

Book Reviews and Notices

AN APPETITE FOR POWER: BUTHELEZI'S INKATHA AND THE POLITICS OF 'LOYAL RESISTANCE'

by GERHARD MARÉ & GEORGINA HAMILTON

Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1987. 261 pp. R24,95.

As the temperature has soared recently in the cauldron that is South African politics, so Chief Gatsha Buthelezi has swiftly been acclaimed as an honorary Natalian. For many Anglo-Natalians he is with them, if not quite one of them. And Gatsha is no more. Instead, Mangosuthu is preferred. Is this Natalian symbiosis taking effect? More significantly, though, Buthelezi certainly knows how to pander to Anglo-Natalian sensibilities. What a fragile regional species these Natalians are. Wedged between the Drakensberg mountain range and the Indian Ocean, their political connection to the South Africa beyond seems forever tenuous, giving rise to a fickle turn of mind. The South African Nationalist regime is supposedly an ogre, treated with scorn and derision; yet the Natalian of whom I speak is hardly reluctant to shelter under the selfsame regime's protective mantle. Secessionary talk, then, is not uncommon but sheer bombast nonetheless. Probing further one soon discovers that above all the average Anglo-Natalian places a premium on the species' identity. Ridding Natal of its pure white regional elective provincial government meant ceding autonomy to Pretoria. But it also meant alienating the institutional repository of one's being as a Natalian, or more especially, as an Anglo-Natalian.

Buthelezi understands the Anglo-Natalian's dilemma full well. Where to now? Scenarios emerge. The Buthelezi Commission, which reported in 1982, offered a way out to Natalians that entailed seeking common cause with the Chief's KwaZulu administration. Likewise, the KwaNatal Indaba translated these premises into tentative practice by creating a negotiating forum for all interested parties in the entire region. Moreover, the newly construed Natal regional government and the KwaZulu authorities have initiated common administrative procedures. Buthelezi has become a seemingly indelible feature on the Natalian political landscape. To Anglo-Natalians he is their political saviour. For such stalwarts *Qua* Natal? has become KwaNatal. Better to compromise, to opt for a future as QuasiNatalians than to suffer the Natal identity withering away altogether, consigned to the political scrapheap. This, I suggest, is one dimension of the Buthelezi phenomenon. His machinations on the podium have partly been directed towards a white, essentially Anglo-Natalian audience. In so doing he has struck a strongly receptive chord.

On the national stage, too, Buthelezi walks tall nowadays. We have here a second dimension. How strikingly the tide of opinion has shifted. In the early

1970s, Chief Buthelezi assumed control of the nascent 'self-governing homeland' designated as KwaZulu. Shortly thereafter he was castigated by the National Party government for not playing the Verwoerdian apartheid game according to the preordained rules. KwaZulu should have regarded self-government as a transitional phase, a preparatory period for 'independence' proper, a move Buthelezi has steadfastly resisted. And foes of apartheid rule applauded the Chief precisely for his intransigence. Latterly, however, President P.W. Botha, in seeking desperately to keep the apartheid ship afloat, and on a course to who knows where, has sent fleeting placatory signals to the Zulu leader. The very undertaking holds perils for them both. Mr Botha is keenly aware that *toenadering* with Buthelezi yields political capital for atavistic proponents of apartheid gathered under the banner of the Conservative Party. On the other hand, Buthelezi cannot maintain a credible image as an apostle for liberation should he join Botha at the helm of the apartheid ship. Nonetheless, Chief Buthelezi's credentials as a major actor on the South African political stage are indisputable. He and his constituency certainly make their presence felt.

The first and second dimensions of Buthelezi the politician are crucially linked to a third. In fact, precisely the reason why not a few Natalians and P.W. Botha alike feel impelled to court Buthelezi, albeit for differing motives, is because they felt seriously threatened by the turmoil that came to characterize the political scene as this current decade has unfolded. The proximate cause was, and continues to be, the apartheid system itself. The immediate cause was the *brouhaha* surrounding the Republic's second constitution, as it was debated, tested and then implemented in 1984, with elections for the re-enfranchised Indians and 'Coloureds' being held that same year. A strong, widely felt need to resist the National Party's constitutional shenanigans gave rise to the United Democratic Front, an amorphous body composed of myriad affiliated groups. Many such groups were rooted in residential areas. Their presence lent substance to the UDF; and the UDF's effervescent burst onto the country's political scene, in turn, encouraged ever more organizations to take root in local communities.

