

Book Reviews and Notices

DR HENRIK GREVE BLESSING: SOUTH AFRICAN MEDICINAL PLANTS FROM KWAZULU-NATAL: DESCRIBED 1903-1904

by PAULSEN, B.S., EKELI, H., JOHNSON, Q., AND NORUM, K.R., EDS.
2 Vols. Vol. I 239 pp, Vol. II Facsimile of two field notebooks. Illus.
Norway: Unipub, 2012. ISBN 978-8-274775-54-1.

HENRIK Greve Blessing was born in 1866 in a small town in Norway. After qualifying as a doctor in 1893, he spent a few years on the polar exploration vessel *Fram*. In 1901 he travelled to what is now KwaZulu-Natal, hoping to work as a doctor. However, the English colonial authorities did not recognise his Norwegian medical qualifications, and he spent the next four years staying with various relatives in eShowe, eKhombe and eQhudeni. He had always had an interest in botany and during his time in Zululand learnt some Zulu and spent much time with local traditional healers. They showed him how they used plants for medicinal use, and what the Zulu names of these plants were. Blessing recorded this information in two handwritten notebooks and took these back to Norway, where they remained in the

hands of his family, unpublished until 2012. Blessing died of kidney failure in 1915, aged only 50.

It is not clear how Blessing's notebooks found their way into the public domain. Two of the four co-editors of the 2012 publication – Hege Ekeli and Berit Semstad Paulsen – merely say in their introduction

When we first learned about Blessing's notebooks on medicinal plants from South Africa, we thought these were merely fascinating documents from 100 years ago. However, from discussions with Professor Quinton Johnson at the University of Western Cape (UWC), it turned out that, from the South African point of view, these notebooks were of the utmost importance. Thus far, they seemed to be the only written information on traditional uses of plants in KwaZulu-Natal from that period and so it would be of vital interest to make

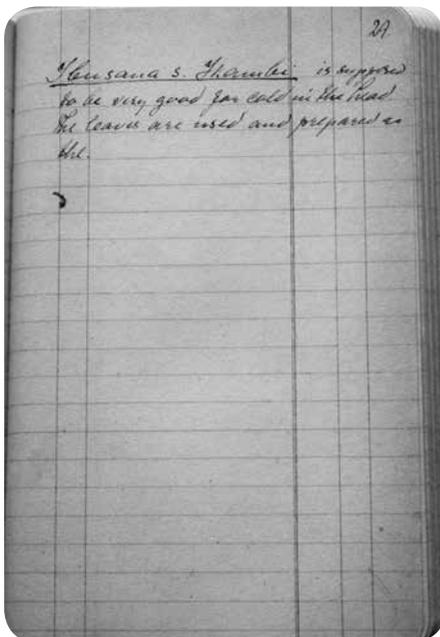
the Blessing documents available in South Africa. (Vol. I:16)

What Kaare Nostrum, Hege Ekeli, Berit Paulsen (from Norway) and Quinton Johnson (UWC) have done with Blessing's notebooks is rather unusual: they have produced a double publication – two boxed volumes of which one is a facsimile reproduction of the two handwritten notebooks themselves, with Blessing's fine botanical illustrations, and the other a transcription of his original notes (mostly written in Norwegian), with a translation into English, and then for each species that Blessing recorded extra notes on traditional uses and "Scientific Documentation" on the chemico-medical properties of that plant. These additions expand greatly on Blessing's original notes. For example, Blessing's original entry (Vol. II Notebook 1 p 29) reads simply "Ibusana s. Ikambi is supposed to be very good for cold in the head. The

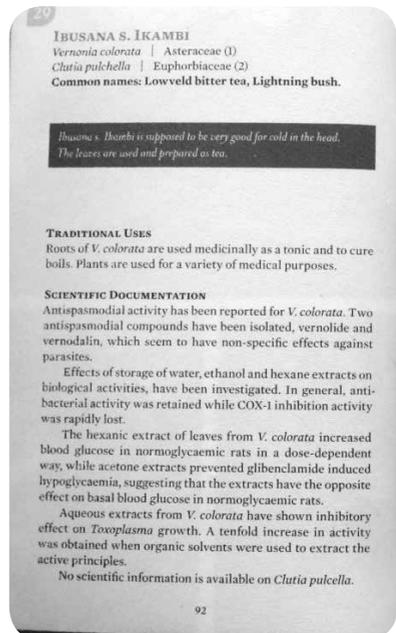
leaves are used and prepared as tea."¹ In the companion volume, the section Scientific Documentation occupies more than half the page. The following extract may be taken as typical of the scientific documentation additions throughout the book (Vol. I:92):

The hexanic extract of leaves from *V. colorata* increased blood glucose in normoglycaemic rats in a dose-dependent way, while acetone extracts prevented glibenclamide induced hypoglycaemia, suggesting that the extracts have the opposite effect on basal blood glucose in normoglycaemic rats.

In addition to these highly specialised notes on the chemical and medical effects of each plant listed by Blessing, the editors have provided lavish full-page colour photographs of the foliage, flowers, fruits, etc. of each species. The result is a startling contrast between the "equivalent" pages for each species listed by Blessing, as seen in the illustrations below:



Entry 29 in Blessing's original notebook



The same plant in Vol. I page 92

The value of this publication, in my opinion, lies not in all the extra material added by the four editors. The photographs are excellent, but similarly excellent illustrations can be found in other botanical reference works, such as Coates-Palgrave (1977, 2002), Pooley (1993, 1998) and Boon (2010). The chemical and medical information is impressive, but no more than can be found for example in Hutchings et al (1996) and Van Wyk et al (2009). For me, the value of the publication lies in the reproduction of Blessing's original notebooks, and the processes involved in the updating and extending of the original notes. The editors have revealed a hitherto unseen stage in the interface between indigenous oral knowledge and modern, scientific published knowledge.

At the time Blessing was collecting plant names from traditional healers in Zululand, all botanical knowledge was held in the "group mind" of *izinyanga* (traditional healers), and to a lesser extent *izangoma* (diviners). This was oral knowledge, passed on from generation to generation, and only stored in memories. Blessing was one of the earliest (if not the earliest) "outsiders" in Zululand to attempt to collect this knowledge, and to transfer it to paper. The process whereby traditional oral knowledge becomes published "scientific" knowledge is a complex one. Firstly, in the earlier days (and until comparatively recently), plant collectors (and plant-name collectors) were white, non-Zulu-speaking individuals. The holders of the indigenous knowledge spoke African languages. The brief biography of Blessing in Volume I says "after about two years in KwaZulu-Natal, he learnt some native language", but there is no denying the fact that a native speaker of Norwegian (who clearly spoke English

as well), was collecting information from monolingual Zulu speakers.

