

Book Reviews

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Boekresensies

**An account of a neglected aspect
of South African radical political history**

Crain Soudien, *The Cape Radicals: Intellectual and Political Thought of the New Era Fellowship, 1930s-1960s*

Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 2019

212 pp

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R320.00

This is a well-written book on the seminal ideas of the New Era Fellowship (NEF), a public education and cultural project of the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) and the Workers' Party of South Africa (WPSA). A book of this nature is long overdue and is urgently needed given the fact that the political history of South Africa is almost always equated with the African National Congress (ANC) and its sister organisation, in the Congress Alliance, the South African Communist Party (SACP). This book is not a biography of the people who led the NEF. Rather, it is "a sociology of knowledge of the left movement of the 1930s to the 1960s" (p 21). What the author grapples with is the NEF's sociological reading of South Africa of the period just mentioned.

Soudien divides the book into three sections or "steps", as he calls them, each of which consists of various chapters. In total, the book has seven chapters. The first step comprises three chapters: the 28-page introductory chapter, and chapters 1 and 2. The introductory chapter not only provides a synopsis of the book, but also emphasises "the need to tell the story of South Africa's social and political history more fully" (p 19). In this way, the book attempts to fill a void in South Africa's political and cultural history. The introductory chapter also raises theoretical and methodological issues as they relate to the question of race in South Africa. Chapter 1 contextualises the emergence of the NEF, while chapter 2 traces the figures who gave the NEF its life, character and purpose.

The second step comprises three chapters – chapters 3, 4 and 5. This section of the book attempts to piece together the narrative and ideas of the NEF. Chapter 3 not only describes the early developments of the NEF between 1937 and 1942, but more importantly shows how eclectic this movement was in terms of its focus and projects. Chapter 4 deals with the successes of the NEF, its agenda setting attempts and its position within the broader sociological and political context of the day. In the 1940s, Soudien maintains, the NEF became the face of the WPSA. Chapter 5 analyses NFF's "consolidation phase" from the 1950s and 1960s and outlines the organisation's theoretical and strategic positions during this period. Soudien argues that the NEF

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was less visible during this period but operated “behind the scenes” while busy developing ideas and concepts of non-racialism. In teasing out these issues, Soudien also attempts to provide an explanation of how South Africa of the 1950s can be understood. The third step of the book is brief, and includes two chapters, 6 and 7. This section of the book assesses the contribution and legacy of the NEF. In chapter 6, the author not only grapples with internal organisational issues, but also shows that the split within the organisation was inevitable. Chapter 7 attempts to provide the lessons of the NEF for contemporary South Africa and the rest of the world.

For Crain Soudien, the NEF “seeded into South Africa’s political and intellectual life a relatively small but deeply important legacy” (p 163). By the 1940s, not only did the NEF establish structures which engaged directly with communities, but it also tried to infuse its ideas on these communities. These ideas were primarily about education and the liberation of the mind of the oppressed. In this regard, the NEF leadership engaged in intellectual activism. The leaders emphasised that it was not sufficient to mobilise against an idea – it was important to own and live that idea. The overriding principle in all these efforts was to counter the divisive and hegemonic racist ideology of the government of the day.

According to Soudien, in trying to infuse the South African society with its ideas, the NEF claimed it was “spreading enlightenment”. Although the NEF established debating societies and cultural initiatives, the awkwardness of the phrase “spreading enlightenment” comes close to ideas of the civilising mission of colonialists and missionaries. Soudien argues that the members of the NEF were “the first in South Africa’s political history to locate the wider global discussions about ‘race’ and class in a larger discourse about the nature of domination” (p 2). This is a mischaracterisation of South Africa’s history of the liberation struggle. Both black nationalists and Pan-Africanists in South Africa grappled with these issues as early as the late nineteenth century. In her book, *Discordant Comrades: Identities and Loyalties on the South African Left* (2000), Allison Drew shows that there were socialists in South Africa at the turn of the twentieth century who grappled with these issues.

