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Gangsters Nexus Urban Violence in South Africa: A Bibliographical Review

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Abstract:

There is scant literature in gangster's nexus urban violence in African towns and cities. Scholars did not take this issue as their subject of study. Only some prominent scholars tried their best to deal with this topic. Gary Kynoch is worth mentioning. This paper attempts to conduct bibliographical review on some research works of Gary Kynoch. It consulted ten (10) articles of Gary Kynoch dealing with gangster's nexus urban violence in different towns of South Africa. The articles were selected depending on the reviewer's access to them. Kynoch's articles cover the period from 1900s up to 1990s. This paper reviews Kynoch's articles focusing on the general history of urban violence in South Africa, the leading actors of the violence and their impact on the lives of the township and mine residents in South Africa. The major causes of the violence, the anthropological backgrounds of the actors of the violence and their general features are assessed in the author's research works. The author's articles also emphasize on the history of immigrant workers primarily the Chinese mineworkers and some major factors that hampered their effectiveness in the mining activities. These articles also focus on the role of Chinese police in aggravating the political and criminal violence in South Africa. Gary Kynoch's articles pay due attention to issues related to the impact of military development on the lives of South Africans.

Keywords: Gangs, urban violence, miners, immigrants, criminals

1. Introduction

Gary Kynoch is an associate professor of history at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. He is the author of numerous articles on crime, policing, and violence in urban South Africa. The last theme is the major concern of this review paper. Based on various articles wrote by Gary Kynoch, there was very frequent and destructive urban violence in South Africa. This marked survival in the country questionable. There were various leading actors of the violence. Mine residents in South Africa were seriously affected by the violence. The major actors of the urban violence in South Africa had different anthropological backgrounds.¹ The author's articles emphasize on the history of immigrant workers primarily the Chinese mineworkers and some major factors that hampered their effectiveness in the mining activities. His articles also focus on the share of Chinese police measures in aggravating the political and criminal violence in South Africa.² Military development of South Africa highly affected the lives of South Africans.³

Kynoch utilized both primary and secondary sources in articulating his articles. The major primary sources used by the author include correspondences, letters, official documents, reports and oral information. His secondary sources also include various journals, books and periodicals. Likewise, his articles can be categorized either under heavily dependent on primary sources⁴ or secondary sources.⁵

¹Gary Kynoch, "Urban Violence in Colonial Africa: A Case for South African Exceptionalism," *Journal of Southern Africa Studies*, 34, 3 (2008), pp.629-645., Idem, "Crime, Conflict and Politics: A Historical Account of Township Violence in Transition Era South Africa," *African Affairs*, 104, 416(2005), pp.1-19., Idem, "Friend or Foe? A World View of Community-Police Relations in Gauteng Townships, 1947-77," *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 37, 2/3(2003), pp.298-327., Idem, "A Man Among Men: Gender, Identity and Power in South Africa's Marashea Gangs," *Gender and History*, 13, 2(2001), pp.249-272., Idem, "Politics and Violence in the 'Russian zone': Conflict in Newclare South, 1950-1957," *Journal of African History*, 41,2(2000), pp.267-290., Idem, "Marashea on the Mines: Economic, Social and criminal Networks on the South African Gold Fields, 1947-1999," *Journal of Southern African studies*, 26,1(2000), pp.79-103., Idem, "From the Ninevites to the Hard Livings Gang: Township Gangsters and Urban Violence in Twentieth century South Africa," *African Studies*, 58,1(1999), pp.55-85.

²Gary kynoch, "Your Petitioners are in Mortal Terror: The Violent World of Chinese Mineworkers in South Africa, 1904-1910," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 31, 3(2005), pp.531-546., Idem, "Controlling the Coolies: Chinese Mineworkers and the Struggle for Labor in South Africa, 1904-1910," *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 36, 1(2003), pp.309-329.

³Gary Kynoch, "The 'Transformation' of the South African Military," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 34, 3(1996), pp.441-457.

⁴The major article predominantly used oral information (primary sources) is Gary Kynoch, "A Man Among Men..."

⁵Gary Kynoch, "Urban Violence..." Idem, "Friend or Foe..." are produced on the basis of secondary sources.

Meanwhile, majority of his articles are articulated with the corroboration of primary and secondary sources.⁶ Kynoch has utilized different methods such as analytical⁷, argumentative⁸ and descriptive⁹ approaches to address his issues effectively.

