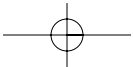
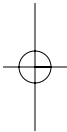
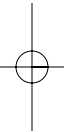


*Book Reviews /  
Comptes Rendus*



*LABOUR, Capital and Society* 36:2 (November 2003) pp. 297-306  
*TRAVAIL, capital et société* 36:2 (novembre 2003) pp. 297-306

Bozzoli, Belinda. *Theatres of Struggle and the End of Apartheid*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2004. ISBN 0-8214-1599-9

Alexandra, proclaimed a 'native' township by the government of the Union of South Africa in 1912, is located in the northeastern suburbs of Johannesburg, and was always exceptional in that it was surrounded by — rather than being distanced from — white residential areas. In terms of the racial logic of both segregation and apartheid, it shouldn't really have been there, for its inhabitants should either have been consigned to the 'native reserves' or 'homelands' or if not, at least to some far less obtrusive location. And indeed, between 1963 and 1970, many thousands of its 120,000 'despairing inhabitants' (p. 1) were forcibly removed to Soweto and other places, so that by the mid-1980s (the period with which the book deals), there were just about 35,000 left before the removals and the bulldozings were finally stopped as the result of widespread protests. Those who remained were "bereft of a major portion of their community and left with a half-destroyed township, a rubble-strewn space which did not permit them to forget how families had been split"(p. 31).

Always hugely impoverished and grossly neglected, this township was "not surprisingly...home to a long and proud tradition of resistance" (p.1) which was to culminate in what became known as the Alexandra rebellion, or in local parlance, the 'Six Day War' in 1986. In *Theatres of Struggle and the End of Apartheid*, Belinda Bozzoli — then as now a concerned academic at the University of the Witwatersrand who became involved in the defence of some of those 'rebels' arraigned by the state — has provided an admirable interpretation of the protest which seeks, deliberately, to take its readers beyond a conception of the rebellion as a modern morality tale, of 'good against evil', to one which concerns itself with the everyday life in the township alongside its opposition to the state, and which "most strikingly....took a spatial and highly theatrical form" (p. 2).

We are all subject to some spatially structured form of power, argues Bozzoli, even if we do not fasten on to its meaning.

However, particularly in colonial settings which rest upon racial distinctiveness or separation, spatial relations are likely to shape community resistance to rulers who wield disproportionate power. The politics of *location* as well as the grounds on which any resistance struggle is to be fought, therefore tend towards the tearing down of *boundaries* and the transformation of space into *territory*. These transformed spaces were to be used by the township rebellions in South Africa in the 1980s, and especially that in Alexandra, to construct public spectacles, as well as alternative institutions such as Youth Groups and people's courts, to further their struggles. Spaces were used to create social and political *theatres* wherein *dramas* could be enacted and "thus become the means to claiming greater power" (p. 10). This was a vital ingredient of the revolt, and these dramas "acted as devices to magnify the revolt and thus to enlarge its claims upon the polity" (Ibid).

The 'architecture' of the book, the author tells us (p. 16), proceeds in a three fold manner. First, it takes a narrative form, so that the reader can grasp the sequence of events as the rebellion proceeded. Second, it weaves into 'the story' a panoply of conceptual and interpretative frameworks, so that the nature of the rebellion can be understood in the light of theoretical and comparative frameworks. Third, the design takes a broadly cinematic form, 'zooming in' on the story so as to move from a superficial 'external' view of the township and the rebellion to a depth of intimacy and meaning sought in earlier chapters, before a brief conclusion reflects upon the present outcome for Alexandra. Using as her chief sources the extremely rich trial records of key participants accused of treason, Bozzoli attempts to ask new questions of the rebellion and of its relationship to the broader crisis of the apartheid state informed by the insights of contemporary social movement theory.

Because this is an extraordinarily complicated — and rich — book which defies casual summary in a short review, I am going to restrict myself to three broad comments. First, set against the background of the history of the township and the failure of the state, the narrative of the revolt takes us into a vivid portrayal of the daily lives of the poor, and notably of the emergence after the 1976 Soweto revolt of a new generation of protesters, 'the youth', who

began to 'challenge the existing repertoires of peaceful resistance' (p. 36). The early township, notes Bozzoli, was born of 'welfare paternalism', whose appointed guardians presided over a system of control which created buffer social strata between the rulers and the ruled and which encouraged the development of patronage systems. This fostered the creation of a hierarchical system which stressed a reluctant acquiescence (with exceptions) to the law, respect for private property, schooling and education, rejection of violence, respect for elders and adherence to religion.

