Book Reviews and Notices

LABOURER OR SETTLER? COLONIAL NATAL'S INDIAN DILEMMA 1860-1897.
by DUNCAN DU BOIS
Durban: Just Done Productions, 2011. 216 pp. illus. map.
ISBN: 978-1-920315-65-8. R190

DUNCAN Du Bois' book, *Labourer or Settler? – Colonial Natal's Indian Dilemma 1860-1897*, is a veritable tome of information on the goings-on in colonial Natal from the time of the arrival in 1860 of the first group of Indian indentured labourers from India. The book conveys detailed information on the role that different colonial prime ministers and other leading white figures played in the politics of Natal during this period, with particular reference to their reactions to the arrival and settlement of the Indian indentured labourers.

Over the years, there has been much scholarship on the history of Indian indenture in South Africa, but largely from "inside" indenture. Among the trail blazers or pioneers in this field are Bridglal Pachai, Surendra Bhana, and Joy Brain. Recent scholars who have written on the Indian indentured history include Goolam Vahed and Ashwin Desai [2007]. Du Bois' contribution is a necessary one, as he writes mainly from the perspective and vantage point of the dominant and powerful white settler community, and of their responses to the indentured labourers. Du Bois foregrounds a neglected but crucial angle to the history of indentured Indians. While the other historians allude to this history, he explores in close detail the changing reactions and attitudes of white settlers to the arrival of Indians as they became a growing and permanent presence in the colony.

The study is principally about Sir John Robinson, who was the editor of *The Natal Mercury*, which was established in 1852, eight years before the arrival of the indentured labourers. The newspaper itself became an important medium where opinions on indentured labour were routinely expressed and which served to mould white settler opinion. Du Bois points out that *The*

Natalia 42 (2012) Copyright © Natal Society Foundation 2012

Mercury strove to champion the cause of the sugar planters. Robinson also became Prime Minister of Natal, and wielded strong influence.

The narrative of indentured Indians in South Africa is well known. As the colony was developing its sugar industry it needed labour. At the request of some 50 white sugar planters, it was decided to import workers from India as a panacea to the problem of the shortage of labour. Although there was a large indigenous population, Du Bois rightly points out that Africans enjoyed a certain economic independence in that the needs of their subsistence economy did not require them to subject themselves to regular employment by the colonial farmers. Some scholars argue that Africans actively resisted being co-opted in the new proletarianising economy of the colony [See Atkins 1993]. However, as Bhana [2012], citing the works of John Laband and P.S. Thompson, observes, this did not prevent the colonials from moving away from their own policy of "trusteeship", to land ownership or land appropriation; and to luring Africans away from peasant labour and their traditional moorings to mining and manufacturing pursuits. Thus began the infamous migrant labour system.

The first group of Indian indentured labourers – 342 in total – arrived in Durban, or Port Natal, on 16 November 1860 on the *SS Truro*. The decision to import Indian labour was to change the economic and socio-cultural landscape of South Africa radically. Du Bois states that Robinson noted that the arrival of Indians was "the harbinger of a new dispensation … though in a sense far wider than we expected".

Indisputably, the Indian indentured labourers had a huge impact on the economic development of colony. J.R. Saunders, a well-known sugar planter, noted that "each shipload of coolies brings with it, indirectly, importation of capital and capitalists" [in Du Bois 2011:45].

As Indian immigration to Natal swelled, however, with many labourers opting to remain in Natal when their "girmits" [a vernacularised version of the word "agreement"] expired, the white colonists became apprehensive of the growing Indian presence, and words such as "threat", "menace", "influx" or "invasion" were frequently used to describe the new Indian presence. Du Bois points out that between 1876 and 1886 the increase was 278%, where the number of Indians actually eclipsed the size of the white population. The perception that many indentured workers did not go back to India because Natal was a "paradise" for Indians needs to be re-examined. We should remember that there were several push factors that forced the indentured workers out of India. Ironically, many of the push factors in India were created by the British Raj, the ruling power at the time in India. In addition, returning to India was not a simple matter. Apart from problems of poverty and famine in India, there was also caste stigmatisation for those who had crossed the dark waters or *kala pani*, as Desai and Vahed argue. Distanced from their homeland, which began to exist only in receding memory, the labourers were reluctant to leave the "familiar temporariness" of their new abode, to use a phrase from V.S. Naipaul's classic diasporic novel, *A House for Mr Biswas*.

As it emerges, Du Bois's narrative shows how the Indian indentured labourers were seen solely as mere labour units, reduced to chattels or commodities. Du Bois notes that they were

Natalia 42 (2012) Copyright © Natal Society Foundation 2012

considered as "work hands". Given the economic boom that the Indian presence signalled, many sugar planters were less inclined to halt their entry. It is clear that the colonists were quite happy to use the workers' labour but expressed growing resentment about their becoming a permanent fixture in the colony. The colonists were caught between the Scylla of improved economic prospects and the Charybdis of an alien and unwanted presence in what they saw as *their* colony. Du Bois rightly refers to this as a "paradox", stating that "while resentment towards the presence of the Indian as a settler intensified, simultaneously economic demands for fresh batches or indentured Indian labour reached new levels of necessity". [Du Bois 2011:12]

Du Bois' research is revealing, as we see the extent to which the colonial leaders went in dealing with what they saw as the "growing coolie evil". [Du Bois 2011:71] Among the coterie of prominent men who executed colonial history, the names of John Moreland, Sir John Robinson, Harry Escombe, Harry Sparks, J.R. Saunders all frequent the pages of Du Bois' book. Many have become prominent in the popular imagination as they were honoured by having places in the region named after them. However, in Du Bois' study we see these luminaries in a different light. I read with incredulity that Huletts also feared being "swamped by Asiatics". My grandparents worked for Huletts in Kearsney and several generations of our families were in Huletts' employ, and revered them as benevolent employers.

What is also revealing, from Du Bois' study, is that representatives of the British Crown, such as the Lord Chamberlain in London, and Lord Elgin, Viceroy of India, were not consistent in their objections to the various efforts to control the interests and welfare of Indians. Equally disconcerting, as Du Bois reveals, is that some Christian leaders supported these anti-Indian sentiments. Du Bois records, for example, that the Revd Ezra Nuttall, a Methodist missionary in Verulam in 1882, referred to the "influx" of "Arab" traders. To his credit, however, the Revd Dr Lancelot Booth, founder of St Aidan's Anglican Indian Mission, did draw attention to the "debilitating effects on women labouring in the canefields for 11 hours a day". [Du Bois 2011:27] Du Bois concludes that generally Christian churches did not act as a "pressure group" against the discrimination meted out to the Indians. As a layperson in the Anglican Church in South Africa, I wondered what the faith and church affiliations of many of the white colonists were.