2. Urban Violence in South Africa

Kynoch is a prominent historian who produced many scholarly works on township violence in South Africa. He stated that due to several reasons South Africa had been one of the havens of disturbances in the world.¹⁰ The author illustrated that violence which has not direct link with political movements at a national level in South Africa had been given a scant attention in historical discourses.¹¹ He stated the long existence of gang activities in South Africa,¹² and demonstrated the inadequacy of the efforts made to identify the basic foundations of urban gangsterism in South Africa.¹³ Kynoch asserted that South Africa's "townships have proved a fertile breeding ground for criminal gangs."¹⁴

The author criticizes earlier studies for their scopes were restricted in the activities of gangs on the Rand in the first half of the 20th century.¹⁵ He noted that unlike their frequent mentions in the press reports of the post-apartheid era, gangs have never been elements of an academic research.¹⁶ He further underlined that the major focuses of these reports were on the black gangs while leaving aside the activities of white and Indian gangs.¹⁷ The author strongly believes that no comprehensive academic research had been conducted in the earlier times.

Notwithstanding violence being a burning issue of several colonial African nations, Kynoch argued, South Africa had been identified as a peculiar nation of intensive and persistent violence.¹⁸ In most of his articles, the author mentioned various factors attributed to the presence of the large scale urban violence in South Africa.¹⁹ The most widely mentioned causes of the violence include an inefficient policing,²⁰ competition for women,²¹ resources²² and territory,²³ poverty,²⁴ social anomies,²⁵ joblessness,²⁶ and political motives.²⁷ He also mentioned other causes such as segregation policy,²⁸ gambling debts,²⁹ large scale migration³⁰ and ethnic diversity.³¹ Kynoch rejected the argument of those scholars who tended to attribute the activities of gangs predominantly to a considerable level of political motives.³²

⁶Gary Kynoch, "Your Petitioners...", Idem, "From Ninevites...", Idem, "Marashea on the..." Idem, "Controlling the Coolies...", Idem, "Crime, Conflict and Violence...", Idem, "Politics and Violence...", Idem, "The 'Transformation' ..." are the results of the collaboration of both primary and secondary sources.

⁷See particularly his works on "Friend or Foe?...," Idem, "Urban Violence...", Idem, "From Ninevites...", Idem, "Your Petitioners...", Idem, "Marashea on the...", Idem, "Controlling the...", Idem, "Politics and Violence..." Idem, "The 'Transformation' ...", Idem, "A Man Among Men..."

⁸The following articles of the author can be best explained this. Gary Kynoch, "Crime, Conflict and Politics...", Idem, "From Ninevites...", Idem, "Politics and Violence...", Idem, "Marashea on the...", Idem, "A Man Among Men...", Idem, "The 'Transformation' ...", Idem, "Friend or Foe..."

⁹Gary Kynoch, "Marashea on the...", Idem, "Crime, Conflict and Politics...", Idem, "A Man among Men..." can be taken as cases in examples.

¹⁰ Gary Kynoch, "A Man Among Men...", p.250.

¹¹ Gary Kynoch, "Urban Violence...", p.629.

¹² Gary Kynoch, "From Ninevites...", p.55.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.59

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Gary Kynoch, "Urban Violence...", p.645.

¹⁹ Gary Kynoch, "Urban Violence...", pp.631-639., Idem, "From Ninevites...", pp.60-67., Idem, "Policies and Violence...", pp.267-269., Idem, "A Man Among Men...", p.254., Idem, "Marashea on the...", p.89., Idem, "Crime, Conflict and Politics...", pp.2-4., Idem, "Friend or Foe...", p.309., Idem, "Your Petitioners...", p.531.

²⁰Gary Kynoch, "Crime, Conflict and Politics...", p.4., Idem, "Politics and Violence...", p.269., Idem, "Your Petitioners...", p.531., Idem, "Friend or Foe...", p.309., Idem, "Urban Violence...", p.639., Idem, "From Ninevites...", p.60.

²¹Gary Kynoch, "Urban Violence...", p.633., Idem, "Crime, Conflict and Politics...", pp.3-7., Idem, "Marashea on the...", p.89.

²²Gary Kynoch, "Politics and Violence...", p.267., Idem, "Crime, Conflict and Politics...", p.3., Idem, "Your Petitioners...", p.531., Idem, "From Ninevites...", p.60.

