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The early mission in South Africa/Die vroeë sending in Suid-Afrika, 1799-1819. By Karel Schoeman. Pretoria: Protea Book House, 2005, 272 pp., map, chronology, bibl., index. ISBN: 1-9198525-42-8.

Do not indent the first line of the first paragraph, but indent the first line of all successive paragraphs. Use double spacing for the entire review. Add your name and institutional affiliation at the end of the review. Accuracy of content, grammar, spelling, and citations rests with the reviewer, and we encourage you to check these before submission. Reviews may be transmitted electronically as a Word file attachment to an email to the review editor. If you have additional questions, please contact the Book Review Editors.

Book Reviews

*Hidden histories of GORDONIA land dispossession and resistance
in the Northern Cape, 1800-1990*

(Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 2016, ISBN 978-1-86814-954-4)

Martin Legassick

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The well-known outstanding scholar and Marxist activist of radical revisionist historical thought in South Africa and on matters elsewhere globally – Martin Chatfield Legassick – sadly passed away on 1 March 2016.¹ The first research

¹ For a more comprehensive knowledge of Legassick's diverse knowledge and legacy see "Obituary, Martin Legassick (1940-2016)", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 42(3), 2016, pp. 565-567. See also Martin Legassick (interviewed by Alex Lichtenstein), "The past and present of Marxist historiography in South Africa", *Radical History Review*, 82, 2002, p. 113; Martin Legassick, "By way of introduction", *Towards socialist democracy* (Pietermaritzburg, UKZN Press, 2007), p. 7; Ciraj Rassool, "History anchored in politics: Interview with Martin Legassick", *South African Historical Journal*, 56 (2006), pp. 19-42; Ayesha Kajee, "Obituary: Martin Legassick, leftist historian and activist who was expelled from ANC", *Sunday Times*, 6 March 2016; Noor Nieftagodien, "Revolutionary socialist, scholar, teacher and mentor, review of African political economy, tributes to Martin Legassick", 2 March 2016 (available at on <http://roape.net/2016/03/02/tributes-to-martin-legassick/>).

of his life (1969)² as well as the last with which he was occupied until early 2016 relates to the current Northern Cape Province.³ The first research was done from a distance, namely from the UK, and the second and final research was conducted while he was physically breathing, exploring and experiencing the region's peoples and past after his return to South Africa from exile in 1990 after being expelled from the ANC.

In *Hidden histories of GORDONIA*, the last published contribution of his life, Legassick mostly celebrates a compilation of several past published histories in esteemed scholarly journals on the first pioneers of Gordonia (named after the British Prime Minister of the Cape Colony during 1870 to 1902, Sir Gordon Sprigg and nowadays known as the ZF Mgcawu⁴ district). Six chapters are tributes to already published works while five more chapters have been added to cover fresh angles of research on the coloured Afrikaners of *Riemvasmaak* prior to and after European colonisation, but also irrevocably accentuating the presence and impact of the Xhosa in the region, and the rapid extension of colonial boundaries after the first British occupation in 1795.

Legassick refers to his methodological approach in *Hidden histories of GORDONIA* as being related to public history and heritage, and very much influenced by his mentors to write in post-modern and in post-colonial paradigms. He also – and always in several of his publications – referred to his work as writing “unintentionally” a history that is applicable,⁵ implying that he “looks for transformation in the present on the basis of evidence from the past”. For this reason, the essays in this collection intentionally point out what is implied by an “applied” history when he discusses themes of land dispossession since colonial times and examples of resistance, inclusive of wars. In this process, Legassick does not make extreme efforts to ensure a chronological cohesion from chapter to chapter but rather, by means of a thematic approach, covers periods of events, and thus unintentionally creates decades of historical silence concerning the peoples of the region studied. In several chapter

2 See MC Legassick, *The politics of a South African frontier: The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana and the missionaries, 1780-1840* (Switzerland, Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2010) in which his PhD-degree awarded in 1969 focusing on the preindustrial South African frontier zone of the Transorangia with the Griqua history very prominent, is celebrated.

