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The Perils of History Approaches to the Past in Jonny Steinbergs The Number

Lesley Cowling

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Remembrance: Norman Sims, 1948–2022

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Rachel Carson before *SILENT SPRING*



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Original caption: Rachel Carson, author of *The Sea Around Us*, to be published by Oxford University Press (1951). Unidentified photographer. Smithsonian Institution/Wikimedia Commons.

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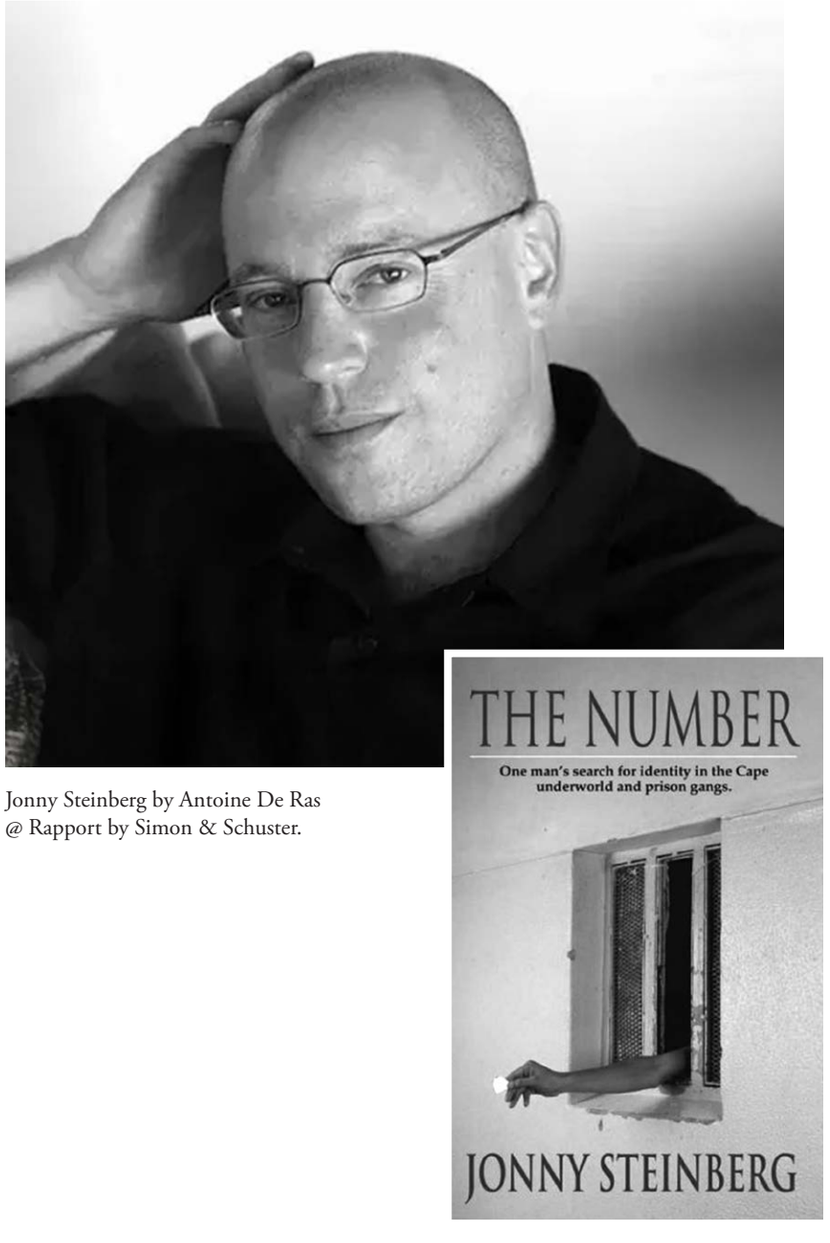
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Jonny Steinberg by Antoine De Ras @ Rapport by Simon & Schuster.

The Perils of History: Approaches to the Past in Jonny Steinberg's *The Number*

Lesley Cowling
University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

Abstract: South African writer Jonny Steinberg's second book, *The Number*, is a deep exploration of prison gangs in the Western Cape. Through in-depth interviews, time spent in the prison corridors and cells, and focusing on the detailed story of one man, Steinberg maps the culture, practices, and history of the "Number gangs" that run prisoners' lives. As part of the book, Steinberg details the history of the gangs as told by prisoners, an origins story with mythological and magical properties. Simultaneously, he uses government records and academic research to set out an "official" history. These histories have the same central character, a powerful and enigmatic founding figure called Nongoloza, but diverge in crucial respects. Steinberg does not attempt to establish factual truth; instead, he allows the contradictions between these histories to erupt into the plot of *The Number*, through his protagonist, Magadien Wentzel, who must find a way to negotiate them in his own life. The use of this approach surfaces and makes visible the submerged webs of gang culture that animate, sustain, and entrap prisoners. This study argues that Steinberg takes a "meta-historical" approach by explicitly investigating the role of history in understanding the lived experience of prisoners. However, the intersection of the narratives also raises questions about the limits of accepted historical methods. *The Number* links to long-running debates about historical research and its challenges in South Africa.

