

SOUTH AFRICAN RESISTANCE CULTURE

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Radical Historiography as Academic Protest

by Hans Erik Stølen

Between the late 1960s and the late 1980s, South African historiography underwent a partial change of paradigm. Marxist inspired historical research broke through and challenged the liberal standpoint as the dominating view at the universities, although it never came close to replacing it.

The point of departure for this radical revisionism was the criticism of the liberal doctrine that capitalism played a progressive role in the undermining of apartheid; a perception which seemed almost shameless in the light of the total suppression of the 1960s. The rapid economic growth of the late 1960s occurred simultaneously with the implementation of an all-embracing policy of racial segregation, from the perfection of petty apartheid in its most humiliating forms to grand apartheid's forced removal of three million people. Thus the radical historians primarily attacked the liberal historians because of their uncritical belief in the liberalising effects of the market economy. Capitalism was not eroding racial discrimination. On the contrary, South African capitalism had helped bring about rational and cost-effective forms of domination.

The development of a deeper sense of solidarity with the impoverished and disenfranchised part of the population added momentum to this criticism of the system. The mass strikes of 1972-73 and the Soweto Uprising in 1976-77 served as catalysts for an intellectual confrontation with well-established notions.

The modern radical school took its point of departure in the critique of the liberal academics collaborative attitude towards the police state. In the light of the militant liberation movements sabotage campaigns and the increasing suppression, some academics felt it necessary to distance themselves from the relaxed evolutionary beliefs of the liberals.

The new radical school of historians tried to localise South Africa in a global context with categories such as capitalism, development, international class struggle, global economy and imperialist exploitation, and they included the African extra-parliamentary movements in the historical analysis as

principal agents of progressive social change. In this radical universe, capitalist economic development and racial discrimination were seen as complementary and mutually reinforcing elements. Some radical authors as Wolpe, Legassick, Trapido, Johnstone and Magubane emphasised the prolonged continuity of capital's effect on state power.¹ Others like Bundy, Keegan and Trapido worked with the impact of white capitalism on African agriculture and they argued, contrary to most of the liberals, that it developed rather flexibly and competitively until it was banished to the reserves by the Land Acts of 1913 and 1936.² Still others as Simons and Simons, O'Meara and Henson have placed analytical emphasis on the persistent ingenuity of the African workers in their reactions to ultra-exploitation and suppression.³

The Canadian Frederick R. Johnstone was the first to develop an explanatory model for the actual, demonstrable harmony between the racial exclusion system and the concurrent high degree of economic vitality in South Africa. As opposed to the liberals, he believed that the relationship between capitalist development, the apartheid policy and other core structures of white

¹ Wolpe, Harold: *Capitalism and Cheap Labour Power in South Africa: From Segregation to Apartheid, Economy and Society*. Vol. 1, No. 4, London, 1972. Legassick, Martin: *Legislation, Ideology and Economy in Post-1948 South Africa*. In Martin Murray (ed.): *South African Capitalism and Black Political Opposition*, pp. 467-509, Massachusetts, 1982. Also *Journal of Southern African Studies* Vol. 1, No. 1, 1974. Trapido, Stanley: *South Africa in a Comparative Study of Industrialisation, Journal of Development Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 3, pp. 309-320, 1971. Johnstone, Frederick R.: *White Prosperity and White Supremacy in South Africa Today, African Affairs*, Vol. 69, No. 275, pp. 124-140, 1970. Also in Murray, M. (ed.): *South African Capitalism...*, 1982. Magubane, Bernard M.: *The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa, Monthly Review Press*, New York, 1979. Denson, D.J.N.: *The Transvaal Labour Crisis 1901-1906, Journal of African History*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 1967.

² Bundy, Colin: *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry, Perspectives on Southern Africa*, 28, Berkeley: UCP / London: Heinemann, 1979. Keegan, Tim: *The Restructuring of Agrarian Class Relations in a Colonial Economy: The Orange River Colony, 1902-1910, Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2, p. 238, 1979. Trapido, Stanley: *Landlord and Tenant in a Colonial Economy: The Transvaal 1880-1910, Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 26-58, 1978.

³ Simons, H.J. / Simons, R.E.: *Class and Colour in South Africa 1850-1950*. Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1969. O'Meara, Dan: *The 1946 African Mineworkers Strike and the Political Economy of South Africa, Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, Vol. 13, No. 2, London, 1975. Henson, David: *Trade Unionism and the struggle for liberation in South Africa, Capital and Class*, Vol. 6, pp. 1-41, London, 1978. Also in Murray (ed.), op. cit., 1982.

supremacy were compatible, or "essentially collaborative", and he asserted that economic growth simply reinforced white hegemony.⁴

Johnstone saw apartheid as a rational policy, whose main purpose was to prevent social mobility among blacks. By keeping the educational level of blacks down, by preventing blacks from handling their own interests on the labour market and by obstructing blacks in the accumulation of capital, the racist system secured distribution and reproduction of the cheapest possible manpower.

This new radical school turned the liberal viewpoint upside down. The foundation for South Africa's economic growth was precisely the cheap labour system and its mechanism of ultra-exploitation. Racial systems and economic growth depended on and supported each other. They were not antagonistic elements, such as the liberal historians alleged. On the contrary, they were inseparable and mutually reinforcing. According to the radical rebels, the explanation of racial discrimination should now be found within the structural conditions of the South African economy. Racist repression had been a condition for rapid growth of a successful white economy and this growth simultaneously led to a fortification of white supremacy.

A significant condition for the new wave of radical and Marxist historical investigation was the recurrence of popular trade union activity and political struggle, which characterised South Africa from the beginning of the 1970s. Especially the "South African Labour Bulletin" (SALB), which appeared from May 1974, played an important role in the discussion on the historically conditioned suppression of independent working class organisations.

The radical revisionists saw the principal problem in South African history as white colonial exploitation of the black population. Even though both liberals and radicals understood racist prejudices as irrational, the radicals perceived South African racism as rational to the extent that it had operated as ideological legitimisation of the exploitation of black workers. Just as the liberals, the radicals did not see the South African apartheid economy as a free market economy, in which commodities were distributed solely on the basis of the principle of supply and demand. But for the radicals, it was first and foremost an exploitative economy, within which fast accumulation of capital and high

⁴ Johnstone, F.R.: *White Supremacy and White Prosperity in South Africa Today, African Affairs* 69/225, 1970, pp. 124-140.

living standards for the white working class were made possible through a political apparatus of repression, which secured continued control of low-priced black labour.⁵

The argumentation in Johnstone's proposal from 1970 mostly dealt with contemporary relations in South Africa's political economy. Johnstone, Legassick, and several other participants in the unfolding of the radical analysis were educated as historians and later employed as lecturers in sociology and social sciences. Thus the historical dimension quickly became a substantial part of the debate.

Johnstone's initial article was issued just before the publication of the liberal school's until then most authoritative "flagship", *The Oxford History*, which triggered the outpouring of radical aggressions.⁶ The liberal perspective was now also attacked for its approach to group identity, for seeing race and nationality as the major determining components in South Africa history.⁷ Johnstone's article outlined the central thesis of the radical school, that capitalist development, the state labour market policy, and white supremacy were determined and completed by each other.

In another significant critique of the liberal school, Mike Morris denounced analytical weaknesses caused by the liberals' deference to neo-classical economy and pointed out the analytical strength of Marxist categories. Accumulation of capital, production relations and class struggle were future methodological tools in the quest for historical veracity. Diffuse notions such as race relations were inadequate for this task.⁸

From its outset, this new historical analysis brought the evolution of the gold mining industry into focus. In the following years the concrete expressions of racial discrimination during the process of industrialisation and proletarianisation, the living conditions of rural blacks, and the connections between culture and ideology were submitted to the revisionists' scrutiny. The radical perspective demanded that future scientific examinations of race

⁵ Trapido, Stanley: *South Africa in a Comparative Study of Industrialisation*, *Journal of Development Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 1971.

