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Historians in the new South Africa: exposing conflicts or promoting reconciliation

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Knowledge of history helps to shape qualities of imagination, sensitivity, balance, accuracy, and discriminating judgement and provides multiple perspectives on how various elements have come together to create a society or to build a nation, as stated by the former South African Minister of Education, Kader Asmal. History writing is an important part of a nation state's collective memory and the nature of historiography is essentially selective and ideological. History is not necessarily a product of the past, but often a product of the needs or requests of the present.¹

Since 1994, South Africa has gone through different phases in the attempt to create a new historical dynamic driven by the aspiration of equal rights and better living conditions. Therefore, one might expect to find a vivacious interest in the historiography of that country, but the study of history in South Africa is in fact experiencing serious decline.

This paper is an attempt to accentuate certain developments in South African historiography, mainly through a survey of conference contributions. The picture drawn will necessarily be selective, incomplete and fragmentary.

In August 2002, The Nordic Africa Institute convened an extended workshop for historians and Africanists at the Centre of African Studies, University of Copenhagen under the heading: Collective Memory and Present Day Politics in South Africa and the Nordic Countries.

The leading thought behind the workshop was to make a multinational contribution to the renewal of the debate between main concepts of South African history in the hope that this could help revitalise the once lively exchange of ideas between progressive academics and the surrounding society. As the organiser, I have just concluded the process of editing the contributions and the following is simply my impressions from topical articles written by important South Africa historians in this context. In the verbal presentation of the paper, I will try to synthesize these impressions.

Some of the pieces reviewed are more controversial than others. Social scientists are humans. They disagree. They become committed. Surprisingly many of them are activists in one form or another. They have fundamentally different political attitudes. Some of them even dislike each other personally. It will affect the history-debate and I see no reason to hide it. In the forthcoming anthology, we have tried to make room for diverging views and tempers to give a broad and inclusive picture of South African historiography.

Ideological consensus under the rainbow

It might be out of line with prevailing trends, but in my view, the liberal-radical history debate which culminated in the 1980s was on the whole very stimulating for both productivity and

¹ Hofstadter, Richard, *The Progressive Historians: Turner, Beard, Parrington*, New York, 1969, p. 3.

quality in South African historical research, and it is difficult for me to accept that this discussion and the related interaction between academia and society should just fade away in favour of some kind of more or less static consensus in the area of basic approaches.

It can still be debated to what extent the historians of the radical-revisionist school have managed to put their original ideas through.² Despite innumerable partial attempts, the radical-revisionist school never presented a complete alternative synthesis of South African history.³ Even though the radical school fulfilled a need for corrections to historiography written up to then, it does hardly do away with the need for a new synthesis, a general history which under a progressive government could have the same potency as Walker's and Davenport's general history works de facto had under earlier liberal academic dominance.⁴

There are still too many unresearched gaps in history. However, those kinds of knowledge voids will always exist, and research to close these will no doubt bring new ones to light at the same time. Liberal Davenport at one point said that synthesis would perhaps never be anything other than "*an interim report, an attempt to present the current state of knowledge about a society in rapid transition*".⁵ That however, does not render such a thing superfluous.

The socialist expectations of the 1980s suffered severe setbacks in the 1990s despite the victory over apartheid. The general picture in the academy over time has been a growing consensus between progressive liberals and soft radicals, and it must be conceded that in the work of many post-radicals, one can trace developments of converging views, where in the analyses, production form or class is no longer regarded as decisive for human relations.⁶

Attempts to amalgamate together liberal and radical points of departure into broader and more generally formulated statements within South African historiography, such as the relationship between racism and its social background, will however have a difficult time getting very far.

Racism always appears as part of a more extensive complex of motives and views, and it will only be possible to agree on a common view of for instance effects of socio-economic changes if this view is based on a somewhat concordant analysis of the relationship between racism and underlying interests of the various sections of the population.

In the same manner, it is only possible to find common views on the effects of economic growth on income distribution or similar central factors if based on coincident positions of the mechanisms that determine the division of income and welfare in society. This in itself presupposes a certain agreement on the role of the economy, government power and ideology in the communal societal process.

² It has been Bozzoli's opinion that syntheses on a large scale, which together could constitute a new South African historiography, require several in-depth, detailed studies of the same type as van Onselen's. For example Van Onselen, Charles, *Chibaro. African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia 1900-1933*, London, 1976; Van Onselen, Charles, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand 1886-1914*, New Babylon, Vol. 1, *New Nineveh*, Vol. 2, Longmans, 1982; Van Onselen, Charles, *The Seed is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, A South African Sharecropper, 1894-1985*, Johannesburg, David Philip, 1996.

³ The closest to this is perhaps still the introductory chapters in the three collective works Shula Marks has edited together with Tony Atmore, Richard Rathbone and Stanley Trapido respectively: Marks, Shula and Anthony Atmore (eds.), *Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa*, Longman, 1980/85.

Marks, Shula and Richard Rathbone (eds.), *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa. African class formation, culture and consciousness 1870-1930*, England, Longman, 1982/85; Marks, Shula and Stanley Trapido, *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth-Century South Africa*, London, Longman, 1988.

⁴ Some attempts more or less inspired by the progressive tradition have been published lately, for example Glaser, Daryl, *Politics and Society in South Africa: a critical introduction*, SAGE Publications, 2001; Maylam, Paul, *South Africa's racial past the history and historiography of racism, segregation, and apartheid*, Research in migration and ethnic relations series, Aldershot, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2001.

⁵ Davenport, T.R.H., *South Africa. A Modern History*, London, Macmillan, first printing, 1977. Quoted here from the second printing, 1978, p. xiv.

⁶ Some saw this tendency very early. Lonsdale, John, "From colony to industrial state: South African historiography as seen from England", *Social Dynamics*, 9, 1, 1983, p. 71.

An attempt to undo the nature of the liberal-radical controversy itself will therefore run into some general problems.⁷ The judgment of historians in cases of existing or past reality depends to a certain degree on their ideas of an alternative society. Despite a great deal of new thinking on ethically and ecologically viable development for example, new visions would probably in the last instance still have to relate to more or less clearly formulated liberalistic or socialistic oriented ideological models.

The disappearance of a concrete socialist developmental model, as incomplete as it may have been, has made the radicals less radical, and one can ascertain that the places where more comprehensive and general questions are left open and where the debate has been centred on more specific historical problems and practical solutions, are (unfortunately) also the places where some form of research debate have developed despite a more secluded situation for history.

Everything seems to show that many of the more open-minded, post-radical historians are increasing their influence at the English-speaking universities in co-operation with undogmatic, political liberals and it could be argued that the practical influences of former radicals are actually greater than in their celebrated heydays of the '70s and '80s. Thoroughgoing radical (or "ultra-left") enclaves will still exist in university milieus, as well as a few surreptitious Afrikaner nationalist hedgehog positions, but perhaps the immediate future for South African historical research lays in a symbiotic hegemony consisting of all progressive streams from liberal Africanism and radical, social history to ANC-informed strategic thinking. This would certainly appear quite natural in the wake of national compromises.

Nevertheless, the severe social contrasts, which South Africa will have to face in the years to come, makes it difficult to believe that such harmony between essentially different ideologies would endure for very long. The discussion about South Africa's controversial past and its significance for the choices of the new South Africa will quite certainly arise again and resemble earlier controversies between liberal and radical historians. The fundamental disagreements between historians will reverberate throughout the academic universe when the social realities recall them once again.

As several of the evaluated articles seems to witness, it has already been necessary for the ANC government to introduce "new Africanism" (under the overriding banner of non-racialism) partly to blur old and new class tensions and thereby secure social stability.

In my own opinion, most good history writing is the history of how present conflicts are rooted in the past. Which cannot be equally comforting for all of course, and many would like to be allowed the luxury of forgetting.

South Africa has to maintain the momentum for its transformation. At the international level, it will probably have to sustain and develop relations with governments and business irrespective of their positions during the apartheid era. This gives the historians extra responsibility not to allow the history of those who chose to collaborate with apartheid to be forgotten.

Black history writing

The apartheid education system discredited history, and even if history was used by both liberal and radical academics in the struggle for democracy, many people have come to see history as a world which is lost.

As a result of unequal access to education, the historiographical tradition in South Africa is marked by the almost total absence of black historians. Even if there are examples of

⁷ Bobbio, Noberto, *Destra e sinistra*, Danish version, Højre og venstre. Årsager til og betydning af en politisk skelnen, Hans Reitzels Forlag, 1995.

outstanding black history writers,⁸ they have been invisible in the institutional communication of history - and unfortunately, they still are.

With a political climate that did not exactly invite to critical intellectual questioning and a regime with an official ideology based on a view of history, which saw the superiority of the white man as destined, it should not be surprising that the great majority of South Africans, excluded from parliamentary political life, also were denied access to their own history. The whites had colonised history and the restricted education did not give black people any feeling of a past they could identify with.⁹

It will be a problematic task for the historiographers to outline in greater detail in what way white history has been forced on black students and academics, and the effects of this, but it goes without saying that the devaluated picture of history was a contributing factor to so few blacks being attracted to the official history studies, a situation of which Matthews was already aware:

*“It is hardly surprising, therefore, that western-educated Africans have up until now largely skirted history as a field of work ... it is high time that African history, written from the African point of view, takes its place on library shelves.”*¹⁰

Fifty years later, the situation in this area has changed far less than expected. Specialist literature written by black historians does not take up much space on the shelves of the university libraries. This is the most serious weakness in South African historiography of all, and in this regard, a great responsibility rests on the institutionalised historical science as well as on the popular movements. Contributions to the history written by black authors at a scholarly level are absolutely necessary if the research community under democratic (black) majority rule is not to appear to be an exclusive white island, a colonial remnant from the apartheid period. Such a thing would be the irony of fate after especially the English-speaking university community for many years has preached racial integration in principle.