Keywords: South Africa – narrative nonfiction – Jonny Steinberg – historical journalism – prison culture

In 2004, South African writer Jonny Steinberg published his second book, *The Number*. Using an approach that was to become the mainstay of his literary journalism, he gave an account of prison life in the Western Cape through the detailed story of one man.[1] The life of Magadien Wentzel, a veteran member of the so-called "number gangs" of the prisons, is at the heart of *The Number*. Indeed, the book in early editions is subtitled *One Man's Search for Identity in the Cape Underworld and Prison Gangs*.[2] Steinberg would go on to refine this technique—a detailed account of one individual to tell a greater story—in four more books, collecting literary awards and accolades along the way.[3]

But, as Hedley Twidle notes, this approach can verge on "formulaic" in the books. It is in the earlier books, Twidle writes, that one finds "odd digressions and detours," where Steinberg is still in the process of "working out his non-fictional modus operandi . . ."[4] In *The Number*, for instance, another narrative strand runs alongside Wentzel's story—an account of the history of the prison gangs (which were known collectively as The Number), woven as a parallel and intersecting story. The fantastical narrative among the prisoners about The Number's creation by two bandits, known as Nongoloza and Kilikijan, is placed in relation to historical accounts of Nongoloza and nineteenth-century banditry from official and academic sources. Steinberg thus tells a history that is authorized by official records and research, as well as a *mythological* story he collates from interviews with prisoners. The contradictions between these histories eventually erupt into the plot of the story, through the protagonist, Wentzel, who must find a way to negotiate them in his own life.

This study will turn away from the problematics of the writer–subject relationship in Steinberg's *modus operandi*, extensively canvassed elsewhere,[5] to consider Steinberg's use of history in *The Number*. The history of the gangs is not simply woven into the main story, but actively foregrounded and problematized. Historical narratives are placed in relation to each other and explicitly discussed, to the point of reflecting on historical truth and examining how historical events operate as mythology in the present day. Although there is nothing new about literary journalists telling historical stories, Steinberg takes a novel step by explicitly investigating the role and problem of history in understanding South African lived experience. In this way, *The Number* links to long-running debates about the practice of historical research in South Africa. This study explores what Steinberg's "meta-historical" approach does for *The Number* and considers what literary journalism of this kind contributes, both to the South African historical record and to public engagement with that history.

Literary Journalism in South Africa

The category of "journalistic forms claiming to reflect the aesthetics of experience"[6] is notoriously fluid, and "various nuances . . . distinguish a country's, a region's, or even a language's traditions of literary journalistic reporting and writing."[7] North American literary journalism, John Hartsock notes—drawing on the work of Tom Wolfe—is somewhat bound by being defined as journalism that reads like a short story or novel, a position strongly advocated by the New Journalism that emerged in the 1960s[8] in North America. In Europe, what is called literary reportage broadens the category to include essays and polemical writing.[9] One definition even proposes literary journalism is a "milieu study,"[10] a term that points to the process of immersion that is often called a defining feature of literary journalism.

In South Africa, there is no agreed definition of what constitutes literary journalism, which tends to be discussed interchangeably with narrative, creative, or literary nonfiction. There is also little consensus—or reflection—on what the history of such writing in the region might consist of. Neither literary journalism nor narrative nonfiction is taught or studied as a separate category in the academy, despite the fact that many notable examples of narrative nonfiction have emerged from the southern African region. In the last two centuries, some ably display the tactics and techniques that define what is today called literary journalism.[11] However, in discussions of literature more generally, the question of colonialism and apartheid—meaning issues of oppression, marginalization, and trauma—are never far away. Leon de Kock has argued that, rather than post-apartheid writing being "freed from the past," many writers are "inescapably bound to the time of before."[12] Bhekizizwe Peterson, on the other hand, notes that a refusal by Black writers to "lay the dead to rest" transmits "memories . . . across generations that later narrators inherit as a living archive," and "binds history to . . . imperatives for social justice."[13]

