communal solidarity, which was needed to make effective 'the struggle'. Social forces related to in-group socio-material differentiation found an expression after 1994, however, with dramatic consequences. South Africa today is fully in the grip of an inequality curse, with a new, socially upward, mobile middle class ostentatiously flaunting their material possessions in the face of a huge, rapidly impoverishing underclass, creating new social tensions in a country that struggles to reckon with a chequered past.

The pursuit of social distinction through prestige goods comes with yet another price. Chiming with Deborah James's important work,[2] Ross shows that private debt drives much of these new forms of consumption. The purchase of expensive prestige goods by aspiring middle classes has been fuelled by the abundant supply of personal credit coupled with limited financial regulation and few checks on private indebtedness. In a process of catching up, driven by a 'desire to impress, and to be considered much richer than one actually is' (p. 153), buying on credit has become commonplace. It is a sobering reality that South Africa now ranks among the most indebted nations in the world today, with little evidence that this might be changing in the near future.

As Ross writes in the acknowledgements section, this book has been long in the making (p. ix). I am happy to comment that waiting for it has been worthwhile. Ross should be especially complimented for transcending his own discipline of historiography with interesting and relevant excursions into the social sciences (he cites sources from anthropology, political science and sociology), and with the casual usage of descriptive statistics, making the book a truly interdisciplinary accomplishment. I therefore warmly recommend it to African studies scholars, but also to those more broadly interested in material culture.

Joost Beuving
Radboud University, Nijmegen, The Netherlands
Email: joost.beuving@ru.nl
doi: 10.1017/S0001972024000615

Noni Jabavu, *A Stranger at Home*, with an introduction by Makhosazana Xaba and Athambile Masola. Cape Town: Tafelberg (pb R370 – 978 0 624 08936 0). 2023, 228 pp.

The personal and professional endeavours of South African journalist and writer Noni Jabavu (full name Helen Nontando Jabavu, 1919–2008) intertwine in the columns that constitute *A Stranger at Home*, weaving together the story of her country of origin, South Africa, as well as her extensive travels and sojourns in many different countries. Jabavu grew up in South Africa but received her education in Britain, working later as a journalist and living for extended periods of time with her third husband in Uganda and Jamaica. Later, after divorce, she relocated to Kenya and Zimbabwe. She returned to South Africa right before the transition to democracy and spent her last years there. Jabavu, one of the first female memoirists in Africa, published two autobiographical works: *Drawn in Colour* (1960) and *The Ochre People* (1963), the former being the first book published in English by a Black South African woman.

---

[2] *Ibid.*

Detailing the experiences of a remarkable woman with a remarkable life, *A Stranger at Home* is a collaborative effort, in a way, of three women: Noni Jabavu herself, as well as writer and poet Makhosazana Xaba and scholar Athambile Masola, who compiled the book and wrote the introduction, afterword and brief overviews of the twelve months covered in Jabavu's columns. The columns were originally written for the *Daily Dispatch*, a South African newspaper, in 1977. Therefore, the book not only brings to light the work of Jabavu herself but also creates continuity across generations. *A Stranger at Home* outlines Jabavu's travels in South Africa in 1976 in order to compile a biography of her father, Davidson Don Tengo Jabavu, writer, editor, professor and politician. Xaba asserts in the introduction to the book that Jabavu's work is important from the perspective of women's roles and lives, as her identity as a writer and traveller differs from what was expected of women at the time (p. 9).

The columns in *A Stranger at Home* are deeply autobiographical, recounting the humiliations involved with being a woman of colour in apartheid South Africa. However, such humiliations are never the sole focus of Jabavu's republished columns. Jabavu's observations are minute and sharp, relating to music, language, and the cultural differences between the countries in which she had lived, including Britain, Kenya and Jamaica. The columns also build on and reinforce a relationship with readers, an almost intimate connection, expressed particularly well when Jabavu addresses questions she gets from readers about her romantic relationships. She challenges readers to tell her details about their lives, as they are so curious about hers (p. 62). She engages in conversation with readers and interacts with them in ways that further emphasize her openness and curiosity to the world and its people. This curiosity is to some extent restricted by apartheid.

