

Mark Sanders. *Complicities: The Intellectual and Apartheid.* Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002. xiii + 273 pp. \$22.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8223-2998-5.



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Mark Sanders's *Complicities: The Intellectual and Apartheid* is a difficult book and it is difficult partly because of its intellectual genealogy. Though developed from what the author calls "incidental remarks in the responses of Jacques Derrida and others" during the mid-1990s debates about complicity, European intellectuals and Nazism, carried out mainly in the *New York Review of Books*, Sanders's affiliation to a Derridean form of reading is more than incidental (p. x). I do not mean this in a pejorative sense (as is now *de rigueur* in contemporary reactions to the work of late-twentieth-century theory). On the contrary, the strengths of Derridean reading come to the fore in this book because it makes difficult or complicates notions of resistance, responsibility, and complicity. Another intellectual affiliation of this book may illuminate this point.

In seeking to "set ... out a theory of intellectual responsibility," Sanders notes that, following South Africa's negotiated settlement and, especially, the work of the subsequent Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the notion of complicity moved conspicuously into public discourse (p. ix).

This, and the debates around European intellectuals and Nazism mentioned above, led Sanders to consider the imbrication of both supporters and opponents of apartheid:

"Complicity was a problem not exclusively for supporters of the apartheid regime and its policies but also for opponents. At another level, in order to resist, victims needed to be aware of and overcome an intimacy of psychic colonization that led them to collaborate with the oppressor." (p. x)

Here Sanders's project reminds me of J. M. Coetzee's thinking in the essay "Censorship and Polemic: Solzhenitsyn." [1] Coetzee shows how "writer and censor [are] carried on waves of polemic toward identity or twinship"; in other words, in opposing the censor, the writer makes him- or herself available to the very rhetoric opposed (p. 118). The writer becomes, in a way, complicit with the system or discourse that he or she opposes. But Sanders approaches the notion of complicity from a different angle. While not wanting to lose the pejorative sense of "complicity"--and unlike in Coetzee's essay where resistance

allows or enables complicity--Sanders sees complicity, or the recognition of complicity, as enabling (p. x). Zola, of course, is the precursor of the responsible modern intellectual and by reference to him, Sanders formulates more exactly what he seeks to do. To Sanders it is in Zola's "J'accuse" that one finds the first "act of affirming one's complicity in order to assume responsibility for what is done in one's name without simply distancing oneself from the deed" (p. 4). Through a discussion of the Dreyfus Affair and Derrida's *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, among others, and, from a short, prior discussion of the TRC and "responsibility," Sanders brings together three terms which will be the foundation of his project: complicity, responsibility, and "foldedness." The latter is really the political heart of the book as it refers, in Sanders's phrase, to our "human-being": "Complicity, ... is thus at one with the basic folded-together-ness of being, of human-being, of self and other. Such foldedness (in contradistinction to the apartness fostered by apartheid) is the condition of possibility of all particular affiliations, loyalties, and commitments" (p. 10).

It is the interplay, then, of these three terms (complicity, responsibility, and foldedness) in the work of a number of well-known writers and intellectual figures in South Africa-- starting with the "two colonial precursors" in Olive Schreiner and Sol T. Plaatje, moving on to N. P. van Wyk, Geoffrey Cronje, and R. F. A. Hoernl-- "on the side of" apartheid and, opposed to it, Bloke Modisane, A. C. Jordan, Breyten Breytenbach, Nadine Gordimer, and Steve Biko, among others--that comes under focus in Sanders's book. The node around which his comparative approach operates is that "it was around apartheid that each of these intellectuals articulated, not simply a position in support of, or in opposition to, a set of policies, but, more or less explicitly, the affirmation or denial of a basic human foldedness" (pp. 14-15). Through careful, close reading of their work, Sanders then goes on to show how "the intellectual emerges as a figure of responsibility-in-com-

plicity, one who points to the limits of universalization inherent in, and risked by, particular commitments" (p. 15). But this reading of "the intellectual and apartheid" Sanders does not regard as limited to the intellectual, apartheid, and South Africa. While he hopes to provide "new protocols for a writing of the intellectual history of apartheid"--which his project is not--Sanders also hopes that, even as he focuses on South Africa and apartheid ("exemplary but not unique"), his "topic of the intellectual and apartheid ... is available for theoretical generalization in terms of responsibility-in-complicity" (p.15). For "to write a history of the intellectual and apartheid," Sanders states a few pages further on, "is also to write the history of the intellectual--a history in which there is no responsibility without the troubling and enabling moment of complicity" (p. 18).

