Review of Glaser C.: 'Bo-Tsotsi: the youth gangs of Soweto, 1935-1976'

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through rumour, anecdote, and the reinterpretation of unfamiliar European medical techniques and technologies, deploying a wealth of oral and archival material. The impact of his arguments fades somewhat when the emphasis shifts towards 1930s discourse on race, education and development. The chapter which considers the debate between Gilks and Paterson, on the one hand, and Gordon, Vint and Trowell, on the other, seems to this reader the least convincing, with the ideological content of the debates removed from the context of the medical practice of the individuals concerned, the colonial science they espoused (in all its intimate linkages with veterinary practice, conservation biology, anthropology and ecology), and the texture of European–African relations which animates the bulk of Olumwullah's argument elsewhere.

In this respect, the arguments put forward do not always keep step with the increasing complexity of the colonial enterprise. Thus, while we see insensitive and unconsultative state policies on public health in the wake of World War One resulting in a flight into the arms of missionary medical care (unsurprisingly misinterpreted by missionaries as an evangelical success rather than a local survival strategy with ideological and political ramifications for 'Nyoleness), the contribution of missionaries to the evolution of public health education and rural medical care and training remain uncommented on. While the interpenetration and interaction of development and death, accompanying 'Nyole attempts to accommodate rupture within continuity and resulting in the contestation of the authority of biomedicine in colonial Kenya, are all rendered convincingly, the tensions between 'Nyole Christians, educated and trained African medical workers, and peasant intellectuals are not fully brought to the fore.

Our reading of this text is unnecessarily complicated by the omission of a glossary, compounded by a cursory and incomplete index. That some of the theoretical distinctions employed threaten to become distractions can be seen from the relegation of substantial portions of the theoretical exposition to footnotes to the first three, largely conceptual chapters, dealing with health and healing, AbaNyole worldviews, and 'Nyole cosmologies. A series of maps would also have been a useful addition to what is a dense, complex and intriguing work.

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CLIVE GLASER, *Bo-Tsotsi: the youth gangs of Soweto, 1935–1976*. Portsmouth NH: Heinemann (paperback US$24.95, ISBN 0 325 00218 5; hard covers US$65.00, ISBN 0 325 00219 3); Oxford: James Currey (paperback £17.95, ISBN 0 85255 640 3; hard covers £40.00, ISBN 0 85255 690 X). 2000, 214 pp.

Clive Glaser's book on successive generations of youth gangs in Soweto makes it clear that South African society witnessed many 'lost generations' before the phrase gained currency in the early 1990s. The 'lost generation' of the 1990s refers to activist youth whose school careers were interrupted by protests and boycotts in the context of a general confrontation with the apartheid state. Finding that struggle credentials alone did not equip them sufficiently to benefit from the new opportunities, some of these former activists turned to various types of crime.

The boys and young men who form the subject of Glaser's study no doubt shared the resentment against apartheid policies that relegated them to a life

on the margins of society. Their energies however were not directed towards the overthrow of the apartheid state but to more immediate strategies of survival. While some of the more adventurous preyed on whites in downtown Johannesburg, most gangs lived on fleecing fellow blacks: waylaying workers returning home with their Friday pay-packets, pickpocketing commuters in trains, robbing children who were sent for groceries, collecting extortion money from township businesses. They were not obsessed with wrestling political power from the apartheid state but with obtaining and defending power in their immediate living environment, securing their 'rights' over the girls in their own territory, harassing school-going youth and fighting off competing gangs. The gangs provided young men with companionship and with a sense of masculinity and power in a society where black people generally featured as powerless subjects. Hounded by police, condemned by the pass laws to a life in the shadows, and unable to find legal employment, substantial numbers of youth found a viable survival strategy in the relative protection of these gangs.