The next step in the process is the writing down of oral information in the field: a major transition from language-as-sound to language-as-letters, with all the potential pitfalls this implies. Blessing wrote in notebooks, using pencil and a pen dipped into ink. Often such notebooks would have been exposed to rain, to sweat, to mud, although it must be said that Blessing's notebooks remain in remarkably clean condition. Handwriting is notoriously individual, and often not clear to later readers, especially when written under difficult field conditions.

Before publication, the handwriting must be interpreted and turned into typeface, often at a much later stage, and often not by the original author. In Blessing's case, this was done more than a hundred years after Blessing had recorded the information, in fact close on a hundred years after his death. In addition, as the editors point out (Vol. I:16), Blessing wrote in "Norwegian with the old-fashioned Danish-based grammar and spelling from that time, quite different to the language used today in Norway".

When there are so many different stages in the transferring of information, there are bound to be some errors, and this publication is no exception.

One very curious entry is on page 26 of Blessing's Notebook 1, where Blessing has simply written "Ubanda used as parfume [sic]." On what was clearly a separate piece of paper inserted between pages 25 and 26 Blessing has written: "Umnama – til pill", below that the word "Umnongwana" with a drawing of a leaf beside it, and below that the word "Hlwahlwe", with a drawing of quite a different leaf below that. There is no indication that this inserted piece

of paper has anything to do with the entry “Ubanda used as parfume”, but the editors of the edited version have recorded all four names, as “UBANDA, UMNAMA, UMNAONGUANA, HLWEHLWE”, changing Blessing’s clearly written “umnongwana” into “UMNAONGUANA”, and then assigning all four names to the Tamboti tree (*Spirostachys africana*). How the editors got to *Spirostachys africana* is not at all clear: Doke and Vilakazi’s 1958 Dictionary recognises *umbanda* as the tree *Lonchocarpus capassa*, *isinongwane* as an [unidentified] shrub, *umnama* as the Silk-bark tree *Celastrus cordatus*, and *umhlwehlwe* as the Lemonwood Tree *Lonchocarpus monospora*. “Identification” of Blessing’s name “umbanda” as the Tamboti *Spirostachys africana* could surely not have come from the drawing of leaves on the inserted piece of paper, as there are two drawings, of quite distinctly different leaves. What makes this entry even more curious, is that on page 36 of the notebook Blessing has entered the Zulu name “Umtomboti” and has himself quite correctly identified this as *Spirostachys africana*. Didn’t the editors notice the connection (or non-connection, as the case might be)?

Again, one wonders how the editors of the edited volume got to *Vernonia colorata* from Blessing’s brief entry for “Ibusana s. Ikhambi” on page 29 of Notebook 1 (Illustration One). The closest existing Zulu word to “ibusana” is *isibusane*, a word which refers to *Andropogon* grass. *Ikhambi* simply means “medicinal herb” in Zulu. Backtracking *Vernonia colorata* in Hutchings et al gives the Zulu word *ibozana* for this species, and one can forgive Blessing, with his limited Zulu, for writing this down as “ibusana”. But

it does not explain how the editors got to *Vernonia colorata*.

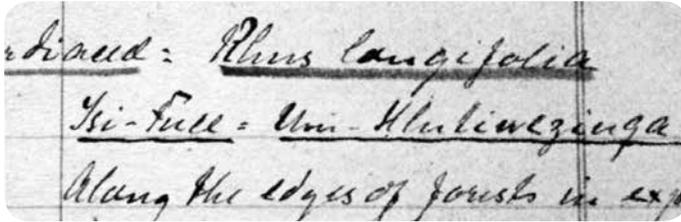
A different kind of problem can be seen in Blessing’s entries on page 16 of Notebook 1. In describing a type of Euphorbia, he has given the names “Umhlonhlo”, “Umhlonhlwana”, “Umsolasola”, and “Umsolulu”. The problem is that on this page Blessing has written his “a”s and his “o”s in exactly the same way, with the tail neither coming off the top of the letter, as in an “o”, or from the bottom of the letter, as in an “a”, but halfway down the letter. Thus “Umhlonhlo” could easily be interpreted as “Umhlanhla”, and “Umhlonhlwana” as “Umhlanhlwana”. The editors of the edited version have “solved” this by writing the first name as “Umhlonhlo” and the second one as “Umhlanhlwana”, a decision that makes no sense given that the second name, with the suffix *-ana*, is a diminutive of the first.

I could give several more examples of such problems, but space allows me only one more. Page 168 of the edited volume gives “ISIFULL” as one of two names for the Red Beech (*Protorhus longifolia*). Anyone with even a rudimentary knowledge of Zulu will recognise this as incorrect – Zulu does not use a double “l” (as does for example Sotho), and all Zulu words end in a vowel. Certainly, at first glance Blessing’s handwriting could easily be read as “isi-full”. But checking with any Zulu speaker would immediately have shown that this interpretation is wrong, and Blessing’s own identification of this tree as “*Rhus longifolia*” would have led to the word *isifuze*, one of several dialectal variations (others are *isifuca*, *isifuco* and *isifico*) of the name of this tree. With this knowledge, one can go back to Blessing’s handwriting and easily re-read this word as “isi-

face”. (See illustration below). The editors simply did not take the trouble to cross-check.

in how oral indigenous knowledge is transferred to the world of scientific publication.

ADRIAN KOOPMAN



: “isi-full” or “isi-fuce”?

This, then, remains my major quibble with this publication – the lack of checking the re-rendering of Blessing’s Zulu names as recorded in his notebooks. It is not as if the editors did not have access to a competent Zulu-speaking botanist. In noting that they managed to identify 95 of Blessing’s 98 plants in his notebooks (Vol. I:17), they say that they enlisted the help of Zulu-speaking botanist Mkipheni Ngwenya, who is attached to the KwaZulu-Natal Herbarium based at the Botanical Gardens in Durban.² It is not as if they did not have a budget – both the quality and the quantity of the photographic illustrations suggest that their budget was extensive. And surely they could not have had time restraints? Blessing’s notebooks have, after all, been published approximately one hundred and eight years after he had written them. Surely a few more months to check the Zulu would have been possible?

Having said this, I must reiterate that the publication of *Dr Henrik Greve Blessing: South African Medicinal Plants from KwaZulu-Natal: Described 1903-1904* is of considerable importance, particularly for those interested

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1 This is one of a few entries written in English. The editors have transcribed the last word of the entry as “tea”, which makes sense, although in the original handwriting the word looks far more like “Bhl”.
2 Although the editors wrongly identify him as “Professor Mkipheni Ngwenya at the University of Zululand”

A WORLD OF THEIR OWN: A HISTORY OF SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN'S EDUCATION

by MEGHAN HEALY-CLANCY

Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013

312 pages, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index

ISBN: 978-1-86914-242-1

IN THIS book Harvard graduate Meghan Healy-Clancy has undertaken the ambitious task of weaving the history of the Inanda Seminary for African girls into the wider context of South African education, and the complexity of factors which affected it, in the colonial, apartheid and post-apartheid eras. This simultaneous crafting of the local and the national requires skill in writing and skill in reading in order to maintain continuity, especially in relation to the narrative of the school.

