

INKATHA WARRIOR MASCULINITIES

Waetjen, T (2004) **Workers & warriors. Masculinity and the struggle for nation in South Africa**. Cape Town: HSRC Press. ISBN 13 978-0769-2171-0. Pages 168.

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This book is a reprint of an American edition of the same work published in 2004 (Waetjen, 2004). The HSRC Press is to be commended for bringing out the book in paperback format and at an affordable price. The work presents some very important ideas, hitherto neglected, to my knowledge, about the notion of *home* in homeland and the way in which gender relations have played themselves out in Inkatha politics. It also explores a range of ways in which Buthelezi and Inkatha sought to contest the hegemony of the United Democratic Front/African National Congress/Congress of South African Trade Unions by appealing to specific notions of masculinity based on relatively static notions of what “being Zulu” requires. In many cases, these notions interfaced well with opposition to militant and particularly guerrilla struggles and also coexisted well with the concerns preoccupying capital from the late 1970s to separate the objections to apartheid from the continued existence of capitalism.

While many sections of capital did not support majority rule, they nevertheless did not want the capitalist mode of production to go down the drain together with apartheid. Buthelezi was a key figure or the most significant leadership figure that supported this cause and mobilised his supporters to act in a manner that conformed to this message. This was a time when Buthelezi had the doors of Downing Street and the White House opened to him while Oliver Tambo had to see junior officials – insofar as the African National Congress (ANC) secured any access at all.

Workers and warriors displays both complexity and sometimes operates in short hand, adopting concepts that are unexplained, inadequately explained or the use of which is not justified.

To deal first with the complexity: The book is an account of a movement, Inkatha, whose fortunes rise and fall. Masculinist imagery is a central part of this movement’s mode of opposing the organisations and ideological trends that challenge areas where it may at times have enjoyed a high degree of hegemony. Waetjen’s careful scrutiny of speeches, especially those of Buthelezi and Zwelithini, yield important insights into the way particular forms of mobilisation were intended to intersect with a specific notion of

masculinity; a gendered message that is commended in a different idiom for Zulu women, reinforcing a patriarchal idea, within the context of general support for Inkatha. Personally, I must admit that the idea of reading these rather long-winded speeches was itself a deterrent and consequently, the important material that Waetjen provides tended to escape me and I had until now only a generalised sense of their importance. Much of this discourse aims at depicting Inkatha as a national organisation, but through using discourse applicable only or primarily to Zulu people. In my view, Waetjen does not make as much as appears necessary to address this contradiction.

I found the chapter on the use of the word “homeland” in a number of different ways, but especially in relation to migrant workers, particularly useful. Waetjen shows how the use of the physical space of KwaZulu provides an opportunity to build unity, connect people to a particular space and history that is presented in predominantly martial terms (while distancing itself from armed struggle). At the same time, the notion of “home” and the way in which women should serve the “nation” is gendered in relatively conventional ways, although in this case, the interface between the political entity, Inkatha, and gender serves to cement people under a common Zulu identity distinct from other peoples, coming from warrior stock and possessing other qualities not always found amongst other people in South Africa. This emphasis on distinctiveness obviously creates definite barriers to Inkatha projecting itself as a national organisation (As indicated, this is a key issue on which Waetjen is largely silent or ambiguous).

It is interesting how the song Waetjen draws on (the second song, 83) depicts migrancy as a place of exile and how the home left behind is romanticised. In contradistinction, the literature and oral evidence on the ANC external exile experience tends to express pain regarding departure on a personal level, for example, not saying goodbye and leaving children behind. It is generally not a specific home that is longed for but primarily a re-connection with the family that comprised a household and needed to be reunited (Bernstein, 1994). The ANC exiles tended not to dwell on a loss of physical space to which they were likely to return, at least after the first group left, expecting to return after six months (Personal interview, Eric Mtshali). Many made a stable life outside South Africa. In fact, many have not returned and some feel more at home in parts of London than in South Africa. Experiences of course varied, with those who were in Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) (ANC military wing) camps being more connected to South Africa and returning home, though even then the notion of home was likely to be less specific than that depicted by Buthelezi. But the notion of home does not appear to figure prominently, and where it does, the discourse is very different. In fact, the ANC and South African Communist Party (SACP) tended to eschew the term “homeland” preferring the word “bantustan”, and referred to the whole of South Africa as the “homeland” of the African people.

This use of “home” (54) is also used to contrast the home-based Inkatha to the “exiled ANC”. Waetjen appears to accept this contrast, but it needs to be subjected to considerable qualification. In the first place, the ANC left *and* stayed within South Africa in that there was an underground from the earliest days after the Rivonia Trial (Suttner, 2008). Secondly, there were many ANC supporters who could not connect formally with an illegal organisation and had to freelance, doing everything that a conventional ANC member would do. While I believe that Waetjen tends to elide the United Democratic Front (UDF) and ANC too readily, there is a sense in which UDF members, especially the leadership, saw themselves as being part of the ANC. At a meeting in February

1986, which I attended in Sweden, Oliver Tambo did refer to the UDF leadership, as the “internal ANC leadership”.

In general, Waetjen’s book presents a complex and nuanced picture of how deeply notions of masculinity of a specific character were embraced within the message that Inkatha addressed to its menfolk and the distinct way in which it sought to mobilise women, but without disrupting patriarchal relations.

That being said, it is my sense that the author is rather careless with terminology. There is never any explanation for the description of the Zulu people as a nation and the struggle of Inkatha as one for nationhood. This notion conforms to certain conceptions of the nation where it is understood essentially as ethnically pure or relatively so. However, how does this interface with the broader South African nation and how sustainable does such an ethnic concept remain? At times, one has the sense that Inkatha is abstracted from any broader nation-building project of the time.

Furthermore, the author elides concepts over which there has been considerable contestation, such as “liberal democracy”, which is attributed to the ANC and UDF, as well as “national struggle” or “national democratic struggle”. In much of the 1980s, when Waetjen’s research was conducted, the difference between the American civil rights struggle for liberal democracy and civil rights was contrasted by ANC and UDF with a national struggle for self-determination. Why is this counter-characterisation not argued, instead of brushing aside what was an accepted position amongst what was probably the majority of anti-apartheid organisations of the time?

The resultant democratic outcome is simply characterised as “liberal democracy”. Is this beyond argument? Does one ignore the ANC-led liberation movement’s characterisation of its struggle as national democratic and does it not evoke a range of potential meanings, some of which go beyond liberal or representative democracy? In fact, at the time when this research was being done, there had been a period of popular power, admittedly not strongly manifested in Natal, where grassroots democracy in street committees and other structures appeared, thus indicating that for many people, the notion of democracy they saw themselves building went beyond representative or liberal democracy. In fact, an informant in Uitenhage, in speaking of crime control measures, spoke of his community implementing the first clause of the Freedom Charter, “The People Shall govern!” (Personal interview, Weza Made).

Given these qualifications, I nevertheless believe this work to be an important addition to the still slender scholarship on masculinities in South African political struggles.

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