Book Reviews

Jinee Lokan, Editor

Governing through Crime in South Africa: The Politics of Race and Class in Neoliberalizing Regimes. By Gail Super. Dorchester: Ashgate, 2013. 182 pp. $ 98.96.

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In ways more similar than different, crime policies in South Africa after the end of formal apartheid play out in a field where the poor are not well represented and indeed where punitive penal policies absurdly reinforce the inequality of the society. So argues Gail Super in *Governing through Crime in South Africa*. Super's raw material in this well-researched book comes from her focus on "official criminology"—state discourses about crime and criminality (pp. 6–7). These discourses are a form of communication and are themselves performative. Using this material, Super shows how the politics of race and class in post-apartheid South Africa under the conditions of neo-liberalism have led to a place where criminal justice and prisons policy appear to exhibit more continuity than change—despite the new democratic government led for more than twenty years now by the former liberation movement, the African National Congress (ANC).

As a historical case study spanning late apartheid, the transition, and post-apartheid South Africa, Super's work perhaps is inherently inclined toward examining the continuities of the new with the old. While this fits with much of the best recent scholarship on crime and policing in South Africa (Altbeker 2005; Hornberger 2013), others call for an emphasis on the discontinuity (Steinberg 2014). In any case, Super's analysis is nuanced and careful. It is not simply old wine in new bottles. Working at the messy and fertile intersection of crime and governance, Super refreshes and complicates the simple distinction that sees apartheid as bad and post-apartheid as better (or perhaps just not-so-bad).

As even a casual reader of the major newspapers in South Africa would become aware, crime and its management have become a central issue in the governance of post-apartheid South Africa. Productively drawing on Foucauldian themes, one chapter follows directly on Super's previously published work on the

spectacle of crime in post-apartheid South Africa (Super 2010). She details how the relationship between crime and politics changed as the African National Congress (ANC) went from a liberation movement to a ruling party. Likewise, the relationship between crime and race changed as blacks moved from the oppressed to the governing majority—Super has less to say about gender. In the new South Africa, crime has become subjected to more intensive measurement techniques but simultaneously has become an object through which governing occurs. Thus the halt to the publication of crime statistics by the ANC Minister of Safety and Security in 2000 justifies Super's contention that "the ANC government used denial and refusal to divulge information as a tactic of rule—just as the NP [National Party] government had done before it" (p. 39).

Continuity also figures in the discussion in *Governing through Crime in South Africa* about the country's shift to neoliberal macroeconomic policies. Super dates the start of neoliberal policies in South Africa to the early 1980s, under the white National Party government: a shift from "racial Fordism" to privatization (p. 9). Post-apartheid, Super describes how the new democratic government has unexpectedly taken stances in favor of imprisonment and without mention of or attention to the structural causes of crime. In this engagement with neoliberalism and its effects, Super follows Jonathan Simon in seeing not only the repressive side of crime control but also its softer and enabling effects (Simon 2007).

Indeed, for Super, the continuities continue. Where others have depicted a shift from early post-apartheid days of community based crime prevention to a later (from the late 1990s or 2000) era of getting tough, she emphasizes the linkages and points of intersection in both language about criminals and in the penal complex. The change in the discourse is from various individual criminal figures—"the drug addict, pass law offender, rondloper (street walker), vagrant and 'idle and undesirable'"—to new notions at a different level of social organization—"organized crime, the supercriminal, and the corporatized street gang" (p. 9). With respect to the penal complex, Super nicely works within discourse theory to argue that the new image of a restorative prison has been constitutive of the new South African democracy. Using the same target categories "poor black and colored males, black foreigners, and drug users," post-transition these categories have been punished less through hangings and whippings (with the former practice truly ended) but rather through long-term imprisonment and a shift from prisons to corrections. Prisons 20 years after the end of apartheid serve both to shore up the sense that the democratic government is serious about crime and also to signal that the government is serious in a different way—not

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focused on the death penalty but at least with good intentions of humanizing punishment (p. 129).

The chapters surveyed above on crime-as-spectacle (pp. 19–40) and governing through the penal complex (pp. 107–131) are perhaps the most striking. Others examine official explanations for the causes of crime in South Africa and constructions of criminality. Here, Super pertinently notes "[t]he fiction at the heart of the argument that employment causes crime is that work is in fact unattainable for many people in South Africa, given the high unemployment rates" (p. 42). The official explanations of crime causation she identifies cumulatively serve to shore up post-apartheid state legitimacy (p. 54). Further, the steady growth of the discourse of community policing in South Africa is due to its capacity to appeal at the same time to the democratic movement, to bureaucrats of the apartheid state's neoliberal turn as well as to those within the world of international security sector consultants (p. 105).

The strength of this book is in its nuancing and making uneven both the apartheid and the post-apartheid smooth accounts of the politics of crime. Not many anti-apartheid activists (whether local or extraterritorially based) will have remembered or been aware that the same 1982 Internal Security Bill always cited for increasing periods in detention for political offences also abolished mandatory minimum sentences as part of an apartheid-era reform (p. 108). Super's *Governing through Crime in South Africa* makes good on its promise to present a nuanced description and analysis of the contemporary history of South African crime policy and should quickly make its way into the bibliographies of comparative criminology and law and society scholars.

References

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AQ1: Please provide the place of publication for the reference Alt-beker 2005.

AQ2: Please check whether the insertion of closing quotes before (p. 9) is appropriate.