The Inanda Seminary has long been recognised as a flagship of African girls' secondary education in South Africa. Situated some fifteen miles (33 kilometres) north of Durban, it was opened by Congregational missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in March 1869. It was the first boarding school of its kind and provided a model which was followed by other missions in rural Natal. In fact, it was also influential in the founding of the Durban Young Ladies' Collegiate Institution for white girls in 1877. Several of the missionaries' wives had been educated at the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary in Massachusetts, which the missionaries hoped could be replicated at the Inanda Seminary. They set out to produce Christian women, *amakholwa* (believers), who would be supportive wives at the heart of Christian families. To this end the seminary worked closely with its brother school, Adams College at Amanzimtoti. Thus the transmission of western Christian religion and culture to the Zulus would be ensured, consti-

tuting what the missionaries understood as 'native agency'.

Healy-Clancy's research is essentially a sociological study conducted within the perspective of a gendered and neo-Marxist paradigm. The terminology which accompanies this method makes for difficult reading. Consider, for example, the following extract from her substantial Introduction:

This book explains the development of African women's schooling as an outcome of the politics of social reproduction in South Africa. Building on neo-Marxist feminist analyses, I define "social reproduction" expansively – as "the gendered processes by which workers and children survive and are reproduced". The "politics of social reproduction in South Africa" thus refers to the contested social relations surrounding the sustenance of racialised, gendered people in a capitalist society.... (p. 2)

It is more than likely that some Inanda Seminary alumnae, expecting a history of their much-loved school, might turn aside from this heavily theoretical and academic treatise, as might the general reader.

The author has produced a mass of information based on extensive research. She has participated widely with academics in the field and has scoured the archival sources. In addition she has conducted interviews with numerous Inanda staff and alumnae, singly and in groups, and she has drawn on earlier interviews associated with the Killie Campbell Oral History Programme. Her endnotes and bibliography alone constitute one third of the book.

What, then, does the book tell us? It traces the fortunes of the Inanda Seminary through its long history and shows how it has responded to the challenges posed by South African society. Complications of language and culture inherent in the missionary interface with indigenous peoples were gradually addressed. It is an inspiring record of courage, adaptation and survival. Teachers, principals, missionaries, pupils and Old Girls from this comparatively small and protected environment have produced women who have gone on to enjoy distinguished careers in a variety of professional spheres. However, the story presented here falls short of an institutional history as it ends rather unexpectedly and sadly in a few paragraphs when the school went into decline after the departure of Constance Koza as principal in 1986. Political disruption in KwaZulu, loss of funding from overseas, student unrest, an accidental fire in 1993 which destroyed Edwards Hall (named after the founding principal) all contributed to the near closure of the school in 1997. A brief account of its revival through the efforts of influential Old Girls of the seminary, involving, for example, Baleka Mbete, the present Speaker of the House of Assembly of the South African Parliament, and others, appears in the Epilogue. The author suggests that the renewed Inanda Seminary could provide a revised model for reviving affordable mission schools, especially in rural areas, and especially for African girls who, she concludes, feel more secure in single sex schools.

On the theoretical side, amidst a welter of analysis and opinion on the South African condition – as seen through a youthful American lens – one observation stands out. Why did the Inanda Seminary survive the closure of mission schools by the Apartheid Government in

the late 1950s? Healy-Clancy contends that women's opportunities in education expanded during this period of racial oppression because the Government followed a policy of 'feminising' African education. In short, African women could be educated without the threat of political activism posed by educating African men. But women were more subtle than this. In the author's words:

I argue that African women's historical association with core processes of sustaining society opened up space for them to challenge the social order during apartheid. Women were able to advance educationally, not despite racialised patriarchy, but by manipulating the contradictions within it – producing new gendered contradictions that have shaped post-apartheid society. (p. 2)

Put simply, Inanda Seminary was as well represented in the struggle for liberation as it has been by women who have achieved prominence in the new South Africa.

Meghan Healy-Clancy has written a challenging book which one hopes will generate further constructive scholarship. One final comment needs to be made. The title of the book is misleading. By calling it *A world of their own*, it is not obvious that it is about the Inanda Seminary, unless one can decipher the pale orange lettering on the flag in the cover picture. More serious is the subtitle. This book is not *A history of South African women's education*. It is about a section of African women's education and excludes the other population groups of the nation. Furthermore, it stops at 1994 and misses the opportunity to engage in a substantial discussion of the significant developments in girls' schools and women's education as a whole in the open era of democratic South Africa.

SYLVIA VIETZEN

A SCHOOL OF STRUGGLE: DURBAN'S MEDICAL SCHOOL AND THE EDUCATION OF BLACK DOCTORS IN SOUTH AFRICA

by VANESSA NOBLE

Scottsville, Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press 2013.

ISBN 978-1-86914-252-0.

PERHAPS South Africa's most remarkable educational institution in the second half of the twentieth century was the University of Natal Medical School in Durban. Although it was established by the apartheid National Party government as a showpiece for its policy of separate development, it nurtured some of South Africa's most important resistance leaders. The medical education that was offered was fraught with contradictions but, despite considerable difficulties, it turned out doctors of high quality. In reality it made nonsense of the notions of black inferiority that underlay white South African racism.

The University of Natal Medical School was founded in 1951, shortly after the National Party came to power, but the pressures for its creation came from very different sources. One significant group were the missionary doctors associated with McCord Hospital, notably Alan B. Taylor. This Christian impetus remained an important influence, especially for students, for many years. A second influence was that of the movement for social medicine originating from the University of the Witwatersrand in the 1940s and 1950s. The practice of social and community medicine, associated particularly with Sidney Kark, was incorporated into the syllabus, making the new Medical School the most advanced in the country but also putting greater pressure on students who were already suffering from an inferior educational system, poverty, appalling living conditions

in the Wentworth (Alan B. Taylor) Residence, transport problems and the like. That so many students were able to graduate under these circumstances is a comment on their quality.

In the twentieth century doctors in South Africa enjoyed considerable status as the purveyors of modern scientific medicine. But for many years debates raged around the kind of black doctors that should be trained, since it was clear that whites could not produce enough doctors to care for the majority of the population. Early black doctors like Alfred B. Xuma were fiercely opposed to a cheap training of black assistants and, in the end, the school that was established was on a par, at the least, with other medical schools in the country. It is hardly surprising that such able people, studying under offensive conditions, became a spearhead of resistance against apartheid. Vanessa Noble explores their motivation and activities in some detail. While some of these more committed students were able to maintain their studies others, like Steve Biko, were forced out because of their lack of commitment. For all the students, the years from the 1960s to 1990 were punctuated with protests and shutdowns. Studying under these conditions must have been extraordinarily difficult.