3 In the timeframe under discussion, the area was part of the former Cape Province and is referred to as the northern Cape. Martin Legassick had also recently published a history on the Eastern Cape, titled: *The struggle for the Eastern Cape, 1800-1854: Subjugation and the roots of South African democracy*, 2011.

4 The 2016 publication by Martin Legassick on Gordonia wrongly refers in the preface of the book to the former Gordonia district (known as Siyanda before 2013) as the present day Z.W. Mgcawu district, and named after the first black mayor of Upington after 1994, namely Zwelentlanga Fatman Mgcawu.

5 See *Hidden histories of GORDONIA*..., pp. XVIII-XIX.

discussions, the documents that the author consulted are quoted verbatim and he virtually only ensures that the quoted phrases flow smoothly by adding informative and insightful comments through efficiency of articulation.

To explore the “evidence from the past” with which Legassick wants to reflect the present, he starts with a first chapter titled: “The prehistory of Gordonia” that covers a pre-1880 background to the colonial occupation of Gordonia, while simultaneously extensively exploring the Baster and white movements from the Western Cape to this region. A lengthy Chapter Two continues with discussing the Baster settlement in Gordonia and its decline from about 1880 to 1923, and mainly covers patterns in a land occupation and alienation in the region. In Chapter Three, an example of land occupation and alienation is viewed, with a detailed discussion of the controversies concerning Abraham September’s farm Ouap and titled: “The will of Abraham and Elizabeth September: A struggle for land in Gordonia, 1898-2014”. The chapter also covers the year 2015 in which Legassick could not help but to remark that the history of 100 years ago was indeed relevant for the present day.⁶ The pioneering role that September played in propagating the idea of irrigation from the Orange River in ca 1888 has only recently been honoured by local management in the very region.⁷

Two short chapters that complement each other follow. Chapter Four on: “From prisoners to exhibits: representations of Bushmen of the northern Cape, 1880-1900” reminds readers of the Bushmen as the erstwhile dominant inhabitants of the area together with the Korana. Again, in this essay, the author uncovers controversies illustrating the inhumane treatment of the original inhabitants of the northern Cape by a magistrate in the 1880s. Closely viewed, his actions reveal that he was an extreme racist of his time. However, what initially appeared to be a sad era for the “Bushman” in 1999 turned into success when they were granted extensive territorial ownership.⁸ In Chapter Five, “South African human remains and the politics of repatriation: Reconsidering the legacy of Rudolf Pöch”, research on illegal research and trade in Bushmen shortly after the turn of the 20th century to especially Vienna is revealed, as is the success story of restoration of dignity in the reburial of the macerated remains of Klaas and Trooi Pienaar. Legassick and his fellow contributor to this chapter, Prof. Ciraj Rassool, rightly leave

6 See *Hidden histories of GORDONIA...*, p. 112.

7 See *Hidden histories of GORDONIA...*, p. 114.

8 See *Hidden histories of GORDONIA...*, p. 141.

the reader with debatable questions such as whether not more remains could be repatriated if more effort was made to trace them to places like Austrian institutions? Also, whether the practice of Archaeology is ethically sound?⁹

The role of the coloured Afrikaans speakers from 1796 to 1898 at Riemvasmaak, close to the Namibian border, is described in Chapter Six. The example of the anticolonial revolt owing to Afrikaans speakers' natural resistance to colonialism receives attention and continues in Chapter Eight with an in-depth description of the Marengo Rebellion of 1903 to 1907. The rebellion was the natural and predictable consequence of the artificial enforcement upon people of space and borders at the time.¹⁰

