.

Paulina's remarkable memory has also given us a wealth of original Zulu praise songs, war songs, and national songs. Songs were even composed in criticism of Cetshwayo's stinginess.

After five years at Ondini, the Zulu war brought catastrophe to the royal *umuzi*. The *isigodlo* fled to Zibhebhu, who appropriated the king's cattle and intended to keep the women to serve him. Paulina and a number of the women escaped and returned to their homes. Civil war once again disrupted life, and the Buthelezi people took refuge in caves in the Ingwenya mountain range.

Paulina's conversion to Christianity can really only be understood in the context of the complete disruption of traditional life after the 1879 war and subsequent civil war. Nearly starving to death, people bartered large numbers of cattle for meagre amounts of mealies from itinerant Boer traders. One of these traders, Shede Foloji (Gert van Rooyen) took Paulina's family back to Natal, where they were registered as refugees, and assigned to work for him. In his home, just three years after she first started to work for him, Paulina had a dream which led to her conversion.

Paulina's dreams evinced considerable interest among the local Church members, and she was sent to the missionary Johannes Reibeling for religious instruction at Ehlazeni. After a year, she returned to Foloji, who by this time had acquired a farm in Zululand. She and her master acted as lay preachers, together discussing the services they would give to their respective congregations, he to the whites, and she to the blacks.

The story of Paulina's evangelical work is fascinating. It, too, is a unique testament, for seldom does one find black women evangelists, and never one whose words have been recorded. It is rare even to hear the words of black men's experience, except through missionary journals.

Paulina concludes her story by recounting the terrible experience of *ufufunyane*, a 'delirious illness of the brain' believed to be caused by evil spirits. Her description reveals a form of modern spirit possession which was related to the defeat of the Zulu kingdom, in which medicine men were called on to exorcise these demons by implanting ghost warriors. Even Christianity could not wipe out the devastation of defeat and dispossession, which is no doubt the reason for this manic possession.

Paulina, however, found solace and strength in her conversion to Christianity. As an evangelist she found an independence and a dignity which fulfilled her spiritually, and gave her a stature she could never have achieved in her previous life. She was able to avoid marriage, for instance, and assuaged her brother's reproach by paying him *lobola* cattle herself! What a remarkable woman, what a remarkable story.

Another remarkable story is that told in the letters of three women set in context by Shula Marks in her beautifully and sensitively written introduction to *Not Either An Experimental Doll: the separate worlds of three South African women*.

Lily Moya, a fifteen year old Transkei schoolgirl writes to Dr Mabel Palmer, organiser of the separate Non-European Section of the University of Natal, appealing to be accepted as a matriculation student. She impressed the unsentimental Mabel Palmer with her first few letters, which showed great originality of expression and great anxiety for further education. Mabel must have remembered how, long ago, she had been helped by a

benefactress to further her own education, for she responded in kind to Lily's appeal.

'My heart aches when I see other children having gone and still going to school', wrote Lily. Mabel's sympathies are aroused, and she makes considerable effort to find accommodation for the young girl in Durban. She even writes to the Native Commissioner in Umtata. Lily has captured her imagination as 'a young thing straining at the leash with desire for some training to fit her to take part in the life outside a native location'. Too poor to bear the full burden of educational expenses, she approaches various bodies to assist with Lily's education. Meanwhile she sends Lily books to encourage her in her studies.

One learns during the course of the correspondence, that Lily is caught in an unhappy situation of servitude in her uncle's home. While she waits for Mabel to make arrangements for her education, and as things become increasingly untenable for her at home, she latches onto Mabel as a potential friend. Increasingly her letters show her need and desire for someone who will understand her. 'I wish you don't tired of me', she writes, and, when she hasn't heard from Mabel, 'I'm withering as well as desponding', she says.

Mabel is not entirely deaf to Lily's pleas, for she drops the formality of addressing her letters to 'Miss Moya' and calls her Lily. She tries to get Lily to write about her experiences as a young girl living in a 'Native Location', though Lily in fact lives in Umtata, and comes from a Christianised and educated background. As Shula Marks points out, when Lily's response is full of moralising, and hardly what she had hoped for, Mabel's own ignorance and inability to imagine the deprivations and oppressions of a young African girl become remarkably plain.

Mabel found it impossible, from her perspective of age and 'rational' modernism espoused by the Fabians, of which she had been a part, to comprehend the experience of an intensely religious young person, to whom individual wickedness and witchcraft had real significance, as they had to Paulina in a different context.

Before Mabel had finalised Lily's educational future, an impending forced marriage induced Lily to flee to Natal. On her arrival, Mabel learns that Lily has a 'very quiet and shy exterior', somewhat belied by the vivacity of her letters, and indeed by the resourcefulness of her decisive escape from the thralldom of marriage, 'that awful bondage' as she describes it. Mabel is very sympathetic, and impressed.