Vanessa Noble examines the context within which students arrived at the Medical School. It is clear that those who came from more educated homes, where parents were teachers, for instance, were more likely to achieve the results that would gain them entrance

into the school. Once there, they were confronted by a variety of challenges. Residence conditions were awful and it is in the descriptions of cramped, overcrowded rooms and poor food that one is reminded most sharply of the degradation of apartheid. Students from very different backgrounds were thrown together and it was natural that there should be some conflict as they struggled to adjust to unfamiliar cultural practices. More daunting was the culture of medical teaching of the day, in which students were sometimes humiliated by their teachers. While the same treatment was meted out to white students in other institutions, the Natal medical students could not know this, and it must have contributed to their rising anger. MEDUNSA [Medical University of South Africa], when it was established, despite being even more tarred with the brush of separate development, offered a more caring learning environment. Clinical training was also problematic, especially at the King Edward VIII Hospital. Students felt that they suffered because, since they were not allowed to see white patients, they were not exposed to the full range of diseases, unlike their white counterparts. Moreover, white staff, especially nurses, sometimes did not accord them the same respect that they gave to white medical students.

While Noble does examine those students who were less politically active, most of her attention is given to the anti-apartheid struggles. The University of Natal Medical School produced some of South Africa's most notable political leaders. Steve Biko is a striking example, but others, such as Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma and Mamphela Ramphele are equally significant.

The students of the Durban Medical School formed a unique group in the history of resistance – highly intelligent, better educated than most of their counterparts, and vividly aware of the way in which apartheid policies affected the health of the nation.

The study continues into the post-apartheid era when students were confronted by new challenges. One was the emergence of HIV/AIDS, which strained the already inadequate resources of the local hospitals where the students received their clinical training. Jerry Coovadia – in 2003 – described it as a “brutalising” experience in which conditions were so bad that there was no space for the humane treatment of patients (pp. 310-311). At the same time, along with other medical institutions in South Africa, the curriculum was modernised to provide for a better understanding of the social context of the patients. Noble does not ignore some of the more recent tensions at the University of KwaZulu-Natal which have meant that, here as elsewhere, post-apartheid South Africa has not been a smooth ride.

If I have any criticisms of this fine book, they are minor. I should have liked to have known a little more about the later careers of some of the students who were less politically active. Did they contribute in other ways to their communities? Did they emigrate? There are a few graphs in the Appendices, providing gender and race profiles of the students, but it would have been interesting to have had more, perhaps on the origins of students, for instance. Nevertheless, this is carping. This book is a fascinating study of an outstanding institution.

ELIZABETH VAN HEYNINGEN

NATAL'S LITTLE DOCTOR: COLONIAL OFFICER PAR EXCELLENCE, P.C. SUTHERLAND

by JOHN CORMAC SEEKINGS

Bradford-on-Avon, Wiltshire: Klipdrift Books 2013.

ISBN 978-0-9561148-1-5.

“AMATEUR” is often used as a term of disparagement, yet amateurs have a distinguished record in adding to the sum of human knowledge. For instance, it is thanks to the efforts of a host of so-called “citizen scientists”, none of whom is a trained ornithologist, that information about the range and distribution of South African birds has been added to immeasurably. Similarly, amateur historians have brought to light aspects of the past, ignored by the professionals.

Such an individual is the author of this slim volume. John Seekings, educated at Hilton College and the University of Cape Town, has spent his working life in Britain in the aviation and tourism industries as a business economist. But while still working, he completed the history of his family business, *Thomas Hardy's Brewer* in 1988. Since retiring, he has completed the first detailed work on the life of Cecil Rhodes' business partner, Charles Rudd in *Rudd: the search for a Cape merchant* (2009) and now, in this volume, the life of his great-grandfather, Peter Sutherland.

The name of Peter Sutherland does not resonate today. He is a forgotten man. The first major modern history of Natal by Brookes and Webb (1965) makes only a single, half-line reference to him; the next major history of the province, that by Duminy and Guest (1989), does not mention him at all. But in 19th-century Natal he was a significant figure in the colonial administration. In 1855 he was appointed head of the public works department and

the following year became Surveyor-General, usually combining this with responsibility for public works, a post he held until his retirement 31 years later in 1887. After he retired he was elected a member of the Legislative Assembly for Pietermaritzburg, retaining his seat until Responsible Government (of which he disapproved) was introduced in 1893.

From these undertakings one might conclude that he had trained as an engineer or a surveyor. Not so. He had qualified in 1847 as a doctor from Edinburgh's Royal College of Surgeons and it was as a doctor that he had first sought employment in Natal. But he was a Renaissance man in the extent and breadth of his interests. There are three blank years between Sutherland's leaving school and the commencement of his medical studies and Seekings speculates that during this time he studied natural history at university in Aberdeen, although without acquiring a formal qualification. As a student he had gone on three lengthy voyages, one to Africa (in search of guano) and two to the Canadian Arctic (in search of whales). As a newly-qualified doctor he had gone on a further two Arctic voyages. By the time he returned (to write a 1 000-page, two-volume tome on the Arctic!) it was clear that he had acquired deep knowledge, both practical and academic, in a wide spectrum of the natural sciences, including zoology, botany, geology and geography. Hattersley described him as “the Sir Vivian Fuchs of early Victorian times”. He had also built up personal relationships with

leading figures in the scientific world, men such as the famous Scottish geologist Sir Robert Murchison, President of the Royal Geographical Society and the equally famous botanists, Sir William Hooker and his son Sir Joseph Hooker, each in turn director of the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew.

Thus, while he was gazetted as “regimental surgeon” when the Natal Carbineers was formed in 1855 (a post he retained for the following 22 years), Sutherland’s first government job the previous year was a commission to report on Natal’s mineral resources. The Admiralty was desirous of identifying a suitable coaling station on the route to the East and it seems highly likely that Sutherland’s appointment was prompted by the recommendation of Murchison. Sutherland duly found the coal deposits of northern Natal, but it was not until 30 years later that the railway made possible their exploitation – by which time they were strategically far less valuable thanks to the opening of the Suez Canal.

As Surveyor-General, Sutherland travelled the length and breadth of Natal, either on foot or on horseback, often alone. He built, or rebuilt, many of the colony’s main roads and laid out the townships of Newcastle, Colenso and Port Shepstone. He collected and sent to Kew a regular supply of previously unknown plants, several species being named after him, just as in his days in the Arctic he had brought back to Britain numerous marine invertebrates for classification and had had one of them, an ascidian or sea squirt, named *Phalusia sutherlandii* by the Victorian biologist Thomas Huxley. He also left his name on the map in the shape of Mount Sutherland (c. 2 300 metres), a major outlier of the Drakensberg. It originally

marked the boundary between Natal and Adam Kok’s country. Today its long ridge separates the districts of Underberg and Swartberg.

