

know more about the less well documented social life of the rural populace at this time. I am not convinced that the picture she draws of institutionalised women participation in precolonial Nigeria, holds true across society and variegated political structures.

Reading through the book, one is pleasantly shocked by prescience and

perceptiveness of the women political activists, who, far more than their descendants of the 1990's, grasped the strategic advantages of organisation and mobilisation, what we see today is a myriad of groups and splinter groups sometimes working at cross purposes. Among the many delights of the book, are the lessons which it offers, in the area of strategy, to the empower-

ment activists of today - the significantly altered terrain notwithstanding.

I warmly recommend the book for the striking contemporaneity of its theme, its judicious scholarship and lucid prose style.

•Olukotun is deputy director of the Times Journalism Institute, Lagos.

Truth Before Reconciliation *Wole Ogundele*

W.P.B Botha, A DUTY OF MEMORY, Heinemann, Oxford, 1997.

THE question, what would post-apartheid South Africa be like has now changed to: what is post-apartheid South Africa beginning to look like? Three years into the new era, it is no longer a speculative question though there are no definitive answers yet. In many respects the whole of the decade-if not also the next-will clearly be a transition period between apartheid South Africa and democratic South Africa-the South Africa without the compound prefix

made things easier. For one thing, there is a feeling among the Black population that the Afrikaner National Party has been let off too easily. Could just dismantling apartheid alone, as laudable as it was, atone for half a century of deliberate, systematic sins, political evils and crimes? Thinking that it had done enough by just letting go of power, the National Party did not see any reason to apologise for all those crimes. Clearly, some form of confession followed but apology was needed to heal the wounds, and also to make the necessary social and moral transition. The device now being employed to bring both about is of course the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Judging by the harrowing truths that several of those-white or black-who have been testifying

before this Commission have been divulging, it has so far been a useful device serving a very psychological as well as social and political purpose. But long after the Commission would have forgiven all those forgivable, wound up its business and dispersed, memories and mutual suspicions would still linger. Especially memories of the seemingly gratuitous violence committed between 1989 and 1994. For apartheid in this period of its death throes was a wounded snake biting anything and everything within its range, blindly, mindlessly. Perhaps the Truth Commission's most difficult task so far has been how to separate genuine politically motivated crimes from deliberate crimes against humanity - i.e, morally reprehensible and politically inexcusable ones. Even if the commission were juridical rather than political, it would still probably never be able to neatly and satisfactorily make the distinctions, talk less of squaring their truths into circles of political and moral reconciliation.

>>



18.1
Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Alex Boraine at the inception of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Cape Town

'post-apartheid', the South Africa no longer weighted down by the terrible burden of two centuries of wars, racial hatred and 'separate development.'

That apartheid did not end in a cataclysmic war but in a negotiated democracy has not

The other family is that of the black worker-servants on the Leeufontein farm: Lucas, Lettie and their children Flora and Mafimane. Midwived by Lettie's mother, Mafimane and Johanna are born in the same hour and in fact put in the same cot for the first few hours of their life. From that moment until Johanna is

Johanna, now anglicised as Jo Hines, returns with her girlfriend Beth from London where she has been living a dissolute life. She believes that it is Mafimane who committed the crime, not out of any belated explosion of black rage, but out of a secret love pact he made with her long ago: 'That night when you were asleep he put his arm round me under the table, whispered in my ear, "One day we will have our revenge. One day, sister, we will put an end to all this suffering."' (p.140). Indeed, by the time Jo arrives - but unknown to anybody - Mafimane has already been hanged as a convenient scapegoat for the crime. It is never clear if Mafimane actually committed the crime, but Jo believes so. On the other hand Franz Muller, the young police sergeant who is in love with Jo, believes that Eeben first killed his mother, wife and children and then shot himself. This looks more plausible, as he has become totally disillusioned with Afrikanerdom and has been on the run from Draak and company, the fanatical and deadly Boer gang determined to undermine the new political process. Jo's lover Beth, who has stayed with her all this while, is intent on saving her by taking her back to England. But having learnt that Mafimane has been hanged, Jo makes a last desperate effort to get the truth out by handing over the tape in which Eeben has recorded the sordid family history to the police captain who has been waiting around. Draak's agents have also been waiting and are determined to not let the truth get out. There is a shootout, and Jo is killed. Her last thoughts are of Mafimane. In the novel's epilogue, Letie and her family, with the help of Muller, have put money together to buy Leeufontein farm under the name Jomane (a combination of Jo and Mafimane) Enterprises and Beth seems on the verge of making a decision to return to South Africa.