History and nationbuilding

Saul Dubow's article *Thoughts on South Africa* will serve in our forthcoming anthology as a general introduction to South African historiography.¹¹ The problem of what the South African nation is and who the South Africans are, seen from a historical background, is obviously fundamental. Dubow asks: how was South Africa conceived and imagined? What form did ideas about South Africans and South African societies take, and how was the South African “problem” defined over time?

Dubow reminds us that the strive for unification is not exactly new in South Africa. His article offers a concentrated overview with focus on the creation of national identity, which was of course not a given thing for the native peoples of South Africa, since they were more excluded from than included in that nation. With great empathy, he gives an impressive

⁸ Luthuli, Albert, *Let my people go. An Autobiography*, Glasgow/London, Collins, 1962; Mbeki, Govan, *South Africa: the peasants revolt*, Penguin, 1964; Mokgethi, Motlhabi, *The Theory and Practice of Black Resistance to Apartheid: a social-ethical analysis*, Skotaville history series, Johannesburg, Skotaville Press, 1984; Gebhard, Wolfgang, *Shades of reality: black perceptions on South African history*, Die Blaue Eule, Englishsprachige Litteraturen Afrika, 3, Essen, 1991; Modisane, Bloke, *Blame Me on History*, London, Penguin Books, 1990; Plaatje, Sol T. (Comaroff, Willan and Reed eds.), *Mafeking diary: a black mans view of a white mans war*, Cambridge, Meridor, 1990; Mbeki, Govan, *The Struggle for Liberation in South Africa: a short history*, Mayibuye History and Literature Series, No. 13, Cape Town, David Philip, 1992.

⁹ Majeke, Nosipho, *The Role of the Missionaries in Conquest*, Cape Town, Johannesburg, Society of Young Africa, 1952, “Introduction”: “If the rulers can make the people believe that they are inferior, wipe out their past history or present it in such a way that they feel, not pride but shame, then they create the conditions that make it easy to dominate the people”. According to Jay Naidoo, Majeke is a pseudonym for Dora Taylor.

¹⁰ Wilson, Monica (ed.), *Freedom for my People. The Autobiography of Z.K. Matthews: Southern Africa 1901 - 1968*, Cape Town, David Philip, 1981.

¹¹ Dubow, Saul, “Thoughts on South Africa: Some Preliminary Ideas”, in Hans Erik Stolten (ed.), *History-Making and Present Day Politics. The Meaning of Collective Memory in South Africa*, NAI, Forthcoming.

account of early black history-related writing and shows how the development of social anthropology on the one hand discovered the dynamics of African societies, but on the other developed a tendency to focus on particular tribal groups in a messy interplay with emerging concepts of segregation from the beginning of the twentieth century.

Dubow uncovers to which extent the history of the black majority was absent in the works of white historians. They usually saw blacks intrude into national politics as a generalised problem or menace. He outlines emerging Africanism in early black historical literature and describes the 1940s as a point of intersection when it comes to blacks identifying themselves as South Africans. He also elevates the dilemma of non-racialist denying of the existence of racial and ethnic groupings on the one hand and the de facto accept of multi-racialism as in the different branches of the Congress Alliance and in the “rainbow notion”.

The paper deals convincingly with ideas and concepts but puts less emphasis on the historians’ extrovert importance. In my view, the author might underestimate the effects of the engagement by historians and other academics in the democratic struggle. The ability of the leading non-academic cadres in the liberation movements to let history writing inspire them is seen as rather low.

Dubow strikes an important point when he demands more openness around personal author identity. Then again, it is probably mainly in times of relative reconciliation that academics do not feel the need to identify with larger alliances of interest such as class, race or nation.

For me Dubow’s article provokes the question whether Africanist views deserve more attention from white historians. In the anti-apartheid movement, I was against alliances with Black Consciousness related organisations mostly out of tactical considerations. The sectarianism of the BC approach would have narrowed the alliance against apartheid. Nevertheless, BCM was right that almost all whites regardless of their political sympathies or class affiliation were beneficiaries of the system. Inverted racism is probably still politically stupid, and affirmative action has already sparked grim feelings between white South African academics, but they will still have to do better if things are truly to change.

Colin Bundy’s contribution to the collection *New nation, new history* supports the view that History in the 1970s and 1980s became the master tool of intellectual resistance, partly because South African historians had sought a praxis extending beyond the university world, translating historical knowledge into popular, accessible expressions.¹²

Bundy traces the first post-apartheid intimations of disciplinary anxiety to the very year of 1994.¹³ The political project of the new ANC-lead government shifted quite rapidly in a direction that confused and discomfited left-of-centre academics. A growing gap between what the academy had to offer and what the state wanted is identified. Apparently, many South African historians have been caught up in “struggle history” and now remain stranded in some kind of limbo.

Bundy notes the global demoralizing effects of postmodern critiques and the turn to issues like ethnicity, race, citizenship, nationality and nationhood. He also has sound reservations about individualising and narrow identity history. The primary enquiry in his analyses remains the “national question” and his central problem is: what political, economic, or moral bridge can span the contradiction between a juridical assertion of common citizenship and the reality of difference, separateness and inequality?

¹² Bundy, Colin, “New Nation, New History? Constructing the past in post-apartheid South Africa”, in Hans Erik Stolten (ed.), *Op. cit.* Also see Etherington, Norman, “Edward Palmer Thompson”, *Southern African Review of Books*, 5/6, Nov/Dec 1993, p. 5.

¹³ Rich, Paul “Is South African Radical Social History Becoming Irrelevant?”, *South African Historical Journal*, 31, 1994, p. 191; Etherington, Norman, “Fissures in the Post-apartheid Academy”, *South African Historical Journal*, 31, 1994, pp. 206-7; Freund, Bill, “The Art of Writing History”, *Southern African Review of Books*, Sep/Oct 1994, p. 24; Maylam, Paul “Tensions Within the Practice of History”, *South African Historical Journal* 33, 1995, pp. 3-12.

Bundy discovers three major discursive attempts to narrate the new nation, namely the “rainbow nation”, the “African renaissance”, and “ethnic particularism”. He sees the optimistic multiculturalism of the rainbow nation fading out from the mid ‘90s, where many Black intellectuals and editors began to distance themselves from the language of reconciliation and pluralism and instead adopted notions of more or less outspoken African nationalism.

The summarizing analyses of Bundy’s article are bright and refreshing. But the tendencies to new Africanism are not mainly viewed from a context of realpolitik. It is for instance not seen as a practical way for the ANC to keep its troops together and at the same time avoid an unwanted social mobilisation.

Bundy’s penetrating critical observation stands as innovative and very necessary, but also seem a little defeatistic here and there, and they do not fully explain the relative stability of the transformation process and the surprisingly high degree of consensus, also in the area of history.

The Danish linguist Ann Langwadt’s short article *Healing history* suggests that the TRC established “trauma” as a master narrative in South African history.¹⁴ In the material from the TRC, there is the notion that telling one’s story could lead to healing, that the recovery of the past would lead to the recovery of wholeness, not only for the individual witness, but also for the nation. Langwadt is focusing on points of conflict between historical, judicial and psychological narratives and suggests that the TRC’s quest for a healing history will force South African historians to look more to psychological narrativization.

She does not provide us with a fully consistent conclusion on the connection between the use of individual experiences and national history. Instead, she calls on the historians to make up their minds about the purpose of writing history. Should we pursue facts only or do we want a healing history in order to save the subject of the story. Should the goal of “truth” always have highest priority? Who wants a truth that destroys?

Elaine Unterhalter’s *Truth rather than justice* links to debates regarding the historians’ craftsmanship in their work with gender relations and with the Truth Commission.¹⁵

Unfortunately, it is highly relevant to point out the relatively low priority of women’s human rights in the work of the TRC and in the history of the democratic movement. The author’s equating of lifetime with political time and the focus on the concept of space represent refreshing new angles. Nevertheless, the question of why male historians work with political economy, while female historians work with individual social life practice and culture, does not arise as a very pressing problem in the article. Maybe because, the male history-writer chosen, Desmond Tutu, is actually not very typically male.

The article remains to a large degree in a literary universe, where Unterhalter seeks to distinguish between autobiographical writings, reflecting the meaning of history, and historical scholarship conducted by professional historians.

The concentration on mentality and changing identity adds qualities to the debate, but from the point of view of a long time believer in the historical materialism as myself, the influence of immediate personal experience as creator of historical consciousness seems rather high in the article compared to that of collective interests, and this way of giving precedence needs to be argued more directly to answer questions like: how does identity become linked to ideas? How do you take an identity?