One key moment in the consideration of literary nonfiction as a special category of South African literature was a 2012 volume of the journal *Safundi*.[14] The issue was positioned as a response to a burst of nonfiction book publishing in the 2000s and to the argument emerging in cultural forums that fiction was being overtaken in popularity and influence by nonfiction.[15] A high profile panel at the Cape Town International Book Fair in 2010 agreed that narrative nonfiction "seemed to provide the most compelling and challenging medium for the serious writer at present."[16] The panel and the ensuing public debates raised the question of whether literary journalism can deal better with the painful racial divides still functioning in South Africa than can other writing forms.[17]

Hidden Histories

In 2012, the journal *Safundi* flagged the relationship between narrative nonfiction and history as an important issue. Twidle's essay kicks off the discussion by proposing that South African nonfiction (including what would be called literary journalism), draws on a social history movement that emerged in the 1980s. Twidle points to a reference Steinberg makes to the Wits History Workshop in *The Number* as an example of South African literary nonfiction's tendency to work in a social history mode: In Twidle's words, the approach to history that emerged in the 1980s ". . . underwrites the kind of non-fiction now achieving prominence."[18] Twidle (and others) position Steinberg's work as exemplary of the "new" literary journalism that emerged after the transition to democracy.

There is no doubt that Steinberg explicitly draws on and discusses the work of historians for *The Number*, but it is not clear that a concern with history, particularly social history, is a defining criterion of South African literary journalism, despite some fine historical works of narrative nonfiction published post-apartheid.[19] What is clear, however, is that the histories of marginalized groups, such as the Black majority, have always been consigned to the margins of public knowledge authorized by scholarship and documentary records. In contemporary South Africa, even the facts of historical dispossession of inhabitants from the land during the colonial period are contested, sometimes violently, while history is often invoked and mobilized for political purposes. These hidden histories offer rich possibilities for journalists attempting to write substantial accounts of social formations.

There is also the question of whether recent literary journalism has been substantially influenced by the approach of social historians (the techniques of research and writing), or whether the writers are doing something quite different—something journalistic—with the same subject matter. Claire Scott has noted that the journalism background of Steinberg and other nonfiction writers (Rian Malan, Kevin Bloom, and Antjie Krog) was important in her decision to classify their books as literary journalism.[20] In addition, as journalists in South Africa, which is continually flooded with cultural and media flows from "outside," these authors would almost certainly have engaged with global literary journalism (particularly the New Journalism in the U.S.), and this influence on their work cannot be discounted. Even so, Scott argues that the writers she discusses have chosen literary journalism as a " 'form of narration' that will open new rhetorical spaces in which South Africans can learn to converse"—in particular, that the borderland between fiction and fact offers opportunities to critically examine issues of white identity and belonging.[21]

"History from Below"

What constitutes social history can be as fluid in definition as literary journalism, overlapping with forms of narrative nonfiction. Luli Callinicos, for example, cites Sol Plaatje's powerfully descriptive account of the impact of the 1913 Land Act on Black South Africans—*Native Life in South Africa*—as a popular history,[22] whereas in the University of Witwatersrand (Wits) journalism program, Plaatje's book is taught as an early form of literary journalism. In South Africa, some have referred, as does Callinicos, to "history from below" to describe an approach that foregrounds the experiences, challenges, and resistance of ordinary people subject to capitalism, industrialization, colonialism, and racist social engineering.[23] Scholars have pointed to the global emergence of radical history in the 1970s and '80s as the impetus for the surge of interest in social history in South Africa.[24] Hyslop notes the influence of British historian E. P. Thompson, whose "ambition was," in a phrase much quoted by his disciples in South Africa and elsewhere, "to rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the 'obsolete' hand-loom weaver, the 'utopian' artisan, and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott, from the enormous condescension of posterity."[25]

The Wits History Workshop was founded at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in 1977, after uprisings in Black townships and the emergence of trade union militancy. "The Workshop," Kros notes, "brought together a group of social scientists from several disciplines at Wits, who desired to be involved with society beyond the ivory tower, and to put history at the disposal of 'the people'."[26] It was not located in any one department but was a scholarly collective that challenged conventional historical approaches in favor of telling the stories of ordinary people. Kros further notes that several different kinds of history, "broadly . . . characterized as left-wing," were brought into the workshop.[27]

The workshop operated in a hostile atmosphere in the academy, as it was focused on producing alternative histories that were aligned to worker movements, anti-apartheid groupings, and marginalized communities, which was a very different approach to the conventional historical research and teaching of the time. As Belinda Bozzoli wrote in 1983, the history of the apartheid regime imposed both "boredom and indoctrination" on generations of school children, while more "liberal historiography in English-speaking universities" purveyed a ruling class perspective.[28] The workshop's first objective was to stimulate historical research into local conditions—" 'decolonising history' " and producing "alternative conceptions of the past."[29] Another aim was to popularize these histories, which the workshop sought to do by channelling their work into slide shows, presentations, plays, and popular books, and

working with communities and organizations to produce educational materials.

