

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Review of AD Spiegel and PA McAllister (eds) (1991) - *Tradition and Transition in Southern Africa* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press; African Studies, 50(1&2)).

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This collection of 13 contributions (including an introduction by the editors) is a *festschrift* dedicated to the anthropologists Philip and Iona Mayer. It concludes with a bibliography of the Mayers' impressive written work spanning the period 1934 (when Philip Mayer completed his Doctoral thesis at the University of Heidelberg) until 1990.

The contributions cover a wide range of anthropological concerns, held together (if at times rather loosely) by the theme of 'tradition and its transformation in situations of social transition'. This theme was chosen because of the Mayers' 'particular contribution ... to the understanding of people's attempts to deal with social structural changes over which they themselves have little or no control' (1991:1).

The question, 'how do people use cultural resources to make sense for themselves of the social change around them', that was addressed by Philip and Iona Mayer, is relevant to contemporary studies, both locally and internationally as ethnic and national groups occupy much of the turbulent world stage.

William Beinart refers to this question when he contrasts, in his biographical note on the Mayers, the analysis of culture as dynamic (in *Townsmen or Tribesmen*) rather than the static vision imposed by apartheid. Beinart notes Philip Mayer's 'intellectual curiosity (which) led him in unlikely directions', and their deep opposition to racial discrimination and apartheid.

It is undoubtedly a mark of the breadth of the interests of the Mayers that so many of the contributions could refer in an unproblematic and unforced way to their influence on the approaches or material dealt with. Dunbar Moodie, writing on 'narratives of resistance on the South African gold mines'; Robin Palmer on 'Italian villagers in London'; McAllister on the use of ritual to resist domination in the Transkei; and Hammond-Tooke and Spiegel on 'kinship authority and political authority in pre-colonial South Africa' and 'extramarital relations in Lesotho', respectively, to take but a few examples.

That same breadth is also reflected in the range of contributions to this useful collection (published as a book, but also as the *African Studies* journal's fiftieth

anniversary volume). The editors note that 'it is... fitting that the contribution by David Webster should conclude this collection'. Webster's article is the last he wrote before he was assassinated, and deals with the gendered complexity of ethnic identities in the Kosi Bay area of Natal. This region of South Africa is undoubtedly that in which the status of and control over cultural resources, at issue in all the contributions in this collection, is most viciously fought over. Understanding is a necessary part of resolution, and the book does contribute to that process.