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(Hrsg.)

Mission
und
Gewalt

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Der Umgang christlicher Missionen mit Gewalt
und die Ausbreitung des Christentums
in Afrika und Asien
in der Zeit von 1792 bis 1918/19

herausgegeben von
ULRICH VAN DER HEYDEN
JÜRGEN BECHER

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GELEITWORT

Wie fruchtbar der interdisziplinäre Dialog über die Geschichte der Mission sein kann, hat das dritte seit 1991 in Berlin durchgeführte Symposium zu missionshistorischen Fragen gezeigt. Nach der regionalen Thematik zum 100-jährigen Gedenken an den Beginn der Berliner Mission in Tansania 1991 und nach der systematischen Fragestellung über das Verhältnis zwischen Missionsgeschichte, Kirchengeschichte und Weltgeschichte im Jahre 1994 hatte die Berliner Gesellschaft für Missionsgeschichte zusammen mit dem Lehrstuhl für Missionswissenschaft und dem Seminar für Afrikawissenschaften an der Humboldt-Universität im Februar 1999 in Berlin diesmal zur Erforschung und Diskussion über das Problem des Verhältnisses von Mission und Gewalt eingeladen.

Wie die hier vorgelegte Dokumentation des Symposiums beweist, hat die Thematik zu sehr unterschiedlichen Arbeiten angeregt. Die Ausbreitung des Christentums hat sich zu allen Zeiten und überall in einem ambivalenten Spektrum von geistig/geistlicher Begegnung der Menschen, Völker und Kulturen und einer Auseinandersetzung stattgefunden, bei der Machtstrukturen verändert oder in Frage gestellt wurden. In der Mission der letzten 200 Jahre ist diese Spannung mehr als vorher zu einem Problem auch des einzelnen Menschen und der Grundhaltung der missionarischen Persönlichkeit geworden. Das in einer angemessenen Weise zu erforschen und im einzelnen darzustellen, bedarf um so mehr der Zusammenschau aus historischer, anthropologischer, ethnologischer, psychologischer, politologischer und anderer Sichtweisen ebenso wie der theologischen Betrachtung in ihren verschiedenen Bereichen. Fragen der Kulturbegegnung sind viel zu umfassend, als daß sie von einer Disziplin allein angemessen erfaßt werden könnten.

Das Thema "Mission und Gewalt" erweist sich in diesem Diskurs als ein Forschungsgegenstand, der von allen Seiten leicht zugänglich ist. Das war für unser Symposium von großem Vorteil. Das breite Spektrum der Disziplinen, die in der Dokumentation vertreten sind, macht das deutlich. Man wird aber auch gewahr, daß mancher Beitrag der Realität noch näher kommen würde, wenn er andere Zugangsweisen zum Stoff ausführlicher berücksichtigt hätte. Und obwohl sich die Tagung durch eine gute Gesprächsatmosphäre auszeichnete, oder eben gerade weil sie es tat, waren auch die kritischen Stimmen nicht zu überhören. Missionskritik hat in der DDR einen staatlich und ideologisch geförderten Stellenwert gehabt. Das ist – so weit ich sehe – auf dem Symposium nicht thematisiert worden. Aber mancher, der aus solchen Erfahrungen kommt, geht damit anders um als andere. Das gilt sowohl für diejenigen, die Mühe haben, die vom "Klassenstandpunkt" geprägte Herangehensweise zu hinterfragen, als auch für diejenigen, die Probleme haben, die Ambivalenzen der Geschichte zu akzeptieren. Daß Mission und Gewalt oft sehr nahe zueinander gekommen sind, ist nicht strittig. Daß Mission emanzipatorische Prozesse verursacht, weil sie von einer befreienden Botschaft lebt, darf aber auch nicht als selbstverständlich oder geringfügig angesehen werden. Die Offenheit und Lebendigkeit des Dialogs während der Tagung haben

Irving Hexham

**VIOLATING MISSIONARY CULTURE.
THE TYRANNY OF THEORY AND THE ETHICS OF HISTORICAL
RESEARCH**

Introduction

Deborah Lipstadt warns historians about the dangers of adopting fashionable theories like deconstruction without solidly grounding their work in an accurate representation of source materials.¹ She makes a passionate plea for historical accuracy while demonstrating the real dangers that occur when people distort the facts. The techniques used by Holocaust deniers, who use history to propagate their views, are not isolated to rogue historians. The basic arguments used by the deniers are not as absurd as most decent people, who instinctively reject such claims, think. In fact, they are increasingly common in popular scholarship.

As Lipstadt points out "It is important to understand that the deniers do not work in a vacuum."² Rather, holocaust "denial can be traced to an intellectual climate that has made its mark in the scholarly world during the past two decades. The deniers are plying their trade at a time when history seems to be up for grabs and attacks on the Western rationalist tradition have become commonplace."³ She continues: "This tendency can be traced, at least in part, to intellectual currents that began in the late 1960's. Various scholars began to assert that texts had no fixed meaning. The reader's interpretation, not the author's intention, determined meaning."⁴

The danger here is not that established scholars are likely to become converts to holocaust denial, although in places like France this is a clear possibility, rather it is the effect such techniques have on students. As Lipstadt observes: "The scholars who supported this deconstructionist approach were neither deniers themselves nor sympathetic to the deniers' attitudes; most had no trouble identifying Holocaust denial as disingenuous." But, "when students had to confront the issue. Far too many of them found it impossible to recognize Holocaust denial as a movement with no scholarly, intellectual, or rational validity"⁵.