But Lily's trials are not over. Strange and awkward in the Natal environment, unhappy in the presence of young men, probably because of her strong Anglican ethic of 'purity', Lily found it almost impossible to settle down. Mabel would not, and could not, be the friend she so yearned for. In fact Mabel tried hard to find a personal mentor for Lily, and appealed to Sibusisiwe Makhanya to help the young girl to adjust to life.

Sibusisiwe remains a tantalizingly shadowy figure in the story, and what we know comes from Shula Marks's researches. An independent and outspoken woman, Sibusisiwe was a member of the Adams school board. With her, Lily felt at home, but this did not cure Lily of her deep unhappiness. She became less and less capable of working. Mabel was deeply disappointed. Whilst rejecting any emotional overtures from Lily,

she continued however to interest herself in Lily's welfare. She tried to get her into an all-girls school. But before she could even tell Lily, Lily ran away and joined her mother and sister in Johannesburg.

Whilst the people in Natal consoled one another about Lily's bad behaviour, and her inability to 'take the chance in life' she had been given, Lily wrote to Mabel from Johannesburg that she was very ill. She expressed strong feelings of having been manipulated, 'I was never meant to be a stone but a human being with feelings, not either an experimental doll'.

What happened to Lily Moya? In a moving epilogue we learn how Shula Marks traced Lily to her home in Soweto, where she lived with her family. Her illness had got progressively worse and her family turned to diviners in their search for a cure. She was diagnosed as being afflicted by *amafufunyane*, the spirit possession which Paulina had spoken about, associated with social stress. When exorcism did not work, and Lily ran away again, she was committed to Sterkfontein, and twenty five years later released into the care of her family.

The tragedy of this story stems from the social reality of the divisions and alienation caused by colonisation and racial segregation. As Shula Marks puts it, 'if there was much that was shared in this common western cultural inheritance which the Christian educated elite of South Africa had by this time made their own, there were hidden assumptions on both sides, and chasms in experience which decisively divided them'. The world of the busy and ageing white academic, the middle-aged Zulu community worker and the fifteen-year-old Umtata schoolgirl were indeed tragically far apart.

The uniqueness of both of these books lies in their illumination of the very different experiences of women from different social, ethnic, and class backgrounds in South Africa. They make fascinating reading.

SHEILA MEINTJES

BEAULIEU-ON-ILLOVO, RICHMOND, NATAL: ITS PEOPLE AND HISTORY

by CHARMIAN COULSON

Richmond Women's League and Institute, 1986. 375 pp. illus. R36.

As both my parents were born in Richmond I was greatly interested in Mrs Coulson's book. The author arrived in Richmond in 1950, and readily admits that when she began her research she knew very little about Natal history and the Richmond settler families. She feels that her task would have been easier if her grandparents and parents had actually lived in the district, for, as she says, 'you need a granny in the Richmond graveyard to be accepted!' Nevertheless, her enthusiasm and perseverance have enabled her to produce a most readable and worthwhile history of Richmond.

Mrs Coulson spent fifteen years doing meticulous research in the Natal Archives and interviewing descendants of the early settlers. Many of them were encouraged to talk freely about their ancestors in the district, and the author was given ready access to diaries, newspaper cuttings, letters and photographs. The book includes accounts of the geology, flora and fauna of the district, some written by specialist contributors, and deals briefly with the early black people, and the Boer farmers who arrived in the late 1850s.

The list of original Boer farms and present names makes very interesting reading for those familiar with the area. The histories of many of the Byrne settler families are recounted, and family trees of the following families are included: Payn, Hackland, McKenzie, Flett, Nicholson, Osborne, Newland, Comrie, Marwick, Cockburn, Antel, Lewis and Mapstone.

Mrs Coulson has also included descriptions of life on board some of the sailing ships, and there are interesting anecdotes based on the experiences of the early settlers. She makes use, for example, of Harriet Nicholson's diary to record the numerous trials of the emigrants aboard the *Sandwich*. They were very seasick in the Channel, and over one 24-hour period the vessel covered a distance of only nine miles. There was one man whom Harriet found most objectionable. He beat his wife of only two weeks, and '... began a most abominable conversation, not recorded here; in fact he is quite an atheist ...' Harriet also discovered to her dismay that their living quarters were infested with bed-bugs. She killed twenty-two, only to find '... nearly a hundred bugs in the gathers of a bolster not in use. 'Tis frightful.' ...