Du Bois' study recounts in detail the different pieces of anti-Indian legislation that were introduced to protect the interests of the white settlers. Much of this history is occluded from general knowledge, and Du Bois' research exposes the relentless and systematic attempts to prevent further immigration and to make life so difficult for the Indian indentured workers that they would opt to return to India at the end of their indentured contracts. There were also attempts to halt the arrival of free or "passenger" Indians, who were mainly businessmen. Both groups were subjected to a battery of discriminatory laws. Legislation to prevent the granting of business licences to passenger Indians was an attempt to reduce the social and commercial impact of Indians, and forestall the competition they exerted against white entrepreneurs. Bhana [2012] points out that it is necessary to chart chronologically the changing

Natalia 42 (2012) Copyright © Natal Society Foundation 2012

attitudes of the colony in relation to Indian labourers. He cites the rise of white working class influence on Natal's politics as an important factor in increasing anti-Indian sentiments in the 1890s – a condition, he points out, that was not prominent in the 1860s.

Du Bois records that other legislation included prohibiting Indians from owning land and, from the 1890s onwards, enjoying the franchise. Robinson, followed by Escombe, was directly responsible for denying Indians the vote. Du Bois states that it was "through Robinson's efforts that Indians were excluded from the franchise and that they posed no political challenge to the dominance of white colonists". [Du Bois 2011:170] Escombe actually cites practices in other colonies, such as Mauritius and Fiji, to justify policies in Natal. He speaks of the "coolie curse" "sucking the lifeblood of the European storekeepers". [Du Bois 2011: 183]

Robinson also advocated residential segregation. The "free coolie population [should be] confined to a distinct locality … where their natural peculiarities will not interfere with the comfort of European settlers". [Du Bois 2011:30] Clearly, there were growing class distinctions that influenced these sentiments, as Robinson asserted in *The Natal Mercury* that "restrictions and regulations as regards residential locations should apply only to the lower orders among Indians". [Du Bois 2011:44]

The colonists also complained about the labourers being a health hazard and, at times, quarantined the ships at the harbour, as in 1896. Du Bois states directly and without equivocation that "much of the municipal history of colonial society concerns its efforts to impose its will and standards on an emerging class of settlers whose presence it resented. Sanitation and town planning by-laws served as the means to discriminate against Indians and to segregate them from white society". [Du Bois 2011: 69] Robinson had described Indians as the most "unsanitary class of people". [in Du Bois 2011:70]

There was no denying the visible squalor of certain dwellings, given the erection of shacks and shanties, but Du Bois rightly points out that many employers reneged on their duty to provide adequate housing for the labourers.

These colonial leaders clearly followed a policy of expediency, influenced more by conservative white public opinion and the ballot box than the demands of justice, decency and fair play. To be fair, however, there were times when Robinson had a change of heart and used *The Natal Mercury* to commend good treatment of the Indians. He exhorted his countrymen to "discharge our trusteeship" as a blessing, and called for compassion. Robinson introduced the more benign notion of "coolie management", and argued that "economic expediency needed to be balanced with humanitarian concern". [Du Bois 2011:37] The Colonial Office, too, was opposed to blatant discrimination; consequently, as Du Bois shows, the legislation was couched in ways that did not make it too obvious that Indians were being directly targeted. The institution of a Protector of Indian Immigrants was inaugurated, and several commissions were set up to look at the abuse and inhuman treatment of the Indians but, as Du Bois shows, they were not exactly impartial and thorough. He notes that "the humanitarian aspect of the inquiry was played down – even sanitised – so that in the interests of the planters the

Natalia 42 (2012) Copyright © Natal Society Foundation 2012

system of indentured immigration could be reinstated". [Du Bois 2011: 49]

The nub of the problem – and this is Du Bois' thesis – was whether the Indian indentured worker, and the passenger Indian who followed, should be given the status of "settler" or relegated to the status of "labourer". Given the white colonists' rather conventional view of "labourer" this became a pressing dilemma, one that defined the politics of the region for many decades. Du Bois concludes that there "never was a clear statement of acceptance by white colonial Natal of the settler status of Indians". [Du Bois 2011:182]

Throughout *Labourer or Settler?*, Du Bois presents a focused chronicle. He comes across as a dispassionate scholar, diligently presenting hard data or facts, through his very commendable use of primary sources. His animated and graphic re-creation of the history of those times is indeed remarkable. His research shows that there was no attempt at whitewashing that history – all records seem meticulously preserved, and he has been studious in exploring them closely, and constructing a credible and compelling narrative. He allows the facts to speak for themselves. To his credit, he is not defensive of the white colonial leaders, who perpetrated acute injustices against Indians, nor does he present information selectively. Du Bois does acknowledge that the legislation was oppressive to Indians. As he points out, for example, in his portrayal of Robinson: "White settler attitudes, perhaps best exemplified by John Robinson, shifted from paternalism to protection of white interests and the perpetuation of white domination". [Du Bois 2011:10] Interestingly, Du Bois allows the leaders to incriminate themselves by what they say and do; nor does he rationalise their behaviour and actions.

It is clear that Du Bois values objectivity as the mark of the historian, and does not adopt a combative or polemical style. However, this very approach, arguably, leads to a certain "mutedness" in the overall presentation. Du Bois' approach raised the question for me of the role of the scholar or historian. Does an historian fix his colours to the mast, and declare where he stands or does he remain neutral? Should a scholar take sides, especially in colonial histories, where the battle-lines are clear from the vantage point of post-colonial critique.

In reading the book, which I found highly informative on many fronts, I wondered how a reflective, theorising, stance might develop a more robust analysis of this historical narrative, supported by the thorough empirical, if somewhat traditional, historical approach that Du Bois adopts. I appreciate that Du Bois is setting himself a very specific goal – chronicling a "straight history" [to use Hayden White's formulation] – and delimiting the boundaries of his study. Initially presented as a Masters dissertation, *Labourer or Settler?* is an impressive study in its scope and execution. One does not normally expect critique of historiographical approaches at this level. However, I wonder what it might mean, in presenting a top-down imperial history, to take a broad, wide-ranging critical view of that very history? How might a scholar working in the 21st century benefit from some of the critical thinking that has been generated in the 20th, especially in relation to reading colonial history?

