

## BOOK REVIEWS

*uDume njengo phuthu*<sup>1</sup>

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168 pp, R103)

Clive Glaser, *The ANC Youth League*

Simphiwe Ngwane

*The Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER)*

*University of the Witwatersrand*

ngwane23@gmail.com

Clive Glaser offers an engaging, short ‘pocket history’, which is still thorough and detailed with the complexities of the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) organisational history. The ANCYL, synonymous with populist Julius ‘Jujū’ Malema’s ‘antics’, ‘the once lean and hungry adolescent became distinctly plump’ (p136) from government tenders, this image has over-shadowed and possibly blemished the history of the ANCYL. Glaser attempts to write a history of the entire lifespan of the ANCYL from its inception in the 1940s until March 2012, using secondary sources and make the book accessible to a non-academic audience. ‘Human beings entering inter relations of many different kinds with others, through which they construct meanings and narratives and fashion their identities, writers must recognize multiple narratives, intersecting, and cross-cutting each other, recognizing one ‘voice’ among others’.<sup>2</sup> Glaser uses political biographies beautifully to trek the ANCYL’s history.

Through the usage of political characters Glaser affirms that a nation is its people and its people are the organizing forces that bring about change. Each individual be it the ANCYL presidents or background thinkers; provided tangential and vibrant arsenals of characteristics which shaped the ANCYL. The Transvaal Youth leaguer Potlako Kitchener Leballo through the ex-facia of the pages can be linked to Julius Malema, or rather the other way around, Malema’s radicalism can be likened to Leballo’s ‘instinctive populist rather than an intellectual’ (p54) demeanour and ad hominem attacks.

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1 An isiZulu saying which means, “As widely known as maize meal pap is to the masses.”

2 C. Rassool, “Rethinking Documentary History and South African Political Biography”, *South African Review of Sociology*, 41(1), 2010, p. 47.

The current Youth League likes to draw comparisons between itself and the generation of Mandela and Co. which founded the movement in the 1940s and effectively seized control of the ANC in 1949 (8) throughout the book Glaser keeps the conclusion, entitled *Class of '44 vs. Class of '04* apparent and muses on the possible extent of such liberties.

The story of the Congress Youth League begins in the early 1940s, and Glaser marks the election of Dr Alfred Xuma to the presidency of the ANC in 1940 as representing an important turning point in the life of the movement, as he was a member of the elite, and never related comfortably to the uneducated masses (pp. 14-15). Xuma was pragmatic when it came to cooperation with leftists and non-Africans, and this was the yeast which saw the gradual rise of the Youth league. The ANC felt it was worth working strategically within state-subsidised advisory structures, such as township Advisory Boards and the new NRC. Glaser provides rich detail on the milieu of the era with rapid urbanization and industrialization, coupled with Xuma welcoming African Communists into the ANC, signing the 'Doctors'Pact', co-operating with General Jan Smuts' 'war liberalism' plans and his stance on paternalist 'trusteeship' towards blacks. Glaser argues that all these decisions and debates were germane and pertinent to the formation of the Youth League.

Urbanization brought many black people into Johannesburg's townships, which became 'an extraordinary melting pot of young educated Africans' (p. 20), two of these being Ashby. P. Mda and Anton Lembede, the inspirational figures in the Congress Youth League and the architects of the ANCYL. Mda rejected all vestiges of Smuts' trusteeship and segregation, he felt it was time for Africans to stop cooperating with all government institutions and challenge white power more directly, and his ideas resonated with a number of young educated men in Johannesburg who were frustrated with the slow pace of change (p. 23). Anton Lembede was responsible for the term 'Africanism' which described his brand of nationalism. These and other men sort ways to influence the 'frustratingly staid ANC from within'. In the lead-up to the ANC's December 1943 congress, they met with Xuma to discuss the possibility of forming a youth league in the ANC, although concerned about their militancy, Xuma felt that they could 'bring new energy to the organization and attract an important new constituency' (p. 29). 'The ANCYL, it was made clear, was never to set itself up in opposition to the mother body but rather to change it from within, to help the ANC to represent the African masses more effectively and more robustly' (p. 30). The ANCYL was inspired by mass

action, but initially it was not an organization of the masses, members being high school and college students and professionals.