Jabavu's perspective is something of an outsider-insider, or insider-outsider, as she arrives in South Africa for only temporary stays despite it being her country of origin. During a visit to Durban, detailed in March 1977, Jabavu describes going on a city tour together with other, mainly white, tourists, where the main attraction was the lives and traditions of the Black population. She wonders about the interest in Black South Africans and the lack of culture among those defined as 'European'. Her position as local-tourist, or tourist-local, creates another bridge between those who experienced segregation (Black South Africans like herself) and her readers. Jabavu repeatedly writes about the Group Areas Act, which determined land and property ownership according to policies of segregation that were built on keeping people of different ethnic backgrounds apart. She observes signs with terms such as 'Nie-Blankes' and mentions her African-American children and grandchildren who refuse to be called 'knee-grows', and she asks whether she can call 'you, my Afrikaans-speaking friends … "Nie-Swartes"' (pp. 124–5). Jabavu uses her writing to directly address those benefiting from apartheid, inviting dialogue across racial lines and observing that South Africa at the time still used terminology that was already considered unacceptable elsewhere.

Jabavu's observations about apartheid South Africa and the indignities she had to face as a Black traveller are to some extent contrasted with her own privilege. She addresses such privilege at length in several columns, in tandem with the richness of South Africa's languages and cultures. She mentions her more than four decades spent in England, with 'white British ethnic servants', as well as her experience living in Kenya and the West Indies, served by 'ethnically blacks and browns' (p. 138). Her privileges are revisited later when a friend in South Africa challenges Jabavu's writing, suggesting that she instead write about those less fortunate (p. 175). Jabavu responds by stating that she cannot write about what she is unfamiliar with: 'What more can one say, expect that as a writer, one can write only about one's own experiences?' (p. 177). Commitment to autobiographical truth is a significant thread in her writing.

The final newspaper columns published in *A Stranger at Home* offer tentative predictions about the future of South Africa and the cultural diversity of the nation, reaching their full potential once segregation ends. Such hopeful notions have not been fully realized, yet Jabavu and the generation to which she belonged desired nothing more than to see apartheid end and believed in the strength of a united people. Masola writes in the afterword that Jabavu's columns provide a 'glimpse into the past; a past which continues to linger in the present' (p. 220). The past may still linger on in the present, as seen through the cosmopolitan eyes of Noni Jabavu, who foresaw a future for South Africa that is yet to materialize. *A Stranger at Home* offers a subtle yet forceful reminder of this dream.

Lena Englund
University of Eastern Finland, Joensuu, Finland
Email: lena.englund@uef.fi
doi: 10.1017/S0001972024000627

Rebecca Tapscott, *Arbitrary States: Social Control and Modern Authoritarianism in Museveni's Uganda*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (hb £87 – 978 0 19 885647 4). 2021, 256 pp.

Individuals want peace and security. One of the most important aspects of security for individuals as they navigate their relationship with the state is having a sense of certainty. Clear expectations and a path to navigate the challenges of everyday life, not to mention political challenges, are essential for public security.

In *Arbitrary States*, Rebecca Tapscott shows how dictators under modern authoritarianism undermine citizens' security and ability to engage in collective action by trading off certainty for arbitrary governance. Tapscott's primarily empirical evidence comes from northern Uganda; however, she also considers alternative explanations for institutional arbitrariness, exploring sub-national variations in three additional regions of Uganda. Regionally, she also provides suggestive evidence that her theory generalizes to other non-democracies including Ethiopia, Rwanda and Zimbabwe. More broadly, she opens up the possibility that a theory of arbitrary governance might even explain patterns of police abuse and democratic erosion for cases such as the USA.

While her theoretical insights generalize beyond the case of Uganda, one of the strengths of the book is its rigorous study of the micro-dynamics of violence and governance in Uganda. Deftly incorporating ten months of qualitative field research on Uganda's informal security actors, Tapscott grounds her theoretical framework of institutionalized arbitrariness with extensive, empirically rich interviews. The study