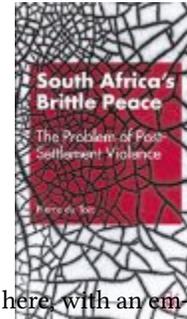


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Pierre du Toit. *South Africa's Brittle Peace: The Problem of Post-Settlement Violence*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001. xv + 222 pp. \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-333-77918-7.

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Pierre du Toit's new book is very much of its genre: a structuralist and state-centred exploration of "post-settlement violence" in South Africa. Du Toit establishes himself within a very particular literature, with a strong reliance, at least to begin with, on some elements of the work of Charles Tilly, Samuel E. Finer and Michael Mann on the sociology of states and their organisation, and more than a glance at the weak-state literature of the past decade. But perhaps the most significant frame for the work is that of Martin van Creveld's history of war as state-sanctioned violence. Du Toit relies heavily on van Creveld to support a set of assertions about the introduction of "Total War" during the Second World War, the erosion of distinctions between civilians and combatants, and the consequent establishment of the necessary conditions for Low Intensity Conflict in the post-war period. In particular, du Toit sees "wars of liberation in the colonies of the major powers" as building "on this fundamental normative breakdown in the conduct of war" (p. 8). As an aside, these discussions of the principal theorists on which the work is posited could have been integrated more fully into the author's own analysis, rather than standing separately as a classic thesis "review of the literature" chapter.

With reference to the theorists, du Toit perceives a deficiency in van Creveld's social analysis in the analysis of the mechanisms of conflict. This leads du Toit to introduce the ethnic group entitlement theory of Donald Horowitz, through which he frames much of the rest of his discussion. In the "new South Africa," this has a curiously old-fashioned ring to it, now that the ethnic-slicing notion of class is increasingly both a social reality and an analytical category. While it is useful for us to recognise that the apartheid state "epitomised a partisan ethnic state," the historical difficulties inherited by the new

government in 1994 seem underplayed here, with an emphasis more on the exploration of "[t]he post-apartheid performance of state officials with regard to matters of corruption, and other gauges of state strength/weakness" (pp. 21-22). This is not to say that du Toit does not recognise the "security dilemma" of apartheid. As he writes:

"Whites sought safety through a discriminatory system which denied security to the majority of black South Africans. The more elaborate and comprehensive the system, the greater the threat it provided to black South Africans, and the more reason it gave to the African nationalists to rebel against it." (p. 36)

A useful and particular-oriented outline of the halting progress towards a negotiated settlement occupies the central section of the work, teasing out some of the innovative South African compromises (such as the notion of "sufficient consensus") which enabled the negotiations to continue, resulting in the 1994 elections. A surprising omission in this narration is the murder of Chris Hani, which is widely understood in many quarters to have been pivotal in restarting the formal negotiations which had been suspended after the Boipatong massacre and which, arguably, took South Africa closer to the brink of racial war than any other single event.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as the principal institution of inquiry into the past, is dealt with in some detail and, to a degree, provides a framework for the eventual exploration of the post-settlement violence featured in the title of the book. The emphasis in much of this work is on the political (political institutions, actors and violence), yet the sub-theme is that in South Africa, the post-settlement violence largely has been criminal in nature. Here I would have found useful a stronger set of definitions of the basic concepts of "pub-

lic violence,” “political violence,” and even of the “culture of violence,” which if used critically can have much explanatory power. Moreover, even though the macro narration of violent crime in South Africa since 1994 is the dominant narrative, some sense, beyond statistics, of the impact of violent crime on ordinary lives and on day-to-day social networks would have been very useful in supporting the author’s contention that violence in post-settlement South Africa has been of major significance.

What does not come through clearly enough is an analysis (rather than a narration) of why and how the massive political violence of the early 1990s came to a comparatively abrupt end. South Africa had after all been undergoing continuous violent political contestation for more than a decade by the time of the first democratic election in 1994. That long period of contestation had acculturated violence as a normative social mechanism in many parts of the country. The links formed by that set of social processes, along with continued economic inequities and criminal violence, cannot be unpacked by reliance on a structural reference to an undifferentiated “culture of violence”. An example of where this might have been handled differently is in chapter 6, “The Role of Negotiated Institutions, the Economy and External Factors,” where du Toit locates the culture of violence in a social and economic context. It begins with the not unproblematic “Nedcor Survey of Crime” (1996) and uses the Survey to establish a picture of a society in which the longer-term impacts of the past (such as material deprivation for the majority population) had not been sufficiently countered in the negotiation process by the establishment of strong institutions such as a new police service. This deficiency, as well as other similar structural and institutional problems, are seen by du Toit as key to the “post-settlement violence” of his title. To cite one example, the 1996 National Crime Prevention Strategy, which promised the arrest of 10,000 most wanted criminals, is depicted as a failure because more than a quarter of those arrested during the campaign “[h]ad again been released on bail!” (p. 118) The provision of new bail conditions was one of the features of the 1993 interim constitution which du Toit sees as “glaring weaknesses” yet “perfectly understandable, given the history of the conflict. A number of the negotiators, with Mandela as the outstanding example, had spent decades in prison, with virtually no constitutional protection from abuse” (p. 117). This perhaps over-personalises the issue and consequently obscures other possible readings of why such grand anti-crime campaigns have failed. Observers, and many police, at the time saw this campaign,

and similar repeated campaigns, as a profound failure because such over-ambitious schemes were recognised as no more than a hangover from the all-encompassing “sweeps” conducted in townships in the apartheid era. Such campaigns were seen by the police on the ground as crude, publicity-seeking, unprofessional, and a waste of their time in the new police service that many were trying to build.

Secondly, and this is a key issue, the transformation from political violence to criminal violence goes relatively uncritiqued. The definition of crime accepted here is that levels of crime, and in particular violent crime, have risen in the former “white” areas, the suburbs and central business districts. This, of course, is a truism much trumpeted by the media and in popular discussion. What this definition does not provide, however, is an understanding that while levels of crime have increased in the suburbs, in the townships conditions have not changed significantly since the apartheid era, when township areas were substantially underpoliced by under-resourced police units. Reporting rates for some crimes have been improved, while the rates of particular crimes (such as child abuse) have increased under the impact of novel circumstances such as the HIV/Aids epidemic and the myths surrounding its spread. Crime in the second half of the 1990s has had devastating effects on the lives of many township residents. We need to recognise that those levels of violent crime had long been the daily reality for many township residents. The impacts of violent crime have been felt far more in the previously advantaged, and therefore, protected (and well-policed) areas.

The analysis of these issues is complicated by the continued lack of reliable crime statistics, by constant tabloid-style media reporting of crime and its impacts, and by the lack of published first-hand research. Further, an analysis of media reporting shows that crimes are much more likely to be reported if they occur in the formerly “white” suburbs or CBDs, skewing the emphasis and providing yet more grist for the popular mill regarding crime in the “new South Africa.”

This is a useful survey of some aspects of the recent history of South Africa. It gives us some wonderful images, of fracturing clay and the brittleness of its individual pieces, of loose cannons on the ships of both the state and the liberation movements. Social analysis is a crucial underpinning of such a study, and here the author could well have extended his range, but as a work of structuralist political science it has much to offer.

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