I appreciate that Du Bois eschews an intrusive, ideological rendering, but I wondered how he might go beyond the notion that archival labour is more than

Natalia 42 (2012) Copyright © Natal Society Foundation 2012

an "extractive exercise", to use Ann Laura Stoler's critique [2008]. After all, at the start of the study, Du Bois himself promises a "fresh review of a formative period in the history of KwaZulu- Natal". [2011:8] Critics such as Madhavi Kale [1998] have been critical of the sole dependence on colonial archives in the history of Empire, particularly in relation to its history of labour. Indeed, Subaltern Studies in general, which evolved to counter the dependence on dominant constructions of imperial history, argue against the sole dependence on colonial archives.

Antoinette Burton [2011], in her insightful re-reading of British imperialism, takes a global and world perspective, inducing a critique of the Western liberal humanist tradition, defined by race representation and a white hegemonic masculinity. This background is pertinent too, incidentally, to a study of Chinese coolie or indentured migration, occurring at roughly the same time as Indian indentured labour. What were the peculiarities of this "Age of Colonial Capital", in which this study is located, and the nature of plantation economies, that determined the way the white settlers behaved? Further, Kale shows through her research that the Imperial state worked closely with the British colonies to set up the indentured system. Kale and other historians, such as David Northrup [1995], argue for a comparative approach to the study of indenture, so that the history of each region is understood more comprehensively and in a more critical light.

These caveats are suggested, not to invoke a solely heroic narrative of Indian history in South Africa, or to present a one-dimensional narrative of "perpetrator" and "victim", or to deny the cultural chauvinism of Indians themselves, but to attempt a holistic, global, critical view of that history. Further, this is also not to deny the combative role that eminent British thinkers played in the politics of Empire in both the metropole and colony – activists such as William Wilberforce and Olive Schreiner, for example, to name just two.

From discourses on Orientalism, as propounded by Edward Said [1979], we appreciate how the sovereignty of the Western self and culture was assumed and assured, and how the Other was constructed, in order to legitimise Western policy and practice. From the research that Du Bois presents, we realise that the Natal colony was a racialised landscape, governed tacitly by reductive dichotomies, such as "civilised West" and primitive or othered East, and this provided the context where the cultural chauvinism of the British was practised and generally accepted unquestioningly. As Du Bois states: "Colonialism was an accepted European practice during the 19th century," [Du Bois 2011:188] and that there was implicit need to keep "Anglo-Saxon traditions". Fanon reminds us how black "deviance" in general was constructed in the colonial mind, as a way of justifying western hubris, and how the pathologies of racist imperial societies played themselves out and were accepted as "normal". Contemporary "whiteness" studies also foregrounds the shoring up of white hegemony historically – of white normativity and natural entitlement, of the invisible ways in which whiteness manifested itself, to generally produce an unquestioned white western subjectivity – all elements, arguably, that we find as the subtext of Du Bois' narrative.

The essential argument around the difference between the status of "labourer" and that of "settler" may be

Natalia 42 (2012) Copyright © Natal Society Foundation 2012

seen in the light of the concept of "abstract bodies". James Duncan [2002], deploying the notion of "abstract space" in plantation economies, such as Ceylon, shows how "abstract bodies" were produced and regulated, through various technologies of control. Joanne Sharp explicates this notion: "Abstract bodies are bodies that are docile, useful, disciplined, rationalised, normalised, and controlled sexually. In short, they are economic investments to be protected and utilised to their greatest capacity … Plantation owners' ideas were based on a nineteenth century belief in scientific solutions to what were seen as highly interrelated problems of race, moral depravity, disease, material squalor and political disorder. They tried to transform what was seen as the flawed native body into the abstract body of the labourer, a body that corresponded to abstract routines of labour in time and space." [Sharp 2009:66]

In addition, Du Bois' study would have benefited from a consideration of the theoretical distinction in the literature between settlers and migrants. The latter are seen as people who move to another country and lead diasporic lives but do not necessarily enjoy inherent political rights; the former usually establish political orders of conquest. According to Belich, an "emigrant joined someone else's society; a settler or colonist made his own". [Belich 2005:53] Other features of settler colonial states include the permanency of settlement; creating political and economic conditions, usually as a result of racial exclusion, that favour settlers over migrants and indigenous peoples, institutional settler privilege [especially relating to land allocation practices] and distinct legal and social structures. Seen in this light, can the labourer ever become a settler? For her part, Kale argues that Indian indentured labour must be seen in terms of imperial labour re-allocation rather than labour migration. This makes the impersonal category of "labour" more important [for the colonials] than the category of "labourer".

In the context of South Africa, the history set out in *Labourer or Settler?* adumbrates the development of class–race conflict in a capitalist society, of worker relations and struggles, of state-engineered racism – that came to define the South African apartheid era and the rest of the 20th century. Du Bois' narrative shows implicitly that there were powerful interests that shaped white bourgeois society in South Africa, and that the colonists followed an unabashed ruling class agenda. The underside of this, of course [although, admittedly, this is not Du Bois' narrative], was the long and convoluted struggles of defiance in different forms and in which diverse peoples participated, that also marked the history of South Africa in the 20th century, culminating in the first democratic elections in 1994. The complex history that Du Bois constructs and documents at a specific and particular period of colonial history in South Africa does illustrate the "working of the law of unintended consequences", [Du Bois 2011:181] but in ways that wildly surpassed the colonial imagination at the time.

REFERENCES

Atkins, Keletso E. 1993. *The Moon is Dead! Give Us Our Money! The Cultural Origins of an African Work Ethic, Natal, South Africa, 1843-1900*. Portsmouth NH, Heinemann.

Bhana, Surendra. 2012. Personal email correspondence with the reviewer.

Belich, James. 2005. "The rise of the Angloworld: Settlement in North America and Australia, 1784-1918." In Phillip Buckner, R Douglas

Natalia 42 (2012) Copyright © Natal Society Foundation 2012

Francis [eds], *Rediscovering the British World*. Calgary, University of Calgary Press, pp. 39-57.