²³ Gary Kynoch, "Crime, conflict and Politics...", pp.3-7., Idem, "Politics and Violence...", p.267., Idem, "Urban Violence...", p.633.

²⁴Gary Kynoch, "Crime, Conflict and Politics...", p.4., Idem, "Your Petitioners...", p.531., Idem, "Urban Violence...", p.639., Idem, "From Ninevites...", p.60., Idem, "The 'Transformation' ...", p.445.

²⁵Gary Kynoch, "Urban Violence...", p. 639., Idem, "From Ninevites...", p. 60., Idem, "Crime, Conflict and Politics...", p.4.

²⁶Gary Kynoch, "From Ninevites...", p.60., Idem, "Urban Violence...", p. 631., Idem, "Crime, Conflict and Politics...", p.5., Idem, "The 'Transformation' ...", p.446.

²⁷Gary Kynoch, "Crime, Conflict and Politics...", p.2., Idem, "Urban Violence...", p.631., Idem, "Politics and Violence...", p.267., Idem, "Your Petitioners...", p.531.

²⁸Gary Kynoch, "Crime, Conflict and Politics...", p.4., Idem, "From Ninevites...", p.60.

²⁹Gary Kynoch, "Urban Violence...", p.633.

³⁰Gary Kynoch, "Urban Violence...", p.639., Idem, "Crime, Conflict and Politics...", p.1.

³¹Gary Kynoch, "Crime, Conflict and Politics...", pp.3-7., Idem, "Urban Violence...", p.639.

³²Gary Kynoch, "From Ninevites...", p. 59., Idem, "Crime, Conflict and Politics...", p.3.

3. Major Actors of Violence in South African Towns

Kynoch gave good emphasis to identify the major actors of township violence in South African towns. He explored various groups who have triggered the South African urban violence in different times. These include squatter movements, well-organized criminal outfits, student groups, vigilantism, youth gangs, municipal political groups, migrant gangs, traditional courts (Makgotlas), civil guard movements, and national political movements.³³

He identified more than twelve (12) gang groups whose anthropological and ideological background and the level of their violent actions were quite different. These include Marashea or Russians,³⁴ Tsotsi,³⁵ Isitshozi,³⁶ Ninevites,³⁷ Jackroller,³⁸ Msomi,³⁹ Spoiler,⁴⁰ Amalaita,⁴¹ Japanese,⁴² Black Swine, Pirates and Hazels,⁴³ Globe,⁴⁴ American⁴⁵ and Akaplas⁴⁶ gangs. However, uneven coverage has been given to the above mentioned gang groups in the author's articles. Some of them are described in detail⁴⁷ while others are merely listed with no vivid explanation.⁴⁸

4. Gangsters in South Africa

It is not common to see the history of gangsters being an issue of scientific inquiry among historians. But, very few historians mainly Kynoch uncover this issue in a well manner. He stated the initial organization of gangs as a protective association and their subsequent transformation into offensive positions.⁴⁹ However, he failed to reveal the situations that underlined the transformation of gangs from their former to their latter positions. His narration and analysis about the dynamic changes among gangs are inadequate. Kynoch convincingly illustrated the misleading role of viewing the relationships among gangs, community and government from a very limited perspective.⁵⁰

Most interestingly, Kynoch criticizes the tendency of some analysts to categorize black gangs either guardians of the oppressed black South Africans or conversely, as oppressive forces who attack their fellow blacks.⁵¹ Kynoch stated the appointment of some prominent South African figures mainly Oliver Tambo and Nelson Mandela to handle the issue of gangs.⁵² However, he wrote nothing in his articles regarding their success or failure in dealing with the task they have been assigned.

Kynoch underpinned the similarities and differences between youth and migrant gangs.⁵³ He clearly revealed that most gangs successfully exploited the socio-economic and political disparity of urban life in South Africa.⁵⁴ He also demonstrated the influence of gang activities in general and Russian gangs in particular in the history of urban violence of South Africa.⁵⁵ The author provided fine explanation about the pervasive influence of Marashea gangs in the lives of women in South African townships.⁵⁶

However, the author's argument that "women have been fully integrated members of the Marashea society..."⁵⁷ is not substantiated both by his further arguments and by the evidence of his informants who revealed that women were considered as little more than their economic and sexual values.⁵⁸

Kynoch illustrated the "hate-love nature" of relationships among various gangs, communities and the state in South Africa.⁵⁹ The author demonstrated that the South African police were inspired to "enforce racial legislation" and to ensure white supremacy vis-à-

³³Gary Kynoch, "Politics and Violence...", p.267.