⁶ Wilson, Monica / Thompson, Leonard M. (eds.): *The Oxford History of South Africa*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969-71.

⁷ Johnstone, Frederick R.: *White Prosperity and White Supremacy in South Africa Today*, *African Affairs*, Vol. 69, No. 275, 1970, pp. 124-140.

⁸ Morris, Michael Leon: *The development of capitalism in South Africa*, *Journal of Development Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 3, pp. 280-192, 1976.

relations in South Africa should rest on an explicit conception of the specific production relations at any given stage in the development of South African capitalism. O'Meara put it this way: "Racial policy is an historical product...designed primarily to facilitate rapid capital accumulation."⁹

The historians who worked from a radical-revisionist perspective were never firmly united behind a single, methodological or theoretical approach to the crucial relationship between economic development and race relations. On the contrary, right from the beginning of the clash with liberal conventions, the new paradigm was marked by extensive, internal discussion.¹⁰ The radical school soon developed a variety of internal tensions. The vitality and diversity which characterised Marxist historical research on South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s was partly due to the fact that it had quite a number of origins and inspirations. Such creative tensions still exist between remaining, revisionist tendencies, even though the sometimes brutal and sectarian forms of the 1970s' debate have been left behind.

Ideology and class organisation

During most of the 1970s and the early 1980s, South African state power succeeded at presenting itself as an authoritative exponent for controlled reforms and as the guarantor for a reasonably stable economy. For many intellectuals, relations between state power and the power of big business seemed a natural focal point in the analysis of society. However, the course of events in South Africa led to a turn of research interests away from both economy and traditional, political history. After the Soweto Uprising in 1976, historians were influenced by a growing respect for the militant black resistance. From the last half of 1984 the situation in South Africa was characterised by repeated waves of widespread popular resistance and by the brutal attempts to suppress them. At the same time the economy moved into a real crisis. This situation also affected the choice of subject matter researched by progressive historians so that new themes were brought into focus. For example, the process of proletarianisation, the social effects of industrialisation,

⁹ O'Meara, Dan: *Op.cit.*, p. 147.

¹⁰ Clarke, Simon: *Capital, Fractions of Capital and the State: Neo-Marxist analysis, Capital and Class*, Vol. 5, pp. 32-77, London, 1978 & Wolpe, Harold: *An Analysis of the South African State - A Critique of the Concept of South African Fascism*, *South African Studies Review*, University of Edinburgh, 1983.

the organising and culture of the black working class, the strength and flaws of the popular movements, the development of consciousness among blacks, the forgotten struggles in rural areas and other local forms of freedom struggle became popular fields of research.

Gradually, and often rather discreetly, some exiled historians began to return to South African universities from the mid-1980s. The internal black freedom movement, the ANC, the trade union movement and the Communist Party, were now seen as important agents of radical change and their historical achievements simultaneously grew in importance to the identity of black South Africans.

The growing dispersion of social and workers history, particularly in the form of articles and single chapters in composite works, makes it impossible to make a complete survey of the multitude of themes and the magnitude of analyses. However, various lines of radical research can be identified. Firstly, the analyses of important events such as strikes, demonstrations, bus boycotts and protests, challenged established notions about organisation versus spontaneity, working class political parties versus union mobilising, industrial unions versus general unions.¹¹ Investigations of popular movements improved the understanding of mass mobilisation around important conflicts in South African history. Tom Lodge's overview of the black resistance after 1945¹² and Helen Bradford's comprehensive examination of Industrial and Commercial Workers Union, ICU, represent this new tendency.¹³ Secondly, some studies looked into popular culture, such as music and dance, sport and literature. Studies like these have broadened the understanding of everyday life for

township residents, migrant workers and poor country people. The works of David Coplan¹⁴ and Tim Cousins¹⁵ are illustrative of this approach.

Finally, a distinctly feminist angle of approach emerged in South African historiography. A great deal of its theories on gender relations and on suppression of women in particular was imported into South African historical sociology from European and American academic discussions. Jacklyn Cook's *Maids and Madams* was an interview-based social history that revealed the conditions for domestic servants, who were exposed to the threefold suppression of race, class and gender.¹⁶ Cook, who was teaching sociology at the University of Witwatersrand, was the object of both death threats and an attempted dynamite assassination after the publication of her book. Specific women's history in South Africa still appears mainly in the shape of unpublished papers, brief articles and dissertations.¹⁷

The radical historians and the Afrikaner society

Dan O'Meara's book, "Volkskapitalisme", contributed to the dismantling of half a century of idealising and romanticising Afrikaner historiography and struck a blow against the already cracked apartheid ideology.¹⁸ His methodology combined a striking accumulation of empirical evidence with a somewhat dogmatic Marxist theoretical apparatus. Unfortunately, the two elements of analysis are not linked together in a particularly convincing way in his work.

Nevertheless, O'Meara's investigation persuasively challenges the Boer claim of Afrikanerdom as an undifferentiated, timeless, ethnic-cultural "volks"-

¹¹ Bozzoli, Belinda (compiled by): *Labour, Townships and Protest. Studies in the social history of the Witwatersrand*. Raven Press (History Workshop), Johannesburg, 1979.

Bozzoli, Belinda: *History, Experience and Culture*. In Bozzoli (ed.): *Town and Countryside in the Transvaal*. Raven, Johannesburg, 1983. Bonner, Philip: *Kings, Commuters and the Concessionaires: The Evolution of the Nineteenth Century Swazi State*. Cambridge University Press, 1983. Webster, Eddie (ed.): *Essays in Southern African Labour History*. Raven Press, Johannesburg, 1978. Also articles by Bonner, Lewis, Ensor, O'Meara, Stein, Davies, Warwick.

¹² Lodge, Tom: *Black politics in South Africa since 1945*. Longman, London, 1983.

¹³ Bradford, Helen: *Lynch Law and Labourers: The ICU in Urvoti, 1927-1928*, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, No. 11, OUP, 1984. Bradford, Helen: *The African Industrial and Commercial Workers Union in the South African Countryside*, Ph.D., University of Witwatersrand, 1985. Published by Yale University Press. Bradford, Helen: *A taste of freedom: the ICU in rural South Africa, 1924-30*. Yale University Press, New Haven, 1987.

¹⁴ Coplan, David: *The African Performer and the Johannesburg Entertainment Industry: The Struggle for African Culture on the Witwatersrand*. In Bozzoli: *Labour, Townships...*, pp. 198-214. Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1979. Coplan, David: *In Township Tonight! South Africa's Black City Music and the Theatre*. London: Longman, 1979.

¹⁵ Cousins, Tim: *An Introduction to the History of Football in South Africa*. In Bozzoli (ed.): *Town and Countryside...*, Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1983.

¹⁶ Cook, Jacklyn: *Maids and Madams*. Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1980. Also London, *The Women's Press*, 1989, p. 14.

¹⁷ Bozzoli, Belinda: *Marxism, Feminism and South African Studies*, *Journal of Southern African Studies* Vol. 9, No. 2, Oxford University Press, 1983. Gaitskell, Deborah / Kimble, Judy / Unterhalter, E.: *Historiography in the 1970s: A Feminist Perspective*. In Frsannan et al.: *Southern African Studies: retrospect and prospect*. Centre for African Studies, Edinburgh, 1983.

¹⁸ O'Meara, Dan: *Volkskapitalisme: Class, Capital and Ideology in the Afrikaner Nationalism, 1914-48*. Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1983. Also CUP, 1983.

unity. O'Meara asserts that economic and social processes, not ethnic conflicts, formed the historical basis of Afrikaner nationalism. Instead of letting himself be pinned down by the obvious, political and ideological expressions of Afrikaner nationalism, O'Meara concentrates on the concrete historical facts, such as the attempts by ambitious Boer-leaders to reach clear material and social targets through the building of organisation, the rewording of Afrikaner ideology, and popular mobilisation. In this way, O'Meara is able to refute the traditional, more ideological interpretation of Afrikanerdom of the liberal school.