¹⁴ Ann Langwadt, “Healing history, narrating trauma. History and the TRC”, in Hans Erik Stolten (ed.), *Op. cit.*

¹⁵ Unterhalter, Elaine, “Truth rather than justice? Historical narratives, gender, and public education in South Africa”, in Hans Erik Stolten (ed.), *Op. cit.*

The Swedish anthropologist Anna Bohlin's contribution *Claiming land and making memory* examines how the notion of heritage is employed within a specific political initiative: the Land Restitution Programme.¹⁶ Within the programme, dispossessed or displaced communities are encouraged to mobilise their local histories in order to obtain compensation for lost land. Bohlin explores the contradictory role of heritage as a political resource in a nation-building project as well as a social, cultural and economic resource for the local communities involved.

While researching memories of forced removals from Kalk Bay, a small community in the Western Cape, Bohlin became directly involved in a land claim process. Partly as a result of her fieldwork, former residents, who had been forced to leave Kalk Bay after it was declared a white Group Area in 1967, decided to participate in the programme of land restitution and submit claims for the homes they left behind. The paper traces the ways the requirements for the land claim stimulated the production and reshaping of representations of the history of removals among the claimants. It illustrates the extent to which people "on the ground" engage with official projects, bringing their own agency to bear on the process and thereby partly shaping its outcome.

This article brings up questions about differences in interests and power relations behind respectively the TRC and the Land Restitution Programme. In contrast to the TRC the role of memory in the Land Commission was apparently mainly instrumental. However, despite not being explicitly designed as such, the restitution programme can also be seen as a site of production of a new collective memory. The nation-wide collection of land claims forms is a unique memory bank of cases of displacement and dispossession. While the TRC was event-oriented, the land claim documents highlight structural injustices experienced by ordinary South Africans. Bohlin argues that because the restitution programme was not explicitly designed to produce new histories, the memories that emerged out of the land claim process escaped some of the constraints posed by more institutionalised attempts at shaping history in present day South Africa. It was subjected to less of the pressure associated with nation building, such as the requirement of reconciliation, and forgiveness, than the TRC.

Martin Legassick is in my opinion a good example of a historian with a lifetime engagement in liberation history, now trying in a very productive way to complete the task in the new South Africa. Legassick thinks that Marxist revisionist historiography are still relevant, because the issue of class has not disappeared in South Africa at all, and partly because issues of the economic policy are now being fought out inside the ANC and within the alliance between the ANC, the Communist Party and COSATU, where Marxists could still have some influence.¹⁷

In his article in our book *Reflections on practising applied history*, Legassick outlines a concept for contemporary historical research, which he calls "applied history". This approach shows enlightening examples of how ordinary people's history connects to present day conflicts in administration and politics.¹⁸

Basically, Legassick's and many other radical historians' engagement in, and political use of history have always been applied history, and this new angle might be a logical continuation of their endeavour for social justice and for a more progressive way of nationbuilding.

¹⁶ Bohlin, Anna, "Claiming Land and Making Memory: Engaging with the Past in Land Restitution", in Hans Erik Stolten (ed.), *Op. cit.*

¹⁷ Legassick, Martin (interviewed by Alex Lichtenstein), "The Past and Present of Marxist Historiography in South Africa", *Radical History Review*, Issue 82, Winter 2002 pp. 111—130, 2002, Website: http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/radical_history_review/v082/82.1legassick.html. Legassick himself expresses a critical view to the Alliance.

¹⁸ Legassick, Martin, "Reflections on practising applied history in South Africa, 1994-2002: from skeletons to schools", in Hans Erik Stolten (ed.), *Op. cit.*

One can hope that this kind of applied history will be able to bring historians out of the “ivory tower” of academia into the real world of people. In the cases mentioned in his article, it has been into communities of “claimants”, people with a specific and instrumental interest in history. Here research in historical injustices can be used practically to satisfy the wronged and actively create equality and human rights. The author’s disputes with the Land Commission are put into perspective with broader analytical conclusions.

Legassick’s descriptions of personal experiences within present historical research make the article appealing. Methodically this kind of applied history looks very interesting, involving a genuine multidisciplinary perspective proving the usefulness of history in present practical matters. The article’s emphasis on museum history, the inside description of the progressing work in South African Democracy Education Trust (SADET) and the South African History Project and the problems surrounding the school curriculum gives a vibrant picture of the present most important South African history activities together with principal considerations on how to use oneself as a historian.

Thiven Reddy’s *From apartheid to democracy* gives an impressive theoretical overview over analytic discourses, parameters, categories and criteria relevant for analysing the newest history of the transition process.¹⁹

In studies of democratic transition, the South African case is viewed as a primary example of a “*transition by transplacement*”. Reddy’s paper challenges this representation as one-sided, and argues that the dominant discourse organises the story of the South African transition in a particular way relying on a familiar narrative structure. The paper identifies important elements framing the way we write, debate, discuss, and think about democratic change, exposing key categories like regime breakdown, transition, consolidation, and the stringing together of “historic” moments into a coherent narrative. Reddy criticises the transitology framework for its narrow definition of democracy, its reliance on a metaphor of stages to frame its study of democratisation, and its overemphasis on political institutions. He highlights two notions that occupy a subordinate position in the dominant narrative of change: first the notion of “the masses”, particularly its role in both regime and opposition elite discourses, and secondly the association between violence and elite negotiations.

Reddy’s critical approach to Huntington’s simplifications is much needed. Nevertheless, the relationship between development level, democracy, and market capitalism are not solved in this article, and despite critique of elite transition, the importance of mass involvement for change and democratisation receives scant attention.

This article provokes the intellect but does not provide many clear answers on the potentials of the relationship between popular mobilisation, activist grassroots influence, and representative democracy. However, concrete analyses of these matters are not the aim, even if some might see a stand-alone-criticism as somewhat irresponsible. Reddy is convincingly criticising the dominating system of thought and practice, but he is not really recognising alternative visions, practices or theories that might hold potentials. What is “The dominant discourse” actually by nature? How was it composed or mixed together, and why did it prevail? Concrete relations to power structures in the surrounding society are obviously very difficult to clarify.

The attention on events, people, and positions that the dominating ideological trends allow us to forget is most welcome. Reddy’s critical examination of the use of “the masses” as a concept gives interesting new angles, but might actually be quite elitist in itself,²⁰ and the

¹⁹ Reddy, Thiven, “From Apartheid to Democracy in South Africa: A Reading of Dominant Discourses of Transition”, in Hans Erik Stolten (ed.), *Op. cit.*

²⁰ Compared for example to Gunnarsen, Gorm, “Leaders or Organizers against Apartheid: Cape Town 1976 – 1984”, a PhD-thesis from University of Copenhagen, 2002, which was summarised in an unpublished paper for

visions on, what a “messier” alternative to transitology should look like, must be developed further.

Memory, heritage and changing cities

Gary Baines’ contribution *The politics of public history* forms a bridge from the part of our book dealing with history in nationbuilding to the part about heritage.²¹

Baines analyses the recasting of history and public memory in post-apartheid South Africa as an explicitly political project. The shift in political power in 1994 has gradually been followed by attempts to renegotiate the meaning of the South Africa past so that it will reflect both the experiences of the black majority and the new elite’s demand for stability. The heritage industry has become particularly involved in the process of reconciliation as it often seeks to promote a common history which glosses over struggles of a conflict-ridden past. However, at the same time, the emergence of new kinds of identity politics has meant competing claims to the ownership of that past. Baines’ paper examines how certain heritage projects and museum displays reflect the tensions that exist between an official history that validates nation building and the public memories of groups that seek to preserve their own identities. It investigates what role professional historians could play in negotiating a path between these competing histories and memories, and the author concludes that the gap between academic history and memory is widening. Through convincing case studies from museums in Port Elizabeth and Denmark, Baines argues for a principal difference between history and memory.

Christopher Saunders’ first article in our collection *The transformation of heritage* gives an impressive updated overview over developments in the field of heritage sites and museums.²² This is one of the few areas witnessing optimistic expansion in the use of history, hereunder the establishment of a whole number of new museums. It could be regarded positively as an extension of progressive popular history, as Africanisation or new patriotism. Or more negatively as deflection, tourist propaganda or as privatisation of history.

The process of restructuring is followed from the time of the transfer of political power in 1994. Conflicting lines are drawn up in the relations between historians and other heritage practitioners. Principal and political considerations around historical naming are discussed and fights over exhibits of indigenous people problematised. Construction of new and removal of old public monuments are debated.

In Saunders’ view, historians provide an interpretation of what happened in the past, while those involved with heritage only are concerned with specific aspects of that past. It is therefore the duty of historians to judge heritage critically. A nice perspective for the historians, but hardly a real peace offer.

Saunders’ critique of the Freedom Park Project is quite uncompromising in its liberal defence of pluralism. Even if I agree that a rainbow history involving different schools of professional historians might have been the right background for a project like this, I have no problems in seeing the need for a new anti-imperialistic history, with which black South Africans (and hopefully a growing part of whites) can identify. Even if there have been many hopeless examples of anti-colonial histories from new states in Africa, these national histories reflects a past were the introduction of modern (in this case colonial or ”globalised”) economy has

the NAI/CAS Conference in Copenhagen: “The tricameral boycott of 1984 and the democratization of South Africa”.

