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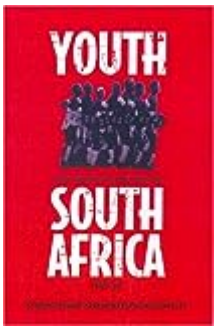

Sibusisiwe Nombuso Dlamini. *Youth and Identity Politics in South Africa, 1990-94.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005. ix + 231 pp. $55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8020-3911-8.

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The Shifting Boundaries of Zuluness

Nombuso Dlamini's urban ethnography examines the ways in which Zulu-speaking male youths define and deploy Zuluness in contemporary South Africa. Based primarily on six months of fieldwork conducted in 1992 in Durban, this study demonstrates that the boundaries of Zulu ethnicity, culture, and identity are porous and continuously shifting, rather than primordial and fixed.

Youth and Identity Politics in South Africa is structured around ten chapters and an epilogue. The first half of the book consists of theoretical and methodological chapters, and a brief historical overview of KwaZulu-Natal. The second half presents case studies of social and cultural groups from two very different high schools: Umganga High in Umlazi township and Greensburg High in a white suburb twenty kilometers away. Political upheaval in KwaZulu-Natal resulting from the violent conflict in the early 1990s between supporters of the Zulu nationalist Inkatha and the African National Congress (ANC) forced high school students to negotiate their identities with utmost circumspection. Working in such a dangerous, insecure space and time, the author chose to work with young men (ages 15-25) who shared her allegiance to the ANC. Consequently, the book charts the contours of an urban male Zuluness that self-consciously favors "moral ethnicity," to use John Lonsdale's phrase, rather than ethnic nationalism.[1]

The most intriguing sections of this book are the case studies of youth leisure spaces and experiences outside of school. Dlamini is at her best in chapters 6 and 7, which analyze *tsatsatsa* sub-culture. The meaning of this name is unclear. *Matsatsatsa* told Dlamini that the "name sounded cool" (p. 97). The origins of *tsatsatsa* lie in the tumultuous 1980s: "Coming from broken families, participation in party politics, and a strong commitment to education are three main features that characterized *Matsatsatsa*" (p. 98). Listening to jazz and hip-hop, wearing fashionable clothes and short hair, lifting weights and modeling, as well as working part-time jobs and socializing with white counterparts, distinguished *tsatsatsa* from other township youth sub-cultures.[2] In doing so, these black youths embraced nonracialism and sought to enter the South African social and economic mainstream. But at the same time, and this is crucial to Dlamini's argument, "they viewed themselves as Zulu"

by virtue of birthplace and descent (p. 114) and "used symbolic resources such as the Zulu language and history [which] made them appear to be like Inkatha, or rather, not very different from the Zulu people who participated in Inkatha politics" (p. 118).

Chapter 7 explores in sophisticated and captivating fashion the politics of language in *tsatsatsa* constructions of Zuluness. Black empowerment and disempowerment were both reflected in the use of isiZulu. On the positive side, youths displayed cultural pride and autonomy by speaking isiZulu in the schools (instead of mandated English), as well as in conversations when whites were present. As one informant put it: "When I use Zulu with other black people I feel free and understood, but when I am with whites it makes me proud to see white people struggle to learn our language because it shows me that they too have a lot that they don't know" (p. 124). A competing, contradictory view, however, linked isiZulu with "ignorance or illiteracy" (p. 128), or worse, association with Inkatha. *Matsatsatsa*, therefore, took great care to explain that they spoke "new" Zulu as opposed to "isiZulu saseNkandla" (Zulu of Nkandla)–the "old" rural Zulu spoken by Inkatha's cultural conservatives and used by township gangsters as a base for their *tsotsitaal* slang (p. 92). *Tsatsatsa*'s endorsement of the gendered and gerontocratic practice of *ukuhlonipha* (showing respect for elders) and concomitant refusal to participate in Inkatha's public rituals of ethnic nationalism (e.g. Dingane's Day celebrations) further evidenced the complexity and malleability of being Zulu.

Chapter 8 explores how soccer enabled young black men to carve out an autonomous space free from ANC/Inkatha conflict for the purpose of escapist entertainment.[3] In the 1980s both political organizations used soccer clubs to recruit members. Violence and criminal activities soared and by the late 1980s community soccer in Durban's townships had virtually ceased to exist. Students and other youths worked successfully with township residents in the early 1990s to depoliticize and revitalize the local game. Interestingly, soccer groups used isiZulu as a tool for social inclusion, enforced *hlonipha* for conflict-resolution purposes, and deployed the culture of *isibindi* (tradition of heroic courage) by regularly making reference to pre-colonial Zulu martial prowess. In other words, soccer teams and competitions were (are) important sites in the formation and articulation of a broad, adaptive Zuluness.