Burton, Antoinette. 2011. *Empire in Question – Reading, Writing and Teaching British Imperialism*. Durham, US, London, Duke University Press.

Desai, Ashwin and Goolam Vahed. 2007. *Inside Indenture – A South African Story, 1860-1914.* Durban, Madiba Publishers.

Du Bois, Duncan. 2011. *Labourer or Settler? – Colonial Natal's Indian Dilemma 1860-1897.* Durban, Just Done Productions.

Duncan, J. 2002. "Embodying Colonisation? Dominance and Resistance in 19th Century Ceylonese Coffee Plantations." In *Journal of Historical Geography*, Vol 28, No 3, pp.317-338.

Kale, Madhavi. 1998. *Fragments of Empire: Capital, Slavery and Indian Indentured Labour.* Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press.

Northrup, David. 1995. *Indentured Labour in the Age of Indenture 1834 -1922.* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Said, Edward W. 1979. *Orientalism*. New York, Vintage Books.

Sharp, Joanne P. 2009. *Geographies of Postcolonialism.* London, Sage Publications.

Stoler, Ann Laura. 2008. *Along the Archival Grain – Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense.* Princeton, Princeton University Press.

White, Hayden. 1975. *Metahistory – The Historical Imagination in 19th Century Europe.* Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press.

BETTY GOVINDEN

FIRST PRESIDENT: A LIFE OF JOHN L. DUBE, FOUNDING PRESIDENT OF THE ANC

by HEATHER HUGHES

Johannesburg: Jacana, 2011, 312 pages, illustrations.

THE name of John Langalibalele Dube is increasingly in the public consciousness. Next to King Shaka International Airport, for example, is the Dube trade port with its new statue. And coinciding with the centenary of the African National Congress (ANC), Heather Hughes has clearly picked an ideal subject. But there is a broader reason why this biography is so timely. It has now become routine for major speeches made by government figures to include a standard denunciation of "colonial oppression" along with apartheid. While there are justifiable reasons for this, it creates one-dimensional history, a victimology that discounts the lives of those who adapted to, and in many cases thrived under, the colonial regime. Dube's life constitutes a classic case study of the ambiguities and contradictions of the *kholwa* community, who were anything but victims.

When Dube died in February 1946 on his 75th birthday, having suffered from diabetes and then a stroke, his study was emptied by persons unknown. Bar a few books everything disappeared into oblivion. So Heather Hughes has faced the challenge of relying on the public record to reveal Dube the private man. The public persona is remarkable enough: founder of Ohlange mission school, editor of *Ilanga lase Natal*, minister, farmer, business entrepreneur, writer, and first president of what would become the ANC.

Hughes, in contrast to previous interpreters who used a linear trajectory of Dube's life that ended as a perceived conservative, reveals a man of conflicting beliefs who was constantly pushed and pulled by radical and moderate instincts. This is not entirely unusual in the human condition, but it is particularly fascinating in the context of the early years of the African middle

Natalia 42 (2012) Copyright © Natal Society Foundation 2012

class with its challenges and complex connections.

Conflicting identity underlies this biography. Dube grew up at the Inanda mission station founded by the Lindleys where his father James was the first African pastor and the Dubes were the leading *kholwa* family. His origins were complex: Zulu, Qadi (many of whom fought for the British in the Anglo-Zulu War) and Lala (people driven out of Zululand south of the Thukela River). At the age of 10 he joined Adams College where he was schooled under a highly intensive, regimented regime of intellectual effort and physical labour. As would happen regularly in black educational institutions, food (in this case the quality of the sugar supplied with the mealie meal) was a catalyst for student revolt. Dube was found guilty of stealing oranges and eggs and taking snuff. In 1886 he was in trouble again and briefly left Adams, but on his return experienced a total spiritual and intellectual conversion under the influence of the American missionary William C. Wilcox, an advocate of industrial missions.

Wilcox became a father figure and sponsor of Dube's further education in the United States. Already absorbed in an American missionary world view, this was a logical move and Dube was one of the first black South Africans to travel to North America. His enrolment at Oberlin in 1887 required considerable adaptation as he had to pay his way as a manual labourer and porter. He was also acutely conscious of his imperfect English, but missionary connections enabled him to practise as a public speaker.

Illness forced an early return home and by 1893 he held a post at Adams with responsibilities at Beatrice Street chapel in Durban, a focus of steady black urbanisation. That year Dube made a significant move to affirm his identity by achieving exemption from Native Law. Now married to Nokutela, he was posted to Incwadi mission station on the Mkhomazi River west of Pietermaritzburg where the Dubes had great success in attracting converts. He also made his first political challenge in a letter to the editor of *Inkanyiso yase Natal* questioning the treatment of Africans by magistrates. A succession controversy over the pastorate at Inanda provided the first inkling that Dube might be too ambitious and autonomous for the American Zulu Mission (AZM) and he and Nokutela returned to America for him to qualify for ordination.

Based in New York at the Union Missionary Training Institute at the close of the nineteenth century they formed an impressive partnership, speaking and singing at fund-raising functions. Dube came under the influence of the Tuskegee movement of Booker T. Washington in particular, Afro-American ideas in general, with an emphasis on self-reliance and the redemption of Africa through pan-Africanism.

Dube was finally ordained in 1899 and returned to Natal qualified, funded and well-connected. The reward was the position of pastor at Inanda, a return to the geographic roots that Hughes argues dominated most of his life. By 1901 he had controversially founded the Ohlange industrial school with a self-help regimen that was both a financial necessity and seen as educationally beneficial. But this was interpreted as an independent move at a time when educated, exempt Africans were regarded with high suspicion by the authorities whose great fear was Ethiopianism. In

Natalia 42 (2012) Copyright © Natal Society Foundation 2012

1904 the Dubes were back in America fundraising to the same formula and earning for Ohlange Washington's imprimatur as the Tuskegee of South Africa. Closely associated with Ohlange was the newspaper *Ilanga lase Natal*, a conservative, responsible but challenging title of which Dube was founder and first editor.

