

liographic details of the source. The review should begin with a heading that includes all the bibliographic data. The elements of the heading should be arranged in the order presented in the following example:

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

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.

*These oppressions won't cease: The political thought of the Cape
Khoesan, 1777-1879, An anthology*

**(Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 2017, 288pp. ISBN:
978-1-77614-180-7)**

Robert Ross

Johan Fourie
Stellenbosch University
johanf@sun.ac.za

The way most of us participate in politics today is by voting. But before 1994, of course, that was only true for a subsection of South African society. Before 1930, it was only true of men. And before 1910, it was only true for those men with certain qualifications, even in the liberal Cape Colony. If we equate political participation with the right to vote, then, politics was the prerogative of the elite.

But political participation, of course, is not only about the right to vote. Petitioning is a mechanism through which citizens can communicate with their government. It is a system that has existed for centuries. In South Africa, petitioning dates to as early as 1675 with the petition of a few small farm-

ers to the Political Council of the Fort of the Dutch East India Company.¹ Petitions, Würgler explains, enable a study of “ordinary people as historical actors”.² Robert Ross in “These oppressions won’t cease” provides a window into the political participation of one such group of ordinary people: the Cape Khoesan.

Published by Wits University Press in 2017, “These oppressions” is an anthology of 98 texts by Khoesan individuals that relate to their “political, social and ecclesiological” thought during the middle of the nineteenth century, from roughly Ordinance 50 of 1828 to the end of the 1960s. The book is divided into three parts: part one focuses on the incorporation of the Khoesan into the colonial body politic (ca 1828-1848), part two on the colonial crisis and the establishment of a new order (1848-1852) and part three on the post-rebellion politics (1852-1879). Part one is further subdivided into eleven chapters, part two into four and part three into three. The book also has a very useful introduction, extensive notes, bibliography and index.

A standard critique of any anthology is text selection. Ross addresses this issue comprehensively in the introduction by answering seven questions: Who counts as Khoesan? What counts as Khoesan intellectual production? What counts as social and political thought? Are there categories of material that have been systematically excluded? Were there geographical and temporal constraints on the selection of material? In what language were they written? Where are the materials to be found, and how did they survive? It is a textbook example of transparent selection criteria, explaining not only why texts were included but also why some were not – and how this curated choice provides a counterweight to existing (oral) histories of the Khoesan. One missed opportunity, perhaps, is to relate these texts to other transcripts of Africans during the same time. Some of the petitions provide surprising parallels (and contrasts) – on the role of missionaries, to name one example – to Bergh and Morton’s transcription of the 1871 Transvaal Commission on African Labour.³

Then there are the texts themselves. They range in size, scope and theme. At a meeting held on the 5th of August, 1834 at Philipton to discuss the proposed Vagrancy Act, Frans Mager stood up to tell a very personal story: “When I was

1 R Kilpin, *The romance of a colonial parliament* (London, Longmans, Green Co, 1930), pp. 10-11.

2 A Würgler: “Voices from among the ‘silent masses’: Humble petitions and social conflicts in early modern central Europe”, *International Review of Social History*, 46(9), 2001, p. 12.

3 JS Bergh and F Morton, *‘To make them serve...’: The 1871 Transvaal commission on African labour* (Pretoria, Protea Boekhuis, 2003).

a boy, my Baas spoke to me in the Hottentot language, he would not teach me to speak the Dutch. I got only a few 'semels' to eat, and my Nation then was in a miserable states, so much so that I even rubbed myself over with white clay to try to gain acceptance with my master".⁴ In other cases, such as in the remarkable rebel orders scribbled in a stolen notebook, matters of national importance are discussed.⁵

It is not a war which the Government have wanted, otherwise the government would, as usual, have commanded us for the war, and have supplied us, at the first outbreak, with guns and gunpowder. It is a war which the settlers have caused, and thus the government must keep itself out of it as much as possible; let the settlers stand up for their own case, which they brought thus far. They have become prosperous and rich in our mother country and we poor Hottentots perish from poverty, having been the means of bringing them to such prosperity, by assisting them as servants and underlings, in various capacities for which we have little reward, and that with much difficulty. Let them now stand up for themselves!

These two examples not only demonstrate both the personal and public nature of these texts, but also point to something else: they provide wonderful insights into the economic histories of the Khoesan, a topic that, based on new statistical evidence, is attracting renewed attention.⁶ While Ross stresses the political, social and ecclesiastical contributions of these texts, to me, as economic historian, they seem fertile ground for future research. Perhaps this is also one minor shortcoming of the book: while the introduction (or "back-story") provides an informed if succinct overview of Khoesan and settler interactions, it neglects to attach numbers to this history. What, for example, was the size of the Khoesan population in 1828 or its share of the total population? And in 1865 and 1875, both census years? And do we know anything about their literacy rates, or occupational status, or family structure, or home or land ownership? Knowing this would help to give the pleas in the petitions better context.