Soudien argues that the NEF showed that the idea of race can be used by those in power to capture the cognitive and sense-making faculties of the oppressed, something which leads to mental slavery. It is true that this happens, especially when one considers notions of an inferiority complex on the part of the oppressed. But at the same time, when the oppressed believe in the salience of race, particularly in racialised societies like South Africa, the oppressed could use race as an organising framework to liberate themselves. If one is oppressed along racial lines, it only makes sense that one fights along those lines. This is not the same as following racial logic slavishly or the same as believing that black people are inferior. It is not surprising, therefore, that “the NEF did not become the mass movement its founders envisaged or hoped it would be” (p 2). This is in contrast to other black political organisations that took the question of race seriously and placed the national question at the centre of the liberation struggle. The folly of the NEF was to focus mainly on education and the teaching profession. Soudien says the NEF laid down standards of comportment

and personal responsibility. This seems excessively individualistic and it is not hard to see why the organisation struggled to appeal to the masses of the people.

Soudien makes informative theoretical moves such as arguing that the NEF sought to locate the local in the global. In this way, he argues, the organisation was not only internationalist, but also anticipated or predated the subaltern movement of Indian scholars by almost 40 years. The genius of the NEF leaders was to bring to bear their concrete conditions on dominant ideas. It is for this reason that Soudien argues that to understand Cape Town as a global site of intellectual innovation, one must grapple with the ideas of the Cape radicals of the NEF. The Cape radicals made it their mission to contain the pernicious ideas of the colonial and apartheid government of the day. The NEF argued that the colonial and apartheid forms of domination should never define the identities of the oppressed majority. The NEF leadership advanced these ideas not only against the apartheid state, but also against the imperial and colonial order which shaped it. Yet some of the blind spots of the NEF include patriarchy and failure to appreciate the gender question not only within the organisation, but also in South Africa more generally. It only opened up the gender debate in the 1940s, and even then, it was largely ignored. Another blind spot of the organisation was its inability to grapple with its place in Africa. The members of the NEF, Soudien argues, downplayed their Africanness and did not pay enough attention to their cultural connection to the rest of South African people.

In the final analysis, the greatest contribution of this book is not only re-centring the Cape radicals in South African intellectual history, but also its analysis of the intellectual work of the NEF, its theories of race and identity issues in the context of a racialised society.

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Making accessible important primary documents on Paul Kruger and the ZAR

J.S. Bergh, *Paul Kruger: Speeches and Correspondence, 1850-1904*

L.W. Hiemstra Trust, Rupert Education Foundation, Jan Marais National Fund and ABSA Bank, Pretoria, 2018

ii + 1087pp

ISBN 978-1-77592-179-0

R500.00

This mammoth publication can be regarded as a *magnus opus* by Johan Bergh, emeritus professor in the Department of Historical and Heritage Studies, University of Pretoria. As the title indicates, the publication contains a huge selection of the vast body of available material on Paul Kruger's life and work. The original Afrikaans/Dutch edition is entitled, *Paul Kruger: Toesprake en Korrespondensie van 1881-1900* and was published by Protea, Pretoria, in 2017. This English edition is an

expansion of the documents on Kruger and covers the period 1850 to 1904. The documents were sampled from a wide array of sources and depositories: previous documentary publications on Kruger in the National Archives of South Africa (NASA), most of them in the Transvaal Archives series, newspapers, British *Blue Books*, published Transvaal Volksraad Minutes, the National Library of South Africa in Cape Town, the Jagger Library of the University of Cape Town, the University of the Witwatersrand De Souza Collection, the NZAV Archive in Amsterdam in the Netherlands, the Free University of Amsterdam, the University Library of Leiden and Gemeentearchief Kampen, the Archives of the Nederlandsch-Zuid-Afrikaansche Vereeniging in Amsterdam, the Free State Archive Depot, ZAR *Green Books*, the Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History in Pretoria and the Rothschild Archive in London. As the author states in his editorial comments, in the document selection process his priority was to make important and, in some cases, lesser known documents available to researchers. A number of well-known and lesser known photos and illustrations of Kruger in various capacities, obtained from the Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History, appear in the centre of the book.