In their research, social historians relied more heavily on oral sources than did conventional historians, and some chose to focus on individuals to illuminate particular historical conditions. A number of books emerged from South African social history that were oriented towards an interested reading public rather than a scholarly audience. These included Charles van Onselen's study of tenant farmer Kas Maine, *The Seed is Mine*; Jeff Peires's *The Dead Will Arise*, which focused on the Xhosa cattle killings of 1856; and Tim Couzens's *Tramp Royal: The True Story of Trader Horn*, about an itinerant traveler from Lancashire.[30] "[T]he idea was to communicate in a jargon-free style, accessible to a non-specialist reader" and, in this way, Hyslop notes, social history could be said to align "with popular non-fiction."[31]

For Hyslop, however, the more substantial link between the Wits History Workshop and *The Number* is the way in which Steinberg draws directly on social histories of prison. Hyslop writes:

> Steinberg was a student at Wits at the time when social history was at its most influential. In his brilliant *The Number*, Steinberg traces the origins of the world of the prison gangs in which his protagonist, Cape Flats gangster Magadien Wentzel, operates, back to the late nineteenth-century gang leader, Nongoloza Mathebula. Steinberg acknowledges his source explicitly: "I recount the story as told by the historian Charles van Onselen, who gathered the scant evidence of his real existence into a slim biography—*The Small Matter of a Horse*. Were it not for Van Onselen, we would know next to nothing about him."[32] In his subsequent discussion of Nongoloza's life, Steinberg also draws on master social historian Eric Hobsbawm's idea of the social bandit.[33, 34]

Drawing on oral sources, focusing on the experience of individuals, using accessible forms of writing, and seeking a popular audience—all four of these strategies are employed by both social historians and literary journalists. But, still, as journalist Nicolas Lemann notes, the project for journalists is different from most historians, in that literary journalists are seeking to make a story out of the material they collect, often looking for people who can become characters, whose experience can illuminate the historical moment being written about. And "many academic historians have little interest or no interest in narrative as a form of professional practice." In fact, they may see narrative as "a perilous thing whose perils one should expose as a historian."[35] In *The Number*, Steinberg shows exactly how perilous a narrative can be.

The Number

Despite *The Number*'s subtitle (*One Man's Search for Identity in the Cape Underworld and Prison Gangs*) and Steinberg's insistence in interviews that the book is the story of one individual, *The Number* kicks off with a focus on the gangs—their operations, mythology, structure, and power. The Number comprises three gangs, known as the 26s, 27s, and 28s, each ruled by a "parliament" that negotiates power in the prisons. Steinberg begins his prologue with the story of one of these negotiations, the trial of a prison murder that was part of the gangs' machinations.[36]

> It happened more than two decades ago, and prison gangsters are not wont to keep records, so fixing the date and time is at best an educated guess. Some say 1976, others swear it was '78. Still others hurry back to their cells to consult the yellowing scraps of paper that were their makeshift secret diaries back in the seventies. Perhaps the story is apocryphal. But it is legendary; the old Number veterans talk of it with pride—the day the coloured man in the gallery stood up and began shouting at a witness in prison language, the white prosecutor and judge staring at him in bewilderment, the meaning of their own trial suddenly unintelligible to them.[37]

The killing, Steinberg was told by his prison informants, was the outcome of a process by the three gangs' leadership to end warfare that had played out between the 26s and 28s, in the prisons of the Western Cape in the 1970s. The victim was an alleged informer, the two alleged killers were leaders of the 27s, whose job it was to keep the peace between the 26s and the 28s. It appeared they were selected for the perpetrator role for failing in this duty. The resulting court case was thus orchestrated as part of this process, concealing the real events of the murder, with witnesses following a predetermined script. The man in the gallery interrupted proceedings because one of the witnesses departed from the script. Using the language of the Number gangs, his intervention was mysterious to the officers of the court but understood by the witness.[38]

Steinberg chooses this moment as the opening for his book because, he says, it was a moment in which "the Number" exerted its power in the oblivious, that is, "unconscious" judicial process. His informants in the gangs see it as an important event, a legendary story of Number power in the oppressive world of the criminal justice system. It is also a scene that brings together the "hopelessly inadequate . . . slivers of the hidden world [of the prisons that] appeared in the courtrooms and judicial hearings,"[39] and the potent operations of the Number, which could deal out death and use the judicial system to carry out its own system of discipline and punishment. The choice of this as an opening also contextualizes Wentzel's story in a broad contemporary context and in the long historical record of South African prisons.