Chapter Seven deals with diverse accounts of the "Battle of the Narogas"¹¹ that occurred slightly earlier than that of the Marengo rebellion, namely during the South African War of 1899-1902, and which is presented as a refreshed account of one of those obscure battles covered only by limited or twisted reporting. According to Legassick (and he refers to the recording of this chapter as a very emotional experience),¹² this is "surely mainly because it is an account of the defeat of a white Boer force by armed brown (sic) people" at a time of complex power relations.¹³ In a "so by the way style" Legassick remarked that the aforementioned three chapters still had to acquire the "applied effects" towards which he was aiming with the research he had undertaken.¹⁴

The "applied effects" are more clearly defined by Legassick in Chapters Nine and Ten. In Chapter Nine, while dealing with "The racial division of Gordonia, 1921-1930", he expresses his belief that his research assisted land claimants after 1998 in Gordonia who had been dispossessed in the years under discussion. The Baster petition to parliament to demand the restitution of their land in Gordonia forms the essence of the discussion. However, a shortcoming of this chapter is that Legassick, without ado, skips the years of South Africa becoming a Union, the years of the Great War and simply continues with "another" prominent time to be linked to land dispossession. Proper contextualising the developments since 1907 (it could have been touched on only briefly) would have been more reader-friendly and not mere jumping from the one to the other exposure of "hidden histories" of Gordonia.

9 See *Hidden histories of GORDONIA...*, p. 156.

10 Compare with Legassick's view in *Hidden histories of GORDONIA...*, p. 252.

11 Also known as N'Rougas.

12 See *Hidden histories of GORDONIA...*, p. XXI.

13 See *Hidden histories of GORDONIA...*, pp. 197, 218.

14 Compare *Hidden histories of GORDONIA...*, p. XX.

Chapter Ten is regarded by Legassick as a complementary chapter, one also linked to racial segregation, and aimed at tracing and recording the eight decade long histories of two locations (named Blikkies and Keidebees), which was conducted for the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights. The years 1894 to 1974 are covered, but the discussion only gains momentum and reaches some depth from after 1945 and up to 1967, with a brief reference to 1974 when a group area was proclaimed.¹⁵

Whether Chapter Eleven as the last chapter manages to efficiently wrap up the exposure of several moments in the history of Gordonia can be designated as “hidden”, and highly contestable. It involves the autobiography of a former politically active black resident of Upington from the southern part of the Gordonia district. This man, Alfred Gubula, assisted Legassick during several research interviews. Alfred’s autobiography is not introduced as a “hidden history” nor is he even particularly introduced as a descendant of the coloured people associated with Gordonia. The memories of Gubula on his life and world view, are quoted verbatim, then extensively defended and generally analysed by Legassick. Though it may be possible to “read into” this text an understanding of an individual’s life and hardship under former apartheid (and perhaps some value of writing about a struggle for liberation in the course of South African history in general terms) it does not complement the rest of the chapters in which an explicit discourse on land dispossession and revolt received major emphasis.

A better conclusion would have involved a critical reflection on at least the first ten chapters. Even the revelation of explicit challenges and shortcomings as ideas for future research would have proved worthwhile to address specific gaps and silences regarding the Northern Cape history. Early in the preface, Legassick generally does so by acknowledging that much yet remains to be done in recovering the history of Gordonia and the Northern Cape in general. Examples that he points out mainly involve the political histories of the area still to be uncovered.¹⁶ Other historical developments that should also not be ignored include the economic impact of the diverse cultures in, for example, Gordonia, namely the sociocultural life and legacy; the influence of colonialism on language and religion and so forth.

If the expectation of the reader is to engage in a rich and contextualised history of human movement in the Gordonia district within some conscious

¹⁵ See *Hidden histories of GORDONIA...*, p. 334.

¹⁶ See *Hidden histories of GORDONIA...*, pp. XXI-XXII.

chronological framework, there will be disappointment. The value of *Hidden histories of GORDONIA* must rather be pursued in what Legassick could unlock and reinterpret from the local, oral and archival sources on relics of hidden histories of pioneers of the region. The reality that the imposing of formal colonial boundaries has cultivated the development of racial classification is evident in the histories discussed by Legassick.

