

# MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

The African e-Journals Project has digitized full text of articles of eleven social science and humanities journals. This item is from the digital archive maintained by Michigan State University Library. Find more at:

<http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/africanjournals/>

Available through a partnership with



*Scroll down to read the article.*

# TRANSFORMATION

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON SOUTHERN AFRICA

44



## INCLUDED IN THIS ISSUE

- CHERRYL WALKER LOOKS AT THE WORK OF THE COMMISSION ON RESTITUTION OF LAND RIGHTS.
- TESSA MARCUS HIGHLIGHTS THE ROLE OF WOMEN CRAFTERS WHO LIVE IN THE SHADOW OF AIDS IN KWAZULU-NATAL.
- TERENCE RANGER SUGGESTS A RESEARCH AGENDA FOR AFRICAN LANDSCAPE.

# TRANSFORMATION

critical perspectives on Southern Africa

ISSN 0258-7696

## EDITORS:

Keith Breckenridge, Bill Freund, Gerhard Maré, Monique Marks, Imraan Valodia (University of Natal), John Daniel, Adam Habib, Lindy Stiebel (University of Durban-Westville).

## CORRESPONDING EDITORS:

Mike Morris, Vishnu Padayachee (University of Natal), Colin Bundy, Debbie Posel (University of the Witwatersrand), David Kaplan, Dave Lewis, Mary Simons (University of Cape Town).

## INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATE EDITORS:

Henry Bernstein (SOAS, University of London), Gillian Hart (University of California), Mahmood Mamdani (Columbia University), Martin Murray (SUNY Binghamton), Dan O'Meara (University de Quebec à Montreal), Terence Ranger (University of Zimbabwe), John Saul (York University), Elling N Tjenneland (Christian Michelsen Institute, Norway), Gavin Williams (University of Oxford).

## PUBLICATION GUIDELINES:

We ask contributors to submit two (2) typed copies, following the format (on such issues as references and notes) of articles in this issue of *TRANSFORMATION*. Whilst the journal will cater for work at any level of abstraction, or detail, a number of criteria will guide the editors in selection of material for inclusion. Articles should aim for academic rigour but also clarify the political implications of the issues discussed. We are concerned not to compete with other South African journals that may cover related ground but in different ways - this will govern our selection principles. All articles will be assessed anonymously by the referees. Contributions should preferably not exceed the following lengths:

**Analytical articles:** 8 000 words

**Debates, comment and review articles:** 3 000 words

Also see inside back cover 'Notes for Contributors'.

The views expressed in *TRANSFORMATION* do not necessarily reflect those of the editors.

## EDITORIAL and CONTRIBUTIONS ADDRESS:

*TRANSFORMATION*

Programme of Economic History

University of Natal

DURBAN 4041 South Africa

E-mail & Web: [transform@nu.ac.za](mailto:transform@nu.ac.za) / [www.transformation.und.ac.za](http://www.transformation.und.ac.za)

**SUBSCRIPTION RATES and ADDRESS at the back of this issue.**

# TRANS FORM Ation

44 (2000)

Critical perspectives on Southern Africa

---

## CONTENTS

### Editorial

- The 'Land in Africa: space, culture, history' workshop i  
*Lindy Stiebel, Liz Gunner, Jabulani Sithole*

### Articles

- Relocating restitution 1  
*Cherryl Walker*, until recently Land Commissioner for KwaZulu-Natal, looks critically at the work of the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights over the last few years.
- Crafting in the context of AIDS and rural poverty: a livelihood strategy with prospects 17  
*Tessa Marcus* highlights the marginalised but important role of women crafters who live in the shadow of AIDS in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands.
- Culture and nature in the Valley of a Thousand Hills - a tough guide to 'other spaces' 36  
This article by *Malcolm Draper* looks at places, such as Thor Chemicals, The Valley Trust and Camelot, which lie along the route between Cato Ridge and Hillcrest in the Valley of a Thousand Hills, which he maintains yield insight into the problematic relationship between culture and nature in very different ways.

