

**Interpretative Methodologies and Methods Group @ APSA
2020 Charles Taylor Book Award**

Honorable Mention

Nicholas Rush Smith, City University of New York - City College
Contradictions of Democracy: Vigilantism and Rights in Post-Apartheid South Africa
(Oxford University Press, 2019)

Contradictions of Democracy: Vigilantism and Rights in Post-Apartheid South Africa (Oxford University Press, 2019) is a work of methodological rigor and innovation as well as substantive and theoretical insight. South Africa is often heralded as a beacon of successful transition into democracy; yet its citizens are riddled with anxiety and insecurity, often taking to vigilantism in order to protect themselves including from the state itself. Why would citizens feel this way, especially given the fact that South Africa has a constitution with one of the most robust set of rights' protections in the world? Rush Smith uses a careful research design, mixing ethnographic (based in two townships, KwaMushu and Sebokeng) and archival methods, to investigate this empirical question. He develops an account of what he sees as the contradictions of democracy, whereby citizens resort to vigilantism in part to correct for perceived failings of the legal order. Where constitutional rights lack substance, those rights become actually generative of the very anxieties they seek to quell. For scholars interested in using interpretive methods, especially in complicated empirical domains, this book offers an excellent guide.

Selection committee

Erica Simmons, chair (University of Wisconsin-Madison)
Matthew Longo (Leiden University)
Robyn Marasco (CUNY-Hunter College)