

The left 'wilfully chose the route of theatrical campaigning around a half-baked messianic figure over the painstaking slog of building a genuinely left democratic movement that could challenge for hegemony' (p. 443). Instead of a revitalised left, the Zuma presidency provides a new embrace of 'custom' and 'tradition', and a drift away from reliance on the constitution. The ANC under Zuma, suggests Marais, is dabbling with a normative framework combining social conservatism, an unbridled acquisitiveness and populist nationalism.

It is a pretty bleak horizon. Marais ended *Limits to Change*, a decade ago, with a call for 'new levels of invention, new forms of courage and a new appetite for risk'. The concluding chapter of *Pushed to the Limit* lacks this tone, this zest for left renewal. Its tone is set in an epigraph quoting Slavoj Žižek: 'The first step towards liberation is, in a way, the awareness of defeat.'

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Representing Bushmen: South Africa and the origin of language by S. MORAN

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2011 is the centenary of the publication of *Specimens of Bushman Folklore*, a book concerning the folklore and beliefs of /xam and !kun Bushmen, as recorded by the philologist Wilhelm Bleek and his sister-in-law Lucy Lloyd, in Cape Town in the 1870s and 1880s. The centenary is being celebrated by an international conference at the University of Cape Town. The conference focuses on the multiple ways in which the /xam material has been engaged with by scholars, artists and authors, and how this has placed the material in the public domain. From the motto on South Africa's coat of arms, to poetry, picture books and revised interpretations of ancient rock art, /xam Bushmen have become enmeshed in the restructuring of post-apartheid South African identity.

In *Representing Bushmen*, Moran seeks to provide a counter narrative to the continued enthusiasm for the Bleek archive, as epitomised by this conference. Moran believes such enthusiasm perpetuates lamentable but habituated ways of thinking which prolong the legacy of the joint ventures of apartheid, capitalism and colonialism. He suggests that the cooperation of Bleek with the /xam to save their beliefs is overwhelmingly perceived as an exception to the broader oppressive colonial project, and a breach in the stultifying influence of the colonial legacy. With a mind to put the record straight, Moran burrows deep into Bleek's philological theory as principally propounded in his earlier work, *On the Origin of Language* (1869), aiming to reveal a man at the heart of the dark colonial enterprise.

Moran highlights Bleek's role in the development of South African racial discrimination by drawing on literary studies, linguistics, history and philosophy. He follows Saul Dubow's call for the academic exploration of the intellectual roots of racism and Andrew Bank's wider historical contextualisation of Bleek. Moran determines that Bleek located the Bushmen within a discriminatory economic model of progress. Drawing on Marx, Moran identifies a fetishisation of Bushmen in Bleek, rooted in his evolutionary ideas regarding development. Bleek envisaged a hierarchy, from human origins in ape-like feelings and

gestures, to abstract thinking and literacy via anthropomorphism, personification, analogy and metaphor. At the heart of this is the notion of progress from the animal to the civilised, based on the increasing abbreviation and refinement of language that are associated with the ability to think abstractly and, in a related capitalist sense, be efficient and productive. Moran tracks Bleek's blinkered theorising regarding how certain types of primitive languages related to abstract thought and explains how Bleek understood evolution to proceed from animal, to African, to civilised.

Moran's book is a useful contribution to both Bushmen studies and the wider arena of post-colonial analysis. His highly detailed study ably and satisfyingly contextualises Bleek within his own historical intellectual milieu. The unpacking of the contemporaneous and subsequent relevance of Bleek's search for origins provides fascinating insights into the intellectual currents behind South Africa's distinctive social problems. There are, however, two points which make me hesitate to fully commend Moran's clearly erudite work.

The first (and lesser) of these criticisms concerns style. At times Moran's writing is difficult as he employs philosophy, rhetorical concepts, and Marxism, while simultaneously seeking to illustrate Bleek's own relationship to aspects of the same intellectual inheritance. While it may be interesting to analyse anthropomorphism through Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, and useful to analyse Bleek's work through ideas such as catachresis, parataxis, prolepsis, propaedeutic and prosopopoeia, I am not sure this provides the most accessible or efficient route. Linking Aristotelian ideas of respiration to Bushman ideas of the throat is particularly perplexing (p. 142). Such continued application of European theorising to African contexts seems to jar with Moran's own critique of the perpetuation of colonial thought.