Hughes explores the parallels between Dube and Mohandas Gandhi at nearby Phoenix. Both were fundamentally conservative with radical political aspirations ahead of their time. Dube harboured anti-Indian sentiments reflected in *Ilanga*, but his attempts at an early form of black economic empowerment to counter encroachment foundered. In 1908 he gave up his Inanda position and began a process of distancing himself from both the AZM and the Qadi hierarchy to concentrate on Ohlange and *Ilanga*. Keeping the latter going in the face of colonial hostility Hughes regards as a major achievement.

Dube's greatest obstacle was the perversity and hypocrisy of a supposedly civilised settler society that propagated Christianity but refused to share its spiritual message. This had, of course, been exposed by Bishop John Colenso. Dube and exempt *amakholwa* occupied what Hughes describes as a "legal wilderness" (p.105). The defining moment arrived with the Bhambatha Rebellion of 1906 when the *amakholwa* were placed in an impossible position. Dube played an entirely honourable role, persuading the Qadi not to rebel. He advocated loyalty to and basic compliance with the authorities, but refused to ignore justifiable African grievances. In *Ilanga* he published "Vukani bantu!" a wake-up call arguing for a Native Congress. His testimony to the post-rebellion commission of inquiry was critical of white attitudes that had blossomed since 1893 under responsible government. His overall response to the rebellion was logical and farsighted: acknowledging his "patron saint", Washington, he argued that black South Africans were following the historic example of the British in pursuit of their rights.

Dube had kept his distance from the early Congress movement regarding it as too conservative and passive. However, he became an important figure in opposition to reactionary colonial legislation that was eventually to appear as the Native Administration Act and was drawn into national politics by the move towards union. In January 1912, at Waaihoek near Bloemfontein, he was elected the first president of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC), in absentia and virtually by default, for his abilities and contacts. Hughes suggests that for Dube the idea of "greatness thrust upon him" might have been congenial (p.163). As president he was energetic in campaigning against government policy as it affected the ordinary lives of African people. In broad terms he opposed legal discrimination and social prejudice, and even crossed the Thukela River to campaign. The greatest challenge lay in the possessory segregation of the 1913 Natives Land Act and once more he linked its appalling consequences to a lack of political representation. Nevertheless, he took a pragmatic line suggesting the legislation should await the results of the Beaumont Commission. Significantly, he ruled out passive resistance, already in use by the Indian community, as inappropriate to the temperament of the dispossessed.

In the summer of 1914 Dube was part of the SANNC delegation to London, an exercise in futility that he abandoned

Natalia 42 (2012) Copyright © Natal Society Foundation 2012

prematurely, later using the outbreak of war as a somewhat transparent excuse. It was a time of crisis for him. Estranged from Nokutela (who was to die in 1917) following the birth of his illegitimate child, various business deals fell through, his oversight of Ohlange and *Ilanga* grew distant, and in 1917 he lost the presidency of the SANNC.

The needs of Ohlange constantly pulled him away from other involvement. But rather than the end of a reluctant politician, the twenties saw Dube embroiled in issues relating to Durban bylaws, the iniquitous municipal beerhall system and the plight of rickshaw pullers. Manager of the Native Affairs Department J.S. Marwick successfully sued Dube for defamation, but this only increased his popularity. At a time of increasing segregation and harsh repression, Dube witnessed the Cartwright's Flats massacre of December 1930 as a passive spectator, exacting criticism from the communist Eddie Roux then teaching at Ohlange.

Facing the dilemma over boycott or participation that was to haunt South African opposition politics for decades, Dube took part in the Governor-General's Native Congress on the grounds that it provided a platform for his forthright views. His relationship with Congress waxed and waned. A consistent feature of his political belief was the need for control, predictability and order and it was on these grounds that he opposed A.W.G. Champion of the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (Champion called him Judas Iscariot). For a while he was associated with G.H. Nicholls' communalism proposals advocating a "tempered … nationalist vision" (p.245) based on equal opportunity, social redistribution, political representation, and justice and orderly progress, but lacked the organisational mechanism to drive this. Like other Congress members, he later served on the Native Representative Council. He was also a sugar cane farmer involved in the Inanda Agricultural Show.

The price of saving Ohlange was managerial oversight, moving off the property and relocating *Ilanga* to Durban. This implied white encroachment on black enterprise and was another turning point for Dube. At a time of growing Zulu ethnic consciousness, and a closer relationship between the royal house and Congress, Dube (who had assisted the Colenso sisters in the defence of Dinuzulu in 1906) identified with the establishment of Inkatha. In 1930 he wrote the novel *Insila ka Shaka* and was later to produce a book on Shembe. He was involved in the Zulu succession after Solomon's death, but ended up on the losing side. In the mid-1930s his influence in Congress was on the wane and Dube became closer to liberals and the joint councils. Consequently, Edgar Brookes successfully nominated him for an honorary doctorate from Unisa.

Was Dube a great man? This is the question Hughes asks by way of conclusion. His vision was syncretic, drawing on white civilisation and honourable African traditions and custom, but he was also a pragmatist. As Hughes notes, he was a complex mixture of defiance and compliance, radicalism and moderation, breadth and narrowness of vision (p.259). Trying to navigate a path to modernity he was constantly thwarted by the sour pessimism of colonial society. His own man, he was a controversial figure and not only to colonial administrators. With the help of his Qadi roots, American backers and Marshall Campbell he created the

Natalia 42 (2012) Copyright © Natal Society Foundation 2012

economic and social space to operate independently.

This is historical biography at its very best. Lucid and intelligently written, it places Dube's life in context and perspective. Devoid of sociological jargon, philosophical diversions and theoretical obscurity it is another encouraging indication that real historians are striking back.

CHRISTOPHER MERRETT

A MEMOIR IN LETTERS of the Phelps and Crompton Families in the 19th and 20th Centuries

Selected, edited and introduced by PENELOPE FORREST (née Phelps)
Privately published. P O Box 44201 Claremont, South Africa 7735
© 2011 Penelope Forrest (paf@zarf.com)
236pp. illus. R260 or £25, includes postage

IN the past hundred years there has been a decline in the practice – and many would say the art – of letter writing. Easier travel and the telephone provided more opportunities for people to speak rather than write to each other. Those separated by oceans and continents still use the air mail letter, but as e-mail becomes the norm, they are becoming fewer. Of the vast amount of personal e-mail now being sent and received, probably not very much becomes hard copy or is permanently kept on disk by either the senders or the recipients. Future generations may find very few interesting or significant personal letters from the present time.

