

Mark Shaw. *Crime and Policing in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Transforming under Fire*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002. xvii + 169 pp. \$22.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-253-21537-6.



Reviewed by Joan Wardrop

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In a short first chapter, "A Criminal State," Shaw succinctly articulates the historical context of apartheid's racially-based social and economic policies and the impacts of these on crime and on policing, using the spatial notions of apartheid geography (although not drawing specifically on the work of geographers of apartheid) to make the important points that violent crime has long existed in South Africa, its presence hidden by rigid racial separation, and that apartheid's police were not trained, for the most part, to detect crime, but rather to control public disorder. Succeeding chapters explore the political context of transformation of policing and establish a framework for the violence which is integral to much of the post-1994 crime, and describe the sinews of organized crime in South Africa, before shifting the ground to examine public responses "to insecurity," the development of privatized policing, an assessment of state responses and, finally, some proposals and options for the way forward.

Shaw covers, readably and without overstating his case, the principal lines of policy and practice and the ways in which public reactions, ANC

policies, and criminal behaviors, have interacted in the post-1994 period. For the most part he draws on public sources (the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report, for example) and on a rather restricted secondary literature, acknowledging in the notes to the bibliography that his work "does not pretend to be an exhaustive bibliography on crime and policing in South Africa" (p. 159). In restricting himself in this way, he may well have done his work an injustice. For example, as the author appears to recognize, the issues of the availability of firearms and of the continued limitations of gun control in South Africa are fundamental to the control of crime: "the use of firearms has significantly heightened the impact of violent crime in the country" (p. 53). Yet his analysis and discussion of gun control issues are minimalist, not to say perfunctory, and proceed without reference to the seminal work of gun control advocates such as the sociologist Jacklyn Cock.

Similarly, Shaw seems not to have used any of the very detailed primary source material developed by Anthony Minaar in his various papers

and publications or the equally solidly-based work of Gary Kynoch on gangs and community policing in historical perspective. Brief reference is made to the work of ethnographers such as Monique Marks, while Shaw himself rarely cites direct empirical oral history or ethnographic research of his own, although he does make brief reference to having participated in police "ride-alongs" in both Durban and Johannesburg.

This type of omission places the work in basing it almost entirely on secondary sources and on secondary sources which rely on government and other institutional surveys, statistics, and research for their information and their positioning, both intellectual and political. Shaw is confined to writing an overview, a very competent one to be sure, but an overview that necessarily conflates positions and points of view. I should say clearly that I have no argument with the ways that Shaw deploys his sources: he does so scrupulously and with all the hallmarks of an experienced researcher. It is rather that overview technique which obscures realities with which I take issue. To cite just a few examples beyond the problem of gun control mentioned above: the conjoined issues of privatized policing and gated communities have significant implications for the nature of the moral and social order (not to mention the political order) in the fledgling democracy that is South Africa, as the country's people struggle to find points of commonality. And the enormous question of why young men have taken to criminal behavior, in such large numbers and with such levels of violence, is dealt with again as just one among many issues (although it should be said that the realities of life in the townships peek through just for a moment when the work of Segal, Pelo, and Rampa with the *amagents* allows the voices of the criminals to be briefly heard).[1] Neither are the voices of the police, beyond the usually-anonymous and homogenized utterances of senior police bureaucrats, discernible, even at second or third hand.

These omissions, without an apparent need for explanation, have framed an analytical stance which would have been the better for overt recognition by the author of its constraints. That said, as an overview, working from public sources, Shaw's book is a useful survey, summarizing the principal trends and factors, albeit briefly and in a relatively unproblematized way. The prose style is readable, very clear and succinct, and perhaps we can hope that so competent a writer might, in the future, produce a companion volume grounded in different aspects of the issues of crime and policing.

Note

[1]. Lauren Segal, Joy Pelo, and Pule Rampa, "'Asicamtheni Magents': Let's Talk Magents: Youth Attitudes towards Crime" *Crime and Conflict* 15 1999, pp. 23-27.

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