Sutherland also left his mark on institutions which endure to this day. He was an active member of the Royal Agricultural Society and served a term as its president. He was a very senior member of the Education Board, often its chairman. Unsurprisingly, he was a foundation member of the Botanical Society and a motivator for the establishment of Pietermaritzburg’s Botanical Garden. During his last years he became heavily involved in religious affairs. He was a founder member of St George’s Garrison Church. His contribution of £200 to the appeal fund for its construction (four times that of the governor!) was the largest of any individual. And hardly had the church been opened when the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War and the military set-backs suffered by British arms led to its conversion into a military hospital – a process in which Sutherland played a key role, organising the supply of all the beds, mattresses, bed-linen and crockery. This was to be his last public service as he died in November 1900 while war still raged. Among the many military memorials in the church are two stained-glass windows given in his memory.

It is curious that so significant a figure in colonial Natal has more or less disappeared from the pages of history. Seekings speculates that his lowly birth, the son of a Scottish cooper, meant that he did not quite fit into a social “class” of administrators largely drawn from the major English public schools and Oxford and Cambridge universities. Moreover, as Surveyor-General, Sutherland would have found himself in the centre of the struggle between the

need to protect the interest of Africans, especially in regard to land, and the demands of the colonists for both land and cheap labour. The records of the Executive Committee and of the several commissions which were set up to deal with land ownership matters show that he often found himself in the lonely

position among senior officials of being “pro Native”.

Peter Sutherland was clearly a most remarkable man and John Seekings has performed a valuable service in lifting the veil of silence which has shrouded him in the century which has passed since his death.

JACK FROST

THEOPHILUS SHEPSTONE AND THE FORGING OF NATAL – AFRICAN AUTONOMY AND SETTLER COLONIALISM IN THE MAKING OF TRADITIONAL AUTHORITY

By JEFF GUY

Pietermaritzburg, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013.

ISBN 978 1 86914 249 0

ACCORDING to Anglo-Zulu War historian Ian Knight, “Professor Jeff Guy is a towering figure in the field of Zulu historical studies, and his previous works – including *The Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom* – largely redefined the historiography of the period.”

There are few who would disagree with this statement which is to be found on the back dust jacket of Guy’s latest book, *Theophilus Shepstone and the Forging of Natal*.

Since that earlier work mentioned by Knight, which dealt with the aftermath of the Anglo-Zulu War, all Guy’s succeeding books have broken new ground – a biography of Bishop John Colenso, *The Heretic*; another featuring the indomitable daughter, Harriette Colenso, *The View Across the River*; and two books dealing with the 1906 Bhambatha uprising: *The Maphumulo Uprising* and *Remembering the Rebellion*.

Shepstone has long remained without a biographer – admittedly Theophilus stood centre stage in

Ruth Gordon’s *Shepstone* (1968) but her book was a study of the whole family and, in addition, though well-researched, tends to near-hagiography. While Guy was an obvious choice for biographer of this key figure in colonial Natal he had previously indicated a disinclination to address him as he felt no affection for Shepstone as a subject.

While we can be grateful Guy has overcome his feelings about the man, it would be a mistake to see this landmark study of Shepstone as a full biography. It isn’t. As the subtitle indicates Guy’s quarry is Shepstone and the role he played in shaping the nineteenth-century colony of Natal while Secretary for Native Affairs. There is nothing here about Shepstone’s tentacles (and those of his brothers) reaching out and manipulating the chieftaincies and royal lines of the Zulus, the Swazis and the Ndebele, while his spell as Commissioner in the Transvaal is lightly sketched.

In an interview in *The Witness*, Guy indicated that his lack of affection had been triumphed over by “tremendous

interest” in Shepstone. Shepstone’s centrality to nineteenth-century Natal and his seemingly deliberate inscrutability are ultimately challenges that could not be refused. “Aloof, secretive, intelligent and devious,” is how Guy describes this fascinating, frustrating figure who effectively compartmentalised his private and public lives.

During his research, as Guy points out in his introduction, “the man himself remained beyond my grasp”. Shepstone’s extant letters and diaries are few compared to other nineteenth-century figures of similar stature. And those available are reticent, enigmatic, and frequently opaque. Consequently, says Guy, Shepstone’s life “has to be reconstructed largely out of the contradictions and inconsistencies of the wordy reports and long memoranda that he chose to leave as a record of his activities – and their silences”.

Guy portrays Shepstone as a misunderstood figure, partly due to his own silence but also because his legacy has been reinterpreted and rewritten over time. Frequently vilified by settlers during his lifetime, Shepstone was later rehabilitated by his earlier critics. Historians’ views on Shepstone have also morphed over time. In the first half of the twentieth century he was promoted by segregationists, seen as significant but problematic in the second, and finally dismissed as being part of an irrevocably irredeemable colonial system.

Shepstone was credited with creating some of the key features of colonial administration, including indirect rule, customary law and segregation into locations. What was later dubbed “the Shepstone system” has also been credited with providing the prototype

for apartheid. According to Guy, this is a later construction created by Natal settlers after Shepstone’s death to coincide with and provide an imprimatur for their own agendas.

In many respects *Theophilus Shepstone and the Forging of Natal* constitutes a new history of nineteenth-century Natal as it closely investigates the interactions between colonials and settlers and natives – terms Guy chooses deliberately, as being historically accurate, and as a way of avoiding the broad brushstroke adjectives of “black” and “white”, while also conveying the social complexities of the period.

Guy also makes clear the novelty that Natal provided: here was a colony where the indigenous peoples had never been conquered; white settlers, Boer and Briton, gradually infiltrated. Shepstone was aware of this and it provided him with a clean slate on which to order the relationship between colonials and settlers on the one hand, and the indigenous peoples – the natives – on the other.

The settlers insisted Africans were interlopers, refugees from Zululand, as well as a much-desired source of labour which Shepstone prevented them from accessing. With an intimate understanding of the position of Africans in a colonial situation Shepstone took neither the settler nor missionary line. His stance was one of conservation, buying time for Africans to grow into the future.

Guy makes much of Shepstone’s power over Africans coming from his understanding of the importance attached to land ownership and that for their traditional way of life to continue they had to have land. This understanding came from Shepstone’s

experience of growing up on the eastern Cape frontier, where he interacted with both the African world and the settler world. According to Guy, it is this period that provides the key to Shepstone's character, growing up on a bloody, contested frontier masking his feelings as he moved between settler and native communities. Out of this came his silence and what Guy describes as "his notorious, formidable reserve". Or as Shepstone's contemporary, Sir Bartle Frere, would have him: "shrewd, observant, silent, self-contained, immobile".

While Shepstone is the central figure of Guy's book other figures who went against the grain of their times emerge as eminently in need of more extended studies. David Dale Buchanan, for one, founding editor of *The Natal Witness*, a consistent, critical voice. Another was magistrate George Ryder Peppercorne; competent and upright amidst a slew of corrupt officials, he fell foul of both the settler authorities and Shepstone, who would not brook others being as perceptive as he of African interests.