Central to his investigation are organisations or class agents, such as the firm "Sanlam" and the farmers in the Cape, who initiated the transformation of Afrikanerdom during the 1930s and 1940s.

Dan O'Meara and other radical historians argue that it was an alliance of corporative Boer capital, lower middle class farmers with labour recruitment problems, white English-speaking labour aristocracy and Afrikaans-speaking poor whites with unemployment problems which constituted the core elements behind the reshaped Afrikaner nationalism. Underneath this constructed and controlled brotherhood also lay outright manipulation and banal profit motives. Sanlam supervised the preparations for the Economic Volkskongres in 1939, and most of the new volks-institutions channelled the savings of the Boers into Sanlam-controlled firms and stocks. According to O'Meara, this handy financial alliance, which was wrapped up in ethnic and ideological slogans, determined the expression of Afrikaner nationalism. Afrikanerdom should not be seen as a popular response to generations of English suppression but rather as a construction defined by specific class interests and formed through political perseverance.

Despite its weaknesses, Volkskapitalisme must be seen as a convincing challenge to the mythological and unhistorical conceptions of the Boer-Christian nationalism which has perceived ideology and mentality as autonomously determining forces. Unfortunately, O'Meara went to the other extreme and although he convincingly placed the ideas in their material context, it feels as if he himself was strangely uninterested in the impact of those ideas.

Colonialism of a special type

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s there was a lively academic debate on how to characterise the suppression in South Africa. The intensity of this discussion reflected the growing political struggle in the country during the last years of apartheid, as well as the liberation movement's need for a precise theory that could also serve as a mobiliser in the freedom struggle. A central aspect of the debate was the theory of "colonialism of a special type", which was developed and enhanced by radical historians with relations to the ANC.¹⁹

The discovery of distinctive common features between various historical processes of external colonisation and the subsequent forms of internal ethnic, cultural, national or racial hegemony in Latin America, the United States, Israel and South Africa paved the way for internal colonialism as a model for the analysis of these societies.²⁰

According to this model, the specific trait which separates internal colonialism from "normal" colonialism is simply that the colonial power (or in the case of South Africa: the dominating, racially defined social group) is located within the same geographic territory as the colonised people. The adherents of the model often emphasise that the underdevelopment of the exploited ethnic or racial groups within the state boundaries is reproduced through mechanisms of cultural domination, political suppression and economic exploitation similar to the global mechanisms which have created welfare and prosperity in the highly developed western industrialised countries through the underdevelopment of their colonial satellites.

The radical historians showed that during the 20th century, this kind of internal exploitation has been possible because of the pre-capitalist forms of agricultural production in the reserves, bantustans and homelands. This mode of production was superimposed on older kinship and community traditions requiring that production was redistributed to tribe and family. If production for

¹⁹ eg Malapo, Ben: *Marxism, South Africa and the Colonial Question* 1-2, *African Communist*, No. 113/114, London, 1988.

²⁰ Casanova, Gonzalez P.: *Internal Colonialism and National Development, Studies in Comparative International Development*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1965. Carter, G.M. / Karis, T. / Shultz, N.M.: *South Africa's Transition: The Politics of Domestic Colonialism*. Heinemann, 1967. Blauner, R.: *Internal Colonialism and Ghetto Revolt, Social Problems*, Vol. 16, No. 4, pp. 393-408, 1969. Frank, André Gunder: *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967. Also London: Penguin Books, 1971. Blauner, R.: *Racial Oppression in America*. New York: Harper & Row, 1972.

a whole year's subsistence could be taken care of in less than a year, it will be possible for the modern capitalist sector to subvert labour to ultra-exploitation in the remaining part of the year. However this necessitates that capital "finds the means to extract it practically, without the direct intrusion of capital into the self-sustaining sector."²¹ According to this model, too much intrusion of modern capital might cause a breakdown in the pre-capitalist production relations and thereby complicate subsistence, constrain the surplus working hours and the reproduction of cheap manpower outside the capitalist sector. The radical historian Harold Wolpe has proved that this internal colonial system only functions properly when in balance, without the use of too coercive and expensive labour recruitment measures.

However, such measures might be unavoidable if agricultural production in the reserves produced a surplus for the market, since the Africans need for taking up wage labour would then decline. Fortunately for the mineowners and industrialists, the rural, native economy was in a so miserable condition after the Native Land Acts that this never became a problem.²²

This radical analysis also had implications for the international solidarity movement. It was precisely the colonial character of the apartheid regime that made its lacking legitimacy unique and made it fundamentally inconsistent with international law. The traditional liberal understanding of South Africa as an autonomous and legitimate state with unfortunate imperfections might have reduced the freedom struggle to an effort for human rights inside the limits of the existing social order and thus turned the regime into the main agent of lasting but insufficient reforms. Acceptance of the liberal position could have reduced the status of the freedom struggle to less than a fully evolved, national liberation struggle with all its potentials for popular mobilisation.

Although the theory of internal colonialism has been frequently used in rather speculative ways, one cannot question its importance for South Africa. The nearly complete international isolation of the apartheid government was strengthened by the consciousness of the colonial character of the regime. The decision of the ANC to take up arms depended on the lacking legitimacy of colonialism, and the subordination of the armed struggle to the strategy of mass

mobilisation was also due to the widespread support of national liberation. The radical academics helped to enhance this vision at a critical point in history.

Labour history

Traditional labour history has regularly been criticised for its narrow focus on trade union organisations and their leaders. Despite its powerful, moral condemnation of capitalist exploitation, it has frequently ignored the majority of the underprivileged, who fell outside the organised, urban working class.²³ Some traditional working class history has been distinctly reductionist. Working class organisation and revolutionary activity is almost automatically created by an almost too obviously suppressive situation. It is based on a preconception of a united and homogeneous working class on its way towards socialism and it has explained away the flaws of the movement with lack of class consciousness or with intrigues by reformist and opportunistic leadership circles.

The labour history of the 1970s often developed a pedantic and legitimising air because of its pure class approach, which was oriented directly towards establishing a historical tradition for workers resistance in South Africa. Parts of this historical writing were unmistakably produced to influence a contemporary situation.

The labour history of the 1970s mainly consisted of works dealing with the mining industry, various models for workers control, narrative expressions of class consciousness and early forms of resistance during industrialisation.²⁴ Charles van Onselen's "Chibaro" analysed an early phase in working class formation during the industrialisation of the mines.²⁵ While he was less concerned with unionisation, which just barely existed at that time, he sought to uncover early, informal resistance. Peter Warwick's studies also treated early African workers protest,²⁶ while Peter Richardson worked with problems

²³ Hobsbawm, E.J.: *Labour History and Ideology*, *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 7, No. 4, 1974, pp. 371-373.

²⁴ Rex, J.: *The Compound, Reserve and Urban Location - Essential Institutions of Southern African Labour Exploitation*, *SALB*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1974.

²⁵ Van Onselen, Charles: *Chibaro. African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia 1900-1933*, London, 1976.

²⁶ Warwick, Peter: *Black Industrial Protest on the Witwatersrand 1901-12*. From Webster, E. (ed.): *Essays in Southern African Labour History*, Johannesburg, 1978/81. Warwick, Peter: *Black People and the South African War*. Cambridge, 1983.

²¹ Wolpe, Harold: *Capitalism and Cheap Labour Power in South Africa*. From Segregation to Apartheid, *Economy and Society*, Vol. 1, No. 4, London, 1972, p. 439.

²² Wolpe, Harold: *Ibid.*

concerning the import of Chinese mine workers.²⁷ Philip Bonner dealt with the great mine conflict of 1920²⁸ and Sean Moroney with the compound system and informal resistance at the mines.²⁹ However, historical writing on early workers protest and workplace organisation, both in the mines and in the secondary and tertiary industry, came to a standstill and much work is still lacking in this field of research.