Penelope Forrest's mother preserved old family letters, and these, together with some provided by other family members, make up this remarkable collection. The earliest letter in the book is dated 9th May 1834 – though the narrative actually begins with a diary entry from January 1784 – and the last one was written in 1978.

The letters are accompanied by linking narrative and extensive genealogical tables. The latter will be of interest to keen genealogists, and also to those who find their own family names included. Although the *Memoir's* title states that it is "of the Phelps and Crompton families", scores of other surnames appear in these family trees. As for the letters themselves, anyone with a sense of social history will find much of interest in them. Even detailed discussions of illnesses (of which there are many) illustrate not only the limitations of medical knowledge at the time, but also the helpless anxiety and uncertainty experienced by previous generations about sick loved ones many thousands of miles away.

Other things we may note with amusement. In 1883 19-year-old Mary Crompton of Pinetown, engaged to Inskilling Dragoons officer Edward Pennefather, wrote to her future mother-in-law in England: "I am afraid I am dreadfully young for him, but I suppose I shall be grown up some day & I daresay he will not be very severe." The words "I daresay" may have the sound of timid hope, but she seems to accept a strict patriarchal order as a natural part of life.

These were large, extended, upper middle-class English families, many of whose members lived abroad for long periods, even permanently, and many

Natalia 42 (2012) Copyright © Natal Society Foundation 2012

of them were prolific letter-writers. In 1854 Harriet Phelps, from a family of English wine merchants in Madeira, married Revd John Crompton. The wedding was a great occasion for the considerable English community in Madeira and one of John's letters to his mother in England gives the guest list – almost all English names. He provides much other incidental information, such as, for example, the fact that "Mrs and Major Peacock were invited but Mrs was too unwell and the Major got a fall from his horse on the way, which prevented his coming and caused the absence of Dr Ross who was sent for him". These may be small, unimportant, domestic and family matters, but when taken together they help us to bring the lives of our forebears into sharper focus.

The English climate was not good for Revd John Crompton's "weak chest" and he therefore looked for a "Protestant British colony" where conditions would be better for his health. He might have gone to Bermuda, which he was told "resembles in some respects Madeira in climate & is supposed by many to be equally favourable to persons of tender lungs or throat". However, he decided on Natal, and so he and Harriet came to live in Pinetown, where they raised a large family and where he died in 1889 at the age of 74. The same timidly hopeful daughter Mary in due course accompanied her soldier husband on tours of duty in Singapore and Ceylon, and so more intercontinental correspondence was generated. The pattern was repeated for various other members of the extended family.

Letters received were sometimes forwarded to other relatives as a convenient way of passing on family news; they responded, and so the volume of correspondence increased. Incidentally, in 1858 we find Revd Mr Crompton complaining about the unsatisfactory postal service between Natal and England. And in 1899 Mary writes from Ceylon, "I hear the Johnstons find Natal very expensive. They and some other families club together and give their cook £8 a month. What are things coming to!" The Cromptons of Pinetown were certainly not Colensoites, and the late bishop's daughter Harriette comes in for some severe censure for some of her actions and utterances. ("How disgracefully Miss Colenso has behaved …. ")

In a family which included several clergymen – and later even an archbishop – one would expect letters to contain comments on church matters, but Jane Phelps in London writing in 1899 to her sister Harriet in Natal reveals an unexpectedly sharp class-consciousness. The Bishop of London at the time was Rt Revd Mandell Creighton, the son of a carpenter, and Jane tells her sister, "The Creightons are an ill-mannered couple, as might be expected from their origin." Had Jane known that her great-great-niece would more than a century later give her letter a rather wider readership, she would probably have chosen her words more carefully.

A whole section of the book is devoted to letters written by family members in Europe, Africa and Asia during the Second Anglo-Boer War, revealing how that last great British imperial conflict was viewed by them, and how it affected them.

When Penelope Forrest's father, young Abel Phelps, arrived in South Africa from England in 1927 under the auspices of the 1820 Settler Association, he dutifully visited his Crompton relatives in Natal, and subsequently married his second cousin Natalie

Natalia 42 (2012) Copyright © Natal Society Foundation 2012

Crompton (but only after their degree of consanguinity was deemed acceptable and safe). Natalie's mother had been Hildegard Meyer, daughter of Ernst Gustav Meyer and Harriet Mary Bunton, and her father was Godfrey Crompton, tenth and youngest child of the Pinetown Cromptons. There is a charming letter from Godfrey Crompton in Pietermaritzburg to Hildegard, declaring his love for her. "I have to confess that you have quite stolen my heart, which sentiment, if I judge rightly, is reciprocated by you …." A hundred-and-one years later we will be forgiven for not heeding the postscript, "Please treat this as entirely confidential."

The section of the book entitled "The German Connection" traces the Meyer branches of the family. Natalie was visiting cousins of her mother in Germany in 1936 when Hitler's troops occupied the Rhineland, and her brother Evelyn actually entered Germany in June 1939 on a visa issued by the German Embassy in London. Their relatives outside Germany were in a better position to see how the political situation was rapidly deteriorating, and the sister and brother both received cables, in Natalie's case asking anxiously when she was returning to England, and in her brother's, instructing him to do so immediately.

A Memoir in Letters is generously illustrated, not only with the genealogical tables, but with 26 pages of facsimiles of letters and envelopes, and pictures of important people and places in the story. It was awarded the "Publication of the Year" prize for 2011 by the Genealogical Society of South Africa. Several works were considered, but Penelope Forrest's book was unanimously selected by the judges, who said it had "set a new benchmark in this category" – well-deserved praise that will surely be echoed many times by its readers.

JOHN DEANE

UKHAHLAMBA: UMLANDO WEZINTABA ZOKHAHLAMBA / EXPLORING THE HISTORY OF THE UKHAHLAMBA MOUNTAINS
by JOHN WRIGHT and ARON MAZEL (Zulu translation of the English text by Sylvia Zulu).
Johannesburg: Wits University Press. 2012. 96p, soft cover.
(ISBN: 9781868145287). (R126 – R136)

THIS is a well-illustrated, attractively laid-out, sturdy, thread-sewn soft-cover book in semi-landscape format (wider than usual at 22cm high × 20cm wide).