The second and not unrelated criticism concerns whether or not there is something of a straw man in Moran's argument – and whether this reflects a deeper gulf between the concerns of critical theory and the current academic relationship with the Bleek material. Moran is clearly unhappy with the colonial capitalist conspiracy, its legacy and its ties to persistent racist thinking entrenched in 'the brutal system' – and quite rightly so. However, he seems to be arguing against celebrating the Bleek archive, in any manner, because it was written by a founding father of South African racism. Bleek was undoubtedly part of the colonial project, and Moran's analysis does much to emphasise his centrality and the insidious role he played. Nonetheless, Bleek was a dedicated, ambivalent and complex person, unusually focused on capturing an authentic idiom in his translations of folklore and beliefs. His work is indeed a text encumbered with colonial representation, but it was done meticulously. At the same time, the writing seems metaphorical and mystical. It plays with nature, enchantment and dreams of origins. Collectively this confluence brings an extraordinary depth, richness and salience to the archive and it is this that continues to be explored and celebrated.

Moran's deeply colonial staging of Bleek seems to reflect the excessive emphasis on ideological demystification that has dominated critical theory conferences of recent decades. It is a preoccupation with the past that is out of step with what Skotnes and others behind the UCT conference have long been striving for, which is a place where the text is recognised for its historical

anthropological value, while also being allowed to become something else. The future that was dreamt for South Africa has not happened. The multivalent quality of the Bleek and Lloyd archive places it at the forefront of a process of reimagination. I am left wondering what is more useful to the future of South Africa: more dogged high theory deconstruction of colonialism, the details of which I am sure no one contests in principle, or an exploratory energy which weaves academia into the very real concerns, feelings and hopes of Bushmen and other Southern Africans alike.

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Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta: managing the complex politics of petro violence edited by C. OBI and S. A. RUSTAD

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Building on over two decades of research on the political economy of oil and conflict in Nigeria's Niger Delta, Cyril Obi, with Sari Aas Rustad, is well placed to bring together fourteen authors all with their own track record in what has become the field of 'Niger Delta studies'. The aim of this edited volume is to explore 'the complex causes and dimensions of petro-violence and insecurity in the Niger Delta'. The book does not claim to provide an overarching theoretical or empirically grounded perspective of the Niger Delta problematic. Dividing it into three parts – the first looking at structural causes of conflict, the second at the internal dynamics of conflict, and the third at the role that multinational corporations have played within it – the editors deliberately seek to create a space for the airing of a 'variety of perspectives' amidst 'the ongoing debates' between those who subscribe to the 'greed and grievance' thesis, and those who 'call for more nuanced, balanced and radical perspectives'.

The collection as a whole is welcome reading, especially in light of the recent proliferation of 'reportage' style narratives written mainly by journalists turned academics on the Niger Delta (Shaxson 2007, Peel 2009, Ghazvinian 2008), or partial comparative analyses (Soares de Oliveira 2007), that while rich, fail to do justice to the complexity and specificity of the Niger Delta situation. This volume has the merit of at least attempting to focus specifically on the Niger Delta, and builds on earlier collaborations by some of the same authors (Keneth Omeje 2008). Of particular note is the detailed and crisp analysis of militants and militancy by Augustine Ikelegbe ('Popular and criminal violence as instruments of struggle in the Niger Delta'), in which he provides a dynamic yet structured typology of the different kinds of militia groups that have emerged. Charles Ukeje's historical comparison between colonial pacification methods and latter-day approaches to security in the Niger Delta ('Changing the paradigm of pacification: oil and militarization in Nigeria's Delta region'), and Anna Zalik's plea that we deconstruct narratives of transgression (militancy, violence, oil theft) that are promoted by multinational corporations and portray oil companies as victims and communities as perpetrators of violence, are particularly inspiring reading and suggest new ways of making sense of the Niger Delta which go beyond received wisdoms and the frequent lament that