Glendora Books Supplement

told in the camera close-up technique of first person; Jo's in the long-distance one of third person and through the recollecting minds of Eeben and Beth. Then a part of Caroline's is told through her letters, as are some parts of Mafimane's. There are also Jo's memorial flashbacks, which make the past not far away and long ago, but a continuous, immediate present. All these give the narrative the pace and quality of a slow-motion picture in which the camera lingers continuously on the faces of the actors, to register their minute and slowly changing emotions. The technique also enjoins the reader to constantly adjust her/his emotional involvement in the story, in addition to adding to its technical as well as thematic complexities. This is particularly apposite in a novel about time and memories, as the title emphasises. As Beth surmises, 'memories were not the same as facts.... Without memories facts were like the bricks of a demolished house. It was memories that held them together, gave them shape, meaning' (p.88). Indeed, at another point, there is a brief debate about the uses of memory between Beth and Lettie. 'Old memories,' says, Lettie, 'are like too much fat. They block the arteries.' No, Beth disagrees, '...they're the oxygen in the blood' (p.133). It is memories of their repressed childhood, of their brutal father as symbol of Afrikanerdom, that destroy first Eeben, and then Jo. But then, it is also memory, a refusal to sweep the past under the carpet of naive forgiveness, that will save the future nation from its horrendous past. Individuals like Jo, Eeben and Mafimane may be crushed, but as long as the nation is saved, their tragedies would not have been in vain. At the group level, the point that Andrie's story drives home is that the Afrikaners have been as much dam-

aged by their oppression of others (to oppress others, you have to repress yourself) as the Black people; but that because they are the victimisers, their own damage has remained repressed, hidden and unrecognised.

Written in a simple lyrical style that verges on the poetic (especially in the numerous landscape descriptions), *A Duty of Memory* invites reading as a political allegory, especially of its numerous, obviously symbolic objects, actions and episodes: the tape as hidden/repressed memory which has to be brought out into the open; the birth of Jo and Mafimane at the same moment and together, plus the posthumous combination of their names in Jomane Enterprises, both encapsulating the past and future of South Africa; Jo's failed solo attempt to build a memorial wall in the kraal and her dream of Lettie (African), Beth (English) and Muller (Boer) cooperating to build it; and many more.

Although holding the advantage of numerical superiority, Blacks in South Africa never looked forward to the day when the Afrikaners would be driven into the sea, even in the days when war was considered the only option left for achieving freedom. Literature of reconciliation and racial integration has always poured forth from them, and from the pens of Coloured and Anglo-South African writers. Now that Afrikaners like W.P.B. Botha are adding their voice to this genre, we have reason to look forward to a real attitudinal sea-change in the country. For what *A Duty of Memory* shows is that, beyond its political and economic manifestations, apartheid was fundamentally a religious doctrine.

•Ogundele was until recently a senior lecturer in literature at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife

Reading Faces

Owen Logan

Roger Ballen, *CETTE AFRIQUE LA*, photo Poche Societe, Paris, 1997, 55 pp

TO summarise Roger Ballen's photographs in South Africa involves inevitable simplifications. The pictures are for the most part of white South Africans and have been made in a way slightly reminiscent of Diane Arbus. Extending the

parallel with north America one might borrow the term 'white trash' which, although harshly pejorative, doesn't seem out of place when approaching the images. Lionel Murcott's introduction to the photo poche publication remarks on the 'atavistic' bleakness to be found in these pic-

tures. Ballen has indeed sought out a particular version of whiteness in South Africa which may appear subversive in the context of the former apartheid regime. The psychological sense which Ballen has brought to the pictures suggests perversely damaged and fragmented identities which seem to spit on South Africa's former white face. Many of the pictures also suggest an unseen violence which is more frightening by its very absence. Apart from the occasional gun or truncheon, Ballen draws on more ambiguous

>>