



P. BONNER *et al.* (eds). *Holding their ground: class, locality and culture in 19th and 20th century South Africa*. History Workshop 4. Ravan Press & Witwatersrand University Press: Johannesburg, 1989. 318 pp. Illus. R34,95 (exclusive).

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Since its first publication in 1979 the *History Workshop* series has established itself as a showcase of revisionist writers of South Africa history. This work is a selection of papers read at the fourth History Workshop Conference at the University of the Witwatersrand held in February 1987. While the open day of the 1987 work-

shop — intended 'to involve people in reinterpreting their past' (p. vi) — is discussed in the preface, the book is rather a reflection of the academic part of the workshop.

As with previous workshops, the theme of the conference — 'The making of class' — reflects the approach of historical materialism to the history of South Africa. The nine papers (not eight as mentioned on p. 1) were apparently selected as representative of the issues community, class, culture and consciousness.

In the introduction by Bonner and Lodge themes relevant to the nine papers are discussed. These include the creation and defence of illegal space by black urban communities as well as the establishment of an alternative cultural milieu in these communities. The issue of ethnicity, the political co-optation of sections of black society to it and resistance against it are also addressed in a few papers.

As was the case with previous books in the series, the local/regional emphasis of papers remains a strong point. The papers by La Hausse and Edwards about aspects of life in the city of Durban clearly illustrate the value of such studies to highlight the local character of events. La Hausse looks at the development of a distinct local political culture in Durban during 1925-1930 with specific reference to the relationship between the labouring poor in Durban and the ICU yase Natal. In his paper Edwards shows that the co-operative movement was the real base for African political expression during the late 1940s in Durban while the political parties and trade unions were stagnating.

Eales looks at the inclusion of African women under the curfew regulations in Johannesburg in 1925 and 1930. She emphasizes the important role of class in the protest against this extension of the pass laws. While the resistance against the pass laws can be easily viewed as a unified response, Eales indicates that the reaction of the African middle classes in Johannesburg was based on the erosion of their status as a distinct and privileged elite.

Sapire's paper clearly illustrates the value of historical focus on the locality or region. She discusses the patterns of permanent African settlement in the small Reef town of Brakpan prior to the establishment of a separate location for the African inhabitants in 1927. The paper demonstrates that not even in the Witwatersrand area (usually treated as a geographic unit) did the evolution of urban segregation take place in a typical way.

In his discussion of the role of the liberally inspired joint councils in black politics in the Orange Free State during 1925-1942, Rich also examines

the activity of the joint council movement on local level with regard to trading licences for blacks in Kroonstad. Hyslop indicates in his paper that the inability of the school boards and school committees to win popular support on local level contributed greatly towards the failure of Bantu education during the period 1955-1976.

The much neglected issue of ethnicity is addressed by Delius in his paper on the defeat of the Ndzundza chiefdom in 1883 and the response of the Ndzundza Ndebele to the process of division and indenture. Delius views the strong ethnic identity and traditional culture of the Southern Ndebele as part of their reaction to conquest and dispossession. Hofmeyr looks at ethnicity as expressed in the narrative of English settlers in the Waterberg at the turn of the century. Like the African communities, these settlers attempted to 'create a sense of space and community' (p. 13) within their new surroundings through writing about the region.

In the final contribution the value of local studies to describe the unique character of a locality is clearly illustrated. Nasson uses oral evidence to create a vivid picture of the leisure activities of the mostly working-class inhabitants of District Six from the 1920s to the 1950s. He indicates how these activities contributed to the shaping of their lives and to the creation of a class consciousness among inhabitants.

The nine papers in this work cover a wide spectrum. As a result the book will probably be consulted for a specific paper rather than be read from cover to cover. Notwithstanding, it is another worthy contribution to the History Workshop tradition in South Africa.

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