

*Angels of mercy: Foreign women in the Anglo-Boer War*

(Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2013, 246 pp., bibl, index. ISBN: 978-1-77022-499-5)

**Chris Schoeman**

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In terms of historiography, the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) continues to fascinate both historians and the general public. Serious studies on the war are undertaken annually, while popular books and documentaries proliferate. The latter, of which Chris Schoeman's *Angels of mercy: Foreign women in the Anglo Boer War* forms part, is valuable not because of the information they add to our knowledge of the war, but for recruiting a new generation of readers. This, in turn, fosters a wider understanding of Afrikaner nationalism and Southern African history.

The book details the experiences of twelve women who sacrificed their time and energy for their fellow human beings in the Anglo-Boer War. It can be described as a study in altruism. In general, historical writing about the active role of women as shapers of human destiny has been neglected. While the suffering of women in the war is well documented, it is safe to say that women played no passive role in the war.

There is no concluding chapter, and this is perhaps the greatest reason why this book cannot be said to be a serious study of history. Given the limited recognition of women, a concluding chapter could well have augmented an appreciation of the active role of women in history. The reader is left only with the introduction stating that literature on the war "focused largely on the men who fought on either side" (p. 2). What this study also alarmingly highlights is the way in which the careers of teaching and nursing are perceived in our society.

The text is based largely on secondary sources, to which some primary sources have been added. Of special importance are the endnotes. Because of the potential to cultivate a greater interest in our heritage, the endnotes in

this work, despite not being very detailed, provide just the right amount of credibility to the text. They also demonstrate historical methodology to those interested in further studies but who are unfamiliar with the subject.

Much of the detail can be said to be a bit trivial, or, as the old accusation against history writing states: “just one thing after the other”. Only one of the twelve women can be said to be a truly noteworthy historical figure. That honour belongs to Mary Kingsley, who was a very successful author. Kingsley’s restless, defying and often anti-colonial spirit provides pleasure for the reader and certainly stands out in the text. However, despite each one of these twelve women living remarkable lives, the sheer volume of factual information lacks proper interpretation, resulting in these accounts not being as memorable as they ought to be.

The book is not set entirely during the course of the war. Following the war, numerous teachers sailed for the new colonies in order to provide their services to the children of the two defeated Boer republics. The dedication of these teachers parallels those of the nurses who served during the course of the war, as the circumstances in which they worked left much to be desired. That these women sacrificed so much for the upliftment of their former enemies forms the greatest part of the rationale behind this study, and the text certainly celebrates the human spirit and its ability to endure hardship in search for the greater good of mankind.

Another important observation that can be made and could have added to a proper conclusion of this work, is the fact that the knowledge that nurses gained during the Anglo-Boer War would prove instrumental during what was once known as “the Great War”. The year 2014 marks a century since the outbreak of the First World War, and it is fitting to reflect on the role that nurses played. Using the lessons learned in the Anglo-Boer War, nursing professionals were able to plough back their expertise and skills, empowering others to follow in their footsteps and to render their services during the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The text is written in an easily digestible style. This is exactly what the publication requires, as it assists the leisure reader. If Schoeman’s exploration of these foreign women and their role in the Anglo-Boer War is viewed through the lens of serious scholarship, it may be deemed a failure. This would, however, be missing the point of publications of this kind. It is safe to say that this book is successful, as its role is clearly not one of serious

scholarship, but rather that of stimulating an interest in the Anglo-Boer War. With just the right amount of research to give it credibility, Schoeman has succeeded in producing a work that has one foot in leisure and the other in scholarship, and that is easily accessible to the layperson.

*From Diaspora to Diorama. The Old Slave Lodge in Cape Town*

**(Cape Town: NagsPro Multimedia, 2013, 40 pp. CD-ROM. ISBN: 978-0-620-55581-4 (booklet) ISBN 978-0-620-55582-1 (CD-ROM))**

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This is an unconventional work to review. It consists of an introductory booklet and a CD containing “a new completely revised *Diaspora*, several books, two revised theses, video snippets and a revised *Bibliographies of Bondage*. 9,000+ pages and 200+ illustrations”. The introductory booklet frames the intellectual parameters of the work and there is an introduction to the use of the CD.

As the title indicates, the Cape Slave Lodge at the top of Adderley Street provides the structure through which to enter the lives of Cape slaves. In his introduction Anthony Holiday explains the objectives behind the work. Noting that the building was transformed from slave lodge to judicial court, he observes that “The symbolism of the Slave Lodge did not strike them [the court officials], because the evils of slavery, servility, sexual abuse and madness had so poisoned their being as to quite literally blind them to the meaning of symbols of that kind”. Slaves, he suggests are negated as people and the Lodge, too, cannot “symbolise the condition of slavery” until its inhabitants are seen in a different light.

This is what the “E-book”, as Shell defines it, sets out to do. It aims to remove slave history from the academic world in which the subjects of history “do not recognise themselves”. The people, thus, are cheated of their own past and of their identity. The CD, on the other hand, provides ordinary people with