

## BOOK REVIEWS

EVANS, IVAN. *Cultures of Violence. Lynching and radical killing in South Africa and the American South*. Manchester University Press, Manchester [etc.] 2009. x, 310 pp. £65.00; doi:10.1017/S0020859011000010

Violence is a notoriously tricky phenomenon to subject to sociological analysis, not least because of the diversity of social practices yoked together under its name. Ivan Evans's comparative study of the cultures of racial violence during the segregation periods in South Africa and the American South is a significant contribution not only to the comparative analysis of racial domination, but also to the disaggregation and study of violence itself.

Private or unofficial violence by whites against blacks was pervasive in South Africa and the American South. In both cases, state institutions were responsible for both official and informal coercion and violence to uphold the racial order. Yet there was a major difference: unofficial communal violence in the form of lynching was "fundamental to the making of segregation in the American South but almost entirely unknown in South Africa" (p. 6). Why this should have been so is the subject of Evans's study. In pursuing the similarities and differences in unofficial or extra-legal racial violence in the two societies he significantly extends the range of comparative study on the dynamics of racial order, and at the same time enriches our understanding of the way popular repertoires of violence are shaped by the character of state–society relations.

The periods covered by this study are those of post-bellum reconstruction through to the consolidation of segregation (post-Anglo-Boer War to the 1930s for South Africa, post-Civil War to the 1930s for the American South). In brief, Evans's argument is that in South Africa whites relied on a unitary centralized state to establish and maintain the racial order, deploying both bureaucratic regimes of control as well as direct coercion by state agents, whereas in the American South distrust of the federal state combined with a plebeian culture of extra-legal interpersonal violence led whites to rely on communal violence to maintain the subjugation of the black population. Evans approaches his analysis of unofficial racial violence through examining three institutions: racially coercive labour markets, the character of the dominant white religion, and the nature of the legal system.

With regard to the labour market, South African employers and white workers turned to the state to secure their interests by establishing the pass laws and administrative bureaucracy to channel a cheap but differentiated supply of labour to the mines, farms, and industries of emerging capitalism, and by creating a system of job reservation and public sector employment for white labour. When white labour did engage in violent mass struggles, these were directed at white employers and the state rather than directly against black competitors in the labour market. On the few occasions when whites did unleash collective violence against blacks, state organs moved rapidly to reassert control and white crowds evaporated with little resistance.

In contrast, white landowners and the white working class in the American South were unable to rely on the federal state, but enacted hideous displays of communal violence in the form of lynching, so as to affirm publicly the continuation of white supremacy, ensure the continued subjugation of sharecropper labour on the farms, and curtail the competition of cheap black labour in industry. After the defeat of Reconstruction, state and local

authorities were free to adopt both official and unofficial policies that decisively reinstated white supremacy, such as disenfranchisement legislation, debt peonage, and prison labour, but lynching remained central to racial domination.

The dominant religion of white Afrikaners in South Africa was the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), which refrained from advocating violence and stressed that black South Africans were human beings with souls. With the emergence of poor whites as a social phenomenon, the DRC adopted a social gospel for improving the social and economic conditions of whites, and advocated a native policy of segregation on the part of the state. It, like employers and workers, was orientated towards a strong and interventionist state.

In contrast, white evangelism in the American South developed a theology of individual redemption from which the idea of a social gospel or of the state as actor were largely absent. A theology of retributive justice concerned with guilt and punishment in which violence was both a destructive and redemptive force, provided a powerful symbolic framework for lynching.

The legal systems in both South Africa and the American South were ambiguous in the way they treated unofficial racial violence, but in different ways, which contributed to the different trajectories of extra-legal violence in the two countries. The organization of white domination through the apparatus of a centralized state created a system based on structural violence rather than direct personal violence. Nonetheless, South African society was characterized by a “quiet but relentless carnage” (p. 223) of private unofficial violence by whites against blacks, particularly associated with coercive labour regimes on the farms and in the mining industry. Although the white legal system functioned according to elaborate codes of impartiality and legal formalism, and did on occasion hand down severe punishment for racial murder, in the majority of cases it tolerated or condoned racial violence and meted out trivial punishments. On the other hand, it tended not to tolerate communal violence by whites against blacks.