Moreover, during the same period, anti-apartheid trade unions, catering principally for black workers, flexed their muscle on the shopfloor. They became fully capable, for the first time, of embarking on collective action throughout virtually every sector of the economy once the network that is COSATU, the Congress of South African Trade Unions, was cobbled together in late 1985. Not only this. COSATU was launched in Durban; and UDF activists beavered away in Natal, gnawing their way into as many black ghettos as they could. Buthelezi's pitch was queered. He was being challenged vigorously where hitherto he had reigned supreme, among Zulus at work and at home. Warfare erupted in the townships. Probably thousands have died. Accusations were met by counter accusations. Successive nationwide states of emergency since July 1985 have shrouded the civil combat. Henceforth, without verifiable public information rumours have abounded. The UDF remains anathema to most white South Africans. If they distinguish the UDF at all from the African National Congress, the ANC, it is by only a matter of degree, between bricks and bombs. For Anglo-Natalians, Buthelezi is not the problem; he is the solution. For P.W. Botha, Buthelezi is required as a collaborator in order to show the acceptable face of political reform, particularly to audiences abroad. It has to be said though that Mr

Botha displays little stomach for such courtship. A lack of conviction and a penchant for political expediency have sapped his will, at least for the moment.

From the sketch that I have outlined a three-dimensional portrait of Buthelezi the politician is visible. Indeed, the phenomenon is kaleidoscopic. The trick for the analyst is to keep all three dimensions in focus simultaneously. In *Appetite for Power*, Gerry Maré and Georgina Hamilton, both based in Durban, the former an academic researcher, the latter a journalist, have wrestled to accomplish this, without quite succeeding. I hasten to add, however, that their assiduous labour has hardly been in vain. The book contains a treasure trove of information on which both I and others will feed voraciously for years to come. The metaphor is apt: *Appetite for Power* has a gastronomic, if not gluttonous, ring to it. And as one would guess with a title like that, Buthelezi and his ruling apparatus, namely, the KwaZulu government, the KwaZulu Finance Corporation, Inkatha and the attendant trade union, going by the acronym of UWUSA, are grilled to a cinder from cover to cover.

The author's approach will probably perturb readers with a tender disposition. The book hinges on a single key question: are Buthelezi and Inkatha a force for true liberation in South Africa? No, aver Maré and Hamilton. Their view, clearly discernible throughout, is that liberation entails a non-racial, socialist democratic order under the aegis of a unitary state. Not only does Buthelezi eschew such beliefs, but also in actively hindering their realization his conservative outlook and reactionary impulse blunt the rightful thrust for radical change in South African society. This judgement serves as both premise and conclusion in *Appetite for Power*. Still, the authors' candour is refreshing. It comes as no surprise to see their hunch confirmed in the chapters that follow. This is not in itself unusual in the enterprise of research, although many investigators try to kid their audience into believing otherwise. More importantly, the real issue is whether the authors have offered us a sound analysis. I must confess I have misgivings. A few pointers why.

Buthelezi himself is the key. His personality infuses politics in KwaZulu. And it is Buthelezi the leader to whom Anglo-Natalians and P.W. Botha look for comfort. This proud man is an enigma. A Janus-like figure hoves into view in the book. Reasonable, yet extraordinarily impassioned; critical, yet unable to countenance the same from others, in fact, to a bewildering extent. Hero and villain are roles that come to him with equal ease. Not a flattering impression, but the consummate politician bent on survival and power rarely comes out any differently. As Machiavelli shrewdly advised his Prince, appearance is everything. The real skill is in judging when to behave like a fox, and when like a lion. While we may deplore the politician's duplicity, it must be gauged realistically. I don't believe the authors do this, largely because they seem unable at any stage to suspend, even temporarily, their distaste for Buthelezi and his cause.

Similarly, Buthelezi's patent appeal to Anglo-Natalians, the first dimension I sketched, is beyond Maré and Hamilton's ken. Because they are determined to peer at their material through Marxian lenses, all we learn is that Buthelezi and Inkatha flourish as promoters of capitalists' interests. To sweeten the sugar-barons, in other words. 'Organic intellectuals' pop up too, most noticeably, Lawrence Schlemmer, the erstwhile idol now with feet of clay. The argument has possibilities, I grant you. But again, surely there is more

besides? Not all anxious Anglo-Natalians are just tin soldiers in the capitalist army. Politics is not merely the stepchild of economics; it has its own lineage and its own imperatives.

