***History Beyond Apartheid: New Approaches in South African Historiography*, ed. by Thula Simpson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023)**

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It is difficult to imagine today that 5,000 people would flock to a history conference in Johannesburg, but Thula Simpson reminds us that 5,000 people did indeed attend the triennial conference of the History Workshop in 1990. The conference was about the making of apartheid and it's a good illustration of how South Africa's English-language historiography was relatively unified, one characterised by debates about the nature and origins of the country's racial order between historians seen as liberal or radical. Afrikaans historiography too had been grouped around political questions, namely Afrikaner nationalism and Afrikaner leaders. This is no longer the case. Since the end of apartheid, historical research has expanded in multiple directions and, Simpson argues, the discipline has fragmented. In *History Beyond Apartheid*, he has provided a guide to this historiography and assembled, if not a comprehensive overview, then a helpful snapshot of the historical work that is being done.

It is this historiographical expansion which motivated this edited collection and informs its aim to bring historians working in diverging areas into discussion with each other. This is useful and arguably overdue. Indeed, fragmentation of the discipline had become a point of concern for some. Two decades ago, Keith Breckenridge lamented the lack of engagement by South African historians with each other's work and warned "major works of scholarship seem to be simply disappearing without a trace."[1]

Expansion and the accompanying fragmentation is not all bad though. It might reflect the more open and freer intellectual climate in which historical research is now conducted. This is a change worth emphasising. The apartheid government murdered critical scholars and forced others into exile.[2] Debate was stifled. The *Oxford History of South Africa* removed the chapter on African nationalism from the South African edition lest the book be banned, because it quoted imprisoned ANC leaders. Other contributors to that volume explained they were unable even to cite the work of academics involved in the liberation movement.[3] There were other restrictive pressures too. Simpson mentions that the historian Floors van Jaarsveld was publicly tarred and feathered at a conference in 1979 for questioning the orthodoxies of Afrikaner nationalism. Little wonder that, as Lindie Koorts explains in Chapter Seven, even Afrikaner historians seemed liberated after the collapse of apartheid.

More broadly, the end of apartheid detached the discipline from pressing political imperatives. Consequently, as Simpson puts it, historians no longer feel the same urgency in "defining what the entirety of South African history 'is'" (136). The results are evident in this volume. In his

[1] K. Breckenridge, 'Fighting for a White South Africa: White Working-Class Racism and the 1922 Rand Revolt,' *South African Historical Journal* 57:1 (2007), 231.
[2] The philosopher Rick Turner was likely murdered by the security services. Ruth First was murdered while in exile by a parcel bomb sent by South African police.
[3] R. Hyam, 'Are We Any Nearer an African History of South Africa?', *The Journal of African History* 16:3 (1973), 616.

brief preface, Simpson explains that contributors were given wide latitude on what they could write about and what follows is a kind of snapshot of historical work now being done not only about South Africa but in South Africa, as almost all the nine contributors are at South African universities. Simpson argues that "South African historiography has expanded in multiple directions since the 1990s" (*xi*) and that historians should engage more with each other about changes in the discipline.

As this suggests, this is a book for specialists, and prior knowledge of South Africa's history and historiography is needed to make sense of the chapters. There are nine chapters plus an introduction and preface by Simpson. These chapters are a mixture of historiographical interventions, personal reflections, and discussions about who produces historical knowledge, and under what conditions. The topics are impressively wide-ranging: animal history, transnational history, vernacular archives, whiteness and biography, though one notable absence is a reflection on South Africa's economic history, which has experienced a revival.

Simpson's introduction dives straight into a chronological account of South Africa's historiography from the 1960s onwards, covering the foregrounding of African agency, assessing the debate between liberal and radical historians, the emergence of social history and the critique of its limitations in the 1990s. Simpson's subsequent chapter in the book, Chapter Six, covers similar ground. Here, he focuses more tightly on the idea that the publication of the *Oxford History of South Africa* in 1969 marked "an important historiographical watershed" (120) by transcending Eurocentrism and foregrounding African agency. Simpson instead argues there were strong continuities between the liberal histories of the early twentieth century and the *Oxford History*, and that the former incorporated more African perspectives than has been appreciated.