At the end of her work she warns again that some "historians are not crypto-deniers, but the results of their work are the same: the blurring of boundaries between fact and fiction and between persecuted and persecutor."⁶ Further Lipstadt

1 Lipstadt, Deborah, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory*, New York, Penguin, 1994.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 17.

3 *Ibid.*

4 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

5 *Ibid.*

6 *Ibid.*, p. 215.

correctly observes that "If Holocaust denial has demonstrated anything, it is the fragility of memory, truth, reason, and history."⁷ She is right. As scholars it is our duty to defend history based upon accurate and objective scholarship. No doubt some people will bristle at the suggestion that we ought to strive for objectivity. Such critics regard the discovery of bias as something totally new without realizing that the hermeneutics of suspicion existed long before Foucault or Derrida.⁸

History and the deconstruction of Afrikaner Ideology

With Lipstad's warning in mind let us turn to the study of South Africa history. During the 1980's various writers used history to deconstruct the claims of Afrikaner Nationalism.⁹ These works made an impact among Afrikaners because they exposed the inconsistencies of the historical claims used to legitimate the ideology of apartheid. This delegitimation was possible because these studies were based on the same historical sources as those used by Afrikaner Nationalists to justify apartheid. By demonstrating that the sources themselves did not support Nationalist claims these authors struck a body blow at the intellectual edifice that maintained the self-confidence of Afrikaner Nationalist intellectuals.

At the same time other authors, such as Charles Villa-Vicencio and James Cochran, joined the fray. But, these latter writers were not trained historians. Rather they were theologians who used history as a tool "as a basis for ecclesial renewal" and to "understand the character of the church in South Africa and identify its social function".¹⁰ Worthy as these goals were these theologians appropriated historical evidence rather like fundamentalist Christians use proof texts from the Bible to support their arguments. Thus the historical record was forced into preconceived neo-Marxist ideological frameworks for the purpose of undermining support for apartheid. The problem with this approach was that it often distorted and misrepresented the source documents.¹¹

7 Ibid., p. 217,

8 Spencer, Herbert, *The Study of Sociology*, London, Henry S. King, 1874.

9 Hexham, Irving, *The Irony of Apartheid*, Lewiston, Edwin Mellen Press, 1981; du Toit, André, and Giliomee, Herman, *Afrikaner Political Thought: analysis and documents*, Cape Town, David Philip, 1983; du Toit, André, "No Chosen People: The Myth of the Calvinist Origins of Afrikaner Nationalism and Racial Ideology," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 88, No. 1, 1983, pp. 920-952; Elphick, Richard and Giliomee, Herman, *The Shaping of South African Society, 1652-1840*, Middletown, Conn., Wesleyan University Press, 1988.

10 Villa-Vicencio, Charles, *Trapped in Apartheid: A Socio-Theological History of the English-Speaking Churches*, Cape Town, David Philip, 1988, p. 1.

11 Cf. Hexham, Irving, review of *Trapped in Apartheid: A Socio-Theological History of the English-Speaking Churches*, by Charles Villa-Vicencio, David Philip, Cape Town, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1988. In *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 3, 1989, pp. 516-518; Hexham, Irving, review of *The Thousand Generation Covenant*, by John Gerstner, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1991. *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 3, 1993, pp. 489-503.

At this point, it is necessary to add that whenever one talks about the "distortion" or "misrepresentation" of sources it is important to recognize that everyone makes the occasional mistake. It is also true that in many cases legitimate questions of interpretation may arise when various scholars see the significance of the same piece of evidence differently. Therefore, what I am objecting to is not the occasional mistake, questionable usage, or issues of genuine interpretation. Rather, it is the systematic use or misuse of source texts to support a grand theory without regard to the context and clear intent of the original sources. Such practices ignore historical methods for the purpose of promoting an ideology [Himmelfarb 1987; Elton 1967 and 1991]¹² The problem, of course, is that once these techniques are generally accepted the choice of ideology can change. Today they are used to promote democracy and tolerance. Tomorrow they may be used to promote totalitarianism and racism.

The Role of Missionaries in Conquest

Today, a scepter is haunting South African Mission history, that of fashionable postmodernism and pseudo-Marxism which uses historical sources to proof text ideological arguments. In Southern African studies, the beginning of this trend can be dated to the publication of Nosipho Majeke's *The Role of Missionaries in Conquest*.¹³ David Chidester correctly describes the Majeke's book as a "formative work" which "had the immediate effect of transforming debate about the role of missionaries in southern Africa." He is also correct in suggesting that it "was to remain of signal importance to the history of mission research in South Africa and to the academic study of comparative religion in the region".¹⁴ Among the many authors who were clearly influenced by Majeke's work are James Cochran¹⁵, Charles Villa-Vicencio¹⁶, Willem Saayman¹⁷, Martin Prozesky¹⁸, and John and Jean Comaroff¹⁹. All of these writers appear deeply impressed by the way Africans like

12 Himmelfarb, Gertrude, *The New History and the Old*, Cambridge, harvard University Press, 1987; Elton, G.R., *The Practice of History*, 1967; Elton, G.R., *Return to essentials: some reflections on the present state of historical study*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991.