In the build up to the ANC conference in Bloemfontein in 1949 the ANCYL decided to develop a programme of action; they approached Xuma with it and he reacted angrily, the ANCYL approached James Moroka to be their candidate as they had lost faith in Xuma. The Programme of Action was endorsed and Moroka narrowly won the presidency, even though many in the 'old guard dismissed the youngsters as cheeky, irresponsible and impulsive' (p. 12). Between 1949 and 1951 the Youth Leaguers succeeded in transforming the ANC into a more assertive African nationalist movement (p. 41). Although in the 1950s the Youth League stopped criticising the senior body and became a loyal section of the ANC.

With the ANCYL ceasing to exist as from the 1960s with the banning of political parties, chapter four provides a detailed history of the many youth organizations that sprouted. It is in this chapter that Glaser's attempt of writing a whole history of the ANCYL in a pocket book seems a bit grandiose and splinters, 'carrying' the reader awkwardly, a lot of information is offered but it's not tied together well. With the ANC leaders in either exile or prison the Youth League was left to 'peter out' and a plethora of youth organizations sprouted leading into the 1980s which was known as the era of the 'comrade'; SASCO, NUSAS, SAYCO, 'for many activists, SAYCO, was quite simply the Congress Youth League in a new guise' (p. 97). 1991 was the rebirth of the ANCYL, under the leadership of Peter Mokaba, through the years some leadership were more ideologically aligned to the ANC and were calm and in other period's views would differ.

Glaser references William Gumede's description of 'a gravity-defying somersault' (p. 121) to describe the 2009 political events which saw Fikile Mbalula retract support for Thabo Mbeki and rally support for Jacob Zuma. But how influential is the ANCYL, or does it take liberties in calling itself a 'kingmaker'? Glaser argues that its influence is important, but not overwhelming (p. 131). The ANCYL's April 2009 conference where Malema was voted in was characterised by ill discipline, which in many ways Glaser posits, it was befitting. Three years later Malema was expelled from the ANCYL for sowing divisions and bring the party into disrepute (p. 147).

Glaser's concluding notes; *Class of '44 vs. Class of '04*, draws fascinating parallels between these two 'classes', Mda, Lambede and the Youth Leagues success in 1949 with the Youth Leaguers taking 7 of the 15 National Executive

Committee positions, whereas in Polokwane the ANCYL simply backed a senior faction that won (p. 155). A contrast in ideologies also exists, the class of '44 believed in Booker T. Washington's idea of 'self-help' as appose to what might now be called 'help yourself' (p. 156), Where Peter Mokaba made his wealth through hair salons, Julius Malema made it through government tenders, 'lift as you rise' has been rendered a red-herring. By in large, Glaser succeeds in his objectives, and has written a book of profound utility for anyone who cares to learn more about the history of the ANCYL.

*'n Meer inklusiewe benadering tot die Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika*

(Tafelberg, Kaapstad, 2012, ISBN: 978-0-624-05466-5, 640 pp, R285)

**Fransjohan Pretorius (Red), *Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika: Van voortye tot vandag***

Marietjie Oelofse

*Department Geskiedenis*

*Universiteit van die Vrystaat*

oelofsem@ufs.ac.za

Nog 'n toevoeging tot die Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedskrywing word gemaak deur die boek *Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika: Van voortye tot vandag*, onder die redakteurskap van Prof. Fransjohan Pretorius. Die boek is die gevolg van 'n leemte wat aangespreek is tydens 'n simposium van die Geskiedeniskommissie van die Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns in 2006. Tydens die geleentheid is die begeerte uitgespreek vir 'n "omvattende geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika", waar die pendulum meer in die middel is betreffende die geskiedskrywing van Suid-Afrika. Dus, waar die geskiedskrywing meer gebalanseerd is en wegbeweeg van die vroeëre sterk Afrikaner- of blanksentriese benadering na die huidige sterker fokus op swart versetbewegings of die "struggle"-benadering. Kortom: die ambisieuse projek is van stapel gestuur "ter wille van versoening en wedersydse begrip onder die verskillende kulturele en politieke groepe".

As gerekende navorsers is die medeskrywers van hierdie publikasie terdeë bewus daarvan dat totale neutraliteit en objektiwiteit in geskiedskrywing 'n strewe bly en word onomwonde in die inleiding verklaar dat, ten spyte van die ideaal om 'n meer gebalanseerde geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika te boek te stel,