Within this context, township administration was paternalistic rather than strictly bureaucratic, well meshed with an established stand-holding and cultural African township elite which lent stability and a degree of legitimacy to township governance. After 1948 the National Party spent some time building upon this paternalism, expanding both township schooling and housing. However, the 1960s saw a steady change in 'tone'. 'Efficient' housing provision sought to displace spatial 'disorderliness', and the township became increasingly subject to a more bureaucratic form of governance as the central state increasingly circumscribed the autonomy of the (white) municipal governments which hitherto had been responsible for running the townships. Municipal rule ended in 1972-73 when control of African townships was removed from local authorities in favour of Bantu Affairs Administration Boards. Welfare paternalism was undercut immediately, as these latter were required to be self-financing, rents rose, and the role of the bureaucracy became even more imposing and alienating: mission schools were closed down in favour of Bantu education, and new restrictions were imposed upon African trade, accumulation and mobility.

This 'racial modernism' had little time for the continued incorporation of the African elite, whose position had been crucial to the relative stability of the older, paternalistic order. The capacity of the elite, and indeed of older people as a whole, to exercise authority over those who were younger, already weakened by the normal processes of urbanization and modernization of the family, was thereby fatally undermined. With the youth already influenced by the ideas of Black Consciousness, by the rise of trade unions and by the recent independence of Mozambique, racial modernism ineluctably stoked the fires of rebellion, generating opportunities for

the younger generation to mobilize around crises of rents, schooling and local government.

Suffice it to say here that Bozzoli's blow by blow account of the Six Day War during the hot days of February 1986 — sparked by the fatal shooting of a young activist by Municipal Police — provides a rich narrative of how Alexandra's youths set out to claim terrain, contest bounded space, attack police as they retaliated (forcing many inhabitants to retreat into the unsafe privacy of their homes), achieve a temporary authority by virtue of the violence they deployed and the courage they displayed, use the ritual of funerals (especially) to mobilize support among residents, and finally find themselves subjected to severe repression by the authorities as the army was brought in to recover the ground the state had lost to the rebels. Although this 'week of living hell' (as one journalist called it), was brought to an end, the Six Day war had constituted an unforgettable rupture with the past, which opened the way "for the development of a revolutionary climate within the township" (p. 87).

Secondly, does Bozzoli's presentation of the revolt as 'theatre' work? Is it more enlightening than a more conventional historical account would be? I can only give a personal answer to these questions, which is a rather wishy-washy 'yes' and 'no'. 'Yes' in the sense that the author's camera does 'zoom in' on many angles of the revolt which highlight cultural aspects of the revolt and encourage us to view the actions of the rebels (and other actors in the drama) in ways that they viewed them themselves. I think, in particular, it lightens up the divisions as well as the unities of 'the youth' (largely a male conception in this context) and the older generation, who while broadly supportive, were more timid, yet also shocked not just by the violence of the youth but by the way they had overturned the old order of things, rendering them as 'ungovernable' as the township itself at the height of the war. It also highlights divisions between leaders and followers, and 'Comrades' and 'Comtotsies'. Furthermore, the sharp focus which Bozzoli brings to institutions such as the people's courts, established by the youth, which had a tendency to assume a 'kangaroo'-like character as tensions grew — with brutal consequences for those condemned as 'informers' or 'traitors' — drives home the moral ambiguity and uncomfortableness of revolutionary moments. And yes, the

presentation of ‘reality’ as drama ensures that the counter-movement, the police and the army, are also presented as self-conscious actors, with the former in particular — especially given their penchant for costumery in the form of balaclavas to clothe their violence in anonymity — assuming the roles of villains. Probably, too, the struggle as ‘drama’ allows us to identify more closely with the actors in the story, to take that imaginative step from out of our armchairs into the dusty, litter-strewn streets of an impoverished South African township. Yet against these undoubted merits, a somewhat pedestrian soul like myself is at times screaming for a greater clarity of story, for a closer weaving together of multiple threads into a broader tapestry. The chapter conclusions are certainly helpful, but the cinematic technique (French intellectual rather than Hollywood soap!) means that the author is darting backwards, forwards and sideways rather than steadily forward. And too often, the editor in me was desperate to reach for the red pen.