Steinberg notes of this "apocryphal" story that the dates and details from his informants were contradictory and not recorded in writing (except for

the hidden bits of paper kept by prisoners).[40] However, in a move repeated throughout the book, Steinberg sets out to find court documents of the actual case to ground the event in the record. Thus, in the prologue, Steinberg quickly brings the prison narrative of the case into conversation with the historical record. He also sets out the few research studies on prison and gang life he relies on, going into his story: an unpublished manuscript by a prison official, an Honours dissertation in Criminology, a book by two social scientists, and historian Charles van Onselen's *The Small Matter of a Horse* that is the biography of 'Nongoloza' Mathebula, the founding father of the 28s.[41]

Van Onselen's *The Small Matter of a Horse* pulls together what is known about Nongoloza as a real historical figure (also known in his time as Jan Note) from the official documents Van Onselen could find, as well as contextual work on newspapers and other written archives. The biography emerges from previous work Van Onselen did on industrialization and urban growth in the mining area of the Witwatersrand, around Johannesburg.[42] One focus was on "an association of men who, at different times between 1890 and 1920, called themselves 'The Regiment of the Hills' (*Umkosi Wezintaba*), 'The Regiment of Gaolbirds' (*Umkosi we Seneneem*), 'The People of the Stone' (*Abas'etsheni*), '*Nongoloza*,' or 'Ninevites.' " Van Onselen himself calls them a "lumpenproletarian army."[43] Born Mzoozepi Mathebula, in Natal, "Nongoloza, the man with the piercing eyes,"[44] became the leader in 1889 of a community of thieves who lived in the hills south of Johannesburg. According to an interview Nongoloza gave later to a prison warden—an interview on which Van Onselen heavily relies in his biography—Nongoloza set about organizing his community, introducing ranks, procedures, and rules. He called them Ninevites, based on a biblical story of the state of Nineveh, which had rebelled against the Lord, and the name of the farm where he grew up.[45] The Ninevites ran criminal networks in the Witwatersrand for close to three decades. Van Onselen's Ninevites numbered more than a thousand in 1908 and began to have influence in the prisons as Black migrants circled in and out of these institutions for infractions against the colonial authorities. Nongoloza himself was jailed in 1899, for thirteen years. He took control of prison life, adapting the complex structures of the Ninevites to the prisons. But, in a surprising reversal, he turned his back on the Ninevites and began working with prison authorities, even becoming a warder at one stage.[46]

Steinberg shows there is a Nongoloza recorded in the official historical record, and a prison Nongoloza who is kept alive in prisoners' oral storytelling. In the origins story, Nongoloza is inducted into bandit life by a wise sage, along with fellow bandit, Kilikijan, who is the founding character of the 27s. Initially partners in crime—Nongoloza operating by night, Kilikijan by day—they fall out over the question of sex between men. The differences between the two men are told in the story, and continue in the prisons, where complex webs of rules and processes, and a shared opposition to the authorities, keep order.[47]

In both versions of gang history, Steinberg shows there is agreement over certain broad strokes: Nongoloza was a Zulu migrant who left home for the mines and became a bandit leader. He organized his followers into a hierarchical structure with a complex set of rules, drawing on turn-of-the-century influences, such as Zulu regiments, Boer commandos, and the Natal colony's judicial and military structures.[48]

However, the mythological Nongoloza and the official records diverge in key ways. The prison narrative is rich with descriptive detail, characters, and fantastical elements. The events are set almost a century earlier, in the early 1800s—before diamond and gold mining began—and the mines Nongoloza heads for are (supposedly) at Lourenco Marques. The cast of characters in the saga include a sage in a cave, who advises young men to become bandits; Kilikijan and a young man with whom Nongoloza has sex, which triggers the rift. None of these characters leaves a trace in the records. The most important divergence is that there is no mention in the prison narratives of Nongoloza's repudiation of gang life. As a figure, he epitomizes constant opposition to and battle with the prison authorities.[49]

> At the very time that the mythological Nongoloza was becoming the God of South African prisoners, the real-historical Nongoloza was drifting into an unhappy and anonymous old age. He died in 1948, was given a pauper's funeral, and was buried in a shared grave.[50]

Many episodes in the prison stories are directly linked to explain the structures and rules of "The Number." Indeed, the three number gangs, the 28s, 27s, and 26s, all have their existence underpinned by an origin story. So, when Steinberg realized that he would need to share his material with Wentzel, it made him uneasy. As a high-ranking officer in the 28s—Nongoloza's gang—Wentzel was steeped in number lore and had been a 28 for many years. "What is at stake in his belief that the Nongoloza myth is true? How important is it to his understanding of his past and the preservation of his dignity?"[51] Steinberg asks himself (and, thus, the reader of his book).