African views of the land: a research agenda	53
--	----

**Terence Ranger** suggests a research agenda for scholars working on African landscape which encourages investigation of African perceptions of landscape, and thereby greater understanding of crucial struggles for resources, memories and rights.

Re-reading the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi game reserve: constructions of a 'natural' space	63
---	----

The South African game reserve is frequently promoted as an unproblematically 'natural' and 'timeless' space. **Shirley Brooks** explores such constructions of the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi reserve and the ends they serve.

Landscape and national memory in Steve Chimombo's <i>Napolo Poems</i>	80
---	----

**Mufunanjira Magalasi** shows how Steve Chimombo's *Napolo Poems* use the mythological landslide snake 'Napolo' to critique Banda's repressive rule in Malawi.

## Reviews

Terence Ranger's <i>Voices from the Rocks: nature, culture and history in the Matopos Hills of Zimbabwe</i> reviewed by <b>Tinyiko Sam Maluleke</b>	91
---	----

Stephen Coan (ed) <i>Diary of an African Journey: the return of Rider Haggard</i> reviewed by <b>Lindy Stiebel</b> .	93
--	----

# Editorial

## The 'Land in Africa: space, culture, history' workshop

Lindy Stiebel, Liz Gunner, Jabulani Sithole

1

This issue of *Transformation* has as its focus land and issues related to land: how is land conceptualised, how is it claimed and contested, how do people use the land and to what ends, what are some of the ways in which researchers are thinking about land? The articles in this issue are all drawn from an interdisciplinary workshop entitled 'Land in Africa: space, culture, history' held in November 1999 at Botha's Hill, KwaZulu-Natal. The workshop was organised by Liz Gunner of English Studies and Jabulani Sithole of Historical Studies at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, who together developed the idea of a workshop on land against the backdrop of the university-wide restructuring process over the preceding two years.<sup>1</sup> In spite of much talk about the desirability of developing multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary modules, very little was done to break down the perceived disciplinary boundaries within the university and thus the workshop was seen as a necessary step in this direction.

Recent interdisciplinary works on land, such as by Cohen and Odihiambo (1989), Schama (1995), Darian-Smith, Gunner and Nuttall (1996) and Ranger (1999), influenced the conceptualisation of the workshop. All these texts emphasised the role of culture and memory in creating contesting meanings for any one place. They also maintained that multiple identities associated with land can exist simultaneously at local, regional and national level, with one or another being forced into dominance by historical and political circumstances. This workshop was therefore envisaged as a forum for exploring different ways in which rural and urban 'spaces' are constructed through culture and history from an African perspective. By focusing on ideas of space, culture and history in relation to the land in Africa, the workshop was able to draw in southern African participants from the

disciplines of sociology, literature and cultural studies, history, geography, environmental studies and fine art to explore the construction of modern multiple identities around land in Africa and to debate across disciplinary boundaries.<sup>2</sup>

## 2

The interdisciplinary nature of the workshop highlights what is a key factor of current research on matters pertaining to land in Africa, and more specifically, land in southern Africa. Only when academics and policy makers begin to work across disciplinary boundaries, and talk and write to, and for, each other, can real breakthroughs be made. As recent work has emphasised, maps themselves are arbitrary grids, relating always to moments of history and to the configurations of culture (Carter 1987, Carter, Donald and Squires 1993, King 1996). Landscape, and the very way in which we see 'the land' is an item of cultural production. As Simon Schama has put it: '[t]here is an elaborate frame through which our adult eyes survey the landscape... Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock' (Schama 1995:6-7). It is language that is among the most powerful forms of cultural mapping; and cultures themselves provide maps of meaning through which the world is made more intelligible (King 1996:40). In the South African present, itself the site of multiple cultures and fragmented histories searching for a new unitary meaning after the collapse of apartheid, language, through the naming of places, can show a way back into reinterpreting the past and stitching together a different present. Places are themselves rich cultural archives. Thus the palimpsest of names for a single site - a mountain, a river, a region - points to a new openness of cultural presences and shared histories. We have, now, the possibilities of sharing knowledges and knowledge systems, un-erased histories, un-silenced voices. The moment of openness that history currently gives to us, urges us towards debate, disclosure. We can - indeed must - question the validity of route maps, those far too reliable 'safe-guides' (rather than 'tough guides') to the places we drive past - or fly over: the stately 'Harrismith Mountain', for instance, sprawling next to the N3 as it curves down from the highveld into KwaZulu-Natal, is known also as 'Nombunda' and as 'Ntabazwe' (Mountain of the Country), the latter names marking its Hlubi and Zulu past; another name for the mountain is 'Thabantsu' (Black Mountain) marking the once powerful Batlokwa/Basotho presence. Today, the name that has perhaps most public provenance