Nomalanga Mkhize offers in Chapter Five a different kind of historiographical overview about the sorts of histories that were not considered part of the historiography by historians in South African universities. Her chapter looks at historical writing in Xhosa and clan genealogies produced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She argues convincingly that these sorts of historical texts have been marginalised and their authors not regarded as historians, as their white contemporaries have been. Instead, these texts, when utilised at all, have been consulted primarily to mine empirical details.

Other contributions are historiographical interventions with the authors building on their own specialities. Chapter Two by Sandra Swart is perhaps the best illustration of how far historical research has shifted from the debates that preoccupied South African historical writing thirty years ago. Her entertaining chapter is a macro-scale history of the relationships between humans and baboons, and considers how these ruptured with the spread of sedentary agriculture. This is not only about changes in how humans thought about baboons. Swart shows that baboons have their own histories, as the baboon cultures have changed in response to changes in their environment and changes in how humans interact with them.

Rob Skinner's Chapter Ten is an argument for the importance of global history in understanding South Africa's past. He surveys South Africa's place in the often-weighty tomes written on global and imperial history, and shows the potential for understanding the anti-apartheid movement as a global phenomenon. He has valuable suggestions too for future research looking at connections between Southern Africa and Latin America, such as transnational histories of the apartheid state and military regimes across the Atlantic or comparative histories of reconciliation projects undertaken in the democracies that succeeded them.

Chapters by Neil Roos and Danelle van Zyl-Hermann both focus on histories of whites. Chapter Eight by Roos is a call for what he terms anti-racist histories of white people, that is histories with whites as their subject but which critique whiteness as a stable category. The chapter contains several perceptive historical vignettes that speak to this, such as how the apartheid state created work colonies to punish and rehabilitate whites deemed lazy or degenerate and transform them into productive citizens. He also details recent writings under the heading "writing new histories of whites," though curiously overlooks one of the only books written on the topic in recent years, the edited collection *Rethinking White Societies in Southern Africa*.[4]

Chapter Nine by van Zyl-Hermann can be seen as a response to Roos's call for work on the topic. She makes a plea for studies of white working class lives and critiques the understanding that whites in South Africa became a homogenous group during apartheid. The apartheid state, she argues, was closely concerned with the lives of working-class whites and she disputes the idea that the National Party's economic policy led to a broad and successful economic upliftment of whites. Racial privilege depended on class position and white workers lost key racial privileges in the decade before the end of the apartheid.

Mandisa Mbali's Chapter Four is more methodological than historiographical, though there's a historiographical point too. She aims to look at Black women beyond nationalist organisers or as mothers and maids and suggests that a way to do this is to take a more expansive view of potential sources, one that encompasses art and literary fiction. Her chapter also includes a specific call to action to tackle underrepresentation by Black women in history departments, rather than simply lamenting this situation as is often the case. Adequate knowledge production, she argues, requires the profession "to have more female historians" (76).

Janeke Thumbran too closely considers the spaces where history is being taught and practised in Chapter Three, and provides insights into the conditions under which historical research is produced. She picks up similar points about underrepresentation as Mbali and offers a reflection of her experience as a young Black woman teaching history. One unexpected insight, for me, is her explanation of how student movements pushing for decolonisation in academia have undermined her position. Students have dismissed her intellectual credentials, accusing her of "upholding 'colonial' standards" (57) and challenged her selection of readings. This makes her position in the lecture room tenuous and limits her ability to design courses as she sees fit.

Lindie Koorts's Chapter Seven on historical biography has something of a personal reflection too as she discusses her biography of apartheid leader D. F. Malan and the reception of her book. She situates this in a discussion of the incredible popularity of biography and autobiography as genres in South Africa. This fulfils what she identifies as the urge to elevate heroes "who reflect the values of the moment" (161). Biography may be the most popular way people engage with history, a far cry from what politically engaged social historians envisaged in the 1980s.

Edited books can often be improved with a conclusion. This would have helped the book achieve its stated aim of bringing different areas of the discipline into contact and to think about points of commonality between the diverging chapters. One is chronology. When does "South African" history begin? Most chapters are about events and developments in the twentieth

[4] D. Money and D. van Zyl-Hermann, *Rethinking White Societies in Southern Africa, 1930s-1990s* (Abingdon, 2020)

century, a marked change from older scholarship that took a keen interest in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Geography is another commonality. The chapters largely take the modern boundaries of South Africa as the unit of analysis, a decision that probably flows from the chronological focus on the recent past. For all its strengths, the volume would have been improved had there been more explicit reflection on what constitutes the “when” and “where” of South African history.