13 Majeke, Nosipho, alias Dora Taylor, *The Role of Missionaries in Conquest*, Johannesburg, Society of Young Africa, 1952.

14 Chidester, David, Tobler, Judy, and Wratten, Darrel, *Christianity in South Africa: An annotated Bibliography*, Westport, Connecticut, Greenwood Press, 1997, p. 48.

15 Chocharne, James, *Servants of Power: The role of english-speaking Churches 1903-1930*, Johannesburg, Ravasn Press 1987, p. 1, 13.

16 Villa-Vicencio, *Trapped in Apartheid*, p.59.

17 Prozesky, Martin, ed., *Christianity in South Africa*, Bergvlei, South Africa, Southern Books, 1990, p. 31 f.

18 Ibid., p. 123.

19 Comaroff, John and Jean, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, Chicago University Press, Vol. 1, 1991, p. 7.

Majeke, in Nürnberger's words, "see Christian missions as part of the evils of Western imperialism".²⁰

The tone of this important work reflects a strong desire to delegitimize the missionary enterprise. Its thesis is summed up on the first page where the author writes:

"Now it is one of the many falsifications of history to obscure the true nature of events behind sentimental phrases or catchwords. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries we hear much of the activities of the Evangelicals, the Humanitarians, the Philanthropists, the Emancipationists, those people who concerned themselves with the morals of the poor at home and the sufferings of the slaves abroad, who devoted their energies to the emancipation of the slaves the 'liberation of the Hottentots,' the conversion of the heathen to Christianity and such like. There is no doubt that there were well meaning people who supported these humanitarian movements. But we would have a false perspective if we accepted these grandiloquent aims at their face value and assume that there was some mysterious milk of human kindness animating the hearts of the English."²¹

After invoking this hermeneutic of suspicion the reader is then led on to see that the true nature of the missionary movement lies in the recognition that "The missionaries came from a capitalist chisitan civilization that unblushingly found religious sanctions for inequality, as it does to this day, and whose ministers solemnly blessed its wars of aggression."²² Thus, the whole missionary enterprise is deconstructed and we are shown its true nature as a tool of capitalism intent on oppressing Blacks.

This bad tempered tirade against the role of missionaries in Southern Africa gained credence because it was believed to be authored by a Black South African who was "writing back" against colonial domination. Lacking all scholarly references the author got away with academic murder by playing fast and loose with historical data for an ideological end. Nevertheless, this flawed work was taken very seriously because it was believed to reflect a genuinely Black viewpoint.

The truth is that "Nosipho Majeke" wasn't a Black at all. The name is a pseudonym for Dora Taylor. It is usually assumed that Taylor, who was the English wife of an economics lecturer at the University of Cape Town, represented a Marxist perspective on missions. The timing of the book and the similarity between the arguments presented and those of Afrikaner Nationalists raises the question whether or not it could have been produced, or at least influenced, by an agent of Verwoerd and the Nationalist Government. When I discussed the book with Maimie Corrigan, who was an active South African Communist prior to 1948, and later a leading figure in both the Liberal Party and Black Sash, she expressed her unease with the book and questioned whether the author had been misled by "friends." According to Professor Johannes W. Raum, his father Professor Otto F. Raum also had doubts about the true authorship and intent of this book when it

20 Prozesky, ed., *Christianity in South Africa*, p. 151.

21 Majeke, *The Role of Missionaries in Conquest*, p. 1.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

first appeared. These doubts support the view that the book might have a more complex history than is usually thought.

Whatever the truth of this matter, the whole exercise was, an elaborate propaganda hoax. To add authenticity to the book, which was actually published by Printing Services in Cape Town, the back cover contained a short note saying that it was "Published by SOCIETY OF YOUNG AFRICA, 40, 17th Avenue, Alexander Township, Johannesburg." No doubt if the real author had been known the book would have been thrown out as bombastic trash. But, through a clever deceptive ploy, the book, which was essentially a lie, became the intellectual catalyst for a whole generation of young scholars who in the 1980's and 1990's began using history to promote ideological goals. In themselves these goals, which centered on the destruction of apartheid and establishment of racial justice, were good. What I object to is the systematic distortion of evidence for the sake of an ideological cause.

The clever Comaroffs

The most influential representatives of the new ideological approach to South African history in general and mission history in particular are John and Jean Comaroff. These, sometimes brilliant, scholars use the English language in a highly sophisticated and engaging manner that is unsurpassed in the literature. Consequently, their works contain many valuable insights. Nevertheless, the ways in which they abuse historical sources to construct brilliant theoretical superstructures seriously undermines their work. Further, in the hands of other scholars with different ideological orientations these techniques threaten the values of racial justice the Comaroffs seek to promote.

Here it must be noted that while Michael Foucault was decidedly left in his political orientation his works are immensely popular among a growing number of European intellectuals who openly proclaim their commitment to fascism.²³ The fact that the Comaroffs base much of their work on Foucault ought to serve as a warning that unless it can be shown that they are scrupulously careful in their use of sources then the example they are setting could have very different consequences from those intended. Unfortunately, as will be show, the Comaroffs play fast and loose with their sources.