is its Afrikaans name, 'Platberg' (Flat Mountain). Each name holds its own archive of historical and cultural memory that impinges on the present. To be able to engage with those multiple and inter-related identities held in this particular place involves the co-working of a number of skills: linguistic, literary, historical. At another level, the skills of geology and archaeology are called upon to locate the mountain in its deep time base, as part of the very ancient Gondwanaland. All these activities, flowing from the work of the universities, can be seen as ways of unlocking knowledge of 'the land' and allowing that knowledge to move back into a wider public arena of common discourse and present identities.

Language can also through poetry - the poetry of song and of dance that is part of popular historiography (Luig and von Oppen 1997) unlock the secrets of the land. In strands of contemporary South African culture, an established oral form such as praise poetry - *izibongo*, *iibongo*, *dithoko* - can hide in its often deeply coded language, the clues of past journeys and mappings, held not in script but in the mouth; poetry mapped power relations (as in the *izibongo zamakhosi* - the praises of the kings); it embedded origins in obscure but tangible epigrams, it gave hints of deep journeys and pointed to present identities. But new, modern forms, such as the northern Sotho women's dance and song form, *kiba*, can point backwards not only to old identities but also to new, incorporative ones. Land, often in the form of mountains, sometimes as a region, features in these also, as markings of 'home'. Deborah James (1999: 66-67) records how as migrant women singers banded together in Johannesburg to sing, they sometimes created new 'home' bases and in the process changed songs and wove together a 'variety of disparate landmarks' that marked the new imaginary but important 'home'. Song and performance also bring into view the new social spaces made by those whose homes have sprung up like mushrooms overnight in the fluid social landscape of South Africa. Thus at a recent competition of *isicathamiya* choirs in Pietermaritzburg, two of the choirs - each with very youthful members - came from an area called 'Thamboville', an informal settlement existing on the edge of the city, outside the boundaries of the new dispensation. The opportunity to sing, and in so doing mark one's new place of belonging, has over long periods of time in Africa's history been a way of placing oneself in and on the land, and in a new history - sometimes of the social and moral imagination (Coplan 1994, Cohen and Odhiambo 1989). In the case of the Thamboville Lucky Boys choir, song and its public expression becomes a means of



staking one's claim to a part of the present. In the same way the characters of Toloki and Noria, in Zakes Mda's novel *Ways of Dying* (1995), building their beautiful multi-coloured shack in the unnamed settlement on the edge of the unnamed city are proclaiming their right to exist and be part of the new dispensation, part of the new urban and national landscape of post-apartheid South Africa. The historic Grootboom case in the Western Cape this year which calls on the government to provide adequate shelter on the land for its peoples has, in a strange and wonderful way, direct links with the world Mda was trying to imagine into existence, as he wrote his novel in the period of the 'interregnum', as Nadine Gordimer has called it, between 1990 and 1994.