During the 1980s, labour history changed considerably, partly because of the influence from modern social history. As Murray has established, social history has been affected by the increased interest in the history of working class organisations and in social relations at the workplace, including the actual work-process.³⁰ The fact that South African labour history soon developed a broader understanding, can be seen as a direct consequence of the close relationship between economy and politics in this country: the black trade unions were forced to operate in a broader social framework and frequently organised outside the workplaces in order to survive and be effective. Even though this broad concept of workers history corresponded well with historical realities, it was sometimes overshadowed by narrow productions, which were motivated by the direct utility value of labour history. This situation corresponds with the strong links between socialist parties and trade unions which are reflected in the labour history of many other industrialising countries.

The rebuilding of a popular mass-movement within the country had a considerable influence on the work of progressive university academics during the 1980s. Attention was directed at questions such as the relationship between street organised and work place organised forms of protest, the relationship

between national liberation struggle and the struggle for socialism, as well as on strategic and tactical models for political resistance.

This increasing orientation towards practice in connection with the turbulent situation in the country impressed historical research. Poulantzas-structuralist directions lost influence, while social history and especially narratives of class formation and social unrests in rural areas experienced a boom as study objects. This again caused a development of methodology, as reflected in the increased use of oral historical sources.³¹ Some radical historians were able to make effective use of the methodology of social history in working class studies. This applies to Philip Bonner's investigation of the process of proletarianisation on the East Rand,³² William Beinart's work on class consciousness among migrant workers³³ and Ari Sitas' work on patterns of resistance among the residents of workers hostels.³⁴ Parts of labour history were flourishing inside the framework of social history; this especially applies to investigations of workers culture, informal fellowships and women's history.³⁵

Labour history never developed into a coherent, well defined project. To some degree, this was a consequence of the changed, political climate in the 1980s and particularly the reintroduction of the political traditions of the former Congress Movement and the following internal tensions between workerists and adherents to broad popular mobilisation. Working class history was hereafter often identified with a narrow, workerist political tradition, which reflected its

³¹ Webster, Eddie: *Workers Divided: Five Faces of the Hidden Abode*. From Bozzoli, Beinda (ed.): *Class, Community and Conflict*, Johannesburg, 1987.

³² Bonner, P. / Lambert, R.: *Batons and Bare Heads: The Strike at Amato Textiles, 1958, From Marks, S. / Trapido, S. (eds.): The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa*, London, 1987.

³³ Beinart, William: *Worker Consciousness, Ethnic Particularism and Nationalism*. From Marks, S. / Trapido, S. (eds.): *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa*, London, 1981.

³⁴ Sitas, A.: *African Worker Responses on the East Rand to Changes in South Africa's Metal Industry, 1960-1980*, Ph.D., University of Witwatersrand, 1983.

³⁵ Kock, Edward: *Without Visible Means of Substance: Slumyard Culture in Johannesburg, 1918-1940*. From Bozzoli, B. (ed.): *Town and Countryside in the Transvaal*, Johannesburg, 1983. Kock, Edward: *Dornfontein and its African working class, 1914-35: A Study of Popular Culture in Johannesburg*, MA, University of Witwatersrand, 1984. Moodie, Dunbar: *Mine Culture and Miner's Identity on the South African Gold Mines*. From Bozzoli, Beinda (ed.): *Town and Countryside in the Transvaal*, Johannesburg, 1983.

²⁷ Richardson, Peter: *Chinese mine labour in the Transvaal*, London, 1982. Richardson, Peter: *Coolies, Peasants, and Proletarians: The Origins of Chinese Indentured Labour in South Africa, 1904-1907*. In Marks, Shula (ed.): *International Labour Migration. Historical Perspectives*, Commonwealth Papers 24, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London, London, 1984.

²⁸ Bonner, Philip: *The Black Mineworkers Strike: A Preliminary Account*. From Bozzoli, Beinda: *Labour, Townships and Protest. Studies in the social history of the Witwatersrand*, Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1979.

²⁹ Moroney, Sean: *Industrial Conflict in a Labour Repressive economy: Black labour on the Transvaal Gold Mines, 1901-1912*. BA-Hon., University of Witwatersrand, 1976. Moroney, S.: *The Development of the Compound as a Mechanism of Worker Control, 1900-1912*, SALB, Vol. 4, No. 3, 1978. Turrell, Rob: *Kimberley: Labour and Compounds, 1871-88*. From Marks/Rathbone: *Industrialisation and Social Change*, Longman, 1982/85.

³⁰ Murray, Martin: *The Triumph of Marxist Approaches in South African Social and Labor history*, *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 1-2, 1988, p. 98.

modern, academic origins in the early 1970s.³⁶ Social history on the other hand, with its emphasis on popular culture and group solidarity across class barriers, was more in harmony with the growing political mobilisation.

A development which followed its own path in the 1980s was the analysis of distinctly political trade union activities, including worker-organised activism as an element in broader, social movements. The increased academic interest for street and community organised activities was a clear reflection of contemporary reality. Swilling's investigations of the shop steward movement on the East Rand in the early 1980s demonstrate the shift from pure work place interest to an involvement in broader civil society activities.³⁷

In line with the organisational developments of the early 1980s, Lambert argues that the partnership between SACTU and ANC, which was established in the 1950s, did not necessarily damage the interests of the workers. This viewpoint contradicted the workerists, who feared that working class interests would become a subsidiary to the ANC, which had sometimes been guided by an elite group from the African middle class. This problem might become topical again in the future. On the other hand, Lambert pointed out that trade union membership in many regions was growing hand in hand with the expansion of broad, political street organising.³⁸

Until the last years of the 1980s, the quality of books on worker's history was of increasing quality. While working papers, articles and dissertations were predominant among the early works, a growing number of proper books gradually appeared. A few good surveys are available.³⁹ The best is Steven Friedman's *Building Tomorrow Today*, which includes a detailed historical

introduction of the trade union movement in the 1970s.⁴⁰ Ken Lueckhardt and Brenda Wall's *Organise or Starve* offers a detailed, informative and indispensable, however rather uncritical, account on SACTU's activities through the 1950s.⁴¹

The more or less intentional interchange which took place between parts of labour history and broader social history stimulated scholars to new questions and methods. A substantial number of new fields of research arose, particularly in relation to questions around ideology and civilisation, class and communities and about women, gender and family.⁴² Sitas' study on migrant hostel residents deals with trade union formation by metal workers on the East Rand, but his investigation moves beyond work place analysis and discovers how shifting conditions in the rural areas had importance for the lines of action of migrant workers. He explores the special, collective morality of the hostels and proves how these concentrations of workers formed part of a breeding ground for the rise of trade unions and how the unions tried to keep up a class oriented, social discipline under horrifying conditions of life. The touch of social history in Sitas' methodology also appears in his heavy reliance on oral accounts.⁴³

One of the brightest examples of a mutually inspiring interplay between labour history and social history can be read in Helen Bradford's book about the

³⁶ Friedman, Steven: *Building Tomorrow Today. African Workers in Trade Unionism, 1970-1984*. Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1987. Reviewed in SALB, Vol. 12, No. 3, 1987. Also Friedman, Steven: *Class Conflict, Class Incorporation and Class Power*. B.A. (Hons), University of Witwatersrand, 1975. Friedman, Steven: *Political Implications of Industrial Unrest in South Africa*. From Hindson (ed.): *Working Papers in South African Studies*. Raven Press, Johannesburg, 1983. Friedman, Steven: *The Black Trade Union Movement*. In Mark A. Uhlig (ed.): *Apartheid in Crisis*. Penguin, London, 1986.

³⁷ Also Neube, Don: *The Influence of Apartheid and Capitalism on the development of Black Trade Unions in South Africa*. Johannesburg, 1985.