And, of course, there was Colenso. Shepstone and Colenso famously became great friends drawn to each other in part by a shared vision that saw them look to the values and actions of the past to help indigenous people cope with the future.

Their friendship shattered over the Langalibalele affair of 1873. When Langalibalele kaMthimkhulu, the Hlubi inkosi, was summoned by Shepstone to Pietermaritzburg to account for the lack of registration of guns among his followers, he feared treachery – a not unreasonable fear given an earlier incident involving Shepstone's brother, John, and Matshana kaMondise which led to a brutal massacre. When Lan-

galibalele fled across the border into Lesotho, a skirmish at Bushman's Nek with a force sent to apprehend him saw five men killed, three of them whites. The retributive settler machine kicked into gear: the Hlubi were punished and Langalibalele arrested.

Shepstone stage-managed Langalibalele's trial, conducted according to native law, largely made up on the spot, to secure the desired guilty verdict, the accused not even being allowed counsel.

Thanks to Colenso the injustices of the trial were brought to light. Colenso also found out about the earlier Matshana incident, which had been airbrushed out of the record by Shepstone and here one can see why Guy is unable to summon affection for his subject. The Matshana affair showed the worst side of Shepstone, his deviousness. When Colenso confronted Shepstone about the matter the latter said he couldn't remember it.

But Colenso rendered Shepstone defenceless by connecting the two worlds he moved between – settler and native. Shepstone did this by capitalising on the fact that Africans relied on a spoken, oral culture, whereas whites looked to print. Shepstone manipulated these oral and written cultures, keeping them separate and appointing himself sole mediator. But when Colenso collected written evidence, Shepstone's activities in one world were exposed in the other. Thus revealed, Shepstone simply lied and then took refuge in icy silence.

Another blot on Shepstone's reputation was his ruthless betrayal of the Zulus – his Judas-like behaviour prior to the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 and his role in the subsequent civil war motivated in part, according to Guy, by

his need to reward and acknowledge the African chiefs who had supported him.

While Shepstone remains an enigmatic personality there is no doubting the huge role he played in shaping nineteenth-century Natal and the reverberations of his actions continue into the present, not least in the vexed question of traditional leadership within a democracy. Guy,

in a compelling blend of biography and history, illuminates both the man and his times, in the process setting another benchmark for South African history writing.

STEPHEN COAN

- This review is adapted from a feature article “The sounds of silence” by Stephen Coan, published in *The Witness*, September 20, 2013.

THE DURBAN LIGHT INFANTRY 1854-2011: AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY

By BRIAN KEARNEY

Durban, Headquarter Board of the DLI, 2013. ISBN 9780620589109.

THIS handsome book, in a limited edition, commemorates the Durban Light Infantry, which is entering its 120th year as a discrete military unit. Professor Brian Kearney, and the team of officers who have assisted him in the preparation of the work, deserve high credit for their scholarship as well as the standard of composition. The author admits that a drill hall fire in 1963 destroyed so many records that it shortened the period of research for the book by 10 years! The reader would scarcely know it, for the extant records have been sorted, searched and extracted selectively in such a manner as to produce a narrative and commentary which will serve as a model in the genre of regimental histories.

Much of the material which was destroyed belonged to an earlier era, which was described by another exemplary work, Colonel A.C. Martin’s two-volume *The Durban Light Infantry*, published in 1969. Indeed, Professor Kearney tells us that so authoritative, so meticulous

was Martin’s work that it was a real question for the committee whether a third-volume update would not do instead of a complete new history of the regiment. Fortunately, technological advances in the methods of research and publication carried the day, and we have this work, well written and beautifully illustrated.

Irrespective of the great fire, there is a still a plethora of information available in the regiment’s archives which adds not only to what was available to Martin, but, of course, covers the period since. It is this later period that reveals much on the engagement of local citizen forces in policing and counter-insurgency during the Republic era. Inevitably this is what makes the book most useful and valuable.

The history of the regiment is presented in a way that makes it easy for the reader to follow its career and take note of its highlights. The Preface describes the methodology of the author and his committee.

An Introduction gives an historical overview of the regiment's career. Thereafter this is dealt with in detail, in chapters arranged chronologically and divided according to the major events in the military evolution of the regiment. Each chapter is alike in its layout – first a time line giving the major events, then a narrative of the events, and finally, commentary by individual members on particular events. These latter may be anecdotal, but in some instances, most notably in chapters 21–23, where official records are classified or otherwise inaccessible, these commentaries provide narratives of operations which otherwise may be lost. The text is flanked by illustrations, usually photographs, of persons, places and events mentioned in the text. At certain points, usually between chapters, there appear one or two pages which focus on uniforms, weapons, and equipment of the times, but also on those officers (Brigadier-Generals J.S. Wylie and G.J.M. Molyneux certainly merit special attention) and men who made a difference in creating an efficient and disciplined regiment.

There are twenty-five chapters of varying length (and depth), each treating an epoch in the regiment's development. The first three chapters deal with the antecedent colonial corps, and are relatively brief and fragmentary, more or less reflecting the scant sources on them. The Durban Light Infantry as a distinct unit makes its appearance in Chapter 4, which therefore is perhaps the most vital and interesting one in the book. The next two chapters, on the South African War and the Zulu Rebellion, rather suffer by comparison, not that they are insubstantial, but they are weak in

the description of operational strategy. Chapters 7 and 8 are about the Great War. The first is the stronger, for the regiment operated as a unit in German South West Africa, which therefore affords greater coherence and detail; whereas the second suffers because the unit *per se* did not exist in the controversial German East African campaign, but largely made up the 6th South African Battalion, an ad hoc unit for which existing information is (or seems to be) inadequate..

The main body of the narrative is on the Second World War, which is treated thoroughly in eleven chapters, and notably six on the North African campaign of 1941-42. Since one battalion was captured at Tobruk, there are also two chapters on the experiences of its officers and men as prisoners of war. The surviving battalion returned to South Africa in 1943 and went on *mutatis mutandis* to fight in Italy as part of the 6th South African Division.

As indicated earlier, it is the reviewer's opinion that the next three chapters are the most important contribution to our military history, for they depict in more or less detail the challenges facing the regiment with two changes of political regime. Moreover there was a prolonged (and not always coherent) transformation affecting its training and organisation as well as its equipment and weaponry. There was no conventional war, but on several occasions the regiment was called into service for internal policing (1960 and 1961) and counter-insurgency operations on the border (1976 – 84).

The up-to-date (23) and postscript (25) chapters ought to be integrated. They are fragmentary in content

and tentative in tone, e.g. the topical narrative (pp 354–66) depends rather too much on the supplementary commentary (pp 367–74). But how else can this fine book be brought to a close? It is never easy to splice the recent past with the present (and future) in an institutional history. Fortunately there is Chapter 24, on the Drill Hall and Regimental Headquarters, with a particularly good selection of photographs. This is the author's forte and a most fitting end piece.

