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Book Review Editor (*New Contree*)

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The *New Contree* Journal publishes reviews of significant books that are relevant to historians. Book reviews are written on invitation from the office of the review editor, but unsolicited reviews may also be considered. *New Contree* has an interdisciplinary outlook and welcomes suggestions of historically significant works written by scholars in other disciplines. The review should be submitted to the review editor within two months of receipt of the book. If this deadline cannot be met, a mutually agreeable alternative date can be negotiated. If it becomes impossible to review the book, it should be returned to the review editor. All reviews will be submitted to the members of the editorial board before acceptance for publication.

Contents and additional (or book) references

The review should summarize what is important in the book, and critique its substance. The reviewer should assess the extent to which the author achieves the stated aim of the book. It is important that the reviewer should engage the material instead of simply reporting the book's contents. For this reason, the reviewer should try to avoid summations of book chapters or the separate contributions in an edited collection. Instead, the reviewer should assess the ways in which chapters and contributions are relevant to the overall context of the book. Reviews should be written in a style that is accessible to a wide and international audience.

Any use of references or additional references from other sources must be informed on in footnote style.

Format

The review should generally be between 800 and 1 200 words, and should include as little bibliographic data as possible. When necessary, use page references for quotations in the text of the review and provide complete bib-

liographic details of the source. The review should begin with a heading that includes all the bibliographic data. The elements of the heading should be arranged in the order presented in the following example:

The early mission in South Africa/Die vroeë sending in Suid-Afrika, 1799-1819. Pretoria: Protea Book House, 2005, 272 pp., map, chronology, bibl., index. ISBN: 1-9198525-42-8. By Karel Schoeman.

Do not indent the first line of the first paragraph, but indent the first line of all successive paragraphs. Use double spacing for the entire review. Add your name and institutional affiliation at the end of the review. Accuracy of content, grammar, spelling, and citations rests with the reviewer, and we encourage you to check these before submission. Reviews may be transmitted electronically as a Word file attachment to an email to the review editor. If you have additional questions, please contact the Book Review Editors.

Bank robber: My time with André Stander

(Cape Town, Penguin Books, 2018, 206pp. ISBN 978-1-77609-289-5)

Allan Heyl

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Bank robberies by the infamous Stander gang became headline news in the months of October 1983 to January 1984. These criminal escapades by a former South African Police captain, André Stander, with two other convicted criminals, captivated the South African public. It had the ironic effect of making them into South African folk heroes. One might think that in a country where crime has been a major issue for decades, any criminal would be completely and irrevocably ostracized from society as a whole. Regarding the Stander gang, it is not the case. Hence the reason why this memoir by Allan Heyl probably was published by Penguin Books. Heyl passed away on 17 April 2020 but for crime historians his published memories are a precious legacy which will help to further unlock the mysteries of South Africa crime history.

Yet an array of historians agree that autobiographies and memoirs do suffer from many criticism. Arguments against these type of publications are that the narrative is only told with subjective perspectives, therefore having a limited use for any historical research. Even so, autobiographies and memoirs do deliver a first person account which can also influence and enrich historical research long after the author of such a memoir, or autobiography, had passed on. This will most likely be the case for Allan Heyl's memoir. This book delivers his first hand experiences while being part of the Stander gang and he also explains, in the book, more about his friendship with André Stander. Truly, a clearer perspective of Stander's personality can be seen in Heyl's account. The same can be argued about who Lee MacCall (the other member of the Stander gang) was as a person. In particular interest for historians, criminologists, police detectives and officers is Heyl's clear telling of which banks they robbed as a gang and their usual modus operandi. For historians, this book has the added advantage of delivering another angle of insight into the conditions of living in South Africa during the early-1980s: An era when the South African Police was a highly trained public security force.

It is naturally unnecessary to expect in a memoir a source list or any other reference to substantiate the narrative about the life of Heyl and the Stander gang. How Heyl remembered and presented his account has to be accepted as is. One might argue that Heyl had enough time to think about all the criminal adventures he and Stander had together and the impact thereof on their lives. Therefore, from Heyl's view, his narrative is as accurate as it possibly could be.