Glaser rightly emphasises that 'youth' should not be treated as a monolithic category. While youth/student is frequently used as a double-barrelled concept, in real life there was considerable polarisation between the unemployed youth on the streets and school-going youth. Political mobilisation of youth was largely confined to the high schools which, up to the early 1970s, were attended by only a tiny proportion of township youth. A few ambivalent attempts by political organisations to harness the gangs to their campaigns, particularly in 1960 and 1976, remained largely fruitless—although initially the Pan-Africanist Congress, with its emphasis on action and confrontation, did succeed in mobilising some following on the streets.

An interesting feature of Glaser's book is the detailed picture that emerges of distinctive gangs that developed their own sense of identity. The fashionable gangs which acquired fame in the cosmopolitan environments of Sophiatown and Alexandra, close to the centre of Johannesburg, attached much importance to stylish clothes and flashy cars. Subsequent generations of gangs, whose members grew up in the relative isolation of Soweto, were less exposed to such cosmopolitan influences and became in a way more 'Africanised'. Apart from the changes over time, Glaser distinguishes three different types of formations: the 'big shot' gangs, the 'small time' criminal gangs and the non-criminal street-corner networks.

The imagery of American movies became fundamental to the subculture of the *tsotsis*—a term of uncertain origins. Glaser suggests that one possible origin is in the American gangland slang word 'zoot-suits', used to describe the narrow-bottomed trousers that became popular among urban African youth in the 1940s. But he thinks it more plausible that the word derives from the South Sotho word *ho tsotsa*, which means 'to sharpen', referring to the shape of the trousers. *Tsotsis* were scornful of youth who took school seriously. Glaser underlines that opting for gang membership did not necessarily always happen because of a lack of other choices. Faced with a dreary school routine or poorly paid casual work, gang life could seem much more adventurous, exciting and rewarding.

While ethnicity was rarely a feature in the formation of urban township gangs, it was an important factor in mobilising protection against preying gangs. Some of the almost homogeneous Sotho-speaking areas of Soweto such as Naledi, Moletsane and Mapetla were never penetrated by gangs because they were dominated by a powerful Sotho ethnic association known as 'the Russians'. These older men, patrolling the streets in large numbers, were reputed to take fierce reprisals in response to *tsotsi* harassment. In the 1970s, the *makgotla*, tribunals run by adults who attempted to discipline unruly youth by public

flogging, similarly appealed to 'traditional' African values to counterbalance the moral degeneration of the city.

The most effective blow to gang life however came from people who—like the *tsotsis*—were inspired by urban modernity: politicised high school youth. In the 1970s, school and gang identities polarised. Students developed a strong school identity and organised ferocious reprisals against gang harrassment. In the upheaval following 16 June 1976, looting and robbery became an increasingly prominent feature of the unrest. Student squads cracked down on gang crime and as one gang leader commented: '1976 stopped all our fun'. Moreover, gangsterism lost much of its subcultural appeal. Student youth provided new, bold and assertive activist role models.

The extensive use of interviews with former gang members and with other Soweto residents, in combination with meticulous archival research, makes this book a particularly valuable contribution to our insights into crime and youth culture, as well as the relationship between political organisations and gang constituencies. One issue not addressed by this book is life after gang life. What happened to gang members when their careers on the streets ended, generally around the age of twenty-five? How many were by then dead, crippled or in jail? Did many gang members end up as ordinary township residents with a more or less settled family life, attempting to hold down a tedious, poorly paid job? It is admittedly very difficult to produce statistically sound answers to this question but it would be interesting to have at least some clue as to the fate of South Africa's successive 'lost generations'.

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HERMANN GILIOMEE, *The Afrikaners: biography of a people*. London: Hurst & Company (paperback £19.95, ISBN 1 85065 714 9). 2003, 698 pp.

Ten years in the writing, and based on a lifetime's research, Hermann Giliomee's history of the Afrikaners spans three and a half centuries, from the arrival of the Dutch in the 1650s to the 'new South Africa' at the turn of the twenty-first century. Although the central focus of his analysis is on the Afrikaners, this ambitious book also works as a history of South Africa, touching on the lives and experiences of all its peoples. Giliomee's aim in writing the book was to tell the Afrikaners' story 'with empathy but without partisanship' (p. xiii). In doing so, he has challenged nationalist and liberal myths alike. At times controversial—Giliomee believes, for instance, that apartheid ensured steady economic growth for South Africa from the 1960s onwards, whereas had liberal democracy or a socialist system triumphed in this period the likely consequence would have been the flight of capital and 'a precipitous economic decline from which South Africa would have taken years to recover' (pp. 538–9)—this book both builds on existing historiography and challenges current orthodoxies.