The book is structured in nine chapters, the first serving as a three-page introduction to the publication. The consecutive chapters are all introduced by an explanatory overview of the correspondence and speeches selected for that chapter. Chapter two portrays documents of Kruger's time as field-cornet, commandant and commandant-general of the Transvaal, the administration of and military expeditions against African chiefs and communities, his dealings with these chiefs, his involvement in the establishment of the Reformed Church, as well as the purchase and sale of farms. The documents in chapter three shed light on Kruger's opposition to the British annexation of Transvaal, 1877–1881. This period also covers Kruger's first visits to Britain, Europe and the USA as part of delegations to protest against the British annexation and his role as a member of the successful Boer Triumvirate that regained control of the Transvaal state in 1881.

Chapter four contains documents pertaining to Kruger's role as a member of the Triumvirate, being elected as president of the ZAR and onwards in the period 1881 to 1889. His presidential term includes another visit to Britain and several European countries. This section even includes a speech by Kruger at an audience with the German Kaiser (p 388). It was also in this period that he began to warn his countrymen about foreigners who were streaming into the country daily for its gold (p 423). The documents in chapter five, covering the period 1890-1895, shed more light on matters such as Kruger's concession and railway policy, his re-election as president of the ZAR in 1893 (pp 544–547) and his condemnation of the pro-Uitlander Transvaal National Union. Chapter six concentrates on Kruger and the consequences of the Jameson Raid of 1895/1896. The selected documents discuss the pro-Uitlander lobby supported by a number of mining magnates. By December 1895, Kruger had already blamed Cecil John Rhodes for being behind the raid. After the successful capture of Jameson and his raiders, the German Kaiser congratulated Kruger via telegram (p 619).

Chapter seven highlights Kruger's rule in the years from 1896 to the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War in 1899. The section contains correspondence and speeches by several prominent persons who provided valuable assistance to the president in this period, such as Dr W.J. Leyds and F.W. Reitz who served for terms as state secretary, Jan Smuts as state attorney, President M.T. Steyn of the Free State and the Cape opposition politician Jan Hofmeyr. In spiritual matters, Kruger revealed quite a liberal approach. He believed that God did not distinguish between Africans and whites and proposed in the Volksraad that Jews and Roman Catholics should also be eligible for election to that body. The penultimate chapter focuses on Kruger and the Anglo-Boer War until the end of his residence in the ZAR, in 1900, when he left for Europe. The section includes the ZAR ultimatum to the British government to withdraw its troops from South Africa (pp 838–840). Kruger played an important role in the war by providing tactical evaluations and advice by telegraph, as well as moral and religious support to the fighting Boer forces at the front. He even visited the Natal and Free State fronts to instil courage into the burghers. The chapter also includes documents such as telegrams about Kruger's compelled gradual retreat from Pretoria to Machadodorp, Waterval-Onder, Nelspruit and eventually Lourenço Marques from where he departed for Europe to promote the cause of the two Boer republics there.

In the final chapter Kruger's stay in exile in Europe, until the end of his life, is portrayed. It includes extracts of his speeches and interviews and recounts his enthusiastic reception in cities such as Marseilles, Paris, The Hague and Amsterdam, and his visit to Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands. While in exile, Kruger also corresponded at length with his children, relatives and acquaintances in the Transvaal. Politicians from the Netherlands, Ireland and Monaco, as well as Emily Hobhouse, visited him before his death in July 1904 in Clarens, Switzerland. The last selected document in this collection pertains to a letter by Frederik Eloff, Kruger's son-in-law, on behalf of the Kruger family to General Louis Botha, expressing the family's gratitude for his condolences and for the former president's funeral arrangements in Pretoria in December 1904 (p 1058).

