

the ‘futures past’, to use Koselleck’s term, of the decolonisation movements of the 1960s, and as a theoretically sophisticated framing of the relationship between languages of truth and power.

JACK PALMER
University of Leeds

Contradictions of Democracy: vigilantism and rights in post-apartheid South Africa

by NICHOLAS RUSH SMITH

New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019. Pp. 265. \$99 (hbk), \$29.95 (pbk).

doi:10.1017/S0022278X20000075

Contradictions of Democracy is a must-read book for scholars working on vigilantism, (urban) policing and security in South Africa and beyond. In this alluring account, Nicholas Rush Smith provides a novel perspective on vigilantism by showing that in South Africa, it is not the (inevitable) result of democratic failure, but rather a response to processes of democratic state formation that are fostered by intimate civic networks. With this intriguing claim, Smith critiques two prevalent approaches to understanding vigilantism in the scholarly literature: the civic and state failure explanations. The first argues that vigilantism is the result of a breakdown of social capital and the second finds fault in institutional absence, failure and/or ineffectiveness. By drawing from rich empirical data, Smith powerfully debunks these dominant approaches and provides an innovative way of understanding vigilantism that is not only of interest to scholars working on South Africa, but to an interdisciplinary public interested in matters pertaining to policing, security, citizenship and statehood.

The main theme that powerfully comes to the fore in each chapter is, as the title of the book suggests, contradiction. In the second chapter, Smith explores the historical antecedents of contemporary vigilante violence and identifies the paradox that closely knit relationships often facilitate, rather than suppress, violence. Another key contradiction emerges in Chapter 4, where Smith analyses a killing in KwaMashu’s K Section and questions how violence occurs after the police have made an arrest, i.e. when the state has been ‘successful’ in finding the suspect. Through a meaning-making approach to law and rights, he emphasises how citizens interpret the law and effectiveness of (state) institutions in ambiguous and contradictory ways. In Chapter 5, Smith analyses the contradictory relationship between police officers and citizens who engage in community policing initiatives encouraged by the state. The South African state instigates patrollers to maintain procedures underpinned by the law, yet simultaneously enables, and at times stimulates, those same citizens to violate the law through the use of extrajudicial force. In the last chapter, Smith shows how vigilantism can act as a lens through which to analyse the state’s use of (authoritarian) violence and the contradictory nature of extrajudicial police violence.

Smith succeeds in fleshing out these contradictions in a captivating way through his use of meticulous detail from his in-depth ethnographic fieldwork and extensive archival research. By drawing from this data, he provides vivid and engaging accounts of, for example, a community policing patrol he accompanied in Sebokeng (Chapter 5), the ambiguous position of Vikela, a local crime fighter in KwaMashu (Chapter 6), and the somewhat absurd protest staged at a Pretoria

rugby club (Chapter 8). Combined, Smith demonstrates that these contradictions, as well as many others that define the book, are not only related to democratic state building, but also to the very fabric of social life.

The only contradictions that Smith fails to address are those that he experienced while conducting research. Apart from a small paragraph on page 15, we are not given insight into his unquestionably multifarious experiences while collecting the data and how he navigated this complex web of contradictions. Adding this personal and reflexive dimension would not only have heightened this formidable book's appeal, but would have answered some of the questions that we, especially as ethnographers, are unfortunately left with after reading it.

TESSA DIPHOORN
Utrecht University

Power and the Presidency in Kenya: the Jomo Kenyatta years by ANAÏS ANGELO
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. 325. \$99.99 (hbk).

doi:10.1017/S0022278X20000909

In *Power and the Presidency in Kenya*, Anaïs Angelo explores the rise of Jomo Kenyatta to become Kenya's founding president and how his political career shaped the Kenyan presidency. With a wealth of original archival research, Angelo injects a fresh perspective into the historiography of post-colonial political development in Kenya. The book is an important instalment in the study of Kenyan politics, and challenges several established assumptions about the nature of executive power under Kenyatta. Characterising his leadership style as 'secluded' (179) and reliant on 'charismatic indecisiveness' (87), Angelo shows how Kenyatta tactfully leveraged his own political weaknesses to emerge as Kenya's indispensable post-colonial leader.

The book begins by exploring Kenyatta's political thought. With evidence from his writings, speeches and secondary sources, Angelo argues that Kenyatta lacked a fixed political ideology. Instead, he was a malleable pragmatist, albeit with a deep belief that the family was the primary political unit in line with established Kikuyu moral economy. Building on this foundation, Kenyatta viewed the state as having a limited role in the everyday lives of citizens, beyond establishing order and protecting property rights. The book also grapples with Kenyatta's ambiguous approach to political ethnicity. Although his political thought matured within a Kikuyu cultural milieu, Angelo argues that Kenyatta was not necessarily a tribalist, partly on account of his overriding elevation of the family.

These observations largely jibe with the historical record. Kenyatta opposed the redistribution of alienated land (under colonial rule) 'for free', instead championing a 'willing buyer willing seller' approach that disproportionately benefitted well-connected politicians and bureaucrats at the expense of the landless poor (many of whom were his Kikuyu co-ethnics). And while he appointed Kikuyus to key government positions, Kenyatta did not engage in ethnic mass political mobilisation. His 'kitchen cabinet' was limited to Kiambu Kikuyu, at the exclusion of Kikuyus from other districts. Furthermore, he built enduring alliances with leading non-Kikuyu politicians as a means of cementing his authority and balancing fellow Kikuyu elites.