The mountains of the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park, declared a Unesco World Heritage Site in 2000, and the people who have lived there, have been the subject of a number of books. They have been probed and written about by geologists, mountaineers, archaeologists and historians. But the uKhahlamba have also sheltered cave-dwellers, hunter-gatherers, pastoralists, farmers, cattle-raiders, outdoor lovers, soldiers and thieves. Not a few of them have died violently at the hands of others, or by accident or exposure. Not all of their stories have been told.

Historian John Wright researched relations between hunter-gatherers of the mountains and black and white farmers for his MA thesis at the University of Natal (1968) which formed the substance of a book[1]. He and archaeologist Aron Mazel considerably expanded

Natalia 42 (2012) Copyright © Natal Society Foundation 2012

on the theme with their *Tracks in a Mountain Range* in 2007[2]. The latest offering reviewed here is a condensed, simpler, version of the latter, published with parallel English and Zulu texts. Clearly intended for a wider audience, including secondary school learners and Zulu-speakers, it conveys the essence of the more detailed original.

The book provides a brief overview of the geological and geomorphological history of the mountains before getting down to the real focus: the history of the various people who have inhabited the mountains at one time or another for more than 25 000 years, more particularly the past 8 000 years.

The early hunter-gatherer mountain inhabitants are believed to have been Khoisan-speaking ancestors of the San we know today. They moved away from all but the more protected mountain areas when temperatures dropped to some five degrees centigrade colder than at present between 26 000 and 15 000 years ago. They began repopulating the mountains in small numbers some 8 000 years ago, and then in larger numbers about 3 000 years ago. With the advent of migrating black farmers who arrived with their livestock and subsistence crops from the north some 1 600 years ago, they moved from the northern mountains to the Thukela basin area, possibly to have closer proximity to the new arrivals. Their rock art on some 600 rock shelter walls so far investigated, comprising some 40 000 surviving individual images, is one of the world's great heritage resources.

The elucidation of their living patterns, diet and movements from painstaking work by Mazel and other investigators makes for fascinating, informative reading.

Black farmers began moving into the uKhahlamba foothills about 600 years ago. Much later, from the 1840s on, came white farmers from Europe, who sought to take over the land by driving out first the San and then the black farmers, but retaining, often forcibly, the services of the dispossessed for cheap labour on their own farms.

The harrowing history of dispossession is simply but lucidly told, including the shattering of the amaNgwe and Hlubi kingdoms and the subjugation of their people. The latter, engineered by the Natal colonial government's Secretary for Native Affairs, Theophilus Shepstone, involved the set-up outlawing, capture, trial and banning to Robben Island of Hlubi Chief Langalibalele in 1874.

Eventually, through the determined efforts of Bishop John Colenso of Natal and his family and supporters, the British Government was forced to intervene and order the Natal colonial government to allow the amaNgwe to return to their land and receive compensation for their confiscated cattle, and to release the Hlubi people from the slavery imposed on them. Chief Langalibalele was released in 1877 and allowed to return to Natal to spend the rest of his life under the supervision of Chief Teteleku Zondi of kwaMpumuza, outside Pietermaritzburg, an ally of Shepstone. In 1973, on the centenary of his arrest and trial, the leaders of the Hlubi people unveiled a memorial plaque at his grave. He died in 1889 at about the age of 75 and was taken from Mpumuza by his people to Giant's Castle where he was buried in a rock shelter in the little berg overlooking the upper Bushmans (Mtshezi) River.

Wright and Mazel also briefly discuss the ill-fated Griqua people of Griqua-

Natalia 42 (2012) Copyright © Natal Society Foundation 2012

land East (but space clearly precluded mention of the harrowing Griqua 1863 trek across Lesotho from Griqualand West). They also include the series of rebellions against Cape colonial rule by chiefs from eastern Cape (1877-1878) and south eastern Basutoland (1880) followed by resistance by abeSuthu and amaMpondomise in East Griqualand and the Transkei.

The historical journey continues, with increasing racially discriminatory legislation through the remainder of colonial and Union rule, reaching its apotheosis during the reign of the National Party (1948-1994). Appropriation of black farmland land to eradicate "black spots", overcrowded black reserves, migrant labour, all took their toll. Fortunately the government abandoned its plans to move more than 100 000 people from the Bergville-Estcourt region but did relocate several thousand people in the 1970s and 1980s when Woodstock Dam was built in the Upper Thukela to supply water to the Witwatersrand.

Latterly tourism, and its uneasy ally, conservation, as well as forestry, supplying water to urban conglomerates, and retirement centres for the wealthy, have steadily replaced farming as an economic activity. On a happier latter day note, interested members of local black communities, including some who claim at least partial San descent, are being consulted and involved in the management of rock art sites in the uKhahlamba mountains.

This is a well-written, affordable small book which offers much for the reader interested in the history of the people of the area, be they learner, student, teacher, farmer or visitor.

John Wright is an Emeritus Professor of History at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Aron Mazel, formerly of the Archaeology Department at the KwaZulu-Natal Museum in Pietermaritzburg, is an archaeologist at the International Centre for Cultural and Heritage Studies, Newcastle University, United Kingdom.

PETER CROESER

NOTES

1 Wright, John B. *Bushman raiders of the Drakensberg, 1840-1870: A study of their conflict with the stock-keeping peoples in Natal.* Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1971. 235pp.
2 Wright, John, and Mazel, Aron. *Tracks in a mountain range: Exploring the history of the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2007. 176pp.

ISANDLWANA: HOW THE ZULUS HUMBLED THE BRITISH EMPIRE

by ADRIAN GREAVES.

Barnsley, U.K.: Pen & Sword Military, 2011. 240pp. £19.99.
ISBN 978-1-84884-532-9.

TWO popular histories of the battle of Isandlwana have appeared in the last two years – Ian Knight's *Zulu Rising* (2010), which was reviewed in the previous issue of this journal, and Adrian Greaves' *Isandlwana* (2011), which is the subject of this review.

Greaves' narrative is remarkably compressed, compared with other recent works on the subject, which is a great plus for readers who are not familiar with the Anglo-Zulu War and the battle of Isandlwana. Adrian Greaves is a practised writer on the

Natalia 42 (2012) Copyright © Natal Society Foundation 2012

war, the founder of the Anglo-Zulu War Historical Society in England, a friend of the late David Rattray of Fugitives Drift Lodge, with whom he co-authored a popular tour guide-cum-history. Addenda and anecdotes which swell other writers' works are here consigned to Appendices (there are eight), and Notes are also placed at the end of the book.

