

Erik Green, *Creating the Cape Colony: The Political Economy of Settler Colonization* (London, New York and Dublin: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022, 192 pp., ISBN 9781350258235).

Erik Green is an academic from Sweden whose research focuses on African economic history, also in a global perspective. The latest fruit of his efforts is a monograph on the Cape of Good Hope colony, the settlement that defined the region's history as it grew and developed into Cape Town. The book is well-structured and brings together much available South African literature on the (economic) history of the Cape under Dutch administration, that is, the period from 1652 to 1795.

The six chapters, of roughly equal length, yield from the exceptionally rich archives of the Dutch East India Company's administration (VOC) at the Cape. Green's premise is that 'settler economies and their institutional fabric evolved gradually and were an outcome of both collaboration and conflicts between the colonizers and the colonized' (1). He discusses statistical data from the archives using economic theories to explore this tension through time.

Chapter 4, 'Was the Cape Colony a slave economy?', is notably successful in this set-up. It may confirm the familiar dictum that slavery as labour was instrumental to and omnipresent in the budding Cape economy, yet it also convincingly shows that – to an even larger extent – enslaved people functioned as capital that could be rented out or used as collateral in lieu of cash. Green explains this two-sidedness through the continuous shortage of silver *rixdalers* at the Cape on the one hand, and through the Nieboer-Domar hypothesis on the other hand – a mid-twentieth-century serfdom model that suggests that in case of land abundance, people take up farming instead of selling their labour, thus forcing landlords 'to the use of coercion (slavery) to access labour' (75). Green concludes that 'slavery was not just a form of coerced labour, but a system that gave the slaveholder complete rights over a mobile property, a system that allowed the owner not only to extract labour, but also access capital' (102).

Perhaps just as valuable is Green's insight into indigenous Khoesan labour in chapter 5, 'Unequal we stand'. The VOC administration had declared the Khoesan a free people, *de jure* protecting them from slavery, but Green shows that *de facto* they were paid abysmal wages for their labour and goods, which was crucial to the success of farming at the Cape. He compares the average wealth and the inequality of its distribution (the Gini coefficient) between farming settlers with land and slaves, farming settlers with land and no slaves, and farming Khoesan, and points out that the success of the Cape

as a farming economy in part followed from the low pay that the Khoesan received – which marginalised them socially, economically, and politically. The chapter thus develops crucial insight into the mechanisms of discriminating between different social groups in early Cape society that have left palpable traces today.

All this makes for a valuable book. But it is also a frustrating one. In the light of South Africa's ongoing renegotiation of its past, the book's sensitivity feels somewhat uneven. Green's often-asserted 'indigenous agency', for example, raises altogether different expectations in South Africa's post-colonial moment than in the context of the Khoesan's toil on settler farms that Green seems to describe with it. At times, the phrasing appears outright unfortunate: 'Coercion was used to control the Khoesan, but not on a systematic level, as that was not supported by the VOC' (127). 'The better organized they [indigenous societies] are, the more difficult it will be for the Europeans to defeat them' (15). One sometimes wonders who has the agency that is implicit in the book's title *Creating the Cape colony*.

More fundamentally, the book draws on critical literature from before and after 1994 – the formal end of apartheid and the country's first democratic elections. It is a serious disadvantage that the vast majority of tables and figures are verbatim from 1970s and 1980s research papers and that Green, as he readily admits in the introduction, does not read Afrikaans and, consequently, that he chose not to cite primary sources directly. In a book that engages with issues of slavery and race, this impedes a view of ideological shifts that have surrounded the historiography of the Cape since 1994.

Non-South African researchers in particular will benefit from *Creating the Cape Colony* and the time that Green was able to spend in Stellenbosch compiling it. After all, one of many frustrations for any researcher of South African history is that many sources – both primary and secondary – are difficult to access from outside the country. It is a great benefit that the eBook edition is available open access on the website of the publisher. Finally, it should be mentioned that Green is a contributor to the Cape of Good Hope Panel dataset. Upon its completion, it will contain demographic and economic information at the individual level for the period 1660-1840. In combination with Green's lofty long-term aim to contribute to the study of the Cape in the context of global economies, this is something to look forward to.

Tycho Maas, Utrecht University and North-West University, South Africa