Mrs Coulson has included an interesting section on judicial affairs, and does not hesitate to mention some gun-running activities. On financial matters, the figures she gives for salaries and wages paid between 1874 and 1878 show that the Resident Magistrate was very well paid in comparison with those engaged in other occupations. He received £450 per annum, while the Richmond and Byrne school-teachers were paid only £36 per annum (with additional voluntary contributions of £43 12s 1d and £32 2s 6d!) A domestic servant was paid £24 a year, but the poor postmistress at Byrne received only £10 for the same period. (Possibly it was a not very onerous part-time job.)

Richmond men have always responded to the call to arms, and the book contains information on the Richmond Rifle Association, the Byrne Rifle Range, the Richmond Troop of the Natal Carbineers, the Richmond Mounted Rifles, the involvement of Richmond men in the Anglo-Boer War (with a list of those besieged in Ladysmith), the Trewergerie incident on the Hosking farm during the rebellion of 1906, and the First and Second World Wars (with lists of Richmond men who served in them.)

The author's research has enabled her to give a fascinating account of medical, ecclesiastical and educational aspects, of farming, trading, transport and inn-keeping activities, as well as cultural, sporting and other recreational organizations. She shows, too, that Richmond was first in quite a number of fields: the beautiful St Mary's Church was the first Anglican church to be consecrated in Natal (3 April 1856); the Richmond Primary School, though not the first, is now the oldest existing school in Natal; and the Richmond Tennis Club, founded in 1876, is the oldest in South Africa. The celebrated Richmond Cricket Club is certainly one of the oldest in the Province, the game being played there as early as 1852.

The section of the book dealing with the civic development of the town includes lists of civic dignitaries, and explains the origins of some of the street names. Although by its very nature this book is largely a record of white colonial endeavour, there are also chapters on the Coloured and Indian people of Richmond and on the Amabhaca. The last mentioned was contributed by Dr Barbara Tyrrell.

The Richmond history is well illustrated with many photographs, excellent drawings and some maps — including a plan of Richmond village, drawn in 1853, accompanied by a list of the original owners of erven.

Inevitably in a book of this size there are bound to be a few errors, and some may feel that there could have been a more detailed index. Mrs Coulson to a certain extent disarms such criticism by pointing out that she had no previous experience in writing or in historical research. She is to be congratulated on the way she tackled the daunting task. As Dr Ruth Gordon says in her foreword: 'This book will be of inestimable value to historians, students and enquiring readers in years to come. Richmond, its environment and its people, are here most splendidly enshrined.'

J.M. NICHOLSON

WHAT THE WORLD COUNTS WEAKNESS: a centenary history of the Society of St John the Divine, Natal

by SISTER MARGARET ANNE S.S.J.D.

Durban, Knox Publishing, 1987. 164 pp. illus. R9.

Many people are not aware that there are orders of nuns in the Anglican church, and yet one of them has celebrated a hundred years of work in Natal. As Bishop Michael Nuttall remarks in his foreword to this book, 'The Society of St John the Divine . . . belongs in a very distinctive way to the Diocese of Natal because it was founded here and has lived all its life here ever since.' With the encouragement of Bishop Macrorie and the gift of a large Loop Street property by Canon Usherwood, the Society began its work in Pietermaritzburg. At various times the sisters ran St Cross Orphanage, St Lucy's Hostel, the Good Shepherd School, St Saviour's Day School and St John's School, all in the capital; St Martin's Home and a Mercy House in Durban; and schools at Kloof, Frere and Dundee. In the late 1930s there were about thirty sisters, but in recent years fewer vocations to the religious life resulted in a smaller and older community, and greater difficulty in continuing their various works and maintaining the complex of old buildings which had grown up on the site between Loop and Burger Streets. In 1968, after eighty years in Pietermaritzburg, the convent moved to Wentworth, Durban, to a smaller home and new work 'more in accordance with (its) present circumstances.' The Pietermaritzburg property was sold, and only the convent chapel remains, now a Congregational church. The fact that it is still a place of Christian worship is a source of joy to the sisters, and also to the present reviewer, who grew up in a house not far from the convent and who recalls how his youthful days and weeks were punctuated by the clear tone of the little chapel bell, each stroke preceded by a squeak from the bell mounting, so very high up in its little turret as to make oiling a thing not lightly undertaken!

The centenary history is a very readable account of this Society of religious whose devotion and good works have so enriched church life in this province.

It is available from The Society of St John the Divine, P.O. Box 12183, Jacobs 4026.

J.M. DEANE

THE WHITE MAN COMETH

by LOUIS DU BUISSON

Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1987. R32,95

The history of Natal in the period from the arrival of the first British traders at Port Natal in 1824 to the incursion of the Boers in 1837 has been mythologized by generations of South African writers. They have made the doings of a handful of get-rich-quick roughs in an obscure corner of the globe into the subject matter of a romantic adventure story about pioneers of empire who paved the way for the triumph of British civilization over Zulu barbarism. The myths were created in the writings of Farewell, King, Isaacs and others in the 1820s and 1830s; in popular accounts of Natal history they have survived strongly to the present day.