This book, to be added to the repertoire of studies on the Stander gang, can perhaps be fruitfully utilised in a comparative study with other biographies and historical accounts of the Stander gang, such as the one by Paul Moorcraft and Mike Cohen.¹ Heyl himself mentioned that certain "untruths" will be corrected. Surely, this memoir will be used as a source to critique the historically incorrect 2003 theatrical release *Stander*.

Heyl's memoir is divided into three parts. The first part succeeds a foreword and a prologue in which a reader will read about Heyl's regret regarding his criminal past, and how he acknowledges that his fate was due to poor decisions. His depression has, according to Heyl, had a definitive role in his transformation into a bank robber. From the prologue readers can observe

¹ P Moorcroft & M Cohen, *Stander... Bank Robber* (Johannesburg, Galago Books, 1984).

that Heyl's childhood years were challenging for him. Amongst others he was usually the recipient of Anglophobic slurs and taunts by his Afrikaner classmates. The prologue showcases how an English-speaking White South African in the Free State, being part of Generation Baby Boomer, had a tough time growing up in the era of National Party control. Considered to be part of the old foe Heyl felt ill-treated, while also struggling with a heavy burden of depression. His further descent into the abyss is illustrated in the first part of the memoir where he explains what happened to him for him to finally cross over the proverbial threshold into becoming a bank robber. The bank robberies which Heyl committed himself is described in no uncertain terms. Yet, after his short solo career as a bank robber, it is clear that Heyl did experience some stability and let alone living in a comfortable house with a steady income, he was at one point quite close to begin with a family of his own. However, this utopian dream collapsed when he was dragged into a scheme to rob banks again by an acquaintance who knew about Heyl's criminal record.

When Heyl's last solo bank robbery resulted in his arrest, he became part of South Africa's prison population (the focus of the memoir's Part 2). Heyl spent some time at the main prison facility in Pretoria but he was later transferred to Zonderwater prison (to the east of Pretoria): a transfer with which he was not too happy about because of the lack of privacy he would endure at Zonderwater. In the memoir Heyl portrays himself as an intellectual and a loner, and while educating himself on several subjects such as English literature and psychology, he was able to keep the "black dog" of depression at bay. He enjoyed to read on his own, and he had the opportunity to do so in his single cell in the Pretoria prison but after his transfer to the Zonderwater prison, it was difficult for him to continue to read by his lonesome. However, his time at Zonderwater made it possible for him to meet Stander and McCall. With Stander, he found an intellectual equal. He could share his ideas about the different subjects which he was studying with his Afrikaner friend. Soon they started to share their experiences in robbing banks. When bank security and surveillance was a minor field of expertise, it was easy for Stander, McCall and Heyl to plan several bank robberies as soon as they escaped from prison. Stander and McCall had escaped before they helped Heyl to escape in October 1983.

All robberies and the different amounts of money stolen are carefully explained in the memoir's Part 3. Months after their escape, they had enough money to leave South Africa and to start somewhere anew. However, McCall

was killed by the South African police in their rented Houghton mansion, which the Stander gang used as a hiding place. In January 1984, Stander made his way to Florida in the United States of America, where he was later fatally shot on 13 February 1984 by a Florida policeman. Stander was not shot because he was a famous South African bank robber but because he was investigated for crimes he committed in Fort Lauderdale.

Quite revealing is Heyl's indication of his whereabouts when he heard of Stander's death and how it affected him. He was then the only member left of the short-lived Stander gang. His succeeding travels and crimes in Europe, Cyprus and Britain are also described concisely in the book's epilogue. The memoir ends with a brief description of his time in British and South African prisons until he was released on parole in 2005. Heyl spent the rest of his life giving motivational speeches and of course writing this valuable memoir. This memoir will further engrave the fame and legendary status of the Stander gang which erase the possibility that they would be easily forgotten in the criminal histories of the world and South Africa.