³⁸ Lueckhardt, Ken / Wall, Brenda: *Organise or Starve. The History of the South African Congress of Trade Unions*. London: SACTU/Lawrence and Wishart, 1980. For the 1970s also Lueckhardt, Ken / Wall, Brenda: *Working for Freedom. Black Trade Union Development in South Africa throughout the 1970s*. World Council of Churches, Geneva, c.1981.

³⁹ Bozzoli, Belinda: *Marxism, Feminism and South African Studies, Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2, Oxford University press, 1983. (Critical to Wolpe). Walker, C.: *Women and Resistance in South Africa*. London: Onyx Press, 1982. Brink, Elsabe: *The African Women of the Garment Workers Union, 1918-39*. M.A. University of Witwatersrand, 1986.

⁴⁰ Sitas, A.: *Moral Formations and Struggles Amongst Migrant Workers on the East Rand, Labour Capital and Society*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 1985.

³⁶ Errors of Workerism SALB Vol. 12, No. 3 and Vol. 12, No. 5, 1987. Also Hinson, Barnuch: *The Making of an African Working Class on the Witwatersrand: Class and Community Struggles in an Urban Setting, 1932-1947*. Ph.D., University of London, 1986.

³⁷ Swilling, Mark (Labour Monitoring Group): *Stayaways, Urban Protest and the State*. From *South African Review* 3, Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1986. Frankel, Philip / Pines, Noam/ Swilling, Mark (ed): *State, Resistance and Change in South Africa*. London, 1988.

³⁸ Lambert, R.V.: *Political Unionism in South Africa: the South African Congress of Trade Unions, 1955-65*. Ph.D., University of Witwatersrand, 1988.

³⁹ Webster, Eddie: *The Rise of Social-movement Unionism: The Two Faces of the Black Trade Union Movement*. In Frankel/Pines/Swilling (ed.): *State...*, London, 1988.

Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of Africa, ICU. Even if Bradford treats the start of the ICUs as an urban based union originating in the Cape, she lays the main emphasis on struggles in rural areas after 1924 and on the role of ICU as co-ordinator of the mass-resistance against forced removals of black farmers and farm workers. Bradford, however, brings along the labour historian's emphasis on organisational matters and on the national and local leadership and their relationship to the grassroots. In particular, Bradford's analysis of relations between local activist milieus and the organisation's hierarchy is bold and penetrating.⁴⁴

South African working class history still has lots of cavities in its coverage of the past. Future investigations should probably emphasise the ties which have evidently existed between the black industrial workers and that huge segment of the dominated which has always been excluded from the official labour market. It will be an important mission for future labour historians to undertake research into the living conditions and struggles of interests among the large majority of unorganised black workers. It is probably a condition for such a project that the "the division of labour" between workers history and social history is disestablished. This separation was perhaps logical and necessary once to empower working class history as a kind of battering ram. However, along with the consolidation of the modern "2/3-society", which in poor countries frequently becomes a "1/3-society", it becomes increasingly evident that a genuine solidarity must also embrace those who stand on the sideline of the labour market.

However, this understanding of modern social and cultural history is ambiguous. While it is easy to identify this tradition's enlightening encounter with the narrow, workerist tradition of labour history, it is a little harder to grasp its escalating "openness" from the end of the 1980s. While both the original workers history and the broader popular history originated out of genuine, social commitment, often stemming from a deep involvement in the social struggles of the day, it is obvious that a lot of the choices of theme in the new social and cultural history are determined by the individual historian's career planning and employment possibilities.

Popular history

The many passionate interpretations adds fascinating flavours to historical research on South Africa. Political grassroots activists across the entire spectrum (eg the black student movement, trade union organised workers theatre, and the Boer-fascist resistance movement against democratisation) have used history as a resource of political mobilisation. Therefore it is not surprising that popular history has been widespread during the transformation process over the last 20 years in South Africa. The limits of this genre are unclear and to some degree it overlaps labour history and liberation history.

In the radical, popular writing of history of the 1980s, two lines can be identified which roughly reflect the development within the labour movement and the broader popular resistance movement respectively.⁴⁵ Parts of the former line are written in preparation for adult education or worker education. These parts are class oriented and has political economy as a central component. They mostly deal with non-racial, socialist class struggle, while ethnic, black, national resistance is played down or ignored whereas the latter history line, which corresponds with the popular movement, accentuates the black, national resistance. The focus here is on leaders and heroes of the freedom struggle and it deals more with the suppressive measures of the racist state than with capitalist exploitation. In its attempts to promote collective, black nation building, class barriers are frequently given low priority.

Academic or partly academic support groups, so-called worker service groups, were created around the independent trade unions, which grew out of the 1973 general strikes in Durban. These support groups delivered teaching materials about local and international topics with relevance for unions and workers. International Labour Research and Information Group published history-booklets eg. on the international traditions of May Day. The South African Council for Higher Education, the largest alternative educational network in the country, formed the Labour and Community Project with the purpose of producing easily understood material, for instance an illustrated history of South Africa, "Freedom from Below".⁴⁶ The Culture and Working

⁴⁵ Callinicos, Luli: *Popular History in the Eighties, Radical History Review*, Vol. 46/47, pp. 285-297, 1990.

⁴⁶ IACOM/SACHED: *Freedom from Below: the struggle for trade unions in South Africa*, Labour and Community Project / South African Council for Higher Education, Durban, 1987.

⁴⁴ Bradford, Helen: *A Taste of Freedom: the ICU in rural South Africa, 1924-30*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1987.

Life Project in Durban published *Divide and Profit*, a history of the relationship between various ethnic, working class groups in the area.⁴⁷

An offensive of ideological history, which promoted the popular traditions of the organised, political resistance, was launched by the former coloured University of the Western Cape (UWC). The university's radical director Andre Odendaal⁴⁸ marketed the institution as "...the intellectual home of the left." The UWC published several serials, People's History Series, which included *Let us Speak of Freedom*, a phrase which is also used in the Freedom Charter. The Peoples History Project, which was also launched by the UWC, trained students to record the verbal history of local communities. This ambitious and comprehensive programme involved more than 1,200 so-called external students, who were trained by older college students. The popular line has most recently been implemented through the Mayibuye Centre at the UWC.

Radical academics at South African universities have had considerable influence on popular history during the last 20 years. Popular history was mediated from university seminars, where students collected material and prepared education programmes, which were carried out in co-operation with grassroots organisations.⁴⁹

At the University of Witwatersrand, academic involvement in popular history developed within the History Workshop, which explored and published counter-histories. Committed social history and "history from below" distinguish these works, which moved the boundaries of historical materialism with the help of oral history and popular traditions.

The History Workshop has produced inexpensive, easily readable booklets (Topics Series) on events which occupy a place in the collective, popular memory, such as the Bulhoek Massacre in 1923 of a religious group which had occupied a rural territory in the hope of a miraculous salvation from discrimination. Another topic in the same series was the abuse of alcohol in

connection with suppression, survival and resistance in South African history.⁵⁰ History Workshop has also published a more scholarly "history from below", for example in the shape of Luli Callinicos popular trilogy, of which the first volume, *Gold and Workers*, deals with the genesis of the migrant labour system in the time of primitive capital accumulation, while the second volume, *Working Life*, summarises the history of working class urbanisation, survival and resistance at the Rand until 1940. Callinicos presents the two books as expressions of the development that many radical historians underwent during the 1980s. *Gold and Workers* is an undisguised, class-based counter-history. *Working Life* analyses social structures by means of a deeper, experience-based methodology without forgetting the class view. Both books have been used as alternative material by trade union education committees, authors of amateur history and teachers in need of meaningful material in the classroom.⁵¹

The personal and popular commitment to history has been forcefully expressed by the History Workshop's *Write Your Own History Project*, which has made it possible for common people to express experiences and feelings in opposition to migrant work, influx control and forced removals. The forced, arbitrary, ethnic divisions led many people to investigate their own roots and their ancestors' fighting experiences.⁵²

Traditionally, the historical autobiography has constituted a rather large fraction of the popular history writing and provides an important contribution to the shared historical consciousness. One example is Alfred Temba Qabula's

⁵⁰ Edger, Robert: *Because They Chose the Plan of God: The Story of the Bulhoek Massacre*. History Workshop, Johannesburg, 1988. From: Edger, R.: *The Fifth Seal: Enoch Mgijima, the Israelites and the Bulhoek massacre*, 1921. Ph.D., University of California, L.A., 1977. La Hausse, Paul: *Brewers, Baseballs and Boycotts: A History of Liquor in South Africa*. History Workshop, Johannesburg, 1988, reviewed by Anthony, David: *South African Peoples History, Radical History Review*, Vol. 46, No. 47, pp. 411-419, 1990.