²¹ Gary Baines, “The politics of public history in post-apartheid South Africa”, in Hans Erik Stolten (ed.), *Op. cit.*

²² Saunders, Christopher, “The transformation of heritage in the New South Africa”, in Hans Erik Stolten (ed.), *Op. cit.*

brought not only wage worker freedom but also worse kinds of suppression and exploitation to the majority.

It is very healthy when national myth building is challenged as Saunders does for instance in his critique of the District Six Museum. The awareness of the streamlining of official history expressed in the paper is necessary and well placed, even if I cannot see it as the heaviest problem for South African historiography at the moment.

The South African War of 1899-1902 had a significant and enduring impact on society and on history writing. It assumed a central place in Afrikaner historical consciousness and fed into the rise of Afrikaner nationalism during the first part of last century.

With recent changes in South Africa, the cultural meaning of the war became more of a contested terrain than before. Several competing groups have tried to reshape the significance of the war along different lines and the aim of Albert Grundlingh's article *Reframing remembrance* is to disaggregate these permutations and to elucidate their purpose.²³

Despite all kinds of defeatism, it seems that history in South Africa is very much alive at least in some areas. Strangely enough, there is among whites - parallel with subconscious tendencies to forgetting - much romantic nostalgia for times past. Heritage and some kinds of popular history arouse as much interest as ever, as could be seen from the great number of books published to mark the centenary of the Boer War. Initially, the government did not want to engage in the commemoration of the war, because it was mainly fought between whites. The government's decision to participate anyway was made in the spirit of reconciliation. By emphasising the importance of blacks during the war, which had hitherto been neglected, the government wanted to make the commemorations more inclusive and to move towards a consensus view of the war.

Several of the reviewed authors have noticed a diminished value placed from official side in the public sphere on history concerned with conflict, apparently occurring simultaneously with an upgrading of history as state-sponsored and commercial heritage and legacy projects.²⁴ Heritage studies have been a growth area also at South African universities, and not only for antiquarian reasons. "*The Heritage Industry invokes a sentimentalised past which makes bearable a sordid and painful present*", as Jeff Guy has put it.²⁵

It seems that the ANC-government during the rainbow years had some problems developing its view on the historical conflict between Afrikaners and English-speaking whites in a direction that could be relevant for blacks.

As a progressive historian rooted in the Afrikaans speaking community, Grundlingh is quite sceptical to the government's initial dissociation to this part of South African history, but also to its later engagement. As it turned out, some of the high profile events during the celebration were actually used by blacks to raise pressing demands of poverty alleviation, while others according to Grundlingh's humorous account appeared with a comic touch.

Grundlingh enumerates several different cases of present use and misuse of the history of the Boer War, hereunder white fear that the body counting of black war graves could make Afrikaner history of suffering less important, and as an other case in contrast to this, how more flexible Afrikaners have used a constructed common anti-imperialist past as a basis from where the old white elite could speak to the new black elite. Also, the use of battlefield tourism is taken up. The killing fields of yesteryear are analysed as the potential money-spinners of today.

²³ Grundlingh, Albert, "Reframing Remembrance: The Politics of the Centenary Commemoration of The South African War of 1899-1902", in Hans Erik Stolten (ed.), *Op. cit.*

²⁴ Also Nuttall, Tim and Wright, John, "Probing the Predicaments of Academic History in Contemporary South Africa", *South African Historical Journal*, Vol. 42, May 2000, pp. 29, 30, 34.

²⁵ Guy, Jeff, "Battling with Banality", *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, Vol. 18, pp. 156-193.

It would seem nevertheless that despite the blunders and inaccuracies revealed by Grundlingh, the new regime has succeeded in taking its official claim in the moulding of the war heritage.

Georgi Verbeeck from Maastricht University in his *Apartheid in the museum* critically analyses the newly established Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg.²⁶ This museum is destined to serve as a mirror for the new South Africa trying to come to terms with its past. It has provoked both admiration and criticism. To some degree, it meets the actual needs of the majority to identify with the past. Critics like Verbeeck however point at a growing tendency to create a new nationalistic discourse. In his eyes, the museum constitutes a controversial attempt to close history by locking away the memory of apartheid. Verbeeck also draws attention to problematic links between funding of heritage sites and leading business people in need of absolution for their earlier de facto apartheid-support.

I like the sarcasm and the debating tone in Verbeeck's description of the museum situation, but on the other hand, the serious background - for instance the actual need between Africans for a past to identify with and the lack of black history writing – deserve to be considered on its own terms. Verbeeck is quite sceptical to museums as such: “*A museum that sets the past in concrete, silences the debate and concludes history*”. However, history will hardly be forgotten just because it is put in a museum. The problem, as I see it, is more about which bias and agenda the museums assume and how history is treated in state structures and in society as such, and which pressures emerge to keep history alive.

Martin Murray's article on *Urban space, architectural design, and the disruption of historical memory* reflects penetrating research in present South African and international city architecture seen from a historical viewpoint.²⁷

In the aftermath of the 1994, propertied urban residents have in ever-increasing numbers retreated behind fortifications, barriers, and walls. Fortified enclaves of all sorts have resulted in the privatization of public space. The creation of themed entertainment destinations, like heritage theme parks, has produced new kinds of congregating, social space that in the classical liberal sense are neither fully public nor private. Whereas the historical lines of cleavage during the apartheid era typically crystallized around the extremes of white affluence and black impoverishment, the new divisions go hand in hand with a new post-apartheid rhetoric that in reality has been transformed into a defence of property, privilege, and social status despite the uplifting egalitarian discourses of non-racialist nation-building, and rainbowism. Taken together, these spatial practices have led to new more or less colour-blind forms of exclusion, separation, and segregation that have pushed the black underclass to the margins once again.

Murray's paper is highly critical to the commercial use of new technologies of cultural production and consumption. The social functions of enclosed institutions like the Waterfront, that are made only apparently inclusive by the use of cultural heritage, are convincingly revealed. The article unmasks how the use of heritage in festival-like styled cocooned areas can disguise the meaning of class stratification. This complex of problems definitely has historiographical dimensions and the article's exposure of invented traditions used as sanitised past is very talented. The style of this genealogy of created history might be labelled as deconstructionist or even post-modernist. In that case, it is one of the most usable examples I have come across so far in this genre.

²⁶ Georgi Verbeeck, “Structure of memory: apartheid in the museum”, in Hans Erik Stolten (ed.), *Op. cit.*

²⁷ Martin Murray, “Building the “new South Africa”: urban space, architectural design, and the disruption of historical memory” in Hans Erik Stolten (ed.), *Op. cit.*

Debating divergent history views

Bernhard Magubane's article *Whose Memory - Whose History* in the section of our collection dealing with conflicting interpretations of South African history,²⁸ argues that early colonial history writing was made deliberately to justify genocidal wars.²⁹ After 1910, when the fact of conquest had been firmly established, blacks were reduced to objects. The crude racism of Theal was replaced by the liberal discourse of Macmillan's followers who used much of their energy exploring whether the policies of segregation were compatible with capitalist growth.³⁰ After the Second World War, as the process of decolonisation swept the world, the conventional, partly segregationist, liberal discourse gave way to the renewed liberal Africanist discourse of *Oxford History* and the subsequent neo-Marxist historiography.

What in Magubane's opinion is striking about even the two latter paradigms is the almost complete absence of the African as a historical subject in spite of the long history of national struggles. In Magubane's view, almost nothing of what has been written from both liberal and neo-Marxist perspectives about the African experience has taken into account the African memory. The author's central argument, therefore, is that any discourse on historical memory in South Africa should of necessity focus on the African memory.

Magubane is unreservedly and uncompromisingly loyal to the underprivileged masses of South Africa and only to them. Western opinion makers are increasingly doing their best to relieve the public of the feeling of guilt for the crimes of colonialism, but since the transfer of values from South to North is currently as high as ever before, due to many of the same exploitative mechanisms, progressive academics should oppose this tendency. Magubane's article puts the record straight.

Methodically Magubane attempts to raise the levels of abstraction and understanding through the use of historical parallels inspired by anthropology, a tool often forgotten by conventional historians in favour of the search for the unique and individual.³¹ Magubane asks the important question: Did the events of 1994 make everything written by liberal historians nonsense? However, he himself does hardly answer it fully, and more important, he does not ask where 1994 (or rather GEAR) leaves the radical historians, which seems to me to be an even more important question.

It is important to be reminded that Marxist history writing did not start with the radical revisionists in the 1970s and that consequent socialism has a long tradition in South Africa. Then again, it might be a little too brutal to say that "*the neo-Marxist 'movement' never grew beyond being an intellectual exercise*". In the larger picture, the radical academics, in my view, played a progressive role despite their intellectual sectarianism and personal career agendas. I agree in the author's unreserved recognition of the many years of unselfish cross-racial struggle by South African communists, but it is hardly fair to state that neo-Marxist historiography was only "*a confused mixture of borrowed ideas*". Magubane's respect for early Marxists in South Africa is well placed, but they too had many analytical weaknesses, and the structuralists of the '70s took many penetrating categories in use and strangely enough assisted in bringing historical materialism out to a wider public. To throw liberal and neo-Marxist historians in the same basket, as Magubane does in his critique of Bozzoli, would of course explain, why it has been so easy for the two streams to come together in the new South

²⁸ Magubane, Bernhard, "Whose Memory - Whose History? The Illusion of Liberal and Radical Historical Debates", in Hans Erik Stolten (ed.), *Op. cit.*

²⁹ Theal, George M., *South Africa*, London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd; *History, from 1505 to 1884*, Vol. 4, London, George Allen & Unwin, Vol. 1, *History, From 1795 to 1872*, London, George Allen & Unwin, Ltd, 1894; Theal, George McCall, *Records of the Cape Colony*, 36 vol., Printed for the Government of the Cape Colony, London, 1897 - 1905.