Other requirements to enable readers to understand a region's development are diverse informed source references, maps, documents and photographic/visual material of the area and its peoples. In this regard, *Hidden histories of GORDONIA* does not at all disappoint. It's only the 1882 map (early in the book) that unfortunately is not extremely user-friendly in hindsight. Also, a few errors involving incorrect references to centuries (e.g. in text on page 18, footnote 109) and prominent people's initials (like reference to ZW Mgcawu district instead of ZF Mgcawu) do disturb, but understandably form part of the mishaps in the editing and publishing of books. Another shortcoming is the overabundance of lengthy quoted texts without the necessary comment on or response to them.¹⁷ Some gaps regarding sources are quite obvious. Thus, for example, PHR Snyman,¹⁸ a renowned researcher and author of books on several districts in the northern Cape, is "absent". No reference is made by Legassick to this prolific writer and his major contributions to the recording of the inhabitants and their histories in that region. The same goes for the valued contribution by GJJ Oosthuizen concerning the Rehoboth Basters, which is not even mentioned in the list of contributors when reference is made to some researchers in, for example, Chapter Six, footnote three. By considering all contributions as far as it is humanly possible, allowance must be made for an inclusive (and, by all means critical) historiography related to views regarding the occupation, possession and dispossession of land in this region.

Despite the perceived shortcomings in *Hidden Histories of GORDONIA*, this much valued and timely contribution of Martin Legassick in the post-academic days of his career exposes a giant in thought and a meticulous researcher and recorder of historical detail regarding the themes that occupied his mind. The exposure of several previously hidden histories of Gordonia not only reveals inhumane acts of the past, but also reminds the reader of its

17 See, for example, *Hidden histories of GORDONIA...*, p. 274 quote at the top and then a next section simply continues.

18 Compare PHR Snyman, "Kuruman, 1800-1990" (DLitt et Phil, UNISA, 1992); PHR Snyman, *Kuruman: Vervloëpad na Afrika* (Pretoria, RGN, 1992); PHR Snyman, *Postmasburg: 'n Geskiedkundige oorsig tot 1982* (Pretoria, RGN, 1983); PHR Snyman, *Daniëlskuil: Van Griekwa-buitepos tot diensentrum* (Pretoria, RGN, 1988), p. 186.

value as basis for current decision making on the correction of past injustices, thus to restore the dignity and well-being of descendants of a past generation. This is what the application of the research for which Legassick reached out involves. *Hidden histories of GORDONIA* is a gem of a contribution worth reading, and being regarded as part of the valued historiographical repertoire of the history of the Northern Cape.

Climate change and the course of Global History

(Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014, 631 pp., bibl., index,
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John Brooke's work on climate change can be situated in a burgeoning field of study termed "Big History". It is a very ambitious yet intriguing attempt to contextualize the course of human history within larger structures, ranging from the creation of the universe itself to the geology of the earth and, of course, climate.

Brooke prioritizes climate as a key factor in human history. Through the use of interdisciplinary means ranging from archaeology to advances in genetics, the full scope of human history can be traced and much of it can be briefly summarized as the interaction between culture and climate. At the outset, this interaction would have been dominated by climate, leaving humankind at the mercy of uncontrollable forces that created the conditions of "stress" forcing change in society. Brooke therefore argues against the Malthusian view of overpopulation outstripping available resources – crisis is instead caused by exogenous factors that are beyond human control.

Climate change and the course of Global History is divided into four parts – each dealing with a significant aspect of the progression of human history. In the first part, "Evolution and Earth Systems", Brooke emphasizes human evolution as proceeding both gradually and through catastrophe. In a manner that mirrors the uniformitarianism and catastrophism of geology, human evolution proceeded in "fits and starts" (p. 29) and it is, in fact, the moments of crises that drove evolution. Geological forces such as glaciation, volca-