

BOOK REVIEW

Liz Stanley, *Mourning becomes... Post/memory, commemoration and the concentration camps of the South African War*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008. ISBN 978-1-86814-475-4. xiv plus 303 pages.

Liz Stanley, Professor of Sociology at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, has visited South Africa on more than one occasion to carry out research on the history, consequences and meaning of the Anglo-Boer War of 1899 to 1902. She has already produced several noteworthy papers, articles in academic journals and other publications on aspects of the war. Her latest book, *Mourning becomes . . . Post/memory, commemoration and the concentration camps of the South African War*, “focuses on the part of the past shared by Britain and South Africa shaped by colonialism, imperialism, racism and nationalism, and marked by the unfolding ‘post/memory’ of the concentration camps. It is concerned with how the deaths in these camps have been utilised within a nationalist interpretational framework at a number of subsequent points in time – successive stages in memory-making [...]” (p. 4). It is “not a book about political myth, but one about post-slash-memory and the role of testimony and story-telling in relation to it” (p. 27).

The book is divided into nine chapters. In the introductory chapter (“The brunt of war and where it fell”), a review is provided of the internment-camp system and of its consequences. In Chapter 2 Stanley tells of her research visits to South Africa – “Small personal reminiscences concerning large human issues.” Chapter 3 deals, *inter alia*, with the memorials that were built in honour of the camp victims and how the victims have been commemorated through the years. “Making memory work: remembering, moral life and the concentration system” is the theme of Chapter 4.

In Chapter 5, entitled: “‘Should we forget?’ Some answers from women’s testimonies”, Stanley explores the diaries and reminiscences of some of the internees. “What has been forgotten concerning children in the ‘white’ camps” is the topic of Chapter 6. The next chapter deals with the black internment camps, including the controversial use of “native labour” from these camps. In Chapter 8, Stanley revisits gardens of remembrance (see also Chapter 3) and explores in more detail the words that are used on the various memorials. In the final chapter (“For Electra, peace, of a kind”), a portrait of post/memory is provided, *inter alia*.

Stanley has carried out excellent research. See in this regard the comprehensive source list (pp. 271-297), which contains a variety of sources, although no reference is made to two Masters’ theses that might have been of value, namely J Malan, *Vroue-outobiografieë uit die Anglo-Boereoorlog-era: ’n literêr-historiese ondersoek van enkele Afrikaanse en Nederlandstalige tekste* (Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth, 2005) and HM Ross, *A woman’s world at a time of war:*

an analysis of selected women's diaries during the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902 (University of Stellenbosch, 2006). In addition, there are endnotes (totalling 694) at the end of every chapter. Stanley has also travelled extensively in South Africa, visiting many internment campsites and other locations related to the war of 1899 to 1902.

The book is illustrated with a map and 33 apt photographs. There are also 20 tables, containing a variety of statistical data. The well-compiled index (pp. 298-303) will assist the interested scholar, student and general reader to explore the text systematically.

Liz Stanley's *Mourning becomes ...* is a wide-ranging book that defies categorisation. It is not always easy to read; but then, one should keep in mind that it is not a traditional history book. As Albert Grundlingh has correctly pointed out, only a few of the publications on the war of 1899 to 1902 that flowed from the centenary of the war, have opened up significant new perspectives. Stanley's fascinating book challenges many of the accepted facts in respect of the internment/concentration camps. She clearly demonstrates that much of what we have traditionally understood about these camps originates from the testimony relating to the key role and activities of women in this context, as reflected in accounts and narratives which were solicited, selected and published within Boer proto-nationalist circles. In due course, much of what was remembered was shaped and reshaped to support the development of a racialised nationalist framework.

This intriguing book is recommended as essential reading for anyone interested in the history of the Anglo-Boer War's consequences and legacy, as well as in the role of oral testimonies and commemorations.

André Wessels

Department of History, University of the Free State
and Visiting Fellow, UNSW@ADFA, Canberra