³⁰ Macmillan, William M., *Complex South Africa. An Economic Footnote to History*, London, Faber and Faber, 1930.

³¹ Also see Bernhard Magubane, *The Making of a Racist State: British Imperialism and the Union of South Africa 1875-1910*, 1996.

Africa in what Bozzoli herself has called "*the new hegemony*".³² Nevertheless, even left wing academics' foreseeable deceit cannot wipe out their overall progressive role in the '70s and '80s.

Magubane's article tells us that it might still be too early for historical absolution and demobilization, but it has to be said that the author is much more specific in his critique of the professional historians than in his expectations to the ANC as organisation and as administration. Historically, the ANC made many mistakes which the author in his consideration for unity between the progressive forces does not really take into account.

In some respects, Christopher Saunders's second contribution to our book *Four decades of South African historical writing* stands in direct contrast to Magubane's.³³ One of the key observations in Saunders' paper is that the transfer of power in South Africa in the 1990s was not accompanied by any major new trend in historical writing about the country. His paper argues that a main reason for that is that South African historiography underwent a fundamental change already from the 1960s, when the liberal Africanist work came into existence. In Saunders view, previous interpretations of twentieth century South African historiographical developments, including his own earlier work,³⁴ have laid too much emphasis on the distinction between liberal and radical historiography. While he recognises that there were fierce battles between those two schools, he argues that the more important historiographical development was one in which liberal and radical historians were both involved: placing black Africans at the centre of the story of the South African past.

The author is extremely well informed also in the newest literature. Where other works by Saunders usually have been secure and unproblematic, this piece is more straightforward and even provocative. For example, Saunders seems to think that the contributions made by the early Africanist historians "*tended to over-stress African agency*".

I disagree with the author there and at several other points. Saunders, as a liberal, openly admits the merits of the radical historians. However, merging liberal Africanists and radical revisionists together almost like in Wright's old interpretation (and in Magubane's new apparently!) could unfortunately be true today,³⁵ but hardly in the 1970s, where a clear break based on entirely different world views took place in my belief. Saunders might be right that many of the "social historians" of the 1970s were as much in odds with the radical structuralists as with the liberalists, but nevertheless their actual practical role in societal and professional dynamics at this point in time were more in line with a socialist orientation. Maybe Saunders as a dedicated university scholar is focusing too narrowly on the university sphere, while the use of, and the battle between, views inspired by liberal and Marxist historians was more fierce and prolonged in society as such. I sense an inner contradiction in the author's points where he claims to recognize the external influences on the profession, but in reality in some ways thinks like an internalist.

One of Saunders arguments is that the demands on history being part of nationbuilding have been surprisingly mild. But should that be praised as academic freedom or be moaned as lacking usefulness and ideological demobilisation?

³²Bozzoli, Belinda, "Intellectuals, Audiences and Histories: South African Experiences 1978-1988", *Radical History Review*, No. 46/7, pp. 237-263, 1990.

³³ Saunders, Christopher, "Four decades of South African Academic Historical Writing: A personal perspective", in Conference Book Publication: Hans Erik Stolten (ed.), *Op. cit.*

³⁴ Saunders, Christopher C., *The making of the South African past: major historians on race and class*, Cape Town: David Philip, 1988.

³⁵ Wright, Harrison M., *The Burden of the Present. Liberal-radical controversy over Southern African history*, Cape Town, David Philip, 1977.

Vladimir Shubin's article on the *Historiography of the ANC* is an expedition into some of the literature which surrounds the freedom movement.³⁶ It draws on the author's long-time commitment to the international solidarity movement, on his research on the ANC seen from Moscow.³⁷

His overview over Soviet and Russian South African studies are impressive, and it is depressing that research from Russia and Eastern Europe has got so little recognition in the West. I took part in the 9th Congress of Africanists at the Institute for African Studies in Moscow in May 2002, and my impression was that even if it is in fact still a very large institute with many active researchers, there is little money for publishing, and exchange of research results with western scholars seems to be limited.

Shubin is well versed in the literature of the ANC, but the author's way of giving priority to the analysed books might be considered a little traditional by some. Nevertheless, I personally agree in most of his rough critique of writers hostile to the ANC, such as Ellis and McKinley.³⁸

Shubin gives us valuable insights in some of the progressive agreeable works, like Rusty Bernstein's and Raymond Suttner's,³⁹ while some of his other appraisals of works loyal to the ANC, like Meli's,⁴⁰ seem a little uncritical, and some assessments of independent or critical academics appear a little distanced, as in the case of Tom Lodge.⁴¹

The more obscure works hostile to the line decided by the ANC leadership, Shubin takes on very directly and he puts the usual self-righteous stile of western academia in relief. Shubin is defending international left wing solidarity ties to the ANC against distortions, which is a necessary task now that many different more or less unauthorized intruders want to take over the palms of victory, reduce the role of the actual freedom fighters, and make all actors equally responsible.

My own paper in the forthcoming book, *The discussion of the relationship between capitalism and apartheid*,⁴² is an attempt to renew the debate over the importance of capitalism in the development of the South African society by taking up again a classical analysis made by one of the other contributors to the collection, Merle Lipton.

In my eyes, the liberal way of historical thinking has contained a market determinism, which deliberately placed the political realisation of a predicted future on the agenda. After disappointing results of their own efforts into making segregation work,⁴³ main figures from the liberal school of historians already from the late 1920s postulated, that race prejudice and

³⁶ Shubin, Vladimir, "Historiography of the ANC: An Overview", in Conference Book Publication: Hans Erik Stolten (ed.), *Op. cit.*

³⁷ Shubin, Vladimir, *The ANC: a view from Moscow*, Cape Town, Mayibuye Books, 1999; Shubin, Vladimir, "The Soviet Union/Russian Federation's relations with South Africa, with special reference to the period since 1980", *African Affairs*, 1996, Vol. 95, no. 378, p. 5-30.

³⁸ Ellis, Stephen / Sechaba, Ttsepo, *Comrades against apartheid: The ANC and the South African Communist Party in Exile*, London, James Currey, 1992; McKinley, Dale T., *The ANC and the Liberation Struggle: A Critical Political Biography*, London, Pluto Press, 1997.

³⁹ Bernstein, Rusty, *Memory Against Forgetting. Memoirs from a Life in South African Politics 1938-1964*, Penguin Group, England, 1999; Suttner, Raymond / Cronin, Jeremy (eds.), *Thirty Years of the Freedom Charter*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1986; Suttner, Raymond, *Inside Apartheid's Prison. Notes and Letters of Struggle*, Melbourne, Ocean / Uni. of Natal Press, 2001.

⁴⁰ Meli, Francis, *South Africa belong to us. A History of the ANC*, Zimbabwe Publ. House / Indiana University Press / James Currey, London, 1989.

⁴¹ Lodge, Tom, *Black politics in South Africa since 1945*, London, Longman, 1983.

⁴² Stolten, Hans Erik, "Capitalism and apartheid: elaborations over Lipton's position", in Hans Erik Stolten (ed.), *Op. cit.*

⁴³ Legassick, Martin C., *The making of South African 'Native Policy' 1913-23: The origins of segregation*, Institute of Commonwealth Studies postgraduate seminar, 5/2-1972, University of London, 1972; Legassick, Martin C., "The frontier tradition in South African historiography", *Collected Seminar Papers on the Societies...*, Vol. II, pp. 1-33, Uni. of London, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, 1971.

race separation in it-self were outdated and irrelevant and that they would be gradually weakened due to the logic of modern economic rationality. The free market was colour-blind and would liberate suppressed race-groups, so that the close connection between race and class affiliation would be broken. As we all know however, the South African reality developed a little different with an increasingly extensive legislation after race lines.

Even if it can be argued that in the end, history to some degree proved the liberals right, their unambiguous connection between economic growth and liberal reforms showed to be highly problematic. At least for the first two and a half decade, apartheid did not slow down growth at all. Moreover, at the political level, the liberal thesis in practice was used as a tool to pacify the freedom movements. *Their* activity was more or less unnecessary, if just the market were allowed to do the job.

The liberal doctrine that capitalism in all stages played a progressive role in the undermining of apartheid seemed almost shameless in the light of the total suppression of the 1960s. Inspired by the growing domestic democratic movement and by international solidarity, the radical historians attacked the liberals. Many radical academics also felt it necessary to distance themselves from the relaxed evolutionary beliefs and more or less collaborative attitudes towards the police state common to many liberals.⁴⁴

I consider Merle Lipton's book *Capitalism and Apartheid* as one of the most proficient attempts within the last thirty years to set economic growth and racial discrimination against each other as incompatible dimensions in modern South African society.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, my article contains harsh critique of the liberal school of historical writing in general and of Lipton's work in particular.