³⁴ Gary Kynoch, "Politics and Violence...", p.267., Idem, "Urban Violence...", p.632., Idem, "Marashea on the...", p.79., Idem, "A Man Among Men...", p.249

³⁵Gary Kynoch, "A Man Among Men...", p.250., Idem, "Urban Violence...", p.632., Idem, "Friend or Foe...", pp.301-302., Idem, "Politics and Violence...", p.269.

³⁶Gary Kynoch, "From Ninevites...", p. 57., Idem, "Urban Violence...", p. 632., Idem, "Marashea on the...", p.81., Idem, "A Man Among Men...", p.250.

³⁷Gary Kynoch, "From Ninevites...", p.56., Idem, "Urban Violence...", p. 631., Idem, "Marashea on the...", p.80.

³⁸Gary Kynoch, "From Ninevites...", p.57., Idem, "A Man Among Men...", p.250.

³⁹ Gary Kynoch, "Friend or Foe...", p.303., Idem, "Urban Violence...", p. 633.

⁴⁰Gary Kynoch, "Urban Violence...", p.633.

⁴¹Gary Kynoch, "Urban Violence...", p.633., Idem, "From Ninevites...", p. 56.

⁴²Gary Kynoch, "Politics and Violence ...", p.272.

⁴³Gary Kynoch, "From Ninevites ...", p.57.

⁴⁴Ibid, p.62.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p.65.

⁴⁶ Gary Kynoch, "The 'Transformation' ...", p.456.

⁴⁷ See particularly notes from 35-40 and note 42.

⁴⁸ See particularly note 41 and notes from 43-47.

⁴⁹ Gary Kynoch, "Urban Violence ...", p.632., Idem, "Politics and Violence ...", p.268., Idem, "From Ninevites ...", p.61., Idem, "A Man Among Men ...", p.51, Idem, "Marashea on the ...", p.81.

⁵⁰ Gary Kynoch, "From Ninevites ...", p.59.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Gary Kynoch, "Friend or Foe ...", p.312.

⁵³ Gary Kynoch, "From Ninevites ...", p.62.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.64.

⁵⁵ Gary Kynoch, "Politics and Violence ...", p.280.

⁵⁶ Gary Kynoch, "From Ninevites ...", p.67., Idem, "A Man Among Men ...", p.250.

⁵⁷ Gary Kynoch, "A Man Among Men ...", p.251.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.252.

⁵⁹ Gary Kynoch, "From Ninevites ...", p.68.

vis black Africans.⁶⁰ He revealed that the South African government and police had their own great share for the intensification of criminal and political violence in the nation.⁶¹ He strongly argued that the weakness of the state had paved the way for the organization of gangs and their operation in an uncontrollable manner.⁶²

5. Immigrant Workers in South African Mines

Kynoch underpinned the intensification of urban violence in South African cities following the flux of many immigrants to the area. He revealed that the South African war of 1898-1902 had caused acute shortage of labor force in South African mines. With an intention to improve productivity, the government of South Africa imported labor force from China.⁶³ Kynoch argued that “migrant culture” had a pervasive impact on shaping the nature of urban violence in South Africa.⁶⁴

The author’s justification about the ineffectiveness of the Anglo-Chinese Labor Convention of the 1904 is so persuasive. Even his explanation about the Chinese workers’ socio-economic and political backgrounds which had deterred their success in the mining areas is convenient too.⁶⁵ Kynoch illustrated the share of Chinese police measures in triggering the hostile interaction between the Chinese mineworkers and the mine authorities in South Africa.⁶⁶ His criticism of the mine authority’s failure at least to minimize the illegal actions of Chinese police over their fellow Chinese workers seems plausible.⁶⁷ Kynoch also revealed the equivocal relationship between the Chinese police and the mine authorities.⁶⁸