In the antebellum American South, the law was applied off-plantation and did not interfere with planters’ rule over their domain. At the same time, a pervasive code of “popular justice” sanctioned extralegal violence to settle personal disputes. After the Civil War, the tradition of extra-legal violence merged with hostility to federal authority to produce the tradition of communal violence in civil society as a way of asserting the codes of white supremacy outside the courts. This does not mean that the legal system was irrelevant to lynching. On the contrary, the entire legal system in the American South colluded with blatant and highly visible rituals of violence where the perpetrators were known public figures. Nor was the Supreme Court exempt from this collusion, as it endorsed the “rights of states” doctrine through which it tied its own hands from intervening.

Evans demonstrates, through nuanced but lucid historical accounts, that the different characters of state–society relations in South Africa and the American South produced distinctive forms of unofficial or extra-legal racial violence, making good use of examples drawn from the extensive literature on both countries, as well as archival research in South Africa, to illustrate his general arguments. I particularly liked his analysis of the rare incidents of white communal racial violence in South Africa, for instance during the 1922 Rand Revolt and the Umvoti riots in 1928, which, far from undermining his general case, reinforces his conclusion that white crowds deferred to state authority.

There are puzzling lacunae though. What accounts for the different trajectories of state and society in the two countries? The reader could be excused for concluding that this was predominantly a matter of different ideologies and dispositions in the two white populations. A broader historical frame might have helped – surely a white-settler society

surrounded by a majority black population dispossessed by colonial conquest, necessarily has different historical options from a settler society concerned with subjugating a black minority of former slaves imported from elsewhere, especially when it constitutes a region of a larger federal polity? Evans alludes several times to the anxiety of the white authorities in South Africa about potential black resistance, but never relates this to the larger historical picture.

At a more detailed level, the DRC in South Africa comes across as relatively benign, especially compared with the virulent racism and violence of Southern evangelism in the US. Evans does not make strongly enough the point that its support for segregation constituted a theological justification for systematic structural violence on a vast scale. He also tends to blur structural violence and the coercive violence of the South African state. To what extent did the repeated massacres of defenceless blacks by the armed whites of the state apparatus which, as he notes (p. 7), was an ongoing feature of the white state in the twentieth century, constitute a specific form of communal white ritual, drawing on colonial repertoires and reproduced *within* the state rather than in civil society as in the American South? Turning to the US, I was surprised to learn of the extent to which whites were lynched both before and after the Civil War, but disappointed not to find the relationship between this and the lynching of blacks discussed.

These caveats are a minor. Evans's book is thought-provoking, and productively suggests fresh lines of research. For example, while the white population in South Africa turned to the state rather than resorting to communal violence, the anti-apartheid struggle in the 1980s gave rise to communal and ritualized violence against collaborators on the part of the popular movement. Campaigns of popular justice in revolutionary South Africa bore certain similarities to the tradition of popular justice in the American South, although in the context of vastly differing power relations. Even more interesting, this tradition of extra-legal popular justice continues into the new South Africa in vigilante actions against suspected criminals as well as the repertoires of xenophobic violence that have emerged in the past few years. How do state-society relations in post-apartheid South Africa bear on these forms of collective violence?

Like all the best books, this one not only sheds light but generates new questions and new lines of enquiry.

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HUA, SHIPING. *Chinese Utopianism. A Comparative Study of Reformist Thought with Japan and Russia, 1898–1997*. Stanford University Press, Stanford [etc.] 2009. xvi, 186 pp. £28.94; doi:10.1017/S0020859011000095

Utopianism is a form of historical idealism that has existed throughout history. Utopias, ancient or modern, from the East or from the West, are expressions of social criticism that can be used by reformists of various kinds as blueprints or inspiration for making radical social reconstruction or transformation, despite the fact that utopias are by nature unrealistic and unattainable. Because of this, revolutions or reforms inspired by utopianism tend to end in dismal failure, and very often, utopianism causes more damage to society than the benefits it promises to bring about. Western scholars are familiar with classic utopian thinkers like Plato, Thomas More, or B.F. Skinner. Very few of them,