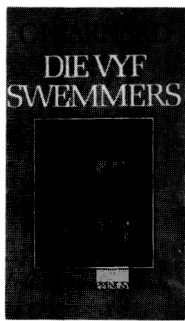


## Boekbesprekings/Book reviews



C.J. BARNARD. *Die vyf swemmers : die ontsnapping van Willie Steyn en vier medekrygsgevangenes uit Ceylon 1901*. Tafelberg : Kaapstad, 1988. 229 pp. Geill. R27,50 (eksklusief). ISBN 0 624 02619 1.

Reeds in 1932 het L.A. Visagie in sy boek *Terug na kommando : avonture van Willie Steyn en vier ander krygsgevangenes* die merkwaardige verhaal vertel van die krygsmakkers se gevangene tydens die Tweede Anglo-Boereoorlog, hul aanhouding, ontsnapping en wedervaringe oorsee, totdat sommige hulle uiteindelik weer by die Boerekommando's aansluit.

Op versoek van Tafelberg-Uitgewers het prof. C.J. Barnard die verhaal van die 'vyf swemmers' (soos president Paul Kruger hulle genoem het — p. 141) opnuut nagevors en te boek gestel. Die outeur ('redakteur') het geen moeite ontsien nie om die avontuurvolle gebeure grondig na te vors in argiewe en biblioteke in Suid-Afrika, Brittanje en Nederland, en die gegewens in Visagie se boek sover moontlik te verifieer en aan te vul. Daarvan getuig die omvangryke bronnelys en voetnootverwysings. Die geskiedenis is 'n diskussie sonder einde, maar ten opsigte van feite-inhoud en diepgang sal dit beswaarlik moontlik wees om op Barnard se werk te verbeter.

Hierdie is geen konvensionele geskiedskrywing nie. Soms kom selfs dialoge in die teks voor! Belangrike strydsvrae van die Anglo-Boereoorlog word nie eintlik aangespreek nie en geen nuwe lig gewerp op sleutelgebeure gedurende die oorlog of op die verloop van die stryd self nie. Vir die belangstellende in Suider-Afrikaanse plaaslike en streekgeskiedenis bevat die boek ook nie juis waardevolle inligting nie; meer as die helfte van die gebeure speel trouens in die buiteland af en die klem val op die hoofkarakter, Willie Steyn. Die verhaal word met heelwat simpatie vanuit die 'swemmers' se oogpunt geskryf, en wanneer die Britte en plaaslike bruin- en swartmense ter sprake kom, is die ervarings feitlik deurgaans negatief (kyk byvoorbeeld pp. 18-24, 29, 30, 57, 177-178).

'n Hoë spanningslyn word deurlopend gehandhaaf: hiertoe dra by Steyn en sy kamerade se vier mislukte ontsnappingspogings in die Groenpunt-krygsgevangenekamp, hernieude ontsnappingsplanne aan boord van die Catalonia — daardie 'luisnes' (p. 69 e.v.) waarmee hulle na Ceylon vervoer is — en uiteindelik die geslaagde ontsnapping in die hawe van Colombo. Daarna reis die leser saam met die makkers op die Russiese troepeskop *Cherson* deur die Suez-kanaal na Feodosia in die Krim, per trein na Leningrad, daarna oor Berlyn na Nederland, en per skip van Hamburg tot in Luderitzbucht. Van daar af volg die tog na Noordwes-Kaapland en meer as 'n jaar nadat hulle gevange geneem is, sluit vier 'swemmers' hulle in Augustus 1901 uiteindelik weer by die Boerekommando's aan.

Die omvattende en hoogs informatiewe register behoort vir die leser nuttig te wees. Duidelike en toespaslike illustrasies en kaarte rond die publikasie af wat taalkundig en tegnies goed versorg en baie mooi uitgegee is. Deur sy arbeid het Barnard duidelik getoon dat geskiedenis nie net op die sogenaamde groot en belangrike gebeure tydens 'n oorlog hoef te konsentreer nie. 'n Werk wat deeglik nagevors en goed gedokumenteer is, kan op so 'n wyse aangebied word dat dit beslis ook tot die belangstellende, deursnee persoon sal spreek.

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P.M. BARNES. *Through the chequered path the story of William Howard's party of 1820 settlers*. (Edited by R.T.J. Lombard). Genealogy publication no. 28. Human Sciences Research Council : Pretoria, 1988. 184 pp. Illus. R30,00 (exclusive). ISBN 0 7969 05932.

