no less provocative and/or thought-provoking and are bound to offer their readers pleasure and surprises in equal measures. Being a long-time reader of Castoriadis’s works and of the relevant literature, I found myself mesmerized by the texts, occasionally nodding in agreement, shaking my head in disagreement or disbelief, but also utterly surprised at times by the brilliance of an argument and by the elaborate and detailed expositions of all the authors. Both publications share the conviction that there is currently an urgent need to bridge once more theory and praxis, and I hope that both books will be warmly received by the reading public and that they won’t fail to enrich our understanding of the present and to inspire our individual and collective praxis.

Peter Vale, Lawrence Hamilton and Estelle H. Prinsloo (eds)
Intellectual Traditions in South Africa: Ideas, Individuals and Institutions
(University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2014)

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‘We may have all arrived on different ships, but we are in the same boat now.’

If you are travelling to another country for work or a holiday, how do you prepare for your trip? A common strategy is to read up on the language, the climate, the country’s history, its cities and its population. If you happen to be travelling to South Africa (a country with 11 official languages!), you should be aware that an exceptional travel guide was published in 2014, entitled Intellectual Traditions in South Africa: Ideas, Individuals and Institutions.

The book is a kaleidoscopic tour of different intellectual traditions, from liberalism and communism to African nationalism and Pan-Africanism, from Afrikaner intellectual history and Black Consciousness to feminism, Hindu tradition, Islam, and so forth. As such, it covers the many individuals and institutions with different backgrounds (and of different colours and sexual orientations) who created and recreated ideas and concepts relating to their history, their place in history and in the future of this country.

The collection is divided into Part One, ‘Inherited Ideas, Transplanted Institutions and Local Critique’; Part Two, ‘Resistance to Domination, African and Asian Alternatives’; and Part Three, ‘Religious Dogma and Emancipatory Potential’. The editors have succeeded in constructing a meaningful framework from the bewildering number of intellectual traditions, running from ‘Heritage of the Past’ (pre-apartheid), through ‘Resistance’ (during apartheid) to ‘Religion and Potential’ (post-apartheid), looking at individuals, institutions and ideas.

The book begins with an introduction by editor Peter Vale, evocatively entitled ‘Of Ships, Bedraggled Crews and the Miscegenation of Ideas’, and ends with a conclusion by a second editor, Lawrence Hamilton, entitled ‘The Power of the Past: The Future of Intellectual History’.
This intellectual travel guide will be indispensable if you wish to familiarize yourself with the various and competing interpretations of the history, present, and future of South Africa. Reading the book, however, one risks becoming even more puzzled by this country’s intellectual scene, due to its dazzling complexity. Moreover, the ‘compartmentalization’ of the intellectual traditions in the book occasionally seems somewhat arbitrary, and a different set of defining criteria appear to have been used for each section. So while this may be an indispensable travel guide, you are also likely to need a guide to reading this compilation.

The introduction by Peter Vale is intended as a guide to the book. He shows how the fact that ships from every part of the world would carry intellectual traditions, along with their ‘bedraggled crews’, to South Africa is central to understanding the country’s intellectual history.

In his review of this book, P. C. Limb of Michigan State University notes that it is exactly this metaphor of ‘ships coming in’ (although in fact ships with crews did arrive many times) that leads other traditions to be overlooked:

Religions are allocated fully one-third of the book, yet largely missing are indigenous cosmologies and attitudes to supreme beings, with scant attention as well to materialism and atheism. Reflecting a decision to start with externally founded ideologies, the authors fold African philosophical ideas (where discussed) into broader (if stimulating) chapters on African nationalism, Pan-Africanism, and black consciousness, which do engage with black thinkers; no chapters focus on individual African peoples and their ideas.¹

If it were only ‘ships coming in’ that built South Africa’s intellectual traditions, then the Terra nullius would have been an empty country with Traditio nullius, so to speak. Part of the influx consisted of the grand narratives of the Western tradition – liberalism, Marxism and Christianity – which ultimately shaped an extremely divided society in terms of race and class; a development that began many centuries ago, but that was shaped by deepening apartheid, especially in the 19th century. And apartheid itself was based on separation: on separate traditions, including intellectual traditions. In Part One, the reader will find contributions on liberalism, Marxism in South Africa, Afrikaner intellectual history and African positivism.