Although each selected document in this collection is carefully referenced, it is however a pity that there is no bibliography. All the archival material could have been arranged in a structured way for the convenience of researchers, as is standard practice in academic publications. This was probably omitted because of the already large volume of over a thousand pages in this book. Nevertheless, this work is a gem. It is a rich and rare source for all researchers, lay persons and professional historians, as well as other aficionados of *Krugeralia*. The documents reveal multiple facets of Kruger as statesman, details that are probably not well-known to many Kruger historians and readers. Collector's items like this do not appear very often and interested readers should grab a copy while it is still in print. Prof. Johan Bergh should be thanked by the South African historical fraternity for his huge effort in preserving this great heritage on S.J.P. Kruger for posterity.

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**A personal reflection and comparative study of apartheid
by an international legal scholar**

John Dugard, *Confronting Apartheid: A Personal History of South Africa, Namibia and Palestine*

Jacana, Auckland Park, 2018

312 pp

ISBN 978-1-43142-735-2

R280.00

Apartheid as a system of government as practised in twentieth-century South Africa is well known globally: an account of the complex legal nature of the system is an area few have been able to explain, however. An international law scholar and advocate for human rights, John Dugard's contribution in the struggle against apartheid was to challenge the legal features of apartheid. He was "involved in the dispute over the legal status of South West Africa and later as United Nations special rapporteur on human rights in occupied Palestine" (p 3). Derived from the author's personal participation in the three cases discussed in this book, *Confronting Apartheid* provides an account of "apartheid, or a system akin to it" and his experiences "in opposition to it in both South Africa and South West Africa". He goes on to explain that he was "fully exposed to Israel's practices as the occupying power of Palestine" (p 3).

Dugard begins by describing his upbringing, education and his early academic career, informative for understanding his professional work and activism. Though he studied law in South Africa, he later read international law at Cambridge University. Dugard explains that this opened him up to new ideas. In particular, he explains, "I learnt of the role played by law in the ordering of international society. Increasingly I saw international law as a normative structure by which law in southern Africa might be examined and judged" (p 17). Dugard played a crucial role in trying to urge the South African government to accept the decision taken by the General Assembly of the UN "that South Africa no longer had any right to occupy or administer South West Africa [and that] it was ... illegally in the territory" (p 28). Not only did this challenge Pretoria's administration of South West Africa, but it in fact called into question apartheid as implemented in both territories.

Dugard offers an account of the main characteristics of apartheid. Rooted in the practice of racial separation and discrimination, the system was established through laws, "Acts of Parliament, [and] subordinate legislation issued by state officials and judicial decisions created the apartheid legal order" (p 74). The highly legalistic order of the system became completely unacceptable internationally, and Dugard notes that a legal reaction was required. The book underscores this point noting that many magistrates and judges were complicit in the enforcement of the repressive and discriminatory legislation and those in opposition were a minority of human rights activists and lawyers. In its application of apartheid in South West Africa and South Africa itself, South Africa's legalistic approach resorted to "international law being used as a shield to protect it from a hostile world determined

to impose upon South Africa the post-World War II values of respect for human rights and promotion of self-determination” (p 135). Dugard devotes this section to the international community’s opposition to apartheid as practised in South Africa, highlighting the legal basis for the UN response. It rested on the section of the UN Charter, which commits member states to the “principle of self-determination of peoples and the promotion of respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all” (p 135).

While the South African case of apartheid is universally accepted as a violation of human rights, this book’s other major concern is a comparative study of the Palestine-Israel conflict. The case made by Dugard is that occupied Palestine also has a form of apartheid in place. While Dugard draws parallels between apartheid South Africa and Israel, he is careful to note features that distinguish between the two. The main difference he says, is that in South Africa apartheid was a policy “applied by the government of a state to its own people whereas Israel purports to be acting as an occupying power in an occupied territory” (p 207).