The book contains a succinct appendix including the roll of honour and lists of commanding officers and regimental sergeants major. There are a useful glossary and a bibliography but, while it might seem irregular, they would better have been placed at the beginning of the book, for the

convenience of the reader. The reviewer does have two criticisms. Both pertain to format. First: the 10-point text is hard to read, especially if one is trying to hold up the two-kg 29 × 29 cm tome (or resting it on his/her lap). To which the answer is: This is a souvenir, of the coffee-table type. What else do you expect? The second criticism is technical. The maps are numerous and well placed, indeed some of them are almost works of art, but in the main they are photographs of originals, and many of these are very detailed (see the North African campaign map on pp 140–1) and the lettering is indistinct. The reader attentive to cartography is well advised to keep a magnifying glass close at hand.

PAUL THOMPSON

CHATSWORTH : THE MAKING OF A SOUTH AFRICAN TOWNSHIP

Edited by ASHWIN DESAI AND GOOLAM VAHED

Pietermaritzburg, UKZN Press, 2013.

READING *Chatsworth, the making of a South African township*, I find I inhabit several time zones at once. I am transported to the time, five decades ago when the Nationalist Government was on an intractable and seemingly irreversible course of Separate Development. Bantu Education had been firmly secured as government policy earlier in 1952; the tribal colleges were being inaugurated all over the country, and soon some of us would be wending our way to Salisbury Island and other bush colleges; the “Homelands” were caught in the carnivalesque of independence; Passive Resistance and the Defiance Campaigns, that blossomed in the first half of the 20th Century, were wilting

in the face of the intransigence of the apartheid regime. The Treason Trial and the Rivonia Trial landmarked the late 1950s and early 1960s, and Nelson Mandela would be sent to Robben Island for 27 years. And it was at this time that Chatsworth came into being.

The apartheid city is built on the principle of proximity and social distance, and this is the rationale for the location of Chatsworth on the perimeter of the city, or “at the edge”, as Ronnie Govender would say. In this, Chatsworth is similar to other well-known South African townships, such as Soweto and Alexandria, synonymous, as they all are, with apartheid's project of racist social engineering. As the editors,

Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed, point out, “Chatsworth was born at the height of apartheid’s madness when the government sought to ghettoise persons of ‘Indian’ origin into what it intended to be a frozen racial landscape”.

One of the unintended consequences of apartheid policies was the way a new sociological analysis of space, place and people evolved and matured, as attempts to understand what was happening in these apartheid spaces emerged as an important and necessary critical endeavour. This new book on Chatsworth is a worthy addition to this burgeoning scholarship.

In our reading of cities, both globally, and locally, and in the autobiographical writings of a host of writers, such as Ellen Kuzwayo on Soweto and Richard Rive on District Six, to name just two, we have learnt to appreciate that urban spaces are not inert backdrops. Urban spaces are actively produced by and, in turn, produce social processes. We have learnt to appreciate that physical locations are theatres of living where a range of elements mingle and interact. We have learnt to read a place like Chatsworth as both a symbolic landscape and an embodied, material landscape. Chatsworth, like its counterparts, is at once a metonymy for the larger history of divisiveness under apartheid, and a testimony of resilience against this very apartheid.

Indeed, this new anthology of stories on Chatsworth, with contributors from a wide range of fields, both locally and internationally, tells of a dynamic and multifaceted world, a world transforming itself and mutating over the decades. We are reminded again and again that human beings are not automatons and robots, and

that Chatsworth “is a living, breathing landscape of people”.

Against the apartheid logic of homogenising and ghettoising racial groups, and stultifying them by imposing residential proximity and corralling them, people are endlessly inventive and creative. In addition, diversity of language, class, ethnicity and religion is not diminished and, if anything, flourishes. The notion of the “tyranny of place”, as posited by Mphahlele, where place is crucial in defining and constructing South African identities, is pertinent here; at the same time, there is every attempt to strain at the confining boundaries of such “tyranny”, and claim wider life worlds, beyond or even within the confines of ghetto-living.

The approach that Desai and Vahed use is both long range and immediate – telescopic and microscopic – and all with an energy and creativity that animates this collection. Against the broad, diachronic sweep of history, we have narratives – immediate and in flesh and blood – of individual actors [referred to as the *synchronic*]. We have fragments of biography and personal narrative, autobiographical micro-history, testimonies, fictional writing – all in a fine orchestration of divergent voices, and exposing layer upon layer of the palimpsest that is Chatsworth. The variety of genres, juxtaposed in the collection, and their diverse themes, exemplify Ali Mazrui’s statement that Africa is not homogenous but is a *bazaar* of people, some in-between; some living inside, others living outside [1986].

The stories in this collection describe a wide array of people going about the business of making Chatsworth “a habitable world”. Some

show the pain and trauma of uprooting and relocation, their lives the stuff of living history, living memory. Hannah Carrim presents a poignant story of loss and nostalgia, through her research with individuals who were removed through the Group Areas legislation from Magazine Barracks. *The inheritance of loss*, might be an apt description of their plight, to use the title of Kiran Desai's Booker Prize novel.

Others, like the renowned playwright Ronnie Govender, write evocatively of Cato Manor, as he does in his story, "The Son of Matambu". In those former places of abode, people were part of long-established, settled communities; they were then disturbed and uprooted, and the repositories and markers of their identity – temples and mosques, schools and community centres – were left behind. The old places either became ghostly remains of a past life rich in culture and tradition, or strange islands in a sea of increasing dereliction. Yet, as Ronnie Govender prophesies in his story, in the new places of relocation a resurgence of the human spirit is anticipated: "In the place of the intended ghetto, a phoenix is rising and the community of Chatsworth is reclaiming the soul that the arbiters of human misery tried to destroy in places like Cato Manor".

Indeed, in the graphic stories of the iconic places of Chatsworth, such as the Temple of Understanding, the RK Khan Hospital, and The Aryan Benevolent Home – all vying to be the signature of Chatsworth – we see Govender's hopes, in time, coming to pass.

Exacerbating the debilitating psychological experience of relocation and removal were gross physical

inequities as well, such as the lack of proper transport or of organised sport. This is why the impossible stories of heroism emerging from Chatsworth, such as Judge Nicholson's moving narrative of the legendary golfer, Pawpa Sewgolum, are repeatedly claimed and reclaimed.

We see this resilience manifesting itself among a variety of people from different spheres of existence, whether priests or religious leaders, educational leaders, sportsmen, traders, fisher folk, domestic workers, and those cadres keeping out of official view (*the underground people*, to use the title of Lewis Nkosi's book). We appreciate the stories of struggles of the small traders against the titans, who enjoyed patronage. The picture presented here by Jo Rushby of the Bangladeshi market is a remarkable testimony of bravery among the traders to survive in the face of competition from the large chain stores.