Weakness in political explanation shows up, too, in other ways in *Appetite for Power*. If Buthelezi advocates consociationalism and federalism, these political arrangements must be fatally flawed. I could only gauge as much in the absence of any alternative line of thought. For Maré and Hamilton are weak at interpreting concepts. Consociationalism, especially, is treated ineptly. The ramifications are profound. The force of the second and third dimensions of the Buthelezi phenomenon arises from his power-base in Ulundi and extending into Natal's townships where Africans are housed. The vast, complex apparatus is spelt out in commendable detail in the book. But how to make sense of it all? The authors are clearly unsure. Populism and patronage are the explanatory variables they deploy to give explanatory shape to the information they have unearthed. Splendid. However, once more, their deficient grasp of the concepts themselves proves an insuperable obstacle. Had they overcome this, they would have been prompted further to explore power relations within and between the organizations underpinning Buthelezi's political leadership. Rather than doing so, our intrepid researchers place unhealthy reliance on earlier studies that have tried to depict Inkatha's and KwaZulu's formal organizational structures. A good start. But we need to get behind the façade. Only then will how power is wielded come to the fore. Without that, we have to content ourselves with an outside gaze at Inkatha and kindred bodies.

Finally, from content to form. As far as I can gather, this book was never once a dissertation. Thank heavens, you say? But it looks like one and reads like one, which is unfortunate. Exacerbating the dense prose is the dense print, to make matters doubly unfortunate. So beware if you find the said artefact in your Christmas stocking. Should you encounter it, do read it. You will be enlightened, provoked and frustrated. Shortcomings there are, but credit where credit is due. *Appetite for Power* is a pioneering effort, a strikingly bold one at that. Gerry Maré and Georgina Hamilton have staked a valuable claim. Let us hope others will be emboldened to follow suit. All of us can only benefit from scholarly inquiry in a country where we still have so much to learn about ourselves and our predicament.

RALPH LAWRENCE

JOHN ROSS: THE TRUE STORY

by STEPHEN GRAY

Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1987. 189 pp. R12,95.

On the face of it, this book is written as a novel, as an adventure story with one of English-speaking Natal's well-known historical heroes as the central figure. Every reader of *Natalia* will know the settler legend of how in 1827 the boy John Ross walked all the way from Port Natal to Delagoa Bay and back to fetch medicines and other necessities for the band of intrepid British pioneers who had recently begun trading from their settlement at what later became Durban. He is regarded as important enough a figure in the version of history favoured by Natal's presently dominant classes to have had several roads, at least one bridge, a large building in Durban, and a tugboat named after him.

Last year a major serial about his life in Shaka's Zulu kingdom was shown on South African TV. What better time for an author and a publishing firm with an eye for a popular line to cash in on the John Ross story with a piece of paperback fiction?

And yet the book's sub-title claims that it is written as a 'true' story, and frequently the author breaks into the narrative to indicate to the reader that his account is based on 'fact' and 'evidence'. Should we read it as history? But if so, what has happened to the history that we all thought we knew? Can it be that Francis Farewell and James King, the founders of settler Natal, were in reality such opportunist hucksters? Was the real Nathaniel Isaacs such a disregardable figure? Why do we hear so little of Henry Fynn? Why do we hear so much of underlings such as the carpenter Hutton, his African wife Domanna, and the coloured woman Rachael? Why does John Ross feature as the main character anyway, when accounts of Natal's history actually tell us very little about him? And above all, how does the quite ordinary figure who is Shaka in this book square with the bloodthirsty monster that all the historical accounts tell us about? Where does the author get these new perspectives? Is the answer which he gives at the end of the book itself fact or fiction?

Fortunately for the reviewer, the author, who is professor of English at Rand Afrikaans University, poet, novelist, and one of South Africa's foremost literary critics, has elsewhere explained the making of his novel in some detail. (S. Gray, 'South African fiction and a case history revised: an account of research into retellings of the John Ross story of early Natal', unpublished seminar paper, African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, 1988.) It turns out that what he says in the book about his sources is true. He has taken the little-known memoirs published in the 1850s by Charles Rawden Maclean, the real-life 'John Ross', and used them as the basis for a historical novel which deliberately sets out to overturn a host of accumulated colonial myths about the first British traders in Natal and their relations with Shaka. His prime purpose has been to produce a text which will stand as a counter to the mythologizing text of the TV serial. By his own account he wrote the book as a step towards establishing 'a comparative debate which will indeed bring the categories of history, truth and fiction into a controversial area, forcing the consumers of the two works into learning how to assess data relatively, and to sort out new meanings from them'.

A good historical novel can tell us more about the everyday past than any number of historical analyses. Gray's book is an important and timely intervention in the process which has recently begun among historians of completely recasting our understanding of the history of precolonial Natal. And it is all the more effective for being an entertaining as well as an intriguing read.

JOHN WRIGHT

A HISTORY OF NATAL

by EDGAR H. BROOKES & COLIN de B. WEBB

Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, Second (Paperback) edition, 1987. 382 pp. illus. R25.