Steinberg provides Magadien with two documents—the statement made by Nongoloza to prison authorities about his life, and Van Onselen's *The Small Matter of a Horse*. Initially, Magadien's response is to reject the history and to frame it in terms of competing narratives of black and white. " 'This Van Onselen,' Wentzel asks, 'Is he a white man?' "[52] Later, he notes that there

are many white men in Van Onselen's story, whereas, in the Number narrative, there is an absolute refusal to truck with whites. "There is the black man's story and the white man's story. Go to any prison in this country, and you will hear the black man's story—exactly the same in every prison. You go there with Van Onselen's story, they will kill you."[53]

Later, Wentzel tells Steinberg: "[Van Onselen] is meant to be a historian, but he came with his own perceptions. We are not historians: we are members of the camp. We were prepared to die for that history. If I am willing to die, I should know the history. I can't die for Van Onselen's version."[54] Eventually, however, he reads the account Nongoloza gave to the warder and accepts that it is true. Despite Wentzel's initial objections, the official history has succeeded in disrupting his personal story, casting doubt on everything he once accepted.

Steinberg asks him why it is important that the story is literally true—doesn't it have value because it made sense to those who joined? Wentzel's reply is angry: " 'And now you come with your documents. They say that what thousands and thousands of prisoners have staked their lives on is a stupid joke. We have all been idiots. Nongoloza became a fucking warder'."[55] Steinberg, he goes on to say, should know why it is important that the stories the gangs tell about Nongoloza are true.

Whereas the sharing of the documents with Wentzel undermines the prison beliefs Wentzel once espoused, the discussion paradoxically makes Steinberg see the authorized records in a new light. He questions Nongoloza's statement. "A bandit king spilling his confessions to his captor—the very spectacle is pregnant with the concealed and the unspoken. There can be little doubt that the complexity of his motives lies buried between the lines of his confession."[56] Here Steinberg, in lay person's language, touches on scholarly concerns about colonial and apartheid archives—the fact that they were formed in certain ways and with certain purposes, that the interviewees' stories, in oral sources, are constructed in relation to the aims of the interviewer and in the context of the time, and should be read with these in mind.[57] He opens the door to questions about authorized history—to what extent can contemporary scholars rely on the details of Nongoloza's confession, given at a stage in his life when he had turned away from his role as a powerful figure in South African criminal enterprises, shaping social life on the Witwatersrand and in the prisons? How do readers make sense of the information that Nongoloza repudiated his role and disbanded the Ninevites, while the culture and community he created spread throughout the prison system?

At this stage in *The Number*, about midway, the overt discussions about the contradictions of history cease. Steinberg turns to Wentzel's personal story, how he tries to navigate his life after he (as did Nongoloza) has left the gangs and is released from prison. But the book leaves the reader with a profound sense of the ways in which the past—industrial, colonial, apartheid—play an active role in ordering the present. Coming to the history in another way—through an immersion in prison life or starting with Wentzel's life and letting the history emerge—would not have achieved that powerful effect.

Drawing on an insight from Herman Charles Bosman's *Cold Stone Jug*, Steinberg writes: "I would come to learn that prison is a world nourished by stories. It would be no exaggeration to say that the master story—that of Nongoloza, the God of South African prisoners—organizes life behind bars."[58] This returns the reader to Bhekizizwe Peterson's notion of the "living archive," passed on from generation to generation through narrative, and carried in the bodies of the recipients, a "haunting," as he calls it, that "transmits memories" and "pays homage to those who have passed on . . ."[59]

> In contexts of subjugation and exploitation, narrative and the imagination also become crucial sites from which the black radical imagination could embark on a wide range of personal and social imperatives aimed at making sense of and alleviating experiences of disenchantment.[60]