When Jean Comaroff's *Body of Power: Spirit of Resistance* appeared in 1985 it was a passionate tract solidly grounded in Marxist analysis.²⁴ As such it was part of a commendable, if misguided, attempt to use an ideological interpretation of history to liberate Black South Africans. By the time volume one of Jean and John Comaroff's *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, in 1991, Mandela had been released, the end of the

23 Golsan, *Fascism's Return*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press 1998, p. 227.

24 Comaroff, Jean, *Body of Power: Spirit of Resistance*, Chicago University Press 1985, p. 4.

apartheid era was in sight, and the Berlin Wall had fallen. Consequently, this latter work lacks the passion of the earlier study. Even more noticeable is the almost complete absence of references to Marx.

Volumes One and Two of *Of Revelation and Revolution* provide a good example of talented scholars who, once they move beyond their earlier commitments, continue to have no qualms about forcing historical evidence to fit their grand theories. Thus their response to specific problems pointed out in reviews of Volume One was to say "On such things there seems very little point in commenting, just as, despite the temptation to do so, it is impossible to answer every criticism".²⁵

Fair enough, but at least one can expect that people learn from their mistakes. Therefore when a set of problems is pointed out in one book, they ought to be corrected in the next. But, this simple expedient seems beyond the Comaroff's ken because in Volume Two we find exactly the same problems in their use of source materials. Consider the way Moffat's description of the South African landscape is distorted in Volume One to fit their literary theory. The Comaroffs write:

"The stylized narratives of these overland travels reveal an important dimension of the evangelical enterprise ... The journey, retold in the indicative mood, framed the encounter, stressing the unreconstructed savagery of the land and its inhabitants"²⁶.

Having prepared their readers for what follows they begin to examine missionary descriptions of the Karoo. This examination is prefaced with the comment:

"Notwithstanding, its dryness in comparison to England, the country through which the missionaries passed was hardly a desert, a century later, in fact ... Charles Ray, was to remark that even its thirstiest parts, the Kalahari, were 'misnamed Desert'".²⁷

With this point established, they add:

"Its extreme lack of fertility to the eyes of the evangelists was a metaphor made matter-of-fact ... But it also evoked the long-standing symbolic contrasts between church-as-garden and world-as-wilderness".²⁸

To prove their theory about the missionaries writing trope the Comaroffs provide the readers with the following quotation from the writings of David Livingstone's father-in-law Robert Moffat:

"The Karoo country, which is the back ground of the colony, is ... a parched and arid plain, stretching out to such an extent that the vast hills by which it is terminated, or rather which divide it from to her plains, are lost in the distance. The beds of numberless little rivers (in which water is rarely to be found) cross like veins in a thousand directions this enormous

25 Comaroff, John and Jean, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, Chicago University Press, Vol. 1-2, 1997, p. 424.

26 Comaroff, J. and J., *Of Revelation and Revolution*, Vol. 1, p. 173.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 174.

28 *Ibid.*

space ... Excepting these. ... [n]owhere appear any signs of life, nor point on which the eye can dwell with pleasure. The compass of human sight is too small to take in the circumference of the whole-the soul must rest on the horrors of the wide spread desert."²⁹

To ensure that the reader understands their argument they add "This was a desert, in short, because it lacked definition, disconcerting because it defied surveillance."³⁰

All of this is very convincing until one reads Moffat's actual words and inserts the missing words represented by ellipses. Below the missing words have been added in bold type to complete Moffat's sentence:

"The Karoo country, which is the back ground of the colony, is as **Lichtenstein** correctly **describes it**, a parched and arid plain, stretching out to such an extent that the vast hills by which it is terminated, or rather which divide it from other plains, are lost in the distance. The beds of numberless little rivers (in which water is rarely to be found) cross like veins in a thousand directions this enormous space. **The course of them might in some places be clearly distinguished by the dark green of the mimosas spreading along their banks.** Excepting these, as far as the eye can reach, **no tree or shrub is visible.** Nowhere appear any signs of life, nor point on which the eye can dwell with pleasure. The compass of human sight is too small to take in the circumference of the whole-the soul must rest on the horrors of the wide spread desert"³¹

Then, after a few more descriptive comments, Moffat explains:

"It is rare that rains to any extent or quantity fall in those regions. Extreme droughts continue for years together. The fountains are exceedingly few, precarious, and latterly many of these have been dried up altogether. The cause and consequences of the diminution of the rains will be noticed as the writer traverses the different fields which have come under his own immediate observation; and if his long experienced and inquiry on that and a variety of other subjects interest and scientific research, should in any degree throw additional light on doubtful points, he will consider his labour amply rewarded, but his theme is man."³²

In other words, as Moffat makes clear in this later passage, Moffat was travelling through the Karoo after a particularly severe drought and his observations were intended to be reports of empirical fact. His description, no doubt, has literary overtones, but it is essentially **descriptive of the Karoo as he saw it**. This fact is ignored by the Comaroffs who, as illustrated, delete key passages from Moffat's account to make his words fit their theory. The Comaroffs also removed Moffat's reference to Lichtenstein's independent testimony about the nature of the landscape. Presumably they did this because Lichtenstein was a German officer and not a missionary. Therefore, Moffat's reference to Lichtenstein's testimony undermines

29 *Ibid.*, p. 175.