'Brookes and Webb' has long been a household word in Natal. Just after the last issue of *Natalia* went to print *A History of Natal* appeared for the first time

in paperback. In addition to its attractive new cover — James Lloyd's painting of Durban harbour and the Bluff in the 1850s — it has two other new features.

In a new Preface Colin Webb reflects on the transformation of South African historiography in the 1970s and 1980s — though with characteristic modesty he does not mention that much of this was wrought by his own former pupils. He rejects what he calls 'the pious hope' expressed in the original Preface in 1965 that one day a 'definitive' history of Natal would be written and ends with a welcome for the forthcoming new Natal history edited by Andrew Duminy and Bill Guest and due to be published in 1989.

The other new feature of this second edition is the updated and expanded source list. Some 300 items published between 1965 and 1986 are included; like the Preface these reflect the transformation of South African historiography.

PETTICOAT PIONEERS: WOMEN OF DISTINCTION

compiled by RUTH GORDON

Federation of Women's Institutes of Natal and Zululand in association with Shuter & Shooter, Pietermaritzburg, 1988. R29,95.

The history of Natal's pioneering men is well known, but comparatively little research has been done into the women of the province. While generations of schoolchildren have learned of Piet Retief, few have heard of his wife Lenie, whose home still stands in Church Street.

Any attempt to correct this imbalance is welcome. *Petticoat Pioneers*, published to mark the diamond jubilee of the Federation of Women's Institutes of Natal and Zululand, certainly fills part of the lacuna. Its compiler, indefatigable Pietermaritzburg historian Dr Ruth Gordon, presents thumbnail histories of nearly 200 women, from trekkers and early missionaries to present-day knitters and embroiderers. Dr Gordon has not only collated this material — produced by relatives and friends of the subjects and by women's institute members and historians — but has written nearly half the articles herself.

The book deals with many obscure but fascinating characters. There is an interesting piece on the founder of the Dominican congregation in Newcastle, Mother Rose Niland, as well as sketches on the wives of notables — such as Margaret Smythe, wife of the first Administrator of Natal, Charles Smythe. There are incredible tales of pioneer women. Such a woman was Sarah Jane Bryant, who, as an orphan teenager in 1849, struck a deal with 10 Zulus whereby she provided armed protection and provisions and they drove her wagon from Port St Johns to Greytown. The book also includes potted biographies on many modern women, such as Pamela Reid (in an article written by Pamela Reid!), historian Sheila Henderson, pianist Renée Reznick and floral artist Eulah Nissen.

Dr Gordon arranges her material in categories such as Pioneers; Educationalists and Academics; State Health, Nursing and Hospitals; The Arts; and Projects, Pioneers and Notables of the Federation of Women's Institutes of Natal and Zululand. While the first chapter on Pioneers is lively, the quality of the succeeding chapters degenerates markedly. Towards the end, dozens of women are given a few lines mention under headings such as: A Miscellany of Notables; and Women of Zululand — which deals with 18 women in less than three pages. At times the compiler's classification is

curious. Historian Sheila Henderson is found under Educationalists and Academics; her fellow-historian Shelagh Spencer is in the chapter, Literary Figures. Even odder is that Elizabeth Klarer, who claims to have mated with spaceman Akon and borne his son, Ayling, is mentioned at some length in the chapter Scientific Persons — with no apparent attempt at being facetious! The chronological sequence of the book is also often faulty, and the proofreading is at times inadequate.

Dr Gordon has obviously attempted to throw her net wide to include as many women and accept as many contributions as possible. The result is that list after list of obscure and often unremarkable women is mentioned. Very few of the articles question or probe, and are often confined to a list of events. Most items show little evidence of research and far too many of the contributors, including at times Dr Gordon herself, punctuate their pieces with statements such as: 'she was a true and gracious example of Christian womanhood' and 'the city mourned the loss of a true and noble woman'. At the same time, the book suffers from anglo-centricity: coverage of both black and Afrikaans women is scant. Educationalists and social workers fare relatively well, but Natal's sportswomen are afforded a mere one and a half pages of print, while even less attention is given to business women. There are glaring omissions in most chapters. Most noticeable of all is the lack of an article on Dr Gordon herself.

Petticoat Pioneers needed severe editing and more careful planning. Perhaps the book would have been more successful had it been confined to the early pioneers and not tackled the vast field of the remarkable women of today. However, despite its faults, the book leaves the reader more aware of the fine contribution of women to the history of Natal. It opens endless possibilities for research into the province's previously ignored 'women of distinction' of both past and present.

CLAIRE FROST