Kynoch stated that the central question of the Chinese workers’ protests of the 1904 and 1905 was the quest for a better pay and a better living conditions.⁶⁹ He stated that Chinese workers were not only exposed to “forced three-year labor contract”⁷⁰, but also they were mistreated⁷¹ and even their complaints were misinterpreted and associated with insurrections.⁷² Kynoch argued that Chinese workers were not merely exploited by their masters. Rather, their highly determining and costly protests urged the mine management and the state to arrange some concessions to minimize further instabilities.⁷³

Contrary to the author’s argument that “despite the routine abuses endured by Chinese laborers, check and balance existed that moderated the worst excesses,”⁷⁴ under hostile environment (both social and physical environment), the implementation of the system of “check and balance” would not be practical as well as effective. It is questionable that in what way the author conceptualized the system of “check and balance” in relation to the urban violence in South Africa.

6. Military Development in South Africa

Military issue in South Africa was another theme considered by Kynoch. Under his article entitled “The ‘Transformation’ of South African Military,” Kynoch revealed the nature of South African National Defense Force (SANDF) during and post-apartheid era. This article is readable and rich in detail than his other articles. The author revealed the extent to which violence had been used as a vital tool by the racist rule in South Africa for its economic, military and political supremacy.⁷⁵ He illustrated the divergent attitude of different groups towards the value of defense industry in South Africa.⁷⁶ He also attempted to show the weak justification of those groups who considered military development as a “savior of South Africa”.⁷⁷

Kynoch stated that an international influence primarily UN’s arm embargo had provoked South African government to produce wide range of weapons in 1980s.⁷⁸ He revealed the negative impact of the development of defense industry of South Africa on humanitarian principles and the socio-economic developments of many regional states.⁷⁹ After having critically analyzing and examining the works of different scholars on the issue under discussion, Kynoch generalized that no real transformation of the SANDF has been achieved.⁸⁰ He argued that the situation provided the minority classes with a fertile ground for their political and financial manipulation at the expense of the majority of the South Africans.⁸¹

⁶⁰ Gary Kynoch, “From Ninevites ...”, p.75., Idem, “Urban Violence ...”, p. 633., Idem, “Friend of Foe ...”, p.321, Idem, “The ‘Transformation’ ...”, p.442.

⁶¹ Gary Kynoch, “From Ninevites ...”, p.76., Idem, “A Man Among Men...”, p. 267., Idem, “Politics and Violence ...”, p.272., Idem, “Crime, Conflict and Politics ...”, p.5.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Gary Kynoch, “Your Petitioners...”, p.534., Idem, “Controlling the Coolies ...”, p.311.

⁶⁴ Gary Kynoch, “Your Petitioners...”, p.531.

⁶⁵ Gary Kynoch, “Your Petitioners...”, p.534., Idem, “Controlling the Coolies...”, p.311.

⁶⁶ Gary Kynoch, “Controlling the Coolies...”, p.317., Idem, “Your Petitioners...”, pp. 536-540.

⁶⁷ Gary Kynoch, “Your Petitioners...”, p.540., Idem, “Controlling the Coolies...”, p.317.

⁶⁸ Gary Kynoch, “Controlling the Coolies...”, p.317.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p.319.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p.310.

⁷¹ Ibid, p.324.

⁷² Ibid, p.326.

⁷³ Ibid, p.318.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Gary Kynoch, “The ‘Transformation’...”, p.441.

⁷⁶ Ibid, p.447.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p.448.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p.449.

⁷⁹ Ibid, pp.450-451.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p.457.

⁸¹ Ibid.

7. Conclusion

The issue of urban violence in Africa did not appear as a subject of study among many historians. Kynoch shares his own contributes in filling this lacuna. He provided a considerable amount of information about several issues associated with South African urban violence. He stated the major factors and the leading agents of the violence in South Africa. He revealed the impact of the criminal and political violence on the township and mine residents in South Africa. Kynoch also provided vivid explanation about the lives of Chinese workers in South Africa and the token transformation of SANDF which had been exploited by few figures at the expense of majority South Africans.

Kynoch's effort to use more oral information to produce many of his articles is good lesson to historians who are interested to write comprehensive history of Africans. Because, this would minimize unwise dependency on archives left by European colonizers, who were biased and perceived Africa as a continent lacking its own history. However, heavily reliance and uncritical use of oral information, too, needs serious caution for its free of distortion and unreliability. All in all, Kynoch's works are so important and well researched studies. They provide readers with valuable and illuminating details of the South African urban violence over several decades.

8. References

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