Probably the key innovation in Giliomee's book is his rejection of 'the view that apartheid policy was mainly the work of populist Afrikaners in the north who were members of the Afrikaner Broederbond' and his persuasive argument that apartheid 'was, in fact, forged in the more settled Western Cape, where politicians, academics and journalists were preoccupied with the removal of the coloured vote and the reduction of Africans in the region' (p. xvii). The dominant influence of what Giliomee terms 'the Cape Town–Stellenbosch axis of the nationalist intelligentsia' (p. 497) is a theme that runs through the eight chapters of the book that cover the twentieth century. Giliomee also argues that 1948 should not be seen as such a definitive shift in racial policy, pointing out that 'an elaborate system of racial segregation was in place by the 1920s', and indeed that it went back as far as the 1890s (pp. xvii, 290–296, 301–314). He further challenges the orthodox view of the 1948 election victory, contending that it was not the result of an upsurge of mass nationalist sentiments after the 1938 Great Trek centenary and the formulation of apartheid ideology, but rather that 'the crucial turning point was the Afrikaner nationalists' outrage over the country being taken into the World War on a split vote, confirming in their eyes South Africa's subordination to British interests, and the disruption brought about by the war effort' (p. 446). In *The Afrikaners* Giliomee also seeks to redress some of the imbalances in the existing historiography of South Africa by focusing on previously neglected areas. The three areas he identifies as needing further attention are 'the importance of religion as a social–political force' (pp. xvi, 454–464), the role of women in Afrikaner nationalism and proto-nationalism (pp. xvi–xvii, 231 f., 256, 334, 375 f.), and 'the interrelationship between language and nationalism' (pp. xvii, 215–219, 223 ff., 361–369, 376 ff. and 401 f.).

Giliomee writes in the introduction to his book that it 'highlights the divided nature of the dominant white group, the British–Afrikaner rivalry for status and economic power' (p. xv), yet he does much more than that. He also reveals the divisions within Afrikanerdom, the degree of variation *between* Afrikaners. Giliomee avoids stereotypes, and his analysis is subtle and incisive, revealing the complexities of South African history and ambiguities of Afrikaner identity. As Giliomee reminds his reader in the introduction: 'The Afrikaners were both a colonised people and colonisers themselves, both victims and proponents of European imperialism' (p. xiv).

For my part, I would like to have seen the inclusion of a bibliographical essay in Giliomee's book, and it seems to me that those who don't read Afrikaans might find a glossary of the Dutch and Afrikaans terms that pepper the text helpful (as indeed would be the inclusion of a detailed chronology), but these are mere quibbles. Encyclopaedic in its detail, *The Afrikaners* is nonetheless eminently readable and well paced for a book that runs to almost 700 pages. Accessible to both specialists and non-specialists alike, this is a book likely to become a classic work.

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DEBIE LEBEAU and ROBERT J GORDON (eds), *Challenges for Anthropology in the 'African Renaissance': a Southern African contribution*. Windhoek: University of Namibia Press (paperback £23.95, US$39.95, ISBN 99916 59 42 0), distributed by the African Books Collective, London. 2002, 307 pp.

In April 2001, the Association for Anthropology in Southern Africa (AASA) and the South African Society of Cultural Anthropologists (SASCA) merged to form Anthropology Southern Africa. The present volume, based on the final separate meeting of the AASA held in Windhoek in May 2000, represents a forward-looking reflection on the challenges for anthropology. The idea of an 'African Renaissance', as popularised by Thabo Mbeki, is very much at the heart of the volume: solving Africa's problems though African ideals and African institutions.