However, when the reader eventually finds his or her way out of the maze, it is to confront exceptionally important chapters (9 and 11) on ‘Nationalism and Theatricality’ and ‘Memory and Forgetting’. As one might expect, Bozzoli provides a highly nuanced picture of African nationalism, which she views as drawing variously upon notions of blackness, primordial innocence, martyrdom, and rightlessness, all of which she sees as present in the South African struggles in the 1980s. The major point she makes is how, although the African National Congress (ANC) did not claim credit for the tactics used by the youth, they reinterpreted their resistance in revolutionary terms. In turn, the social movements which emerged, notably the United Democratic Front (UDF) which served as a front for the banned ANC, translated “the master narratives of nationalism as a whole into more detailed tales of life as it had been experienced by the residents themselves, while at the same time giving it a universally recognizable character” (p. 209). One way in which this was done was the metaphorical portrayal of the township — and by extension of the nation itself — as a family living out a tragic drama (p. 210). The family’s parents were virtuous, hardworking and hard done by, but the children were wayward and undisciplined. The tragedy consisted in the family’s persecution from without. Its children were killed, and their elders

mourned them. Its defenders were the forces of moral good, the church, older patriarchs and matriarchs, the worth of the family sustained through its nobility of suffering.

This tragedy, continues Bozzoli, was carried out in street theatre, and notably via the staging of political funerals. It was avidly reported upon by the media, whose distant lens could never close in upon the detailed texture of daily life, and who inevitably trampled over complexity and nuance. Yet the ultimate irony is how nationalist memory — as captured after 1994, most notably in the proto-religious presentations of weeping mothers and those deemed ‘community representatives’ before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) — retold not only the stories of martyrdom and replayed the morality tale of good versus evil, but more or less completely upstaged the story of the youth. Even if, unintentionally, the ANC was now placed firmly and purposively in the lead of a just war, ‘the fact is that the youth of Alexandra organized and led a revolt’, whose main contours hardly appeared at the TRC hearings. This both demeaned the youth, by not giving them their due, and let them off the hook for the many individual brutalities and ‘revolutionary’ acts of violence they committed. ‘Closure’ was therefore never properly achieved, and Bozzoli finds in this at least one reason why, by the late 1990s, disaffection in Alexandra had proved unable to find a constructive outlet and “instead revealed itself in crime, family violence, semi-criminal strikes, bizarre semi-millenarian movements such as pyramid schemes, witchcraft accusations and vigilantism, street gangs and generalized violence” (p. 281). Her concluding words are important: “The cultural, ideological, moral and structural underpinnings of the drama of the 1980s cannot be wished away; they need to be confronted to help us understand the social decay of today” (p. 284).

This book is not an easy read, but it is a remarkable one which deserves a wide readership for those wanting to grasp the texture and complexities of the struggle against apartheid, and indeed of contemporary South Africa.

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O. Nigel Bolland. *The Politics of Labour in the British Caribbean: The Social Origins of Authoritarianism and Democracy in the Labour Movement*. Kingston: Ian Randle; Princeton, New Jersey: Marcus Weiner, 2001. 696 pp.

During the last two decades, Nigel Bolland has been one of the most prolific and recognized scholars in the field of labour history in the British Caribbean. His articles, books and conference papers deal with various aspects of working-class history, from slavery to post-colonialism.

The underlying thesis of *The Politics of Labour in the British Caribbean* is that the political involvement of the working class was a result of the economic crisis of the 1930s which intensified the long-developing social changes. Bolland also argues that members of the middle class who were forming political parties benefited from the simultaneous development and growth of trade unions.

The vast and diverse primary and secondary sources that Bolland consulted reflect his painstaking and noteworthy efforts in compiling such a study. The book's ten chapters are divided into two sections—the first part, appropriately entitled “The Origins of Organised Labour” and the second, “The Institutionalisation of Labour Politics.” Bolland depicts, as accurately as possible, the evolution of the British Caribbean's labour movement during a tumultuous period of colonialism. He focuses primarily on the politics of labour between 1934 and 1954 and utilizes a multi-disciplinary approach.

Bolland identifies three charismatic authoritarian labour leaders who also possessed political ambitions—Alexander Bustamante of Jamaica, T.U.B. Butler of Trinidad and Tobago and Eric Gairy of Grenada. He notes certain revealing characteristics of Butler and Bustamante: “Their messianic style and proprietorial approach to labour organisation led them to define the trade unions, . . . as if they were their personal property, with a consequent authoritarian disregard for accountability or democratic procedures” (p.530). It is interesting that despite both the attainment of self-government and passage through a variety of political upheavals and cultural changes, this pattern of behaviour has persisted among trade union leaders in some of the West Indian territories.