But let us return to the political. Most of the texts are petitions to the Cape government or transcriptions of political meetings. This "politics from below" is an exciting area of research. Interest in political petitions is at an all time

⁴ R Ross, *These oppressions won't cease* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2017), p. 34.

⁵ R Ross, *These oppressions won't cease*, p. 125.

⁶ C Links, J Fourie and E Green, "The substitutability of slaves: Evidence from the eastern frontier of the Cape Colony", *Economic History of Developing Regions*, 2020 (In press).

high.⁷ In 2019, *Social Science History* dedicated its entire third issue to “The transformation of petitioning” with articles examining petitioning practices in nineteenth-century Spain,⁸ in Early Colonial India,⁹ and in chartist petitioning in Britain,¹⁰ for instance. Two decades earlier, the *International Review of Social History* similarly devoted a supplementary issue to the potential of petitions as a social history source.¹¹ This is facilitated by new digital history tools, from Optical Character Recognition software to statistical packages and textual analysis.

To give one example, quantification can bring meaning to the nature of political interactions. Mass petitioning campaigns, as Maartje Janse has shown, involve thousands of signatories and have been linked with historical revolutions and social movements.¹² Quantifying the numbers of signatories to these petitions could shed light on Khoesan political coordination and participation.

South Africa has been largely excluded from these exciting developments. As Kelsey Lemon remarks in a recent investigation of nineteenth-century petitions in the Cape Colony, secondary literature on petitioning in a South African context, remains thin on the ground.¹³ But change is underway. Kara Dimitruk at the University of Stellenbosch is combining transcribed petitions and statistical tools to investigate labour coercion in the late nineteenth-century Cape Colony. Jonathan Schoots at the University of Chicago is using innovative network analysis tools to investigate the birth of proto-nationalist political ideologies and the rise of new forms of African political and intellectual practice in the Cape between 1860 and 1910. Two teams of scholars at Chicago and the London School of Economics are looking at Cape Colony voters’ rolls, a source I have used recently too.¹⁴

7 H Miller: “Introduction: The transformation of petitioning in the long nineteenth century (1780-1914)”, *Social Science History*, 43(93), 2019, p. 409.

8 DP Cerezales, “Re-imagining petitioning in Spain (1808-1823)”, *Social Science History*, 43(3), 2019, pp. 487-508.

9 JA Jaffe, “The languages of petitioning in early colonial India”, *Social Science History*, 43(3), 2019, pp. 581-597.

10 M Chase, “What did Chartist petition for? Mass petitions in the British movement for democracy”, *Social Science History*, 43(3), 2019, pp. 531-551.

11 “Supplement 9: Petitions in Social History”, *International Review of Social History*, 46, 2001.

12 M Janse, “What value should we attach to all these petitions?”: Petition campaigns and the problem of legitimacy in the nineteenth-century Netherlands, *Social Science History*, 43(3), 2019, pp. 509-530.

13 K Lemon: “‘No sex in citizenship’: Investigating women’s petitions to the Cape parliament, 1873-1902” (Honours dissertation, Stellenbosch University, 2019).

14 F Nyika and J Fourie, “Black disenfranchisement in the Cape colony, c. 1887-1909: Challenging the numbers”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 2020 (In press).

Ross's anthology of Khoesan political thought, sprinkled with his comments informed by a lifetime of work on the topic, not only provides an invaluable resource to political scientists, sociologists, linguists and economists, but sets an example of how a master historian should practice their craft. In a time of underfunded archives and empirical scepticism, we need more historians willing to dig in and dig up.

Cradock: How segregation and apartheid came to a South African town

(University of Cape Town Press, Cape Town, 2019, 256 pp. ISBN 9780813940588)

Jeffrey Butler

Hermann Giliomee
University of Stellenbosch
hgiliome@mweb.co.za

Local history is the stepchild of South African historiography. All too often it is a product commissioned by a committee to commemorate the founding of a town and the role of the community leaders in building up the place from a humble settlement to a prosperous town or city. Invariably the white community and civic leadership enjoy most of the attention. Much work is still to be done on the coloured or black communities confronted various crisis in the places they lived.

In 1977 Jeffrey Butler, just retired from the post of Professor of History at Wesleyan University in Middletown Conn., undertook a trip to Cradock in the Eastern Cape. The task he set himself was writing the history of the town that he left shortly after the Second World War. The focus would be on the way in which segregation and apartheid impinged on a South African town.

Butler's Quaker grandfather came from Britain to South Africa in 1876 and settled in Cradock where he and a younger brother founded the local paper *Midland News and Karoo farmer*. It carried the Reuters wire service and often published articles propagating better treatment of Africans and coloured people. Butler's uncle was the mayor of the town in the late 1930s and his father sat on the town council when the Group Areas Act was imposed on the town. His aunt was a nurse in the African township.