30 *Ibid.*

31 Moffat, Robert, *Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa*, London, John Snow, 1842, p. 17. Bold mine.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 17 f.

the claim that Moffat's description was the result of missionary ideology and literary tropes.

With the publication of Volume Two things did not improve. For example, the Comaroffs write:

"The pioneer generation of Protestant missionaries to Bechuanaland was born in an age of anxious, ardent philanthropy" (Thompson 1854:5), an age in which reformers strove hard to press Africa's afflictions on the public awareness (RRI:115g). Their voices were visceral, their imagery organic (R. Moffat 1846:616):

'Africa still lies in her blood. She wants ... all the machinery we possess, for ameliorating her wretched condition. Shall we, with a remedy that may safely be applied, neglect to heal her wounds? Shall we, on whom the lamp of life shines, refuse to disperse her darkness?'

This was the voice that would beckon the most legendary of all crusading doctors, David Livingstone, to the Tswana field. It echoed a tradition of Christian restorative rhetoric.³³

Anyone reading these words is bound to think that the passage, beginning "Africa still lies in her blood ...", is a statement made by Robert Moffat or some other missionary that reflects a narrow evangelical vision. But, when Moffat's actual text is consulted the passage cited is from a book about the slave trade by Victorian agnostic adventurer, Sir Richard Burton. This type of subtle distortion allows the Comaroffs to scoff at missionary attitudes.

Another example is found in what the Comaroffs say about missionary attitudes to housing and health. The Comaroffs write:

"The houses are generally not very clean," proclaimed Willoughby (1899:84-85), revealingly, in an LMS magazine for British youth. "After a year or two, creatures that the editor will not allow me to name become so numerous that even the thick-skinned natives have to clear out." Although published at the end of the century, this account, with its heavy-handed humor, implied that venacular housing had always been this way; since time immemorial, Tswana dwellings had been the kind of places that only the 'thick skinned' could bear.³⁴

To the Comaroffs, comments like this simply confirms that missionaries were obsessed with cleanliness. The truth is, as anyone who has lived in a traditional African house for any period of time knows, such homes quickly become infested with lice and numerous other equally disturbing insects.³⁵ To report such things does not mean that one cannot also recognize that at times these very same houses are clean or that some are clean and others dirty. But, the Comaroffs ignore this simple observation because they have a theory about tropes and the use of rhetoric in mis-

33 Comaroff, John and Jean, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, p. 324.

34 *Ibid.* p. 285.

35 Cf. Barley, Nigel, *Adventures in a Mud Hut*, New York, Vanguard Press, 1984, p. 46, 52, 85; Cesara, Manda, *Adventures of a Woman Anthropologist*, London, Academic Press 1982, p. 63 f.

sionary writings. Clearly, they have never experienced poverty or the tribulation of living a traditional African lifestyle for an extended period of time.

Instead of attempting to understand the missionaries and the situation they faced the Comaroffs reduce missionary accounts to sophisticated literary constructions that deny the possibility that particular writers might be describing life as they actually saw or experienced it. Consider the following comments on a passage from Moffat's *Missionary Labours in South Africa*. The Comaroffs write:

"Robert Moffat (1842:399) went one better. Using a favorite literary device, he dammed Tlhaping housing by affecting a conversation with the (rival) Ngwaketse chief. In the passage, the two men appear to collude in condemning the 'barbarous manners,' the base building skills, and most of all, the lack of cleanliness of the Tswana to the south."³⁶

When read in context this is not what Moffat does or says. Moffat writes:

"Having thus reached the metropolis of the Bauangketsi ... I visited the town ... Their premises and houses were on a plan rather different from what I had before seen. The houses, though not larger than those of the Batlapis, were built with a greater regard to taste and comfort. The accuracy with which circles were formed, and perpendiculars raised, though guided only by the eye, was surprising. Their outer yards and house-floors were very clean, and smooth as paper. No dairy-maid in England could keep her wooden bowl cleaner and whiter than theirs were. In this respect they formed a perfect contrast to the Batlapis. Makaba [the local ruler] frequently referred to the barbarous manners of his southern neighbors, and asked me with an air of triumph, if the Batlapis ever washed a wooden bowl, or if ever they presented me with food which did not contain the mangled bodies of flies, in a dish which had had no better cleaning than the tongue of a dog."³⁷

Clearly, on page 399 Moffat is not "affecting a conversation with the (rival) Ngwaketse chief," Makaba, as a literary device.³⁸ Moffat is reporting his own observations about housing in Makaba's capital. Further, these comments about housing are quite distinct from the reference to "barbarous manners" which follow. When Moffat speaks about "barbarous manners" there is no indication in the text that he is "affecting a conversation." Rather, he claims to be vividly describing the way a particular individual, the local ruler, spoke about his "southern neighbors."

One may question whether Moffat's observations or account of these events is correct. But, to do so one needs more than literary theory. Further, it is quite unfair to claim that Moffat created an imaginary conversation about housing when, what he actually did was to discuss housing before informing his readers about the petty comments of a local ruler.