Beginning her research in the early 1970's, Lipton denied that capitalism did perpetuate underdevelopment and pointed instead to trends suggesting that South Africa was evolving along a route that held out the possibility of reform. A precondition for Lipton's research results, I think, is that she focuses rather narrowly on the formalised pillars of apartheid and her argument that institutionalised apartheid was almost abolished before 1990 hardly gives a fair picture. In a broader understanding, freedom struggle was present in South Africa long before 1948, just as social resistance against racialist economic extra-exploitation is far from over. Given the social gaps and working class traditions in South Africa, this is the main reason, why the liberal-radical debate is still topical.

The present weakness of this great debate is in my understanding mainly the result of a lack of socialist visions. The reason that the course in South Africa became reformist was not the liberating role of the business organisations, but the lack of alternatives. The macro-economic Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP) of 1994 was a manifestation of the latent wish for a more just society, which GEAR's subsequent submission to international capital has not provided at all.⁴⁶ It *is* actually somewhat of a "miracle" that the social situation so far is rather well controlled. It is only possible due to the broad legitimacy of the ANC government and The Freedom Alliance established during the liberation struggle.

Deliberately or not, politically important research results will be used, so in one way or another, the scholar will act as an "activist". In my opinion, every factor, which weakened the Freedom Alliance during late apartheid, also made third force violence and civil war more likely. Research, which deliberately strengthened economic liberalism and undermined militant socialism, may unwillingly have helped anti-communist and apartheid forces

⁴⁴ During our discussions, Merle Lipton has made me aware that many progressive political liberals like John Harris, Hugh Lewin, Eddie Daniels, Patrick Duncan and others suffered as victims of apartheid.

⁴⁵ Lipton, Merle, *Capitalism and Apartheid. South Africa, 1910-1984*, London, Gower, Temple Smith, 1985. Also in paperback; *Capitalism and Apartheid. South Africa, 1910-1986*, London, Wildwood House, 1986.

⁴⁶ Bond, Patrick, *Elite Transformation: From Apartheid to Neoliberalism in South Africa*, London: Pluto / University of Natal Press, 2000.

prolonging the pain. The debate over responsibility for the victims of late apartheid will not stop soon.

Merle Lipton's article in the book *Revisiting the debate about the role of business* also aims to review the debates about whether the interests and pressures of business contributed towards the erosion or the reinforcement of apartheid. Parts of her paper draw on the testimony presented to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and discuss the relevance of this debate to relations between the ANC, business and white liberals in post-apartheid South Africa.

Lipton's argumentation for a continued historical debate on this issue is central. It is honest on the author's historical resistance towards sanctions. The insight and acknowledgment that conflicts have not gone away, and that the social structure behind the liberal-radical terminology exists are crucial.

Lipton recognizes that there is still disagreement between working class and liberal oriented historical views, but now apparently more over interpretations than over facts. She denies that the phase of the debate about the capitalism-apartheid relationship which began around 1970 constitutes an exceptional intellectual breakthrough by the neo-Marxists. She claims that it was the continuation of a longstanding debate in which many liberal, Marxist, Africanist and conservative scholars were already engaged.

In her recent works, Lipton aims to document that the Marxist (or "workerist") argument is continuously crumbling and that the trade union movement now admit to the changing role of capital due to rising costs under late apartheid. On the other hand, she still does not investigate in depth to which degree difficulties for capital were mainly results of apartheid restrictions, or of political worker resistance, or of international solidarity measures, which seems to be quite crucial for her whole argument.

Lipton is very hostile to the "Stalinist past" of the Communist Party, but in the question of the relationship between reform and revolution, SACP at least was very well aware that a socialist revolution was not imminent in South Africa. However, what was the alternative to calling late apartheid reforms inadequate? Would general satisfaction with the situation have removed apartheid? Orchestrating the strong mix of national, ethnical and social mobilisation was absolutely necessary to get rid of the racial dictatorship.

The approach of Lipton's article is in my eyes classical liberal even if partly denied: if just the dysfunctional ties are removed, justice will eventually appear. The overall message seems to be preserving. Personally, I don't think that wealthy whites and unemployed blacks are much alike, and I still don't see any satisfactory way under which they can just be "living together" as South Africans without conflicts under the ruling conditions.

During the 20th century, a whole corpus of anti-communist literature was produced in South Africa, to a large degree by Afrikaners. Wessel Visser's article on *Afrikaner anti-communist history production* scrutinises the rationale behind this part of Afrikanerdom.

Visser's analysis highlights the tensions between proletarian and religious factors among poor Afrikaner workers in an explanatory way and the paper illuminates the ideological offensive of the Afrikaner churches against communism in the trade unions. Even liberalism was condemned as a so-called "Fifth Column" of communism. With the establishment of the Institute for the Study of Marxism at the University of Stellenbosch in 1980, communism as a historical factor also drew serious academic interest.

Visser's account provides a unique insight in the creation of apartheid ideology through the twentieth century. It also represents a good example of the problems of the proclaimed neutrality of political science. As Visser has stated in the debate around the book, Afrikaners who from a white point of view also bore the brunt of apartheid, are in the process of coming to terms with their past and are presently in their history writing critically trying to assess the historical pros and cons of Afrikaners in South African history.

It is my personal impression that current Afrikaner historiography often might be a little too cautious in keeping the banner of objectivity high. Anti-communism does not have to be extremely outspoken to be present, so Visser might actually place too much blame on Afrikaner history writing.

The article concludes that Afrikaner anti-communism has come to a halt. But also asks the question; if anti-Maxism really has come to an end in South Africa, since there are signs of a new beginning for example in government and ANC leaders critique of the “ultra-left”.

Allison Drew’s article “1922 and all that” examines the construction of facts in history writing, while using the early history of the Communist Party of South African as a case study.⁴⁷

Drew’s paper interrogates a postulated paucity of political history in South Africa as compared to other types of history, such as social history. The author’s moderate, source-critical notion of historical method actually seems rather conventional to me, even if she realises the classical dangers of that approach. Personally, I find it problematic to trust incomplete, or accidentally preserved, or intentionally positioned, written sources too much compared to predictable logical interests. However, with the author’s impressive source collecting work in mind, it is perhaps only natural that she would defend the relative importance of written sources.⁴⁸ And this approach in fact seems to stimulate the author’s refreshing lack of respect for reputable historians’ habitual commitment of to established myths.

Drew is a leading expert in the history of the early communist party, CPSA. She is aware that the CPSA in 1922 had problems in recognizing the position of black workers, but she argues that the CPSA was not responsible for the notorious slogan “*Workers of the World Fight and Unite for a White S.A.*”, and that there were communists who argued strongly for the need to organize black workers. So, even if I would have loved to see the early South African socialists cleared for all accusations of racism, this is not the aim of her article. The focus is on the following institutionalisation of a myth between recognized historians.

Even if drew does not mention this at all, her article might be seen as a reaction to the total subjectivism and relativism of some postmodernists, but on the other hand, their trend has gained its elitist attractiveness exactly because popular external pressure is not present to keep history to its natural place in ideological and national strides.

Drew feels that the challenge in the post-apartheid era is to develop an intellectually autonomous practice of history that avoids becoming the mouthpiece of any particular political organization. However, history is not an exact science. Generally speaking, I am not sure if historians would act better up to professional standards, if they were just left to themselves. There are always external pressures, usually strongest from the established society. Yet in times, when alternative forces are powerful, new visions can easier gain strength in the profession, and it is my overall impression that the popular demands from the 1970s and onwards gave a better history writing, and that one of the major problems for South African historical research in the present situation is the lack of external engagement in “big issues”.

In most modern societies, state subsidised history to a large extent have existed to supplement or substitute obsolete ideological use of religion, nationalism/ethnocentrism and culture to give people a meaning of life in accordance with the interest of the state, and in this it differs to some degree from natural science. The practice of history cannot be autonomous.

⁴⁷ Drew, Allison, “1922 and all that: Facts and The Writing of South African Political History”, in Hans Erik Stolten (ed.), *Op. cit.*

⁴⁸ Drew, Allison. (ed.), *South Africa's Radical Tradition, A Documentary History*, Vol. 1-2, UCT Press / Buchu Books / Mayibuye Books, 1996-97; Drew, Allison, *Discordant Comrades. Identities and Loyalties on the South African Left*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2000.

Remaking the categories for the different kinds of history writing and repealing the more or less political labelling of historians might prove more difficult than Drew thinks, and the more neutral generational explanation of developments in historiography which she prefers might not be the most important either, since all of the treated main ideological categories have actually existed at least from the beginning of last century in one form or another.

In a dialectic way, through painful mutual critique, they have enriched each other, and it could be refreshing to establish that historical research of today is actually generally on a higher level of knowledge and insights than research of earlier times. (At least until the end of cold war and the deterioration of socialism put an end also to much of the dialectic).

Drew rightly accentuates the need for more workers history and feminist history, but how should that be furthered? In total autonomy, by politically engaged popular pressure, or by a progressive government programme for the profession of history?

Problems in the practice of history in schools and institutions

The last part of our edited work consists of articles dealing with the present situation for history as a profession, with special emphasis on teaching in schools and institutions.

Yonah Seleti's article *Changing the Landscape of School History* explores the impact of the South African historiographical debates on the process leading to curriculum 2005.⁴⁹ The role of state power, civil society and academics in the process of curriculum formulation are examined. Technical, political, economic and educational sides are described by the Chairman of the Ministerial History Committee. An examination of the learning support material produced since 1994 reflects the extent in which the historiographical debates have been integrated in the mainstream education system.