Prison life is the ultimate disenchantment, a site of intense and ongoing subjugation. Given the oppressiveness of colonial, capitalist, and apartheid regimes, it is not surprising that South African nonfiction is saturated with prison narratives. Most of these, however, are personal accounts from anti-apartheid prisoners, such as Nelson Mandela,[61] Winnie Madikizela-Mandela,[62] Ahmed Kathrada,[63] Breyten Breytenbach,[64] Ruth First,[65] and Hugh Lewin,[66] separated from the "criminal" prisoners. Bosman's prison book is an exception, as he approaches the experience of his imprisonment for murder in a highly stylized fashion—less memoir, more immersive description. And yet, being white, he cannot observe black prison life. The Number culture has thus remained both hidden and powerful for more than a century, and Steinberg's literary journalism approach, with its emphasis on the history of the present, is the first nonfiction account to bring it to light. In a society like South Africa, the ways in which coercion and incarceration have been shaped by the past is crucial to understand. A literary journalism approach that foregrounds historical narratives, questions their certitudes, and shows their contestations can deliver complex knowledge about the ways in which people living in the present are imprisoned by the past.



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Notes

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[2] Steinberg, *The Number*, republished as *The Number: One Man's Search for Identity in the Cape Underworld and Prison Gangs*.

[3] Steinberg's first book was *Midlands*. *Midlands* and *The Number* won the *Sunday Times* (Johannesburg), Alan Paton Award, in 2003 and 2005, respectively. *The Number* was followed by *Three-Letter Plague: A Young Man's Journey through a Great Epidemic* (2008); *Little Liberia: An African Odyssey in New York City* (2011); *A Man of Good Hope: One Man's Extraordinary Journey from Mogadishu to Tin Can Town* (2014); and *One Day in Bethlehem* (2019).

[4] Twidle, *Experiments with Truth*, 143–44.

[5] The difficulties that have arisen with Steinberg's subjects because of the intimate nature of the storytelling have been extensively discussed by Steinberg and other commentators and scholars. See, for example, Steinberg, "Counting the Costs of Nonfiction," Steinberg's interview with Daniel W. Lehman, 31–34; Twidle, *Experiments with Truth*, 141–83; and Garman, "Deeper and Deeper and Deeper," 118–28.

[6] Hartsock, "Literary Reportage: *The 'Other' Literary Journalism*," 23.

[7] Bak, introduction to *The Routledge Companion to World Literary Journalism*, 2.

[8] Hartsock, "Literary Reportage," 24; Wolfe, "The New Journalism," 10, 10–22.

[9] Hartsock, "Literary Reportage," 31.

[10] Segel, *Egon Erwin Kisch, the Raging Reporter: A Bio-Anthology* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1992), 74, quoted in Hartsock, "Literary Reportage: *The 'Other' Literary Journalism*," 25, note 11; Egon Erwin Kisch, "Wesen des Reporters," Mein Lebenfurdie Zeitung 1906–1925: *Journalistische Texte 1* (Berlin and Weimar: Autbau-Verlag, 1983), 205–8.

[11] Notable books are Sol Plaatje's *Mafeking Diary* (written during the Anglo-Boer War of 1899 to 1902, but published after his death), and *Native Life in South Africa*; Noni Jabavu's *Drawn in Colour: African Contrasts*, and *The Ochre People*; Bessie Head's *Tales of Tenderness and Power* and *Serowe*, *Village of the Rain Wind*; Ezekiel Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue*; as well as the work of "the *Drum* writers," Nat Nakasa, Can Themba, Lewis Nkosi, Bloke Modisane, and others (see Cowling, "Echoes of an African Drum," 7–32).

[12] De Kock, "Freedom on a Frontier?" 57.

[13] Peterson, "Spectrality and Inter-generational Black Narratives," 353; see also, Peterson, 361, n5.

[14] Barnard, introduction to "Beyond Rivalry: Literature/History, Fiction/Non-Fiction," special issue, 1–4.

[15] Cowling, "Looking in New Ways at Frontiers for Literary Journalism," 194–97; Twidle, " 'In a Country Where You Couldn't Make This Shit Up'?" 6, 6n1.

[16] Twidle, 6; 6n1.

[17] Cowling, "Looking in New Ways at Frontiers for Literary Journalism," 195.

[18] Twidle, " 'In a Country Where You Couldn't Make This Shit Up'?" 20n15.

[19] See, for example, Jacob Dlamini's *Native Nostalgia*, *Askari*, *Safari Nation*, and *The Terrorist Album*; and Mark Gevisser's *Thabo Mbeki: The Dream Deferred*.

[20] Scott, *At the Faultline*, 4–5.