Anyone reading Moffat, who has lived in a small town or village, is immediately struck by the naturalness of these comments. Whether we like it or not neighbors often complain about each other in ways very similar to those reported by Moffat. For example in the 1960's workers in the English town of Stalybridge

36 Comaroff, John and Jean, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, Vol. 2, p. 285 f.

37 Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa*, p. 396, 398 f.

38 Comaroff, John and Jean, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, Vol. 2, p. 285.

made very similar comments about the habits of their neighbors in nearby Glosop.³⁹ Similarly, when I lived at Madwaleni in the Transkei the local Bomvana were always complaining about the lack of civilized behavior among nearby Tembu and Fingos. Thus the Comaroffs succeed not in revealing the literary license of Moffat but in demonstrating their own positioned knowledge located in the homogeneity of middle America where such prejudices are no longer encountered.

The Comaroffs are anxious to argue that "For the pioneer generation of evangelists, then, the very idea of healing was inseparable from that of cleansing".⁴⁰ Then they argue that the association created by the missionaries between cleanliness and health is absurd because:

"In the early nineteenth century, British medicine was rudimentary, unsystematic, often unsure of itself; perhaps no more developed, and maybe less coherent, than its Tswana counterpart".⁴¹

Once again, we are faced with a distortion of the truth. In contrast to modern medicine, the early nineteenth century was a dark age. Nevertheless, a revolution in public health had taken place in Europe during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. This revolution, which was based on the recognition of the importance of cleanliness, brought remarkable results in public health and life expectancy.⁴² But, instead of placing missionary statements in their true historical context the Comaroffs make statements like:

"Remember, too, that Livingstone (1961:129) also pronounced Tswant clothing 'unhealthy', claiming that endemic diseases declined as decent Western apparel was put on ... Livingstone's vision of the curative power of clothes was to be revisited, a century afterwards, by the founders of a hospital in his name at Molepolole in the Bechuanaland Protectorate. In a publication intended partly to raise funds 'African Poverty' is portrayed as generic cause of disease."⁴³

The cynicism of this statement is astonishing. Only the privileged are so distanced from the reality of poverty that they can afford to scoff at others who are genuinely attempting to alleviate suffering. In fact, dirty clothing does cause scabies, impetigo and a host of other diseases. Consequently, even today, doctors working in rural areas of Africa make very similar observations and complaints.⁴⁴

39 This comment is made on the basis of personal observation. Similar comments appear in: Roberts, Robert, *The Classic Slum*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1971, 44-50.

40 Comaroff, John and Jean, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, Vol. 2, p. 337.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 328.

42 Conrad, Lawrence, I, Neve, Michael, Vivian Nutton, Vivian, Porter, Roy, and Wear, *Andrew The Western Medical Tradition, 800 BC to AD 1800*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 406-410; Singer, Charles and Underwood, E. Ashworth, *A Short History of Medicine*, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1962, p. 196-232.

43 Comaroff, John and Jean, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, Vol. 2, p. 334.

44 Jansen, G., *The Doctor-Patient Relationship in an African Tribal Society*, Assen, van Gorcum, 1973, p. 186 f.

A similar lack of empathy is found in the Comaroffs' reaction to Robert Moffat's comments about the affect on health of the way African women carried their children on their backs. Moffat states that:

"The child, as may be seen, [in the accompanying prints] is carried in a skin on the mother's back, with its chest lying close to her person. When it requires to be removed from that position, it is often wet with perspiration; and from being thus exposed to cold wind, pulmonary complaints are not unfrequently brought on"⁴⁵.

To this observation, the Comaroffs sneer:

"The warm closeness of an African mother's body did not protect or nurture. It was a source of sickness.

The management of mundane bodily functions in the name of order, health, and cleanliness was a major feature of European social engineering throughout the nineteenth century - both at home and abroad."⁴⁶

Actually, under the conditions described by Moffat, sickness is a likely outcome regardless of how romantic carrying a child around in this manner, may appear. But by calling a simple observation about one cause of childhood illness "social engineering" the Comaroffs deflect attention from the harsh realities of rural poverty to their own sophisticated theories.

Cynical gamesmanship

So far, a pattern of academic abuse with regard to evidence and social reality has been documented. Some people may be inclined to dismiss these criticisms as unimportant. Behind the criticisms lies a more important issue. This is the blurring of moral judgements. A good example of the trivialization of serious moral issues is to be found when the Comaroffs argue that missionaries were "obsessed" with the activities of African rainmakers. Consider the following remarks:

"Rainmakers," said Moffat (1842:305), echoing many similar statements made by his brethren, 'are our invertebrate enemies, and uniformly oppose the introduction of Christianity among their countrymen to the utmost of their power.' The evangelists in fact became fairly obsessed with the problem - so much so that they regarded the eradication of the rites as a major measure of their success."⁴⁷

The Tswana they argue, "were to misunderstand this preoccupation with rainmaking".⁴⁸ Further, "Not only did the Nonconformists fail to see the contradictions in their own actions, but they also lacked all grasp of the complexities of Tswana

45 Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa*, p. 503.