The book has eight chapters. Chapter 1, Conditions at Home, describes the British Army *in situ*, officers regular and colonial, and the 24th Regiment, which was the mainstay of the Imperial forces in the battle of Isandlwana. Chapter 2, The Adversaries, similarly treats the Zulu kingdom and army. Chapter 3, Preparations for War, describes British annexation of the Transvaal and confrontation with the Zulu in the cause of South African confederation; next the marshalling of armies as the Imperial forces for the invasion of Zululand and the Zulu countermeasures. Chapter 4, The Days Before, covers the advance into Zululand of the Centre (No. 3) Column under the British general Lord Chelmsford, from the crossing of the Mzinyathi on 11 January 1879, to the encampment below Isandlwana hill on the 21st. A reconnaissance in force that day leads to the fatal division of the column on the 22nd as the greater portion of it advances to a new position. The arrival of the Zulu army from Ulundi and its dispositions in the meantime are described. Chapter 5, Decoy and Defeat, is an account of the battle, in which the Zulu army annihilates that portion of the column left at the camp. Chapter 6, Flight from Isandlwana, tells of the British survivors; Chapter 7, After Isandlwana, the return of the balance of the column to Natal and the official enquiry into the defeat; and Chapter 8, The Re-invasion and Destruction of Zululand.

Greaves also deals with many of the battle's old chestnuts. Colonel Durnford, whom Lord Chelmsford blamed for the defeat, is pretty well exonerated. (He usually is these days, but in this instance rather too easily, I think). The story of the British infantry in the line running short of ammunition is shown to be false. Zulu mutilation of the enemy dead was not barbaric, only barbarous, a cultural thing. The partial solar eclipse that day, which some writers invoke for dramatic effect, occurred unnoticed by the combatants. There are some new misconceptions, too. Colonel Pulleine takes the place of Durnford as a scapegoat, displaying incompetence, indecision and perhaps even cowardice in the face of the enemy. Lieutenants Coghill's and Melvill's departure(s) from the battlefield and deaths at Fugitives Drift are an unending source of speculation. The tribesmen of the petty chief Gamdana rather than the pursuing Zulu are the new killers of fugitives at the river.

The battle is a conundrum, because so few survivors have told us about it. That is the fascination of Isandlwana. It is susceptible of different interpretations, and every author seems to have his own version. In Greaves' account the climax comes when the Zulu break through the British line as it retreats; he adds a little further on that it is the Natal Native Contingent which gives way and the Zulu break through the gap left by it. (Meanwhile Durnford's mounted contingent withdraws through a gap which somehow appears in the Zulu attack.) Unfortunately, Greaves does not understand the Natal Native Contingent's part in the battle, and he

Natalia 42 (2012) Copyright © Natal Society Foundation 2012

makes numerous mistakes with regard to it.

The positive features of the book do not make it one of the best in the field. Greaves' strengths are his weaknesses. He knows a great deal, and there are passages where he assumes much of his readers, too, as in his somewhat allusive and fragmentary description of British leaders and heroes in Chapter 1. His cavalier handling of citations may most charitably be ascribed to the same assumption of omniscience. Possibly also the way he summarily dismisses many other writers (whom he stops short of naming), because they are not as progressive in their research and interpretation.

Yet it is in research and interpretation that Greaves himself falls short. For example, in the case of research, he tells us that a British detachment was cut off early in the battle, even though his evidence is flimsy. He posits a second, alternative route of flight from the battlefield, but there is nothing new in this and he does not explore the evidence fully. He refers to an account, apparently newly discovered, of Captain William Barton of the Natal Native Horse; this is important indeed, yet his reference to it amounts to some personal correspondence with authors Ron Lock and Peter Quantrell. He makes a tantalising reference to the Glasgow University Survey of the battlefield (2000), whose dig relocates the initial British line in front of the camp, and that is all – he says nothing more about the survey or its other findings.

The notes also suggest an erratic methodology. Quotations are more often (but not always) cited than matters of fact and interpretation. They reveal a propensity to use late primary and secondary sources. Page numbers are never given.

His bibliography is appalling. He does not say it is select, so one may suppose that he means it is comprehensive, but its omission of so many important works is incomprehensible. There is nothing later on the Zulu than E. Ritter's egregious *Shaka Zulu* (1955). Important contemporary accounts of events such as Edward Durnford's *Isandhlwana* (1879) and *A Soldier's Life and Works* (1882), John Maxwell's *My Reminiscences of the Zulu War* (1979), and Hallam Parr's *A Sketch of the Kafir and Zulu Wars (*1880) are not mentioned. Nor are the useful (if hagiographical) compilations, J. Mackinnon and S. Shadbolt's *The South African Campaign, 1879* (1882) and Norman Holme's *The Silver Wreath* (1979). The official *Narrative of Field Operations* (1881) becomes a narrative of Field Regulations and the *Precis of Information concerning Zululand* (1879, 1895) becomes one of the Zulu War. David Jackson's revisionist landmark "Isandhlwana, 1879: The sources re-examined" (1965) does not appear; nor does Ron Lock's and Peter Quantrell's neo-revisionist *Zulu Victory* (2002), all the more surprising given the Lockian tinge of Greaves' interpretation of Zulu strategy. The list could go on. Archival and periodical literature – the little there is of it – is presented in a very sketchy and inconsistent way.

The point is that Greaves' account of the battle evidently is weakened by discounting or ignoring such works. One sees it reflected in the text. For instance, his contentious description of Zulu operations is essentially conjectural, not least in respect of the so-called decoying of British forces. His description of the British side is better,

Natalia 42 (2012) Copyright © Natal Society Foundation 2012

but there is more to work with. Nonetheless, it is bemusing to read that Lord Chelmsford's dividing his force in the face of the enemy saved part of it, rather than put the whole in jeopardy.

The book is entertaining. The narration is straightforward, despite a number of digressions, and plain in style. It is not a scholarly work, although it has useful parts, and some of the appendices are handy references. If on matters of fact and interpretation it sometimes fails, for casual readers it matters little. For *aficionados* it is another historiographical curiosity for the shelf.

P. S. THOMPSON

Natalia 42 (2012) Copyright © Natal Society Foundation 2012