Acknowledging only in 2005 that Israel’s occupation is a form of apartheid, Dugard emphasises that Israel has violated many rules concerning human rights laws and international humanitarian law. The dual legal system in the occupied territory, “one for Israeli settlers and the other for Palestinians... [discriminates] against Palestinians in administration of justice, movement, housing, family unification, allocation of water and enjoyment of many basic freedoms” (p 207). These are some of the conditions Dugard highlights in characterising the occupation as a form of apartheid. The example of high-handed enforcement of the security apparatus on the Palestinians as well as the “privileged position of settlers, checkpoints, the seizure of land, house demolition and virulent racist assertion of Jewish racial superiority” (p 208), are similar, says Dugard, to the South Africa experience.

Though Dugard makes a strong argument for the case of the Palestinian occupation being akin to apartheid South Africa, unlike South Africa, Israel makes no public “...assertion of racial superiority. Discriminatory and oppressive laws are concealed in unpublished military regulations or de facto military policy without reference to the law” (p 232). Consequently, some in the international community have repudiated the suggestion that the system of governance in Israel and apartheid South Africa are similar although it is true to say that and Israel’s “temporary occupation” remains firmly entrenched. Dugard’s focus on the occupation itself is one aspect of a multidimensional picture that supports the narrative of occupying Israel as an apartheid power.

The book focuses primarily on the occupied territories rather than Israel itself, where it is referred to in relation to the political and human rights of the Palestinians. Dugard’s work on the issue of the occupied Palestinian territories has opened discussion on an important aspect of the debate concerning Israel’s presence and behaviour. By underscoring international law and its contribution to the struggle and eventual demise of apartheid in South African and Namibia, Dugard sees international

and human rights law as a tool that may bring a long-lasting solution to what has been an intractable Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Confronting Apartheid has shown how complex and nuanced analysis of the case of Israeli occupation as an apartheid regime can be. There is no doubt that the section on Palestine-Israel provides a critical contribution to the debate on the issue. The earlier section on South Africa and South West Africa would, however, have benefited from an in-depth discussion on how South Africa's illegal presence in the country impacted on the daily lives of ordinary Namibians. Against this framework he could then have to assessed conditions in the occupied Palestinian territories and provided an indisputable case of systems of apartheid in both occupied territories. Despite this, Dugard does indeed offer a strong case for the role of international law in resolving international disputes. His work shows the value of the transnational approach and does not confine the apartheid experience to South Africa. While the Palestine-Israel conflict has been an intractable problem, the South African example provides hope that a lasting solution can yet be found in Israel. The global community, human rights activists and the exercise of international law contributed to the liberation struggle and eventual demise of apartheid. The post-apartheid democratic dispensation has opened possibilities for a solution to the Palestine-Israel conflict. This book makes a strong contribution towards the debate on finding a lasting solution.

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**A valuable collection of primary materials on
Khoesan political thought and identity**

Robert Ross ed., *These Oppressions Won't Cease: An Anthology of the Political Thought of the Cape Khoesan, 1777-1879*

Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 2017

232 pp

ISBN 978-1-77614-180-7

R299.00

It is gratefully acknowledged that your humble Petitioners have received invaluable rights and blessings from the British Crown, Government and nation, but they would also respectfully state that from the time of their becoming British subjects, they not only participated in the rights and privileges, but also in the duties and services which devolved on them in the way of taxation and military service, from the year 1806 to the year 1879 (p 191).

This was the submission of a group of Kat River petitioners to the Cape government in July 1879. Identifying themselves as "landed proprietors, of the Hottentot, Bastard, and other mixed races of the [Cape] Colony" (p 188), the 131 petitioners were voicing concerns over their designation as levies during the Ninth Frontier War which ended

that same year. To justify their discontent over being recruited as the “lowest rank of burgher soldiers” (p 189) in the latest conflict on the eastern frontier, the petitioners recounted the long history of loyal, military service of which they and their forebears could boast. Since the founding of the Kat River Settlement in 1829, this service included the “expedition against Hintza” and the campaign to expel the followers of Maqoma and Tyali from the Amatole Mountains during the Sixth Frontier War (1834–35), combat during the War of the Axe (1846–47), and conflict with their “own countrymen”, when some residents of the settlement rebelled against the colonial government and joined the Gaikas and Thembus during Mlanjeni’s War (1850–53).

