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A History of Childhood in the Cape Colony

Sacha Hepburn

To cite this article: Sacha Hepburn (2017) A History of Childhood in the Cape Colony, Journal of Southern African Studies, 43:4, 842-843, DOI: [10.1080/03057070.2017.1325624](https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070.2017.1325624)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070.2017.1325624>



Published online: 23 May 2017.



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A History of Childhood in the Cape Colony

S.E. Duff, *Changing Childhoods in the Cape Colony: Dutch Reformed Church Evangelicalism and Colonial Childhood, 1860–1895* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), vii + 206pp., hardback, £60, ISBN 978-1-137-38093-7.

The history of childhood in Africa has become a subject of immense interest to historians in recent years. Sarah Duff's rich analysis of colonial childhood in the 19th-century Cape Colony contributes to that expanding historiography. Her analysis centres on the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) and its efforts to convert and educate white children. Duff argues that the DRC was the institution most concerned with the question of childhood in the Cape until the 1870s, and that it provided the road map for colonial policy-making concerning children, education and white poverty into the 1890s. The book relates the making of white childhood to the broader construction of white identities and examines how the DRC, colonial officials and Cape residents attempted to confront the impacts of industrialisation, urbanisation and perceived increases in levels of white poverty.

The first chapter provides an introduction to the history of the DRC in the Cape, tracing the transformation of the church from a 'socially and theologically moribund organisation' (p. 19) during the early 19th century into an evangelical institution at the heart of Afrikaner society and nationalist identity by the 1890s. Duff highlights the important roles played by children and young people in this process, both as the subjects of DRC activism and policy and as actors in their own right, the latter particularly through participation in and leadership of revivals during the 1860s, 1870s and 1880s. The chapter highlights the prominence of poor children and young people in the early revivals. Duff argues that the DRC sought to curb the autonomy of such children, many of whom were black, during subsequent decades, through its efforts to define childhood and channel children's energies into pursuits deemed appropriate for their race, class, and gender.

The construction of a particular model of childhood for the white middle classes forms the focus of Chapter 2. Industrialisation radically altered the demand for and distribution of labour in the colony and led to a reshaping of women's and children's roles. Middle-class childhood was restructured as a period of dependency rather than economic utility, and children of both sexes found that the amount of time they spent in education, secular and religious, lengthened into their later teens. Duff traces these processes at the individual level through a close reading of the letters, diaries and personal papers of a set of prominent DRC ministers and their families. As a result of broader economic changes, white, middle-class children also experienced an increase in leisure time, which, as Duff shows in Chapter 3, various children's societies and religious organisations were keen to control. For the DRC, this meant encouraging children to engage in missionary work and forms of Christian service. Duff relays the particularly interesting history of a Sunday school for black children run almost entirely by a group of white, middle-class girls from the Huguenot Seminary. The girls delivered all teaching at the school, with one older girl organising the curriculum and supervising her peers. Though far from representing the realities of life for all middle-class girls, this example shows that, by working through the DRC, some were able to exercise a significant degree of influence, including over the lives of black children.

Not all children in the Cape experienced the same expansion of education and leisure opportunities during the later decades of the 19th century. Indeed, the book illustrates well the co-existence of different definitions of childhood in the same space and time. Chapters 4 and 5 examine the efforts made by the DRC and, from the 1870s, the colonial state, to reduce white poverty and educate poor white children. Chapter 4 examines how the DRC responded to state requests for help with bolstering educational provision in rural areas during the 1870s. Duff

argues that, in part as a result of the state's increased interest in children's education, the DRC's activities became increasingly racially exclusive from this point, focused on the conversion and education of white children over other ethnic groups. By the 1890s, Afrikaner nationalists had brought white poverty to the forefront of colonial politics. Chapter 5 explores the introduction of the 1895 Destitute Children Relief Act, relating this legislation and the debates surrounding it to broader attempts to secure the future of the colonial state for whites.

The book draws on a range of source material to examine both changing constructions of childhood and children's experiences and subjectivities. Duff had access to the diaries and letters of various children and young people, from both within and without the DRC community. The insights offered by middle-class children's writings are particularly significant, and these sources provide engaging accounts of children's experiences of spiritual conversion and transitions from childhood to adulthood. The gendered dynamics of children's experiences come through clearly in such testimonies and are explored particularly well in Chapter 3. Poorer children's experiences are, however, less fully explored. Accessing such sources is undeniably one of the most challenging aspects of working on the history of childhood in any context, for socially marginalised children have commonly left few written records.

Alongside its focus on colonial childhood, this book also offers excellent analysis of experiences of fatherhood in the 19th-century Cape. Duff argues that DRC ministers' interest in childhood was driven not only by the transformation of the DRC into an evangelical church, but by their personal experiences of being fathers to large families. In Chapter 2, Duff challenges the idea of Victorian fathers as absent and distant, instead constructing a picture of fathers anxious about their children's happiness and well-being and keen to ensure that their sons and daughters had positive educational and religious experiences. Duff's exploration of fatherhood will surely be useful to those working on parenting and masculinity in Africa and colonial contexts.

Overall, this book offers a meaningful contribution to the history of childhood and to the history of South Africa. It demonstrates the centrality of childhood to the making of whiteness and to responses to the challenges of industrialisation and urbanisation in the 19th-century Cape.

SACHA HEPBURN © 2017

Past and Present Fellow, Institute of Historical Research, University of London
sacha.hepburn@sas.ac.uk  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2324-7845>
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070.2017.1325624>



National Storytellers

Ruramisai Charumbira, *Imagining a Nation: History and Memory in Making Zimbabwe* (Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 2015), 304 pp., hardback, US\$45.00, ISBN 978-0-8139-3822-6; e-book, US\$45.00, ISBN 978-0-8139-3823-3.

We live, it seems, in an age of new nationalisms. It is with this in mind that Ruramisai Charumbira's book, *Imagining a Nation*, is particularly timely. The book's central argument is that the processes of writing, retelling, and commemorating stories about the past have been central to the justification of colonial and post-colonial rule in Rhodesia and Zimbabwe, as well as in popular mobilisations against these political orders. Charumbira's main concerns are the histories of two competing 'origin stories': the settler community's narratives of their occupation of the country, beginning in 1890, and indigenous people's narratives of the violent unrest against settler rule that occurred between March 1896 and December 1897. As Charumbira