The story of the flourishing of music in Chatsworth, as told by Naresh Veeran, from a long line of musicians, and the remarkable story of the Denny Veeran Music Academy, recall the monumental achievements of Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masekela in Soweto, and of Shunna Pillay, the Durban singer whose book, *Shadow People*, provides a portrait of Durban, District Six and Sophiatown of the 1950s. The stories show, again and again, the human ingenuity that pervaded a place like Chatsworth where, as David Coplan noted of Soweto, "a wasteland of oppression and neglect" was "humanised" [1985].

I was impressed with the way the voices and images of women pervade this collection. A number are women contributors, and the stories

of women are given equal currency. Reshma Sookrajh's story, for example, illustrates the influence of her remarkable mother, as well as her own achievements as a Comrades Marathon runner, a professor of education at the University of Kwa-ZuluNatal, and her growing immersion in a life of Hindu spirituality.

It is not surprising that religious groupings rallied among themselves. The stories of the survival of Hinduism on rugged terrain (narrated by Brij Maharaj), the establishment of Islam and the work of leaders such as Mawlana Dr Abbas Khan (as told by Sultan Khan), and the phenomenal growth of Christian Pentecostalism, with leaders such as Dr Paul Lutchman (narrated by Karin Willemse and Goolam Vahed), are compelling.

With inroads into the traditional extended Indian family through the Group Areas Act, there are various other formations, including an array of civic organisations, with all their joys, as well as their faultlines. Finding "psychic shelter" in an alienating world is necessary and understandable, but also spawns tensions. We see competing forces at work as the contributors, in their varied and different ways, reveal not only continuities, but ruptures, in people's lives.

Broader social processes and structural constraints from above intersect with internal divisions and constraints imposed from within and below. While the family, for example, might have provided an "inner sanctum" in an otherwise alienating world, it can also be one of those deeply oppressive places.

Thembisa Waetjen shows in the wrenching account of Mariammah

Chetty, whose husband was detained and held in solitary confinement during the apartheid years, the destructive impact this had on her family life. Waetjen argues that "the zones of domestic life are portrayed as non-political spaces of struggle", and that it is necessary to complicate "the often triumphal narratives of family solidarity". We need to write women's hidden struggles – often locked away in the private space of the home – into the liberation narrative as well which has generally extolled "masculine political agency".

Chatsworth is presented then as both a site of social encounter and of social division. These tensions are also manifest through another blight on the social landscape – the prevalence of drugs – showing the social malaise that is just below the surface. As Ronnie Govender has written, "Cato Manor has paid its penance. Chatsworth is still doing so."

Chatsworth was, and continues to be, a smorgasbord of political activity. Alongside the fearless struggles of extra-parliamentary resistance in the 1980s, chronicled by Desai in the collection, with the fighting spirit of activists such as Lenny Naidoo, Kumi Naidoo, Kovilan Naidoo and others, there was the work of the LACs, and the pro-apartheid champions, who grew tall by fighting for what should have been rightfully the people's rights and due anyway. Documented too are little acts of political protest, such as those by Ganpat Foolchand, principal at Welbedacht School, who said, "I closed school as a mark of protest at the passing of the Group Areas Act in 1948."

Desai and Vahed also explore what Chatsworth as a social space means

today, more than 50 years after its formation and almost two decades after racial segregation has been dismantled as a formal policy. The overarching concern of their book is to examine what a space constructed as an Indian township by the apartheid government means half a century after it was established and almost two decades after apartheid has ended.

The stories depict contestations and collaborations with the local state in the post-apartheid period. Thembisa Waetjen and Goolam Vahed, in their chapter, “Gender, Citizenship and Power – the Westcliff Flats Residents’ Association”, tell of the incredible agency of those who run the residents’ associations, especially the women, and the “concerned-citizens groups” that preceded them, all of whom are in the forefront to co-ordinate struggles around housing, electricity and water, given that these basic resources are now privatised.

The problems of economic uncertainty remain, penury and unemployment have deepened, as Desai had also noted in his earlier book, *The Pools of Chatsworth – Race, Class and Social Movements in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, “the poor” for whom it is “not yet uhuru”.

Vahed and Desai, and Waetjen and Vahed, in their contributions, show the coming together of various racial groupings, together with transnational migrants from other parts of Africa, to fight social problems. Does this offer hope of a post-racial community, or a melting pot, they ask? The authors show that there is both unity and friction, camaraderie across racial borders, alongside continuing and enduring dynamics of race and racial ideologies. The demolition of apartheid

fences is, at best, uneven. Hardly the euphoria suggested in “SIMUNYE – WE ARE ONE”!

In his study of Chatsworth, Thomas Blom Hansen refers to the present state as the “melancholia of freedom” where, with the new democracy, there are also new uncertainties and anxieties that are experienced as the old securities, that were ironically buttressed by apartheid, now dissipate. This is an echo of Lewis Nkosi who speaks of the “shattered psyches” of the post-apartheid moment.

Imraan Coovadia is more direct, and observes that “we panic when the chariot of historical inevitability is following us too closely from one day to the next”, when some South Africans feel there’s a doomsday clock ticking for them.

Indeed, the earlier “resilience” that I noted has a darker side, as some of these stories show. The residential segregation of the old apartheid era, inducing ethnic insularity, and that brought a place like Chatsworth into being, forged a distinctive identity that separated and continues to separate “us” from “them”, and all from becoming “one of a living crowd”.

So while we engage in “reflective nostalgia” – which lingers on the ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dream of another place and another time, as Jacob Dlamini has reminded us in *Native Nostalgia*, evoking a golden age, living in the present and into the future might not be so easy, but must become the new imperatives.

At the end of the day, we have to ask: what is the purpose of “dwelling in the house” [as Edward Said would say] or the houses of the past – our apartheid past – as we do through books such as this. This “time of memory” is not, I

am sure, to constantly lick the wounds of the deep alienation wrought in the past, to inhabit the prisonhouses of the past.

Nor is it to retreat into impermeable, ethno-racial enclaves (colluding with an over-determining and persistent apartheid logic in this time of freedom).

It is rather, I would hope, to broaden and open the windows and doors of our houses of the past, as we live in the present moment, to re-define and give brave expression to what true community is. To overcome the dispossession wrought by apartheid, without perpetuating on ongoing dispossession of our very humanity, our very souls....

In their remarkable compendium, *Chatsworth – the Making of a South African Township*, Desai and Vahed have come to the zone of occult instability where the people dwell, and catch in these stories much more than the outer garments of a multitude of worthy Chatsworthians....

Indeed, this book is a good example of merging a “spontaneous sociology” of the people, that Pierre Bourdieu, the French philosopher/sociologist spoke of, where academics and intellectuals do not stand aloof, behind ivory tower walls, but bear on their shoulders, “the weight of the world” [Bourdieu et al, 1999].

BETTY GOVINDEN

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