This petition is the 98th and final text collected in Robert Ross’s *These Oppressions Won’t Cease: An Anthology of the Political Thought of the Cape Khoesan, 1777–1879*, which brings together a rich sample of transcribed, primary texts penned, or articulated, by those who are now considered to have been Khoesan. Arranged into three broad periods spanning a century, from 1777 to 1879, the texts provide an illuminating window onto colonial life for Khoesan, dipping into events of political, social and economic significance for Cape Khoesan, including the aftermath of the passage of Ordinance 50 in 1828, which granted Khoesan equal civil rights to other free inhabitants of the Cape Colony, and the ensuing establishment of the Kat River Settlement the following year. Other notable events covered by the texts and highlighting Khoesan experiences and responses, include the vagrancy agitation of 1834, the anti-convict protests and concomitant debates about the establishment of a representative assembly at the Cape between 1848 and 1853, and the politics of church independence and financial self-sufficiency in the 1850s and 1860s, following the Kat River Rebellion.

Ross acknowledges the flaws and constraints of the archives from which these texts are drawn; that many of the transcriptions, though exhibiting expressions of Khoesan political thought, remain colonial products. There are also limits to the representativeness of the views contained in the documents. Women’s voices are notably absent. And with ‘Hottentot nationalism’ and Khoesan political consciousness having emerged most forcefully at mission stations of the London Missionary Society (LMS), the views of farmworkers are less readily accessible. Though a trawling of the Cape’s criminal records has proven valuable in bringing to light experiences and views of Khoesan farmworkers not associated with the LMS, as demonstrated by the work of Candy Malherbe. In spite of these drawbacks, Ross notes that “the history of the underclass in many countries can be reconstructed from the archives of the rulers” (p xxix), however imperfectly or incompletely. In some instances, such as with Khoesan experiences of the colonial imposition at the Cape in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the alternative to using compromised colonial archives would be to not reconstruct these histories at all.

Those familiar with Ross’s expansive scholarly contribution to the history of the Cape Colony, and in particular his published work on the Khoesan, will recognise these texts as the sources from which he gleaned many of his most insightful observations. The combined meaning and significance of mission Christianity,

respectability, literacy and loyalism to Khoesan political consciousness and identity as subjects of the British Crown are clearly revealed by this anthology. So too is the deep level of disappointment so often felt by Khoesan, who in spite of their best efforts to live up to the standards for social acceptance and equality set by the colonial regime and the settler-colonial milieu, found these efforts not enough. This was especially so from the 1840s onwards, when narrow racial criteria of belonging increasingly eroded other, once powerful markers of social status and respectability. It is both fitting and disheartening to see these disappointments articulated so clearly in the final text in the anthology, the Kat River petition discussed above. By 1879, the political ground in the Eastern Cape was shifting as a growing Xhosa Christian elite became more prominent. Khoesan political thought and identity was to be increasingly relegated to the margins of the region's racial contestations in future decades.

Representing a century's worth of Khoesan opinions, observations and interpretations on political, social and ecclesiological events, this anthology confirms that a sizeable proportion of Cape Khoesan were "informed and increasingly literate" (p xxv) and "developed the first nationalist opposition to colonialism in South Africa" (p xxxi). It is a welcome addition to Ross's canon and to the wider historiography on Cape Khoesan identity, assimilation, resistance and agency, which since a heyday in the 1990s and early 2000s – exemplified by the seminal offerings of Elizabeth Elbourne and Nigel Penn – has experienced a period of relative quiet in terms of new contributions (Ross's own work on the Kat River Settlement being a notable, recent exception). The anthology is compiled in an engaging style and is accessible to a lay readership. It is also ideal for students. Indeed, this collection of transcriptions would be a valuable teaching tool on primary sources and critical, historical interpretation.

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