Bolland acknowledges the role of women in the Caribbean labour movement, especially as seamstresses, nurses, domestic

workers and agricultural labourers. He accurately views the denial to women of leadership roles among trade unions and political parties as originating from “the traditional sexism of the political culture and the wider social context” (p. 663).

*The Politics of Labour in the British Caribbean* does have some shortcomings: the book’s title does not give the date of the study’s historical framework, and the lengthy historical perspectives tend to obscure Bolland’s analyses and arguments and undermine the impact of his comparative approach. The book also contains two fundamental historical flaws which cannot be easily dismissed. Bolland states that there were five elected seats for the Legislative Council in Trinidad and Tobago under the Constitution of 1925 (p. 204), when in fact there were seven. And he claims that the Grenada Workingmen’s Association was formed in 1931 (p. 204) when it was actually formed two years earlier (see *Labour Leader* 16th November 1929).

The book contains two related chapters which might better have been merged or placed consecutively, as they deal with concurrent issues: Chapter 4 “Racial Consciousness and Class Formation,” and Chapter 9 “Class and Ethnicity in the Politics of Decolonisation.” Despite the minor problems, Bolland’s effort deserves commendation and respect. Undoubtedly, it paints a more complete picture than we had of labour’s struggles in the British Caribbean. This comprehensive and valuable study will prove to be one of the scholarly masterpieces of Caribbean history.

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*A Narrative of Events, since the First of August, 1834*, by James Williams, an Apprenticed Labourer in Jamaica. Ed. and with an Introduction by Diana Paton. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001, 141 pp.

The work provides a treasury of information relating to a short pamphlet, twenty-four pages in length and published in London and Glasgow in June 1837. It remains the only existing slave narrative which uses Creole or dialect as the main form of expression. The pamphlet entitled *A Narrative of Events, since the First of August, 1834*, by James Williams, an Apprenticed Labourer in Jamaica, played a pivotal role in the abolition of the apprenticeship system. The book, edited by Diana Paton, a History lecturer at the University of Newcastle, illuminates the argument that historical forces which shaped Jamaica's past were unique yet similar to those existing in other Caribbean colonies. An obvious contribution of the publication is its emphasis on two lesser known figures and their monumental contributions. The first being the author of the pamphlet, James Williams, and secondly, Joseph Sturge, who was the leader of the anti-apprenticeship movement.

The publication of *A Narrative of Events* had a profound impact throughout England. During December 1837 to March 1838, more than 130 public meetings, denouncing apprenticeship, were held in Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England. Such gatherings drew thousands of anti-apprenticeship supporters seeking an immediate end to the labour scheme which replaced slavery.

Without detracting from the work's merits, it would be a grave historical error to attribute the publication of this pamphlet as being the sole catalyst which led to the demise of apprenticeship. The impact of Williams's work cannot be seen in isolation but juxtaposed with the plethora of sermons, tracts, petitions, meetings and newspaper articles which reinforced the anti-apprenticeship campaign and hastened the demise of an inhumane and exploitative system in the British West Indies.

A distinct quality of Williams's *A Narrative of Events* is that it explores the relationship between state representatives and labour. This contrasts to other slave narratives of the broad African diasporic tradition such as Mary Prince and Olaudah Equiano. The thought-provoking and controversial chapter, "A Report of Evidence Taken at Brown's Town and St. Ann's Bay" provided a

graphic account of the brutal punishment and injustices endured by blacks in the colony of Jamaica.

Paton's appropriate inclusion of a final chapter entitled "Additional Documents" provides vital insight into the personalities of the period. This concluding piece included letters from Joseph Sturge and also correspondence of persons who sought to undermine the credibility of Williams. A noteworthy feature of the pamphlet, produced by Williams, is the attempt at objectivity and accurate depiction of events. It was therefore difficult for his detractors to present alternative opinions with credible evidence.

Undoubtedly, the testimonial narratives of Caribbean slaves will be a valuable primary source for both scholars and students, seeking compact yet detailed information on the resistance of apprentices to this new system of control, conditions at the St. Ann's Bay House of Correction and the differences among magistrates, planters and apprentices. The explanatory and elaborate endnotes serve to elucidate any readers who are unfamiliar with the linguistic terrain in which the pamphlet is crafted. The objective of illuminating readers is expertly achieved without diminishing the work's originality.

In retrospect, *A Narrative of Events* is a judiciously edited work which vividly demonstrates the manner in which certain records could be marginalized, overlooked and misinterpreted. This publication will prove to be an invaluable asset for historians in understanding the first-hand experiences of Jamaican apprentices and the evolution of the vibrant transatlantic anti-apprenticeship campaign.

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