⁵¹ Callinicos, Luli: *Gold and Workers, 1886 - 1924. A People's History of South Africa*. Vol. 1. Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1981. Callinicos, Luli: *A People's History of South Africa*. Vol. 2. *Working Life 1886-1940. Factories, Townships and Popular Culture*. Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1987. Labour History Group: *The ICU / The 1922 White Mineworkers Strike / Workers at War / Garment Workers Unite / Organizing at the Cape Town Docks / Asinamall*. Cape Town: Esquire Press. Six pamphlets with popular history published in 1980s.

⁵² Witz, Leslie: *The Write Your Own History Project, Radical History Review*, Vol. 46/47, pp. 377-387, 1990. Witz, Leslie: *History of the people, for the people and by the people: a brief examination of the development of peoples history in South Africa, 1977-1988*, *South Africa International*, Vol. 19, No. 2, pp. 65-73, 1988.

⁴⁷ Marie, Shamim: *Divide and Profit*, Durban, 1986.

⁴⁸ Odendaal, Andre: *Vukani Banani! The Beginning of Black Protest Politics in South Africa* to 1912. Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, Cape Town: Philip, 1984.

⁴⁹ Culture and Working Life Project, University of Natal, Durban. ILRIG, University of Cape Town. Peoples Education Research Project, University of Western Cape.

fascinating narrative of his life in rural based resistance and in the hardships of migrant work, and later his commitment to workers culture and poetry.⁵³ Similar personal narratives were published in *Ravan Worker Series*, for example Petrus Tom's life story with his experience of trade union action.⁵⁴

The biography and particularly the autobiography blend verbal history, immediate personal experiences and folk culture with the writing of history. The outcome is rewarding, though from a historiographical point of view, it includes obvious weaknesses as seen in Don Mattered's rather unsophisticated description of criminal gang activity and resistance in Sophiatown.⁵⁵

Callinicos observes various lines inside popular history. At the History Workshop Conference in 1987, a Popular History Day was arranged where questions of professionalism and responsibility were raised from some participants. It was observed that perspectives and emphasis within popular history depended on the positions in society of the author and the audience. While university employed authors were engaged in research-based creation of knowledge, activist-oriented historians were more interested in liberation strategies. Critics of the former were not slow to point out that academics without organisational affiliation are frequently passive regarding popular participation in history-writing out of fear of losing their monopoly on knowledge. On the other hand, the university academics have helped to curb a fixation on slogans and triumphalism inside the highly goal-oriented trade union history and workers education.⁵⁶ It also seems as if established university historians and those radicals who were actively engaged in the creation of a popular front have had a mutual interest in steering clear of topics such as unsuccessful strikes and the often hostile attitudes of the established, progressive mass organisations to new, undisciplined grassroot movements.

⁵³ Qabula, Alfred Temba: *A Working Life: Cruel Beyond Belief*. National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa, Durban / NUMSA, Pinetown, 1989.

⁵⁴ Tom, Petrus: *My Life Struggle: The Story of Petrus Tom*, Ravan Worker Series, 2, Ravan, Braamfontein, 1985.

⁵⁵ Mattered, Don: *Memory is the Weapon*. Johannesburg, 1987. Mattered received the Swedish Kurt Tucholsky prize in 1986.

⁵⁶ Callinicos, Luli: *Popular History in the Eighties, Radical History Review*, Vol. 46/47, pp. 285-297, 1990. Barrett, Jane: *Vukant! Malhosikazi: South African Women Speak*, London, 1985. Institute of Black Research: *Factories and Families*, Durban, 1984.

History as victor

The general history of the black resistance struggle is reasonably well known and many historical interpretations and types of texts can be found right from propagandist pamphlets over documentary productions to source collections and in-depth research work. It is possible to sketchily identify various approaches to this field of research, for instance a recitilinear, official liberation history, a deeper ANC-loyal historical analysis and a critical culture-analytical approach.

On the left side of the ideological spectrum, writing can be found that could be labelled black functionalist historiography. It is an unreservedly biased history, written out of commitment to (or employment in) a popular movement and tradition.

Even a superficial text analysis will easily identify features that include emphasis on competent leadership, an urban based point of departure and a somewhat manipulative rhetoric. Professor Colin Bundy (University of Cape Town) has proven that the texts more often than not embody a quite unproblematic view on the past.⁵⁷ The ANC is seen to have had a smoothly advancing development towards its current victorious situation, having been almost infallible and steadily growing in membership, maturity and militant bearings as years went by. There is not much room in this version for the misjudgements and blunders of the heroes. Also there are only very few indications of the many contradictions, tensions or mutual conflicts among the leaders or between leadership and rank-and-file members or between the various social classes united by the freedom struggle.

In an anthology called *Liberatory History*, Bundy, Mosala and Alexander attempted to lay down some standards for "Alternative History", "Black History" and "Peoples History".⁵⁸ The editors and contributors of this composite work raise quite a number of relevant questions and challenges to teachers, students and historians.

In his article, Henry Bredekamp very directly urges a broader involvement of the ambient society in the choice of fields for historical investigations. He

⁵⁷ Bundy, Colin: *Remaking the Past: New Perspectives in South African History*, University of the Witwatersrand, 1986.

⁵⁸ Bredekamp, H.C. / Messina, E.A.: *Liberatory History and the Struggle in South Africa*. Proceedings of the IHR History Week '89, UWC, Western Cape Institute for Historical Research, Bellville: Publication Series DL, 1990.

does not believe that lecturers in people's history can be satisfied with legitimising any given, contemporary socio-political order, but argues that:

History as a discipline has to be viewed as a product of the human spirit subject to the critical inquiry and constant reinterpretation of the past in the light of the present.⁵⁹

However, Bredekamp warns the historians of the people. Academics must be aware of the danger inherent in benchmarks dictated by the freedom movement. The history of the people should not become a "handmaid" of the new politicians but unfortunately, Bredekamp does not point to how extra-academic society should influence the fields of research without violating the historians freedom of work.

Colin Bundy proves that divergent, progressive tendencies, such as alternative, radical, black and popular writing of history have been overlapping and partially identical; however, he criticises the last two directions separately. Black-national writing of history is reactionary and in reality it employs the same conceptual framework as the white-national history it is reacting against. It is almost pointless because it seldom asks new questions to the past. According to Bundy, this type of people's history often views people and communities as an undifferentiated mass, totally united in their commitment to the struggle. He characterises this as "left romanticism", which crudely disregards variations in class affiliation and divergent interests. Bundy, who has frequently positioned himself inside the radical school, claims that the modern, culturally informed, radical-revisionist research has developed over and above these flaws and now reflects a "...totality of social and political relations" in its theory and methodology.

Bundy has also considered the function of alternative writing of history in the freedom struggle. As distinct from people's history and black history, professional radical history research should not merely praise the heroic struggles of the people or the supposed idyl of the precolonial past. It should be far more analytic and eg. state how colonialism and capital penetration affected social relations at different times and under varying circumstances. Conflicts and resistance struggles should, of course, form part of these investigations.

However, Bundy warns the radical historians against covering up the dark sides of the freedom struggle, as this would only inspire an interpretation of history which would impair further action for justice. In order for the study of history to contribute with a survey of the past which could serve as guidance for future action, all dangers on the road must be uncovered. If historical research is unable to contribute to this, it has failed those social and political functions which Bundy ascribes to the discipline of history.