Chapter 9 discusses the role of religious groups as a "safe space" for township youths to deal with contemporary events and the harsh challenges of everyday life. The analysis is based, somewhat speculatively, on the case of a single (male) member of the Jehovah's Witnesses. A product of a stable family, Ngubo Kunene immersed himself in the social and religious activities of his church, particularly those involving young people. Kunene is held up as a symbol for youths who navigated township life as individuals, rather than as members of *tsatsatsa* and sport teams. Even so, he and his Christian family exhibited a hybrid Zuluness that embraced traditional cultural practices like *isidikla*–"the ceremony related to the Zulu practice whereby the boyfriend sends his relatives to officially acknowledge the pregnancy and also to apologize to [the] family about the pregnancy" (p. 170). Furthermore, Kunene used isiZulu in church study groups and also incorporated Zulu songs and dances in church ceremonies because the rituals "*awusholutho* (do not have much meaning without these practices), and got boring without Zulu music" (p. 172). Under the protective cover of his reputation as a church-going student in the community, Kunene could deflect accusations of Inkatha sympathies generated by his enthusiasm for certain aspects of Zulu cultural traditionalism (p. 179).

Overall, this book makes two important contributions. First, Dlamini skillfully and unequivocally emphasizes the agency and autonomy of young black men–historical actors who are all too often described in one-dimensional fashion as victims of history: marginalized, unemployed, thugs, desperate members of a "lost generation."[4] Second, she teases out the ambiguities and contradictions of ethnicity and identity by focusing on how linguistic choices, pride in cultural traditions, and selective readings of the past are crucial factors in the creation of Zuluness. Dlamini's study of the leisure actions and choices of township high school students offers a finely honed rejoinder to earlier radical materialist understandings of ethnicity as "false consciousness." A forthcoming 51-chapter edited volume entitled *Being Zulu* confirms that Dlamini has alerted us to something significant. This impressive book takes culture seriously by "testing whether ethnic consciousness adheres to binary oppositions or a self-propelling logic, while exploring more deeply how hybrid interactions shape what comes to be known as Zulu identity in local, national, and global contexts."[5] Historian Jabulani Sithole's contribution, for example, parallels Dlamini's work as it examines "the cultural alchemy sustaining the shared narratives and rituals of *ubuZulu bethu*, an idiom capturing the multiple meanings of 'our Zuluness,' which different actors espouse or discard over time."[6]

On a more critical note, *Youth and Identity Politics in South Africa* misses several opportunities to engage with Zulu historiography, and the growing literature on masculinity, generational dynamics, and the emerging field of South African cultural studies. The historical synthesis found in chapter 4, for instance, glosses over some major events in Zulu history (e.g. Battle of Ncome, "Blood River," December 16, 1838) and oversimplifies other episodes and explanations. In part, this is due to the oversight that left out the scholarship of John Wright, Carolyn Hamilton, Paul la Hausse, Benedict Carton, Sifiso Ndlovu, and Thom McClendon, to name a few. Analytically, the discussion about cultural practices could have benefited from an incorporation of spiritual dimensions and the use of magic as a way to assess more fully the impact of indigenous knowledge and ideology on modern urban culture. Finally, the case studies on soccer and religion seemed thin in ethnographic evidence in comparison to the rich data presented in earlier chapters.

In the end, though, *Youth and Identity Politics in South Africa* achieves its main goal of demonstrating the changing nature and plasticity of Zuluness. Above all else, this study deserves high praise for effectively showing how black youths in the townships, to paraphrase the old Marxian adage, creatively make their own leisure though not in circumstances of their own choosing.

Notes

[1]. John Lonsdale, "Moral Ethnicity and Political Tribalism," in *Inventions and Boundaries: Historical and Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism*, ed. Preben Kaarsholm and Jan Hultin (Roskilde, Denmark: International Development Studies, Roskilde University, 1994): pp. 131-150.

[2]. For an interesting comparison, see Sarah Nuttall, "Stylizing the Self: The Y Generation in Rosebank, Johannesburg," *Public Culture* 16, 3 (2004): pp. 430-452.

[3]. For a fuller analysis of this subject see Peter Alegi, *Laduma! Soccer, Politics, and Society in South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2004).

[4]. By way of example, see: Gill Straker, *Faces in the Revolution: The Psychological Effects of Violence on Township Youth in South Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992); and Thokozani Xaba, "Masculinity and its Malcontents: The Confrontation between 'Struggle Masculinity' and 'Post-Struggle Masculinity' (1990-1997)," in *Changing Men in Southern Africa*, ed. R. Morrell (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2001): pp. 105-124.

[5]. Benedict Carton, "Zuluness in the Post- and Neo- World," in *Being Zulu: Contested Identities Past and Present*, ed. Benedict Carton, John Laband, and Jabulani Sithole (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, forthcoming). I am indebted to Benedict Carton for allowing me to read a preliminary draft of parts of this manuscript.

[6]. Jabulani Sithole, "Changing Meanings of the Battle of Ncome and Images of King Dingane in Twentieth-Century South Africa," in *Being Zulu*.

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