

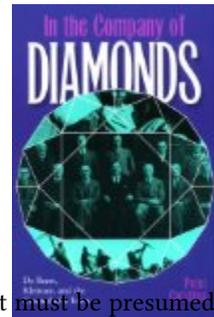
# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Peter Carstens. *In the Company of Diamonds: De Beers, Kleinzee, and Control of a Town*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001. xvii + 257 pp. \$59.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8214-1378-4.

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*In The Company of Diamonds* is a well-researched book that any reader will find challenging. The high quality of the information contained in this book is a result of the author's personal ties to the community of Kleinzee, to which he returned after many years to conduct his research. Peter Carstens shows us that there is always something to be gained by a researcher who goes back to his or her 'roots'. The impressions one made early in life become an asset in the research as one goes back to the same area at a later stage. I quote Carstens: "The vantage point from which I experienced this mining community as I was growing up—was unlike that of the son of a mineworker—but it did provide me with the credentials in later years to reflect on the nature of the hierarchical structures..." (p xiii). Carstens also points out that successful social research is enhanced by the availability of reliable primary and secondary sources and lively oral traditions. Together, these enable an astute researcher to produce a credible study, such as this one by Carstens.

Carstens had a rare opportunity that many researchers over the years have tried to obtain without success: access to De Beers Company Archives, and (restricted) access to the Anglo American records in Johannesburg. Moreover, as the author states, 'luck' was also on his side when 'priceless documents were rescued from a garbage dump'. Carstens had better experience with his research in Kleinzee than some other researchers. Ian Phimister confirms the problems historians can encounter with accessing company records. Phimister states that when conducting research on the Wankie Colliery in Zimbabwe, "repeated attempts to locate the papers of successive Wankie Colliery Companies were unsuccessful. Several visits to the colliery itself were fruitless in this regard, and unless the Anglo American Corporation of South Africa is sitting on this

material as well as its own papers, it must be presumed that the early Colliery Company papers were destroyed in the Blitz along with those of the British South Africa Company" (p. i). Anglo American, one of the companies active in Kleinzee, gave Carstens restricted access to some files (p. iv). It is the same Company which Phimister had problems with on his research on Wangi Kolia.

Carstens presents an analysis of the key "players" at the Kleinzee Diamond Mine, from the mine owners, to the workers, and the different suppliers of services to the community of Kleinzee. The role of Company management in the recruitment of cheap labor from among the surrounding Africans is dealt with very well. Carstens leaves no one in doubt as to the reliance of mining companies in Southern Africa on African cheap labor. The invitation of the Transkei Minister of the Interior to the opening of new hostels for Africans and Coloreds was indeed a recognition by the Company of its reliance on cheap labor (p. 133). Carstens aptly sums up company power when he describes it as paternalistic and hegemonic. In addition, he places his study in the context of other Company town studies, ones which may have been particular in approach yet like his study they can be generalized in their application.

The one question that is not answered fully in the book is: Who controls the town? Is it the service providers or the mine management? In fairness to the author, he tries to address this issue. It is a question that not many of us too will be able to answer. There are many towns in the world that revolve around a certain type of activity. Is it possible to actually ascribe one entity as being "in charge"?

The book is both historical and sociological in its analysis and presentation. The author takes us from the

early beginnings of Kleinzee under the De Beers Company to the takeover by the conglomerate Anglo American Company. His study addresses everyone at Kleinzee: domestic workers, guards, supervisors, management, contract worker or migrant workers, the churches, courts and social services. Although the book is about the mining town of Kleinze and its community, it is really about what happens in any mining, agricultural, or lumbering town. It is about the origins of what seems to be a 'closed town' but which in reality has interactions with outsiders all the time.

Carstens ably presents Kleinzee as a miniature model

for the South African experience, from the period before apartheid, through the apartheid and post apartheid eras. He takes the reader through these periods with a full understanding of how each period affected the mining community of Kleinzee. However, the comparisons made with asylums, convents, military camps, native reserves, etc., seemed to me to be over-stretched. Kleinzee seems to be different from military camps and convents.

This book is a great contribution to the study of the origins and growth of Company towns throughout the world.

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