46 Comaroff, J. and J., *Of Revelation and Revolution*, Vol. 2, p. 336.

47 Comaroff, J. and J., *Of Revelation and Revolution*, Vol. 1, p. 208.

48 *Ibid.*

ontology".⁴⁹ All of this appears to make a very sophisticated argument against the missionaries based on the use of tropes and anthropological insights into African thought. Thus, the Comaroffs write "the argument over such issues as rainmaking became a confrontation between two cultures"⁵⁰. So convincing is the flow of the narrative that one easily misses the following admission:

"The fact that the color black and rhythmic sounds were important in rainmaking, and that **bodily parts** were used in potent medicinal concoctions, seems to have suggested to the Tswana that the foreigners intended to use their own capacities to usurp local ritual forces."⁵¹

The question that the Comaroffs avoid is where did the "**bodily parts**" they admit rainmakers used come from? Actually, missionary arguments against rainmaking and related rituals of healing were not tropes at all. They were reactions to the ritual murder of small children who were killed to obtain body parts such as their hearts, intestines and testicles.⁵² But, the Comaroffs are so busy pointing out the narrow-mindedness of the missionaries that they merely mention in passing, without even seeming to realize the import of their statement, that Tswana ritual medicine contained "**bodily parts**"⁵³. Willoughby, it should be noted, is one of the sources the Comaroffs use to build their argument against the missionaries. Yet he repeatedly points out that traditionally rainmaking involved ritual murder. The Comaroffs completely overlook Willoughby's description of this aspect of rainmaking and offer no explanation for the source of the body parts which they appear to accept were used in these ritual.⁵⁴

Recognizing that the use of body parts involved the ritual murder of young children puts the rejection of rainmakers and rainmaking rituals by the missionaries in a completely different light. The Comaroffs claim that rainmaking was rejected because of the missionaries embraced a Biblicist ideology which caused them to think in terms of Satan and human evil.⁵⁵ No doubt, many 19th century missionaries did think in these terms. But, to claim that this was the principal reason that they opposed such practices overlooks the reality of murder and the clear testimony of the missionaries themselves.

Another instance of apparent moral blindness occurs when the Comaroffs deconstruct the work of medical missionaries in Volume Two. The Comaroffs write:

"The correlation drawn by the evangelists between indigenous 'customs' (mekgwa) and ill-health went yet further, reaching deep into setswana. Some offered lurid accounts of diseases

49 Ibid., p. 209.

50 Ibid., p. 213.

51 Ibid., p. 212. Bold added.

52 Willoughby, *The Soul of the Bantu*, London, SCM 1928, p. 205-219. Note that until at least 1989 the South African Police Museum in Pretoria had an extensive exhibit with gory photographs of contemporary ritual murders that confirm Willoughby's observations.

53 Comaroff, J. and J., *Of Revelation and Revolution*, Vol. 1, p. 212.

54 Ibid., p. 158, 212; Willoughby, *The Soul of the Bantu*, p. 212.

55 Comaroff, J. and J., *Of Revelation and Revolution*, Vol. 1, p. 158.

and deaths cause by such 'loathsome and horrible' rites as circumcision. Others told of the killing of babies in the instance of twin births (Campbell 1822:2:206). It is not surprising, therefore, that clarion calls to the civilizing mission, calls for the replacement of old African ways with the ways of European modernity, should have rung with medical metaphors."⁵⁶

What is this passage supposed to mean? The Comaroffs appear to be totally oblivious to the moral implications of their sophisticated theories and word games. Are they denying that Campbell was correct when he claimed that twins were murdered when such deaths are very well documented and no secret among Africans in Southern Africa even today?⁵⁷ Or are they seriously suggesting that objecting to the murder of twins is simply a Western prejudice associated with "European modernity" and "medical metaphors"? Such moral ambiguity is highly disturbing particularly when it is present in conjunction with sophisticated interpretations of history that frequently distort historical data.

Conclusion

Majeke, or rather Taylor's, apparently pro-Black *The Role of Missionaries in Conquest* appeared in the same year as Capt. J.J. McCord's anti-Black *South African Struggle*.⁵⁸ Curiously, both authors agreed that missionaries were the servants of an evil capitalism thus reflecting older Afrikaner Nationalist criticisms of missionaries made by men like J.D. du Toit and his brother-in-law Willem Postma.⁵⁹ The same anti-missionary rhetoric is found the work of the Afrikaner Nationalists who wrote *500 Years: A History of South Africa*, and the reactionary French historian Robert Lacour-Gayet.⁶⁰ Against these writers Edgar Brookes, Eric Walker, and Rodney Davenport, presented a very different vision of mission activity from a non-racial, liberal, perspective.⁶¹

Only in the 1980's did a growing number of radical Whites seriously begin to view missions and missionaries as agents of capitalist oppression. When they did, they too used arguments that are almost identical to those used by Afrikaner Nationalists. We need to ask hard questions about the adoption of this type of interpretation and its implications for scholarship. But, that would take another paper.

56 Comaroff, J. and J., *Of Revelation and Revolution*, Vol. 2, p. 334.

57 Hammond-Tooke, W.D., ed., *The Bantu-Speaking Peoples of Southern Africa*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974, p. 214, 296.

58 McCord, Capt. J.J., *South African Struggle*, Pretoria, de Bussy, 1952.

59 du Toit, J.D., *Hel Methodism*, Pretoria, Höveker & Wormser, 1903; Postma, Willem, *Doppers*, Bloemfontain, De Nationale Pers 1918, published under the name of "Dr. Okulis".

