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## Review of Ronnie Kasrils, 'Armed and Dangerous': my undercover struggle against apartheid

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Thanks to his refusal of easy classifications Warnier offers interesting insights into other aspects as well. A recurrent topic is the relation of entrepreneurs to the state. On this aspect the grassfield businessmen seem to differ from the Kenyan or the Nigerian bourgeoisies, with their sophisticated forms of 'straddling'. For various historical reasons the grassfielders are more distant from the state. But this does not mean that they are an example of the kind of independent entrepreneurs who have become so dear to the World Bank. Warnier concludes—on the basis of a broad array of case studies—that their relation to the state is marked by *extériorité* but also that they need it. This leads him in his last chapter to a piercing critique of the World Bank's new tendency to 'bypass the state'. The undeniable resilience of grassfield entrepreneurship offers no guarantee that it will eventually bring true economic growth to Cameroon. An important condition for this is that the entrepreneurs will be supported by a *société politique viable*. The World Bank policy of weakening the state does not open the way to economic growth but will rather lead to *la marchandisation et la privatisation intégrale de la vie politique* and thus to a result *de type zaïrois*.

The value of Warnier's multifaceted approach is exemplified by the ease with which his rich treatment of grassfield entrepreneurship leads to such general comments. One could object that in some chapters his ethnographic base is not as strong as in others—for instance, his case studies of *des paniers percés*, those without 'luck', are somewhat impressionistic—but this is probably unavoidable in such a broad-brush approach. And it is because he relates the performance of his entrepreneurs to such a broad array of aspects that he offers fascinating insights into the various trajectories of entrepreneurship—the different possible articulations of economics, culture and politics—in present-day Africa. This is a book that *must* be translated into English.

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RONNIE KASRILS, *'Armed and Dangerous': my undercover struggle against apartheid*.  
Oxford: Heinemann Educational, 1993, 374 pp., £6.00, ISBN 0435 90983 5.

There is a lot we need to know about the African National Congress, in power at last. This autobiography by Ronnie Kasrils, a veteran member of the South African Communist Party and of Umkhonto we Sizwe, would be welcome for that reason alone. There is much here to help academic analysts of the ANC/SACP, who will be aided by the fact that the book contains an index, although no bibliography or footnotes. It is plain that it is mostly compiled from memory with assistance from Kasrils's own letters to his wife and other personal sources. This is a book written for a popular audience.

The essence of the story is Kasril's progression from his childhood and youth in a conventional and happy middle-class Jewish family in the Johannesburg suburbs into a somewhat flamboyant guerrilla commander. He was chief of Umkhonto we Sizwe military intelligence from 1983 to 1988, is a member of the Central Committee of the SACP, and was only the second white to serve on the ANC's National Executive Committee after membership was opened to all races in 1985. The overall impression we have is of an amiable man, radicalised initially by the Sharpeville massacre of 1960 and by an 'emotional revulsion for racism' (p. 36), whose subsequent life has been led at the heart of the ANC/SACP social and political nexus. At the same time it is clear that Kasrils has managed against all the odds to cultivate a long and happy marriage, and his devotion to his family is touching. He makes no claim to be one of the SACP's heavyweight intellectuals, like Joe Slovo or Jack Simons. He portrays himself rather

as one of the lads, an avid follower of Arsenal Football Club, not averse to a stiff drink and a joke at his own expense. In political matters his hard-bitten Stalinist exterior always hid a humane and tolerant interior, as some associates noticed (p. 197). Kasrils acknowledges some regret that he did not allow himself to act on his more generous impulses by taking more pains to express his misgivings about the SACP's slavish adherence to the Soviet Union or the excesses which emerged in the ANC/SACP security apparatus in the 1980s, which have tarnished the reputation of both organisations.

The basic course of the armed struggle is well known and there are no surprises here. The interest for scholars lies chiefly in the pen-pictures of numerous individuals who played major or not-so-major parts in this history, in small details mentioned in passing, and in the evocation of the atmosphere in training camps in the Soviet Union, in exile circles in London, and in Umkhonto we Sizwe bases in Angola. Here Kasrils is sometimes on the defensive: he goes to considerable lengths to explain how it was that he and others in the SACP for so many years failed to notice the flaws in the Soviet version of socialism. South African isolation was a factor (p. 37), although this is perhaps an odd assertion in view of the fact that the SACP leadership was for nearly thirty years based outside South Africa. 'In my experience,' Kasrils tells us, 'only Ruth First and Joe Slovo, of the older leaders, were to show signs of a critical attitude in the 1960s' (p. 38), although he also adds Jack Simons to this list and pays generous tribute to the independence and strong-mindedness of the non-SACP intellectual Pallo Jordan, who was himself briefly detained by the ANC's security department. When Kasrils was training in the Soviet Union 'it did not occur to us that we were receiving special treatment' (p. 83) or that 'reality for ordinary people... might be different' (p. 82). Kasrils reveals that he had misgivings about the manner of Khrushchev's removal as General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (p. 99) and about the suppression of reform in Dubček's Czechoslovakia. He now regrets having been swayed by an argument 'that mixed up Soviet interests with those of true socialism' (p. 103). Given Kasrils's general lack of interest in theoretical matters, this may be so. It can hardly apply to the SACP's more sophisticated strategists, who continued to guide the SACP in the path of soviet Marxism-Leninism until the 1990s.