Neville Alexander's paper in the anthology states that some crucial flaws in the genre of popular history might lie in the concept of "the people" and in the ideologies which constitute the basis for the construction of people's history. Just like the other contributors, Alexander warns against the dangers in expounding the people as a homogeneous category, and he cautions that submission to the struggle must not blind the historians of the people and thereby blur a realistic view of the many-faceted dividing lines inside a complex society.

Black history

Except for the lack of organisational affiliation or commitments black-national history has much in common with liberation history. However, it is often both more original and less theoretical. It embodies works like Eddie Roux's outstanding *Time Longer Than Rope*, Mary Benson's *Struggle for a Birthright*, the four volume source-collection edited by Karis and Carter, André Odendaal's study on the history of organised nationalism, Gerhart's description of the Black Consciousness Movement and Walshe's *Rise of African Nationalism*.⁶⁰

Compared with the somewhat inadequate functional history these works are generally more substantial. They are most often based on more thorough

⁵⁹ Roux, Edward: *Time Longer Than Rope*. The University of Wisconsin Press, 1964. Also London: Gollancz, 1948.

Benson, Mary: *South Africa. The Struggle for a Birthright*. London: Penguin, 1966/1985. Odendaal, André: *Vukani Bantu! The beginning of black protest politics in South African* in 1912. Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, David Philip, Cape Town, 1984. Gerhart, Gail M.: *Black Power in South Africa. The Evolution of an Ideology*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1978. Karis, T. / Carter, G.M. / Gerhart, G.M. (eds.): *From Protest to Challenge. A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa 1882-1964*. Vol. 1-4, Stanford University, 1972 - 77. Walshe, Peter: *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa. The African National Congress 1912-52*, London: C.Hurst, 1970. Also University of California Press, 1982.

⁵⁹ Bredekamp, H.C. / Messina, E.A.: *Op.cit.*, p. 7.

Investigations and they are not deliberately one-sided or written in order to justify or pay tribute to their topic. Even so they share a certain likeness with the functional texts. They both represent an uncritical, much too respectful attitude to the idea of black nationalism as such. Therefore they also have certain stylistic similarities with some Afrikaner nationalist works. Like most of these, they tend to take nationalism for granted, as an organic expression of a collective identity; and often they are comparatively uninterested in how this identity was constructed over time.

This concept of history tends to overlook difficulties, such as contrasts between distinct strata in the social composition of the national movements. It rarely raises questions around the class background or class interest of black national politicians, and not surprisingly, it is seldom capable of giving answers which explain internal contradictions or tensions in black-national policy. In this respect, these historical texts resemble Africanist writing everywhere on the African continent in the years after the 1960s when the anti-colonial enthusiasm created a wave of pro-nationalist histories on the triumphs of freedom struggle.

In the South African context, these histories generally dedicate much attention to the leadership of the movements. They view the mass mobilisations of the 1950s as a kind of golden age and they overemphasise continuity and common identity inside the black-national movement over time to such an extent that history develops with self-evident inevitability. The main title of Karis and Carter's work, *From Protest to Challenge*, signals this just as the subtitles, *Protest and Hope*, *Hope and Challenge*, *Challenge and Violence*.⁶¹

Interpretations of history within the ANC

As a significant national movement throughout 85 years, the ANC has attracted many different types of history writers. A more detailed bibliographic investigation would most certainly reveal a mosaic of diverse tendencies and thematic developments, rather than one coherent school.⁶²

Tom Lodge has divided the literary, historical tradition of the ANC into four phases up until 1990. The earliest phase embodies mainly biographies,

historical fiction and social reporting. It displays an organisation whose leading personalities were still rooted in a native, rural culture. This phase was followed by a wave of mostly autobiographies, produced in the township milieus of the 1950s. The third phase is constituted by a number of partially analytical works written mostly by communists within the Congress Alliance through the 1940s and 1950s. The last phase is characterised by ANC-informed historians whose intellectual training mainly took place in exile.⁶³

The bulk of publications, which form the historical tradition of the ANC, are not the work of professional academics. However, this does not mean that the ANC lacks a historical identity. Speeches and statements of the ANC are frequently loaded with historical references to traditions of pre-colonial communities, to early resistance struggles against colonisation and to previous, heroic campaigns. The ANC has regularly motivated its positions with reference to precedent both of its own historical experiences and those of other international revolutionary movements.

After the 1960s, a new generation of academically educated authors marked the historical writing around the ANC. Many of the intellectuals in the inner circles of the ANC were men whose first political experiences came from their involvement in student organisations at the University of Fort Hare in the beginning of the 1960s.⁶⁴ Some of them achieved foreign Ph.D. degrees or other academic degrees and took up university positions around the world during the 1970s, when the ANC established training camps and education centres in front-line countries and issued a number of publications despite the hardships of the exile situation.

The work of Bernard Magubane stands central in this genre. In Magubane's view the race system of South Africa is unambiguously attached to capitalism:

While a racist social structure is not inherent in the colonial situation, it is inseparable from capitalist economic development. In a racist-capitalist power structure, capitalist exploitation and race oppression

⁶¹ Karis & Carter: *Op. cit.*

⁶² Kagan, Alfred: *The African National Congress of South Africa. A bibliography*. U.N. Centre against Apartheid, New York, 1982. Limb, Peter: *The ANC and Black Workers in South Africa 1912-1992. An Annotated Bibliography*. London: Hans Zell Publishers, 1993.

⁶³ Lodge, Tom: *Charters from the Past: The African National Congress and its*

Historiographical Traditions, Radical History Review, Vol. 46/47, p. 163.
⁶⁴ For instance Frances Meili and Chris Hanu.

are inextricably linked; the removal of one ensures the removal of the other.⁶⁵

It is a simple consequence of this standpoint that the national struggle in the South African context is seen also as a battle against capitalism, as Magubane makes clear in his critique of Edward Feit's book, *African Opposition in South Africa*.⁶⁶ Magubane's characterisation of the South African state was shaped by his observations of the political economy through the 1960s. He accentuates the strong, mutual dependence between South African, European and American economic centres. The progressive challenge of the status quo in South Africa also threatened foreign interests. Accordingly, he believes that foreign capital interests looked at Afrikaner nationalism as an asset to their own efforts of capital accumulation, in spite of its outdated, petit bourgeois character. White party politics is seen by Magubane simply as a reflection of conflicts between different factions of capital.⁶⁷ His work corresponds to an intellectual touch in the ANC debates of the early 1970s.⁶⁸

After Magubane's pioneering work, two proper history books were published by authors close to the ANC-leadership. The first of these was *South Africa Belongs to Us: A History of the ANC* by Francis Meli.⁶⁹ Keeping Meli's position inside the organisation in mind, it seems most likely that the book both reflected and influenced the ANC's conception of its own history. Meli was editor of the ANC journal *Sechaba* after 1977 and had a degree from the University of Leipzig, GDR. One general feature throughout his seven chapters is that the relationship between top and bottom inside the ANC has been relatively unproblematic. The book provides a reasonably solid and useful historical presentation, but despite the author's proclaimed intention of writing a book which could register the roots of the ANC in the history of the people,

⁶⁵ Magubane, Bernard M.: *The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa*. Monthly Review Press, New York, 1979, p. 16.

⁶⁶ Feit, Edward: *African Opposition in South Africa*. The failure of passive resistance. The Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, Stanford University, California, 1967.

⁶⁷ Magubane's argumentation in this period corresponds roughly with early structuralist orthodoxy although he expresses reservations in opposition to this - Magubane, Bernard M.: *Op. cit.*, p. 128, 189, 214.

⁶⁸ Tambo, Oliver (Tambo, Adelaide (comp.)): *Preparing for Power: Oliver Tambo Speaks*. London, 1987.