The history of the 1820 settlers has always been an inviting field for the amateur historian. Tales of endurance in the face of hardship and heroism in the face of danger have inspired numerous settler descendants to research and record their family history and genealogy. Whatever their academic shortcomings, these family records serve a double purpose: for the

intimate audience for whom they are primarily intended, they nurture a sense of kinship and of continuity with the past. And for historians with a wider and more detached view, they can provide valuable bricks with which to build. Their danger is that they perpetuate the errors of traditional settler historiography, and the conclusions their authors draw are often based on inadequate or biased evidence.

The most recent addition to these settler histories, Pamela M. Barnes's *Through the chequered path*, does not relate to one family only. Mary Barnes and her two young sons arrived at Algoa Bay in 1820 aboard the *Ocean* as members of a party of 15 men, 11 women and 33 children, under the leadership of a Buckinghamshire schoolmaster named William Howard. Barnes's book follows the individual fortunes and includes the family trees of not only the Barnes family, but all the members of Howard's party.

This is a pleasantly-written book, but its author deserves to be commended for her enthusiasm rather than for her historical perspective. She has fallen into the amateur historian's error of drawing conclusions from evidence that is partial in both senses of the word: for instance, her statement that many settlers died of starvation during the early years of the Albany settlement is entirely unsupported by the historical facts, although it accords with the propaganda put out by the Society for the Relief of Distressed Settlers, which had its own axe to grind. She has misconstrued the conditions of the 1819 emigration scheme — it was never the British government's intention to grant 100-acre smallholdings to individual settlers — and she ignores, or is unaware of, the current argument that the 1820 settlers exacerbated the explosive frontier situation that resulted in the outbreak of war in 1834-35. (This is not a new idea: it was a widely-held opinion in 1836, and settler historiography was on the defensive about it for a century.)

However, Barnes's main concern is with the foreground rather than the background of her story. Her stated intention is 'to show the true fabric of the daily existence' of the families that made up Howard's party. To this end she has made a painstaking search of contemporary published works, and in particular the pages of the *South African Commercial Advertiser* and the *Graham's Town Journal*, for any mention of the names with which she is concerned. The difficulty here is that the plain fabric of everyday lives is seldom reflected in newspaper reports, so that the picture that emerges from them is an unduly highly-coloured one, woven from those incidents that were considered newsworthy at the time.

In addition to printed sources, Barnes had made use of the unpublished papers of William Howard, a schoolmaster-clerk with a ready pen, but she has not drawn as fully as she might have done from the mass of settler material in the Cape Archives. The records of the special commissioner, William Hayward, who visited Albany in 1824 to investigate settler affairs, the insolvency papers of William Howard, petitions for land grants, and the official records of the various court cases in which members of the party were involved, would have provided her with further information and perhaps a different perspective.

Pamela Barnes's conscientious research in her chosen sources over a period of many years is evident, and her carefully compiled genealogical tables of the families in Howard's party make a valuable contribution to settler genealogy. Where she has fallen down is in trying to link the information she has garnered into a whole narrative. It is apparent from her text as well as her bibliography that she is not aware of recent academic research into settler history; her source material, and her interpretation of it, give a slanted picture of settler life and perpetuate many of the errors of settler mythology.

Most family histories are published privately at the author's expense, and meet with a deservedly kind reception from their intended audience; this book has been published by the Human Sciences Research Council as the latest in its genealogical series, edited by the head of the Division for Genealogical and Biographical Research, and introduced by the executive director of the Institute for Historical Research. Appearing under these respectable auspices, it must be judged more critically as a serious contribution to South African historical knowledge. This opens up an important question, and one that needs to be answered: is it justifiable at this time to publish a book at public expense that does little to advance current scholarship, but serves, if anything, to set it back a step?

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P.L. BERGER en B. GODSELL (reds.). *A future South Africa : visions, strategies and realities*. Human en Rousseau, en Tafelberg : Kaapstad, 1988. 344 pp. R24,95 (eksklusief). ISBN 0 624 02617 5.

Hierdie publikasie is die resultaat van die sogenaamde South Africa Beyond Apartheid-projek wat sedert 1985 geloods is om die debat oor verandering in Suid-Afrika te probeer verdiep. Die eerste fase van die projek was 'n beskrywing van sleutelrolspelers ('akteurs') wat waarskynlik die soort verandering sal bepaal wat in Suid-Afrika sal voorkom. Die tweede fase was 'n kritiese ontleding van die toekomstvisies en

die strategiese logika van die 'akteurs' in die lig van die realiteite van die Suid-Afrikaanse situasie. Die derde fase was die voorbereiding van hierdie boek.