Unsurprisingly, these imported intellectual traditions provoked resistance in South Africa, both physically and intellectually. This resistance was articulated in neighbouring but competing traditions, which are the focus of Part Two, and include African nationalism, Pan-Africanism, Black Consciousness, the legacy of Gandhi and feminism.

One curious aspect of Part Three, which discusses the emancipatory potential of intellectual ideas, is that its title starts with the adjective ‘religious’. The editors appear to believe that while religion has historically acted as a divisive force, it could also have emancipatory potential in the future. Part Three includes contributions on Christianity, Hindu tradition, Jewish responses and Islam.

This differentiation in terms of different traditions is understandable and, to a certain extent, logical, but it is also arbitrary and indiscriminate, and is thereby a weak point of this compilation. Take, for example, Anthony Egan’s contribution on Christianity, in which he defines Christian theology both as part of the ideological structure of the state and part of the process of resistance; in short, a ‘site of struggle’ (p. 245). One might
easily draw a connection between the ‘Christian intellectual tradition’ and the Afrikaner intellectual tradition, and simultaneously with black theology on the other side of the racial divide. The book seems to imply a certain ‘pillarization’ (in Dutch, *verzuiling*) of traditions, suggesting that these pillars were developed in isolation, thereby downsizing the complexities and constant cross-over between traditions. One should note that this reviewer lives in the Netherlands, a country that used to be strongly ‘pillarized’ (*verzuild*). Note, too, that during the neo-apartheid period, some political scientists, including Arend Lijphart (who ‘invented’ the concept of *verzuiling*), even suggested that pillarization might be a productive recipe for South Africa’s future.\(^2\)

Like any collection, this book contains contributions of varying scope and quality. One exceptional article is the contribution on the *Double Lives of South African Marxism* by UCT’s Andrew Nash. Nash provides an informative and analytical account of the ‘implosion’ of Marxism in South Africa. Another interesting contribution is that by Pieter Duvenage on Afrikaner intellectual history. As Peter Vale said during the book launch in Cape Town, addressing the Afrikaner intellectual tradition was a delicate issue. If there is an Afrikaner intellectual history, does it follow that there is indeed an Afrikaner *Volk* with an intellectual ‘biography’? In his contribution, which is none too accessible in places, Duvenage gives an account ‘of the intellectual history of a specific community from the inside-out’. He adds, though, that his contribution is only *an* interpretation, not *the* interpretation.

Let me end this discussion with a final concern about the future of South Africa. The book focuses on different intellectual *traditions*, in plural. Might South Africans – to quote the words of Peter Vale again – be in the ‘same boat’? Might an intellectual tradition develop that applied to the whole society, a ‘true’ South African tradition? In other words, might there be a post-modernist ‘end of history’ that could draw the different traditions together? If this were to occur, what might serve as an overarching concept? Tutu’s diversity-based concept of the rainbow with its many colours, or Thabo Mbeki’s African Renaissance, as described in 1996 in his famous *I am an African* speech to South Africa’s parliament, or perhaps the indigenous concept of *Ubuntu*?

Or is ‘intellectual tradition’ necessarily a plurality of traditions? In the end, any concept that ‘merges’ different traditions will only be lived by people if it acknowledges and respects the distinct colours of the metaphorical rainbow, the separate traditions of separate groups. In this sense, this book is a timely and indispensable appreciation of the complexity of this society, before one even considers what the unifying concept of post-apartheid South Africa might be. The book can indeed be seen, as Lawrence Hamilton suggests, as ‘a first step towards nurturing a vibrant intellectual history research agenda’ (p. 334).

So if you plan to travel to South Africa, whether for real or in the mind, then I would advise that you first gain some in-depth knowledge of the country by reading this indispensable book.

**Notes**

1. P. C. Limb, *CHOICE: Reviews online*, 52-3245, 2015.
2. See HJ van Rinsum (2003) Co-ordination of diversity, politics of accommodation in a new guise? In: Pansters W, Van Beek W and Fumerton M (eds) *Meeting Culture, Essays in Honour of Arie de Ruijter*. Maastricht: Shaker Publishing, 51–63.