This is a remarkable book, a difficult, but remarkable book. It is difficult, again, partly because of its intellectual genealogy, but also because of its topic. Its intellectual genealogy means that the arguments are often difficult to follow, not because the author is seeking to be obtuse or difficult, but because he is teasing out extremely complex intellectual moments in the chronology of a political system that itself sought to simplify human behavior by reducing it, in the main, to race (but also, importantly, to gender, as the author makes clear) and a political system that we often still think of as engendering stark realities. While its realities were (and are still) stark--especially where economics and race overlap--human behavior, even under its oppression, more often than not escaped its rigidities. Human behavior remained, in other words, complex and complicated. And the book's difficulty is thus also welcomed because it overcomes easy dismissals or accusations by overhauling what we understand "complicity" to mean. This is especially the case when we consider the recognition of complicity as enabling responsibility, a responsibility that, by extension, leads to the kind of critique, say, that Black Consciousness launched against apartheid.

To recognize, in its turn, Black Consciousness as complicit in the system it sought to overturn is also to acknowledge that even via a resistance signaled in the main by separatism, that separatism was profoundly intimate with the thing from which it sought separation. As Sanders points out in his chapter on Black Consciousness, the complicity that Steve Biko recognizes and which enables his critique, is not only of the "conscious, analytical mind," but also "of the psyche, and, it would follow, requires a psychic solution" (pp. 178-179).

In other words, and to use another keyword from the book, South Africans' lives are contaminated by each other. This is not a new insight. Recent commentators have suggested that a focus on racial separation under apartheid, in critical and cultural commentary, leads to a caricature of South African lives and denies intimacies and influences across its racial lines.[2] In some ways, this is a denied complicity. Sanders's project, of course, is not to name such a complicity. Rather, as I have pointed out, he teases out moments where key intellectual figures not only recognize such complicity, but recognize it so that it enables forms of resistance. As such, the Sanders book is an important revision of our understanding of figures as opposed to each other, in our reckoning of apartheid, as N. P. van Wyk Louw and Steve Biko. N. P. van Wyk Louw, an apologist and intellectual of apartheid, developed his mode of "lojale verzet" (translated by Sanders as "loyal opposition" or "loyal resistance") in the early 1930s as an avenue of criticism of Afrikaner intellectual life. Although his notion would be dismissed as an authorizing and regulating convention by later writers such as Andre Brink and Breyten Breytenbach, the point remains that Van Wyk Louw's early Afrikaner nationalism, in opposition to British colonialism, is "in *form* no different from the campaign against mental self-colonization conducted by Black Consciousness forty years later" (my emphasis, p. 91).

This is an important point because, after all, and despite certain postmodern pronouncements concerning the demise of the nation-state, the complicity shared between Van Wyk Louw and Biko is nationalism. The former may speak to an exclusive nationalism (white, Afrikaans) and the latter to a relatively inclusive one (all those cast out by apartheid, "black"), but the *form* of nationalism persists. Biko's radicalism then also wanes when we think of the masculinist genealogy of nationalism imprinted on Black Consciousness (also dealt with at length by Sanders). While Sanders focuses on the intellectual, the book led me to think of a number of directly political questions. If the recognition of complicity enables responsibility and resistance, can the latter lead one significantly away from that complicity? To what extent does that complicity leave its traces? To what extent, for instance, has post-1994 South Africa escaped its complicity with nationalism and with the nationalism of apartheid? Have we escaped apartheid-nationalism in form? If the African National Congress is enabled by apartheid nationalism, then what psychic solutions exist to break free from complicitous nationalisms?

While being difficult, Sanders's *Complicities* is also a deeply satisfying book. The range and depth of research is assimilated into a style of writing that is neither tedious nor pompous, and the author shows himself in full command of his sources. And while the book should be of immense interest to South Africanists across a range of disciplines (Literary Studies, Politics, Ethics, and so on), it should also be of equal interest to anyone interested in the notions of intellectuals, responsibility and ethics.

Notes

[1]. J. M. Coetzee, *Giving Offense: Essays on Censorship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp.117-146. Originally published in *Pretexts* 2, no. 2 (1990).

[2]. Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael, eds. *Senses of Culture: South African Culture Studies* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 2000).

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