Maps, however, cartographic maps, have their own value in our attempts to reread the difficult but in some ways still hopeful present. At the Millenium Project Workshop, organised by the Speaker of the National Assembly, Dr Frene Ginwala, and held in Parliament in July, with 'Perspectives in and of Africa' as its topic, participants were shown a fifteenth century Korean map of - almost certainly - Africa. It was drawn in 1402 by a Chinese man, Li Kai, at the request of the Korean Envoy to the Ming Dynasty in China and had for many years been housed in the Buddhist temple in Honganji, Japan, and then given to Ryukoku University. The map shows a rather bulbous Africa, but with the (unmistakable) Nile creeping down it, the lighthouse of Alexandria clearly marked and the landmass of the Iberian and Italian peninsulas and the rest of Europe above it. Such a map gives us fascinating glimpses of an Africa that was, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, part of a wider world of trade and exploration, one not linked to the later centuries of colonial conquest. That too needs to be seen as part of the history of land in Africa and it relates to the present efforts to resituate ourselves conceptually both in our own continent, and in the world. As academics we need to be bold in taking initiatives that allow us to pool our skills and be willing to place our knowledge in the public sphere so that our voices can be heard in the important issues around 'land' that currently face us.

### 3

This issue then is, in its way, an effort to re-site some recent academic debate on questions of land and identity. It opens with the workshop's first plenary paper, Cherryl Walker's address on the work of the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights during her tenure as Land Commissioner for KwaZulu-Natal over nearly five years. What she offers is a way of

understanding why what initially seemed like a straightforward process of repairing one of apartheid's most visible injustices - that of physically moving people from one place to another to fit into government policy - by restoring people to their land, is not straightforward at all. She balances what she calls the 'master narrative' of dispossession and the constitutionally entrenched right to reparation with the difficulties of achieving this in reality; ranging from bureaucratic tardiness due to the sheer volume of claims, to communities split in their decision to stay where they are or move yet again. She offers a way forward out of what might seem a quagmire by suggesting the master narrative be reformulated and ways of restitution be reconsidered in the light of the past five years' experience. She asks how academics can contribute to a politics of land reform in the current climate of pressing land debates and suggests that one way is to ground research in 'actual places and projects, and not remain abstractions, floating like balloons over exotic landscapes'.

Her advice is heeded in the papers selected for publication. Tessa Marcus bases her research into black women crafters in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands on extensive study through interviews at four rural sites which lie in the shadow of the Midlands Meander, the largest tourist route of its kind in South Africa. She argues that the almost exclusive focus on agriculture when it comes to rural development initiatives in South Africa is misguided in the face of advancing deagrarianisation, compounded by the HIV/AIDS pandemic which is progressing as rapidly in rural areas as it is in urban areas. Given a fatal disease syndrome that particularly affects adults in their most economically active years, Marcus suggests that the pursuit of agricultural revivalism as a livelihood strategy is not promising for rural dwellers, particularly women. Crafting initiatives and production, on the other hand, offer brighter possibilities for income particularly near tourist routes such as the Meander. To foster such development, state regulated micro credit and investment in training and skills development needs to be made available for this traditionally marginalised sector.

Basing his research slightly geographically south of the Midlands Meander, Malcolm Draper offers what he calls a 'tough guide' to places located on the tourist route in the Valley of a Thousand Hills. He uses Foucault's notion of 'heterotopia' to subvert the popular tourist perspective of the landscape between Pietermaritzburg and Durban. Sites focused on are Thor Chemicals - a multinational recently subjected to litigation on behalf of 16 poisoned workers, and still home to barrels of imported toxic

waste - The Valley trust, an NGO which offers training courses, consultation and resources in the fields of primary health care and sustainable development; and further down the road, Camelot, a private theme park and residential development for the middle classes. Draper poses the puzzle that these seemingly disparate spaces are nevertheless linked in complex ways, not least by their close proximity to each other.