The record of the South African History Project is revealed and connected with the process of reviving interest in history as subject in schools and universities.

For an article dealing with pedagogy, Seleti's paper is partly quite technical and formal with a high weight on official definitions, but it also contains accounts of the actual value debate around the curriculum, revealing interests behind educational conflicts.

More fundamental external explanations might have been brought in, however. Like for example overall declining enthusiasm and lack of engagement partly due to the demobilising policies of the government. One reason for the crisis in history is ascribed to "*silo mentalities*", which leads to limited engagement of academic historians in school matters. This is probably a very necessary critique, which should be extended in future debates.

June Bam's contribution *Making History the South African Way* provides an account of the important South African History Project from a more didactic angle. Even if the optimistically assessed achievements are in focus, the Chief Executive of the project reveals many of the problems in the great endeavour of using history education for nation building. Bam places new heavy burdens on the shoulders of South African historians focusing on history as pedagogical instrument for social construction under the transformation process. She seems to be confident that a common future can be obtained through dialog using the healing power of historical memory.

One can only appreciate this effort to mobilise the stakeholders of history and culture for idealistic purposes. On the other hand, I have always been a little sceptical towards an overall national interest shared by all, but continued divergence used as fuel and driving force for the engaged implementation of history is not the main focus of this article.

The official intentions, plans and principles for South African education, as outlined by Bam, are among the best in the world, but as Bam also notices, the transformation of these

⁴⁹ Seleti, Yonah, "Changing the Landscape of School History Education in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Prospects and Challenges, 2000-2004", in Hans Erik Stolten (ed.), *Op. cit.*

objectives into existing reality is a whole other matter. Bam specifies all the areas in teacher education and all the pedagogical skills which will be necessary to upgrade before the ambitious goals for the new history education can be achieved.

Marietjie Oelofse and Derek du Bruyn's paper *The need for oral history* embarks from the point of view that oral history is as old as history itself and that the use of oral evidence is not new in South Africa either.⁵⁰ It is the authors' claim that the use of oral history has led to a focal change and transformation of content in the historical profession.

Oelofse and du Bruyn present an engaged defence for the use of oral history in the teaching and practice of history. The article highlights the social, democratic, and pedagogical advantages in using oral history and puts popular, folk, and local history at the centre. The authors are aware of the drawbacks of oral history. However, interests involved in this discussion are not pinpointed and the approach of the article confirm to me that Afrikaner and African newcomers to the historiographical discussion often treats both the liberal historical establishment and post-apartheid government educational structures too diplomatic.

Catherine Burns' contribution *A Useable Past* can be seen as a critical engagement with the claim that South African historical research is suffering from a deep "post-crisis".⁵¹

Examining the demands and expectations being placed on history specialists by for instance biomedical researchers, gender activists, educationalists, development specialists, economists and others, Burns' paper argues that historians are being called on with just as much urgency as in the 1980s, but to answer very different questions about the new social and political order.

On this background Burns explains why it could appear as if history, as a genre of human thought production, is under siege. The main argument of the paper nevertheless is that this appearance disguises important key openings and potentials for the profession. Burns declares that "*the study of desire, disease, delight and death*" could provide new ground for history research, writing and teaching. She argues that young South Africans face a world of complexity and want to communicate, be understood, and change. It is here the teaching of history has its mission.

Burns' considerations over the use of history in connection with the AIDS pandemic are therefore very important and her unreserved praise of activist use of history inside the AIDS campaign must be welcomed in times of rising expert exclusivity. So, I am sympathetic to the author's argument for more focus on health related history, even if I am not convinced that the situation for this branch of our profession suffers more than the history of Africans in trade unions, townships, and rural areas.

An uncritical reader of Burns' article could get the impression that there is little wrong with the lacking interest in history among the youth, and that if all history departments in South Africa would just learn from Durban, we might have a new renaissance for the profession. This might be to underestimate the problems.

The dangers of popularising history are stressed in a way that seems a little contradictory to me. To which extent do historians have to adjust to their audience? What if some attitudes of "*the new audiences*" are totally superficial? Should we really just applaud the turn to "*the good history*" of the autobiographies on the expense of structural analyses? I fear that if history must give in there, it is dead already. Even if it could sound quite dry and conservative, my foremost expectation to academic history is not that it is entertaining, but that it is necessary. Why was it actually that popular pressure in the '80s gave us a more vital

⁵⁰ Marietjie Oelofse and Derek du Bruyn, "The need for Oral History in a changing South Africa", in Hans Erik Stolten (ed.), *Op. cit.*

⁵¹ Burns, Catherine, "A useable past: the search for 'history in chords'", in Hans Erik Stolten (ed.), *Op. cit.*

and analytical academic history writing than the one we are getting now? Because the current external and popular influences are less genuine, I think.

That the historians are called on with the same urgency as in the 1980s is unfortunately not true, as I see it. It ought to be so, because the need is not much lesser now, but to create that situation will demand external pressure from a broad and genuine social movement in need of a useful history for the purpose of building a more just society. I am not sure if that reflects the existing situation in South Africa right now.

Having the language of the ANC-government and the Truth Commission in mind, one could expect, that the TRC would have made an important contribution to the development of a new historiography for South Africa, and that this would be traceable in the new curricula for South Africa history education. Giulia Ray found in her *Post-Apartheid Use of History Education for Nation Building* that the TRC and its history related writing have had little impact on South African history education.⁵² Instead, the major didactic shift in South African education, to an outcome-based approach (OBE), seems to have demanded all the effort, from both curriculum planners, policy makers, and teachers. The new curriculum, not listing a specific content, allows the individual teacher large freedom to teach as much or as little history as he/she likes. Phrases like “the new patriotism” and “allegiance to the flag” seem to indicate a non-history related way to promote and create a shared South African identity. Despite recent efforts towards putting history back into the curriculum, the “subject” is no longer perceived by teachers as being as important as it used to be just after the first free elections.

As Saunders has also established, professional historians are not without responsibility for the way in which the TRC-results were not used. Even if it is years since the five volume Truth and Reconciliation Report appeared, few historians have commented on them, let alone subjected them to any detailed critique.⁵³ In my opinion, the historians’ aversion could have something to do with the political agenda around the establishment of the Truth Commission. Only little was said or done on apartheid destabilization of neighbouring states, collective responsibility for past mistakes by the ANC leadership was relativised, the role of big business in upholding apartheid was only discussed very superficially, even whitewashed by the TRC submissions.⁵⁴ Part of this can be explained by the Christian and liberal ethos that was uncritically accepted as a moral basis that would provide both “*opening up and healing of wounds*”. Because of this, the way in which liberal ideology had worked together with authoritarian capitalist exploitation was not researched critically in any depth at the TRC.⁵⁵ Therefore, the results were difficult to use in the struggle for fundamental structural changes.

The historians and the political struggle for a better South Africa

Allow me some further personal reflections after the going over of the articles in our forthcoming collection.

The matter of a fruitful union of scientific work and political engagement remains central to South African historiography. For example, how could support for the ideals of the previous freedom movement, including the ANC and COSATU, and historical research be combined in

⁵² Ray, Giulia, “Creating the Future - Post-Apartheid Use of History Education for Nation Building Purposes”, in Hans Erik Stolten (ed.), *Op. cit.*

⁵³ C. Saunders, “Historians and the TRC”, *Focus*, February 2003; D. Posel and G. Simpson, (eds.), *Commissioning the Past*, Johannesburg, 2002.

⁵⁴ Liebenberg, Ian, “Liberation in South Africa: Civil Strife, Diaspora and Visions Contending”, Conference paper from Collective Memory and Present day Politics in South Africa and the Nordic Countries, Conference of Historians, Africanists and Development Researchers, Copenhagen 22-23 August, 2002.

⁵⁵ This is simply my impression from the Report. Under a recent discussion in Copenhagen with Charles Villa-Vicencio, he saw it differently.

a creative manner? What significance does such applied partiality have now that the same organisations are part of the government?

The problem is important, because sanctioned relationships between research and political priorities, defined by the former national freedom movement in the current prolonged transitional period could influence the educational system for a long time to come.

The intellectual's defence against the demands for socialisation, whether put forward officially or by an alternative party, has often been the traditional, unproblematised argument for autonomy. In this argument, research is often viewed as ethically and politically neutral, a value-free, objective practice that develops within its own rationale and logic.

Deeply engaged in liberatory history Harold Wolpe maintained that the independence-goal of progressive historians with sympathy for the creation of a more just future could best be achieved if the priorities of the freedom movement are kept in mind, without this leading to a simple dependence on the movement's ideology and policy. In his opinion, this would be the best compromise for tackling the principle opposition between the idealistic vision of complete research autonomy and reduction of research to an ideological function.⁵⁶

The tendencies among historians to an individualised concern for more or less exotic subjects seem worrying. Especially in the case of applied history used to sustain progressive movements or tendencies. Empathy and good insight into the feelings and needs of ordinary people should originate directly from progressive political organisations. Structural analysis does not, and should therefore be a top priority for historians and other researchers who wish to contribute to the further liberation process and democratic build-up.

There are reasons to be cautious of the dangers on this route of course. Even the Anti-Apartheid Movement does not own its own history. A new history project, such as the South African Democracy Education Trust, should benefit from an altogether inclusive approach towards historiography rather than selective inclusion.