The book under review, written as popular history by a journalist with long experience of Natal, sets out to knock down the established stereotypes. Its focus is not so much on the history of the Port Natal settlement as on the relations between the Zulu monarchy, British traders, and, later, Boer pastoralists in the reigns of King Shaka and King Dingane. This time the good guys are the Zulu and the bad guys are the British and the Boers.

In the first part of the book, which covers the reign of Shaka, this simple inversion of roles does not work. The British traders may well have been the frauds, fortune-hunters, liars, schemers and cheats that the author makes them out to be, but to credit them with the power to manipulate the Zulu monarchy that he gives them is to make nonsense of the political realities in Natal-Zululand in the 1820s. The author makes virtually no attempt to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the Zulu kingdom; the result is that in some places the Zulu emerge as a mighty, all-conquering nation (just as the stereotype has them), while in others they come over as little more than the simple-minded victims of the conspiracies of a few unkempt British adventurers.

This part of the book relies too heavily on sensationalism to ring true. It smacks suspiciously of the kind of romanticized history which is currently propagated by the ideologues of KwaZulu. And, paradoxically, it draws heavily for its information on the very writers whom the author sets out to criticize.

The second part of the book, on the reign of Dingane, works better. It mostly manages to avoid the kind of pop judgements which mar the first part; and the author's sympathetic treatment of the much-maligned Zulu king is a useful antidote to the denigration that has commonly been heaped on him. But in this part of the book, as in the first, the line between historical fact and author's fancy is too often unclear. The process of disentangling the one from the other is not helped by the absence of notes, list of sources, and index.

Popular history is an immensely important field of writing. The task which the author of this book set himself is one that much needed doing. It is unfortunate that he did not approach it more critically.

JOHN WRIGHT

PRECIOUS STONE: the life and works of Mary Stainbank

by MARY WEBB

Durban, Knox, 1985. 186 pp. illus. R7,80.

Mary Stainbank (b. 1899) is the daughter of Dering Lee Warner Stainbank of *Coedmore*, Bellair, near Durban, who came to Natal in 1857. She is a well-known sculptress, of whose work many examples are to be found in Durban and in other parts of the country. This story of her life also provides many interesting facts about the Stainbank family as a whole.

THE NICHOLSON FAMILY TREE

by JOHN DUGGLEBY EDWIN NICHOLSON

Underberg, the Author, 1986. 75 pp. illus. R15,00.

This book was written to commemorate the centenary of the Nicholson family in Underberg. The earliest known Nicholson in this family is William Nicholson (born c. 1690). It is his grandson Craven's 34 great-grandchildren who form the 34 branches of the family as presented in this work. Descendants of Branches 1 to 14 are either still in England, or are in Canada, while Branches 15 to 34 are headed by the 22 children of John Duggleby Nicholson (1816-1879) and William Nicholson (1819-1902), who came to Natal in 1850, and settled at Richmond. Where possible full dates of birth, death and marriage have been provided. J.M. (Skonk) Nicholson is responsible for the introductory chapter 'History of the Nicholson family of Underberg'.

There are indexes of people mentioned in the text — one for Nicholson, and one for family members with surnames other than Nicholson.

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MORE LOCAL PUBLICATIONS

During the last year new items have appeared in three of the University of Natal Press's established series.

December 1986 saw the publication of the fourth volume of the *James Stuart Archive of recorded oral evidence relating to the history of the Zulus and neighbouring peoples*, edited by Colin Webb and John Wright. This is the largest volume so far published and contains the testimony of 19 informants including Ndukwana kaMbengwana, Stuart's most prolific informant. This title is Number Four in the Killie Campbell Africana Library Manuscript Series and is on sale at R49,95.

Shelagh Spencer's massive work, *British Settlers in Natal 1824-1857*, reached its fourth volume in July this year. Among the 170 colonists whose lives are written up here are families particularly well known in a variety of fields in Natal's history — most notably the Catos, the Churchills and the Colensos. The family of Professor Desmond Clarence, former Principal of the University of Natal and more recently a household name as Chairman of the *Indaba*, also appears. This volume, Cadle to Coventry, is priced at R36,00.

The Ukhahlamba series is a much younger venture but seems set fair to make a significant contribution to the literature of this province. Berg walkers, as well as farmers, game wardens and foresters, will always be grateful to Olive Hilliard and Linda Davis for *Grasses, sedges, restiads and rushes of the Natal Drakensberg*, which was published in April at R7,95.

The Killie Campbell Africana Library and the University Press have recently closed their Reprint and Translation Series and launched a new series called Killie Campbell Africana Library Publications. The first two items are fully reviewed in this issue.