60 Muller, C.F.J., ed., *500 Years: A History of South Africa*, Pretoria, Academica, 1969; Lacour-Gayet, Robert, *A History of South Africa*, Loncon, Cassell, 1977.

61 Brookes, Edgar, *History of Native Policy in South Africa*, Cape Town, Nasionale Pers, 1924; Walker, Eric, *A History of Southern Africa*, London, Longmans, 1964, first published 1928; Davenport, Rodney, *South Africa: A modern History*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press 1977.

All that can be done now is to note that a similar change has taken place in the interpretation, or reinterpretation, of the works of men like Michael Foucault, to whom writers like the Comaroffs' are heavily indebted. This reinterpretation involves the co-option of Foucault, and other writers like Antonio Gramsci, by neo-fascists in Europe.⁶² What this suggests is not that scholars like the Comaroffs are fascists. They are not. Rather it demonstrates the instability of theory.

Relying on theory and theoretical frameworks without a solid grounding in accurate factual evidence is a two edged sword. Theory can be used and misused by many groups to promote diametrically opposed causes. Only empirical data and a careful sifting of sources will protect the reader against such misuse. This is the task facing us as serious historians. Only when we command the source material can we construct theories that are not open to endless interpretations and misuse by political extremists. Deborah Lipstadt rightly warns against the misuse of historical sources, clever theories, and a lack of moral vision. To ignore her warning is folly indeed. We may disagree with the religious vision of missionaries and their solutions to the human suffering they observed. But, we are not free to distort their words or trivialize the importance of the moral issues they raise. To do so is an act of intellectual violence that rapes the missionary record in the service of a new intellectual imperialism that in the end may turn out to promote the revival of fascism.

62 Golsan, *Fascism's Return*, p. 224-232, 244- 258.

Ulrich van der Heyden

DER "BURENKRIEG" VON 1899 BIS 1902 UND DIE DEUTSCHEN MISSIONSGESELLSCHAFTEN

Die deutschen evangelischen Missionsgesellschaften gehörten zu diejenigen etwa 60 um die Jahrhundertwende in Südafrika tätigen christlichen Missionen,¹ die über ein weitverzweigtes Netz von Stationen, Außenstationen, Predigtplätzen, Gemeinden und Institutionen im Süden Afrikas verfügten.² Von hier aus berichteten sie an ihre Leitungen nach Deutschland. Demzufolge ist nicht nur ihr überlieferte Papierbestand recht umfangreich, sondern das Wirken deutscher Missionare hat auch qualitativ in der südafrikanischen Geschichte nicht unbedeutende Spuren hinterlassen: außerhalb ihres eigentlichen Aufgabenbereiches, der Gewinnung von Afrikanern für den christlichen Glauben, vor allem in den Geisteswissenschaften, der Tropenmedizin, der Religionswissenschaft, der Geologie und Geographie sowie in manch anderen Bereichen. Hierüber gibt es unzählige schriftliche Quellen. Einige Spuren ihres Wirkens sind noch gar nicht in ihrer vollen Bedeutung entdeckt oder gewürdigt worden.

In Südafrika arbeiteten insbesondere die deutschen Missionsgesellschaften der Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine (Moravians), die Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft, die Berliner Missionsgesellschaft, die Hermannsburger Missionsgesellschaft sowie die Bleckmaer Mission. Von den katholischen Missionen ist vor allem die Marianhiller Mission zu nennen.

Nicht nur die von den Missionaren hinterlassen schriftlichen Quellen bergen so manchen Schatz für den Wissenschaftler,³ der noch seiner Hebung harrt, sondern nicht wenige Details aus der südafrikanischen Missionsgeschichte sind nach wie vor wenig erforscht. Die meisten Forschungsergebnisse, wie auch die Periodisierung, stammen von weißen Missionswissenschaftlern, was die Kritik von nicht-weißen Akademikern hervorruft.⁴ Sie werfen u.a. den etablierten Wissenschaftlern vor, einige Themen negiert oder falsch bzw. unvollständig interpretiert zu haben.

- 1 Vgl. Bauder, S.: Äthiopische Splitterkirchen in Südafrika (Teil I), in: *Neue Allgemeine Missions-Zeitschrift*, 1938, S. 7.
- 2 Allein die Berliner Missionsgesellschaft verfügte zur Zeit des "Burenkrieges" bzw. des "Südafrikanischen Krieges", wie er auch genannt wurde, auf dem Territorium der heutigen Republik Südafrika über 57 Hauptstationen, 179 Außenstationen und 264 Predigtplätze. Vgl. Sauberzweig-Schmidt, Gabriel: Der Einfluß des südafrikanischen Krieges auf den äußern und inneren Zustand der Berliner Mission in Südafrika, in: *Allgemeine Missions-Zeitschrift (AMZ)*, 31, 1904, S. 437.
- 3 Vgl. van der Heyden, Ulrich: The Archives and Library of the Berlin Mission Society, in: *Africa in History. A Journal of Method*, 23, 1996, S. 411 ff.
- 4 Vgl. Balia, Baryl M.: Decolonizing Mission History in South Africa, in: Ahrens, Theodor (Hg.): *Zwischen Regionalität und Globalisierung*, Ammersbek bei Hamburg 1997, S. 467 ff.