[21] Scott, 5. Scott examines Malan's *My Traitor's Heart*, 5–6ff; Steinberg's *Midlands*, 25ff.; Bloom's *Ways of Staying*, 5, 9ff, and Krog's *Country of My Skull*, 5–6ff; *Begging to Be Black*, 1, 5ff.; and *A Change of Tongue*, 11, 12ff.

[22] Callinicos, "The People's Past," 21–22, citing Plaatje, *Native Life in South Africa: Past and Present*.

[23] Callinicos, "The People's Past," 21.

[24] Callinicos, 22.

[25] Hyslop, "South African Social History," 62–63, quoting from and building on Thompson, preface to *The Making of the English Working Class*, 12.

[26] Kros, "Twenty Years of Heritage Studies," 360.

[27] Kros, 360. In the original, "favour" and "characterised."

[28] Bozzoli, introduction, "History, Experience and Culture," 1.

[29] Bozzoli, 3.

[30] Van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine*; Peires, *The Dead Will Arise*; and Couzens, *Tramp Royal*.

[31] Hyslop, "South African Social History and the New Non-Fiction," 64.

[32] Hyslop, 64–65, quoting Steinberg, *The Number*, 45 (page number from the trade paperback) in Hyslop, "South African Social History," 64–65n6. "I recount the story as told by the historian Charles van Onselen, who gathered the scant evidence of his real existence into a slim biography—*The Small Matter of a Horse*. . . . Were it not for Van Onselen, we would know next to nothing about him." Hyslop, 51, note 6, citing Steinberg, *The Number*. Hyslop, 65, note 7, cites Steinberg, *The Number* (2004 edition), page 42, for Steinberg's mention of Hobsbawm, *Bandits*; page 51, of the trade paperback, page 41 of Hyslop.

[33] Steinberg, *The Number*, 41–42, quoted in Hyslop, "South African Social History," 64–65; 65n6, 65n7; Steinberg, *The Number*, 51–52 (trade paperback); Hyslop, 41–42; Hobsbawm, "Social Banditry," in H. Landsberger, ed., *Rural Protest*, 152, 142–57.

[34] Hyslop, "South African Social History," 64.

[35] Lemann, "Writing Literary History," in interview with Sims, 27.

[36] Steinberg, prologue, *The Number*, 1–11.

[37] Steinberg, prologue, *The Number*, 1.

[38] Steinberg, prologue, 1–4.

[39] Steinberg, prologue, 5.

[40] Steinberg, prologue, 1.

[41] These were Haysom, *Towards an Understanding of Prison Gangs*; Lotter and Schurink, *Gevangenisbendes*; Van Onselen, *The Small Matter of a Horse*; and Keswa, *Prison Gangs* (not publicly available due to a fire at University of Cape Town library).

[42] Van Onselen's research was initially published in 1982 in two volumes as *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand 1886–1914.* Volume 1 was titled *New Babylon*, and Volume 2, which covers the emergence of Nongoloza's bandits, was titled *New Nineveh.* It was republished in 2001 by Jonathon Ball as one volume, *New Babylon, New Nineveh: Everyday Life on the Witwatersrand, 1886–1914.*

[43] Van Onselen, *New Nineveh*, 171; "lumpenproletarian army," 171; the "black lumpenproletariat," 172.

[44] Van Onselen, *New Ninevah*, 179.

[45] *Jonah* 1:7, 4:11; *Nahum* 1:1; 2:8; Van Onselen, *Small Matter of a Horse*, 6n12.

[46] Van Onselen, *Small Matter of a Horse*, 23–36.

[47] Steinberg, *The Number*, 54–63.

[48] Steinberg, 45–49.

[49] Steinberg, 235–39.

[50] Steinberg, 53.

[51] Steinberg, 235.

[52] Steinberg, 235.

[53] Steinberg, 236.

[54] Steinberg, 237.

[55] Steinberg, 239.

[56] Steinberg, 242.

[57] Hamilton, "The Long Southern African Past," 345–50.

[58] Steinberg, *The Number*, 18. In the original, "organises." Quoting Bosman, *Cold Stone Jug*, 42, "Touch a man like that [longterm prisoners] anywhere, and a story would flow from him like blood from a wound. They were no longer human beings . . . They were merely the battered receptacles of stories . . . ."

[59] Peterson, "Spectrality and Inter-generational Black Narratives," 353.

[60] Peterson, 348.

[61] Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*.

[62] Madikizela-Mandela, *491 Days*.

[63] Kathrada, *Letters from Robben Island*, and Kathrada, *A Free Mind: Ahmed Kathrada's Notebook from Robben Island*.

[64] Breytenbach, *True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist*.

[65] First, *117 Days*.

[66] Lewin, *Bandiet*.

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