There is also a whiff of the application of hindsight in the descriptions of people whom Kasrils met during his career and who later turned out to be South African agents. He claims to have had early misgivings about a catalogue of ANC traitors including Bruno Mtolo, who turned state witness at the Rivonia trial, Craig Williamson, who infiltrated the ANC in the 1970s, and Glory Sedibe, who betrayed the Umkhonto we Sizwe network in Swaziland. Perhaps Kasrils has a remarkable instinct for people. Or perhaps he is being wise after the event.

Some of the most interesting descriptions are of life in ANC camps in Angola, where the bulk of the Umkhonto we Sizwe soldiers stayed throughout the late 1970s and 1980s. In general Kasrils paints a picture of guerrillas making the best of difficult circumstances, but he does acknowledge the brutality and authoritarianism which crept into the camp administration (pp. 94-5). He refutes at some length claims made by a South African advocate and by a leading journalist regarding his own responsibility for brutality in Angola (p. 165). He suggests that the hard line adopted in the ANC in general came not from the SACP and its intellectuals but from 'the intolerable oppression that was the life experience of the black comrades, leaders and rank and file alike... It was for this reason that many black comrades, particularly workers, continued to sympathise with Stalin's tough practices' (p. 177). It is stretching the argument a little far to claim that Stalinism did not originate with the SACP, and Kasrils is distinctly coy in denying the SACP's crucial role in cementing the relationship between the ANC and Moscow (p. 273) and in his refusal

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to discuss the role of the commissars, who, as he notes (pp. 151–2), were originally introduced in the Soviet Union so that the young Communist Party could ensure the allegiance of former Czarist officers. Why they were necessary in the ANC he does not say.

Some of the extensive passages justifying the SACP's past appear to show the influence of another hand than Kasrils's. Since Kasrils opens his acknowledgement by thanking Jeremy Cronin for his editorial help, one is left wondering to what extent some of these passages were suggested to the author by Cronin, the SACP's leading journalist.

The final chapter, which also contains a strong element of self-justification, concerns the Bisho massacre of September 1992, when Kasrils led a break-away group of demonstrators from an ANC march on the capital of the Ciskei homeland which was fired upon by Ciskeian soldiers. Much was made of his role in this in the South African press at the time, with journalists alleging that Kasrils had cynically used ANC marchers as cannon fodder in order to provoke a political crisis. Much about the episode remains mysterious. Clearly responsibility for the massacre lay primarily with those Ciskeian and South African officers who ordered troops to fire on unarmed demonstrators. Kasrils confesses an error of judgement in his assumption that the Ciskeian forces would not open fire (p. 364). It seems extraordinary that, after thirty years of armed struggle, he and others in the ANC/SACP leadership could still underestimate the ruthlessness of the enemy and be willing to gamble with the lives of their supporters. We may well hear more on this theme, particularly in criticism of the ANC and SACP from the left, in the years to come. In may be true, as Kasrils asserts, that the ANC 'fought a just war and took decisions on the basis of principle and morality' (p. 240). It is certainly true that much of the more repulsive violence carried out in the name of the ANC, such as the 'necklacing' of victims, including old women suspected of witchcraft, was invented by pro-ANC comrades inside South Africa, and not by the exiled ANC leadership. In the 1980s both sides, the ANC and the government, engaged in a destabilisation of South African society. In the next few years we will see how far the ANC can succeed in coping with the inheritance of the ungovernability which it once encouraged.

Some of the most important events in the history of the period, which Kasrils was well placed to observe, are barely discussed or not at all. We hear little about the Morogoro or Kabwe conferences of 1969 and 1985. There is nothing whatever about the exclusion from the ANC of the so-called 'Gang of Eight' in 1975. Still, one does not expect a fully balanced account from a memoir by a political activist who is justifying a course of action rather than attempting an even-handed analysis. We must give Ronnie Kasrils a vote of thanks for putting pen to paper and providing an insight into important questions of South African history.

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✓<sup>a</sup> ELIZABETH M AMUKUGO, *Education and Politics in Namibia: past trends and future prospects*. Windhoek: New Namibian Books, 1993, 227 pp., 38·35 rands.

Since the introduction of Bantu Education in South Africa in 1956 and its extension to Namibia in 1962 a fair amount of scholarly attention has been devoted to the evaluation of this system and its consequences for social formation in those societies. Most studies have been presented in the framework of Christian National Education (C. Van Til, *Essays on Christian Education*, 1977; J. H. Malan, *Die Wysgerig-Antropologiese Grondslae van die Opvoedkundige Teorie* by C. K.