It has in any case been a mistake on the part of the ANC that they have not encouraged actual research activities more within the organisation. It must become a task to collect the atomised individual research works and establish more collective, mixed environments for studies that can reveal the background for the rapidly changing and complex conditions in southern Africa.

Some of the contributors to our upcoming book have noticed a narrowing of ideological differences between academics. A significant part of the explanation could possibly be ascribed to present-day use of history—or rather lack of same—and opportunism inside the profession. Why should academics stick to viewpoints that for the time being have no penetrating-power and are only counter-productive to themselves? Does such a phenomenon exist elsewhere in society? They are just humans. It is perhaps typical that only COSATU workers, still with few possibilities for individual career moves, finds that ascribing guilt to business will help their bargaining position, as Merle Lipton notes.

To some degree, I concur with the scepticism towards career oriented intellectual lefties expressed by Lipton and Magubane among others. However, it will probably always be impossible to distinguish clearly between career and education policy interest on the one side and contents of the research on the other. It is just a fact of life, but it demands of course as much openness as possible around the interests behind, when one deals with ideological inflamed matters.

It is not my impression or personal experience though, that liberal researchers have been the primary target for blacklisting or that radical researchers at any point have actually been able to dictate university politics on a large national scale, such as Lipton seems to maintain.

⁵⁶ Wolpe, H., "The Liberation Struggle and Research", *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 32, 1985, p. 74.

Neither in South Africa, England or Scandinavia. I would say that it has mostly been the other way around. Academia as such in South Africa has always been dominated by white liberals. Before, during and after apartheid. Therefore, the declining interest for history studies in South Africa might be caused more by lack of surplus energy, cutbacks, and neo-liberal government signals, than by stolid radical teachers out of step with market developments. Lipton among others gives credit to the point made by Magubane that more African scholars are needed in the field of history, but how can Africans break the social heritage and make their way into the white hierarchy of academia without being part of some kind of broad social mobilisation?

The continued story of the nation state

The discussion over formal and informal power will also continue. One author rises an interesting problematic, when he describes the white minority in the new South Africa as “*Politically condemned to powerless and fragmented opposition but socially and economically virtually unaffected*”. I am reluctant to accept that such a situation could exist, and it could be an interesting task to prove just how much political influence white South Africa still has at the hidden structural level or with other words to which extent apartheid is actually over.

Several of our articles deal with the national question in one form or another. Early post-apartheid efforts were seemingly aimed at using the past as a uniting factor. However, concentrating on the future and how to regain pride for all South Africans seems to be the way the South African government has chosen later. The present nation building exercise is done more through cultivating skills needed in an economic and market-based context as well as in an increasingly globalised environment. One senses impatience with history by a present-minded generation interested mostly in the market and its utilitarian values. As a result, history is seen as peripheral. Even if official South African rhetoric still promotes dealing with the past in order to cope with the present, it shows rather little real interest in this past. In the same scenario, full of contradictions, the “Rainbow Notion” appears to be toned down, because it failed to assist in the emergence of a “New African Nation” and “New Patriotism”. And just as in the European nations before the developed welfare systems, this kind of patriotic mobilisation seems to be necessary for social stability.⁵⁷ To which extent should historians apply their skills for this purpose? South Africa might actually still be at a stage where patriotism is needed. It might be one of Africa’s biggest problems that its nations have not been allowed to fully build and defend nation states and I am not sure if this development stage could just be skipped.

It seems to me that some of our post-radical historians are relatively cool to the black communities’ legitimate feelings and needs for counter-histories of freedom struggle, but one has to recognise that there were actually victims and heroes in that struggle. The emergence of identity politics in post-apartheid South Africa is hardly possible to avoid, and the idea of a common past that all South Africans can gather around is probably something of an illusion. The question may rather be *how* group identities and a plurality of histories are defined and used.

The majority of South Africans might have a past in which they could at least partly identify, namely the fight against colonisation and the freedom struggle. But that is not the past of most whites, and to have conflicting pasts is not necessarily very productive for a common harmonious nation building. The past of the black mine worker and that of the white white-

⁵⁷ Ray’s article refers to Hobsbawm, E.J *Nations and Nationalism since 1780 - Programme, Myth, Reality*, Cambridge 1992; Gellner, Ernest, *Stat, nation och nationalism*, Falun 1997; Hylland-Eriksen, Thomas, *Kulturterrorismen – En uppgörelse med tanken om kulturell renhet*, Fagernes, 1999.

collar worker was as different as the present of the township squatter and of the businessman of today. The social protests were an important part of the liberation struggle, but to stress that today would be to admit that the conflict is not over. That might explain why neutral symbols are often preferred to signify the shared citizenship.

The future of African historiography

It is impossible to predict which direction black historiography will take. Even if the situation in the South African society develops in the best way possible, i.e. towards a reasonably harmonious socially and stable pluralistic system, which is probably an optimistic expectation, the black population will continue, although from a better position, to have to fight for its rights and opportunities.

A development that was predicted by some, but which has not yet materialised, was the elevation of the freedom movements' historiography, first and foremost the ANC's, to honour and dignity, maybe partly through a professionalisation of the organisations' own authors, or as inspiration and study area at the universities. Many expected that with the transfer of power to a majority government in 1994, a new nationalist history writing would emerge, as had happened in other parts of Africa with the decolonisation.

If South Africa really was liberated from white structural control and had been fully unchained from internal colonial, and from external neo-colonial, domination, it would have been only natural, if a bearing of black, African, nationalist history writing would have matured and prevailed. A new black consciousness with a view on whites mainly as intruders into a basically African country.

However, after 10 years of democracy, there are only weak tendencies in this direction, and little is being written on the development of South African historical writing. The transfer of political power has not yet been matched by any significant new development in basic historiographical approaches.

There could be a number of reasons for this. To explain the absence of a new direction in South African historiography in the 1990s, Martin Legassick and Gary Minkley pointed to the nature of the negotiated revolution. The change of power in South Africa was slightly different from the decolonisations of tropical Africa thirty years previously, in the way that it was the result of a set of negotiations within the country between the ruling white minority, which was forced to give up political power, and the party, representing the majority, which accepted a liberal democratic constitution and at least in middle-long term agreed to work within a capitalist framework.

Chris Saunders adds another possible and partly conflicting explanation: that the historiographical equivalent to the dramatic political change of 1994 already had taken place decades earlier. He suggests that South African history was decolonised long before the political decolonisation of 1994. He refers, I think, to the wave of liberal Africanism spearheaded by Oxford History around 1970.

Let me bring out a couple of other rather obvious reasons: first that radical African researchers have not entered into the profession and hardly exist at the history departments. Secondly, it also seems reasonable to presume that radical liberatory history for example became less relevant during the ANC-government's social demobilisation.

Therefore, the question, if South African history has actually been liberated at all, still seems relevant to me.

One can only hope that continued engagement in the struggle for equal political and economic rights, even within historiography, will adhere to topics such as black consciousness and national sovereignty, the forms of exploitation, and the organisational history of the resistance struggle.

A growing demand on closer connection to the rest of Africa is about to be added to the agenda of South Africa historians. During the first 20 years following the decolonisation of

tropical Africa, African nationalism, the traditions and roots of the independence movements and anti-imperialism were the main themes for African historians north of South Africa. They sought continuity between pre- and post-colonial phenomena to show that original African values had survived despite white supremacy and could give the new states an African character in the form of “African socialism”, for example. The first years of independence were in addition characterised by a confrontation with the colonial myth of the “Europeans who brought progress to primitive Africa”. The overwhelming problems, that lowly developed states experienced when attempting alternative socialist or non-capitalist paths of development and more or less self-elected isolation from the dominant Western economies in the following years, brought about a great imbalance, on the theoretical level as well.

African historians have already showed that Africa had large old kingdoms, mining and trading centres and well-functioning infrastructures before the arrival of the Europeans. Some researchers have even suggested that the real values in Africa’s history have to be found in the stateless society based on local autonomy, cooperation and cooptation, rather than on disciplining and competition.⁵⁸

Perhaps a new generation of black South African historians could learn from this series of experiences without entirely renouncing universal, theoretical presentations. It would be unfortunate just to see a return to a new variety of the conventional empiricism.

Even for one who remains sceptical to “New Africanism”, it is highly problematic that South African history to a great extent continues to reflect the world-view of the white minority. The pace of change and transformation has actually been rather slow. This causes hurt and pain to the majority of black people and makes it less easy for South Africa to fulfil its role as an African country. Many of the discoveries made by the Human Rights Commission on racism in the media could in fact be valid also in the area of historical identity creation.⁵⁹ White experts continue to set the public agenda and the editor of NAI’s forthcoming collection, *History making and present day politics: the meaning of collective memory in South Africa*, regrets that he has not been able make much of a difference in that respect.

⁵⁸ Curtin, P., “Recent trends in African historiography and their contribution to history in general”, from Ki-Zerbo (ed.), *General history of Africa*, Vol. 1, Unesco, London, 1981, p. 58.

⁵⁹ South African Human Rights Commission, *Faultlines: Inquiry into Racism in the Media*, A SAHRC Report, August 2000, <http://www.sahrc.org.za/faultlines.pdf>, p.22.