If Walker's paper focuses on practical issues to do with land restitution and with how academics should try to marry theory to practice, then Terence Ranger, now visiting professor at the University of Zimbabwe and the second plenary speaker at the workshop, asks in his paper for academics to carry forward a theoretical project which has its roots in practice. His paper 'African Views of the land: a research agenda' is in response to the colonial view that Africans themselves, living within their environment, did not have notions of landscape, of aesthetically appreciating the land they occupied. He maintains, by way of contrast to the colonial view, that Africans have long invested their environments with moral and symbolic qualities, and with beauty; that 'modernisation in Africa was more a matter of clashing concepts of landscape...than it was a matter of introducing a totally new, alien and distancing concept'. He illustrates this position with four examples drawn from Kenya, Uganda and Zimbabwe, and concludes by suggesting that crucial struggles for resources, memories and rights can be better understood by engaging with such African perceptions of African landscape.

Two papers which pick up this thread are those by Shirley Brooks and Mufunanji Magalasi. Brooks's paper on the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Game Reserve looks at both European and African constructions of this space, the largest game reserve in KwaZulu-Natal, together with the ends these views have traditionally served. She argues that the way in which such natural spaces can be made to appear as existing outside of history, or else within a romanticised history, is particularly troubling in a postcolonial context such as South Africa. Magalasi's paper looks at African landscape used subversively for political critique in literature. His example is Steve Chimombo's collection *Napolo Poems* first published in Malawi in 1987 during the repressive rule of Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda. He shows how Chimombo draws on oral Malawian landscape myths, particularly those related to the Napolo snake god of landslides, to provide an oblique political attack on Banda and his regime in a climate of political repression.

## 4

Land as an issue has gained vastly in topicality in the year since this workshop occurred: paper givers at the workshop, though they were all obviously interested in various questions to do with land, were not to know that the year 2000 would bring land sharply into focus—the Zimbabwe farm occupations and related disquiet about the slow pace of land restitution in South Africa, the Grootboom test case in the Western Cape, the contentious proposal to open up parts of Ndumo game reserve for farming, disputes over heritage sites and so on. These papers knew none of this but they do appreciate the crucial role land and perceptions of land and landscape have played, and continue to play, in southern Africa. By drawing these papers together in a special issue devoted to land we have hoped to stimulate discussion in this vital field.

## Notes

1. The organisers of the workshop would like to acknowledge the generous financial assistance for the workshop from the School of Language, Communication and Culture at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg - *sithi akwandenalanithathe khona*. We would also like to thank Clare Landon, Wiseman Masango, Mqondisi Ngcobo and Steve Smith for their invaluable help in organising and running the workshop. Liz Gunner and Jabulani Sithole are guest editors for this special issue of *Transformation*; the editorial board, especially Lindy Stiebel as responsible editor for this issue, wishes to thank them both for their work in putting this collaborative edition together.
2. This workshop was followed by an international conference organised Terence Ranger and Liz Gunner, and funded by the *Journal of Southern African Studies*, the University of Zimbabwe, the Historical Association of Zimbabwe, and the National Museum and National Art Gallery of Bulawayo in July 2000 in Zimbabwe. The conference was entitled 'A View of the Land'.

## References

- Carter, P (1987) *The Road to Botany Bay: an essay in spatial history*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Carter, E, J Donald and J Squires (eds) (1993) *Space and Place: theories of identity and location*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Cohen, D W and A Odhiambo (1989) *Siaya: the historical anthropology of an African landscape*. London: James Currey.
- Coplan, D (1994) *In the Time of Cannibals: the world music of South Africa's Basotho migrants*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Darian-Smith, S, L Gunner and S Nuttall (eds) (1996) *Text, Theory, Space: land, literature and history in South Africa and Australia*. London and New York: Routledge.
- James, D (1999) *Songs of the Women Migrants: performance and identity in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.
- King, G (1996) *Mapping Reality: an exploration of cultural cartographies*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Luig, U and A von Oppen (1997) 'Landscape in Africa: process and vision. An introductory essay', *Peiduma* 43.
- Mda, Z (1995) *Ways of Dying*. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Ranger, T (1999) *Voices from the Rocks: nature, culture and history in the Matopos Hills of Zimbabwe*. Harare: Baobab, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, Oxford: James Currey.
- Schama, S (1995) *Landscape and Memory*. London and New York: Harper Collins.