⁶⁹ Meli, Francis: *South Africa Belongs to Us. A History of the ANC*. Zimbabwe Publ. House / Indiana University Press / James Curry, London, 1989. Also Harare 1988.

South Africa Belongs to Us is a fairly traditional, organisational history, which views the history "from above".

Another ANC-history, *National Struggle, Class Struggle*. South Africa since 1870, was written by John Pampallis, a former teacher at the ANC's Solomon Mahlangu College in Tanzania, later lecturer at the University of Natal. It is a genuine high school textbook, which contains a reasonable synthesis and a very good source apparatus, even though it contains the same predictability and uncritical attitude as Meli's book for instance to unsuccessful mobilising attempts of the defiance campaigns in the 1950s.⁷⁰

The regained and continually growing political strength of the ANC inside South Africa during the 1980s was accompanied by a number of new books. Some of these texts revived events and personalities from the 1950s with a magnificence which served the present more than the past. One of the most impressive was Fatima Meer's biographical tribute to Nelson Mandela, *Higher than Hope*, which was published on Mandela's seventy-year birthday.⁷¹

Critical writing of black history

When a work of history dealing with the black freedom struggle is described as "critical", this does not necessarily imply that it embodies any disapproval of this struggle. It simply indicates a wider range in the questions put up and a more complex examination of the past. For the qualified reader, it suggests a more interesting interpretation. For instance a critical history about the ANC could hardly reveal anything else than a living, altering, dynamic organisation that has demonstrated capacity for persistence and adaptability. It would probably be a history which disclosed that the ANC, just as any other large movement, has gone through internal conflicts and contradictions and has experienced tensions between leadership and membership and competition and conflicts between leaders, accompanied by attempted and successful take-overs with subsequent changes of policy, which again has spawned defection, exclusions and regained strength through changing tactical alliances.⁷²

⁷⁰ Pampallis, John: *National Struggle, Class Struggle, South Africa since 1870*. ANC, London, 1987.

⁷¹ Meer, Fatima: *Higher than hope. Rollibhala We Love You*. Skotaville Johannesburg, 1988.

⁷² Marks, Shula / Trapido, Stanley (eds.): *Social History of Resistance in South Africa, Journal of Southern African studies*, Vol. 18, No. 1, Special issue, Oxford University Press, 1992.

In spite of the advances of the ANC, critical interpretations of the liberation movement do exist. This criticism has partly been forwarded by competing movements, but also in the shape of academic works and comparative analyses. In the following some of the more important of these criticisms and the correlations between them are enumerated.

Firstly, there is a critique which is mainly preoccupied with tactical and strategic flaws. Occasionally the ANC fell behind its vanguard role, so the leadership was lagging behind the militant action of the rank and file. There is plenty of source material which supports this interpretation, both in the form of contemporary narratives and of retrospective studies; "...the masses are marching far ahead of the leadership".⁷³

A similar, general critique states that the Congress Alliance remained wrapped up in constitutional, parliamentary and juridical forms of resistance, even long after these had been anachronistic:

1960 was a testing time...the militancy was growing outside, but we were so preoccupied with the legal processes, we didn't have the right conception of revolution as opposed to pressure. We didn't make the right break.⁷⁴

Another critique deals with the organisational foundation of the Congress Alliance, which in reality accepted ethnic divisions between the various partners in the alliance, that is the ANC, the Coloured Congress, the Indian Congress and the white Congress of Democrats. According to that view, the movement duplicated or reflected certain state views on race at the same time as it concealed the class problem behind African nationalism.⁷⁵

⁷³ ANC, NEC: Draft report of the NEC of the ANC, submitted to the annual conference, dec. 1950. From Kats/Carter (eds.), Vol. 2, Doc. 85, p. 452, 1973.

⁷⁴ Lambert, Rob: *Black Resistance in South Africa, 1960-61. An Assessment of the Political Strike Campaigns*. Collected Seminar Papers, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, SSA 7/78, 1978, p. 9.

⁷⁵ Nisebeza, Lungisile: *Divisions and unity in struggle: the ANC, ISL and the CP, 1910-28*. BA, University of Cape Town, 1988.

Adam, Herbert: *Exile and Resistance: The ANC, the SACP and the PAC*. In Berger/Godsell (ed.): *A Future South Africa. Visions, Strategies and Realities*, SABA Foundation, Cape Town, 1988. Denga: *For a Broad Coalition of Anti-Apartheid Forces, African Communist*, No. 114, London, 1988.

A more fundamental critique perceives the mass-strategy of the 1950s as inadequate. This strategy kept the movement pointing to the political immorality of society and thereby remain within the limits of protest rather than create a real challenge. This strategy of the ANC certainly showed its lacking perspective in the time after Sharpeville.⁷⁶

Another critique questions the special type of armed struggle which the ANC adopted.⁷⁷ From December 1961 the banned and exiled ANC established a sabotage strategy, which included violent raids against symbolic and strategic targets, with extensive consideration to avoid civil casualties. This has been described by critics as:

...isolating the vanguard from the masses...who were left on the threshold, fascinated bystanders of a battle being waged on their behalf.⁷⁸

Finally, a line of critique focuses on class composition and class interests inside the Freedom Alliance of the 1960s. In its most simple form the leadership is renounced as petit bourgeois. In its more sophisticated versions this point is not entirely irrelevant.⁷⁹

Tom Lodge's *Black Politics* since 1945 soon established itself as a classic among the critical but engaged accounts of the black freedom struggle. Lodge assembled his history of the struggle through a convincing selection of important sequences of events and a balance between representation and

⁷⁶ Mort, Sophie: *Some CP/SA/SACP Activity in the Early 50s, Azania Worker*, (11-12), London, 1988. See also Benart, William: *Political and collective violence in Southern African Historiography*, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 1992.

⁷⁷ Davis, David / Fine, Bob: *Political Strategies and the State: Some Historical Observations*, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1, Oxford University press, 1985, p. 47. De Kock, Wessel: *Usuhulu: Civ peace! the black liberation movement Inkatha and the fight for a just South Africa*. Cape Town: Open Hand Press, c.1986. Turuk, Ben: *Strategic Problems in South Africa's Liberation Struggle: A Critical Analysis*. Richmond, Canada, 1974. Gene Sharp: *African Opposition in South Africa from 1948-1969: an analysis of the ANC's nonviolent and violent actions*, Berlin, 1982, p. 227. (Critical to Zola Sonkosi).

⁷⁸ Sizwe, No: *One Azania, One Nation. The National Question in South Africa*. Zed Press, London, 1979.

Slovo, Joe: *South Africa - No Middle Road*. From Davison/Wilkinson: *South Africa. The New Politics of Revolution*, London, 1976, p. 193. Kgope, Tebog: *Is South Africa Suited for Guerrilla Warfare?* *African Communist*, No. 117, 1989.

⁷⁹ Simons, H.J. / Simons, R.E.: *Class and Colour in South Africa 1850 - 1950*. Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1969.

interpretation.⁸⁰ His account is well documented and both devoted and critical to his sources. Nevertheless objections have been raised against his work. His book is not explicitly theoretically positioned, which results in a description of the popular struggle where the ANC is given a touch of capriciousness. Moreover, Lodge underrates the importance of certain cases of popular resistance and the scope of concrete protests in some urban areas.

The historians and the struggle for a new South Africa

The conjunction of scholarly responsibility and political commitment stands central in South African historiography. Under apartheid, pressure on research institutions and intellectuals for products that corresponded with the interests of the state was always present, though the intensity and the character altered. Based on their assumption of influence within the system, many liberal historians were ready and willing to let themselves be used professionally in connection with official government accounts and reports.⁸¹

For the radical academic, who placed him/herself in open opposition to the prevailing order, resistance against cooption was inevitable. But how should the reverse situation be assessed? What if the scholar works more or less in extension of the political agenda of a resistance movement? Must progressive intellectuals at institutions of higher education then give up their critical role and restrict their investigations to directions from the movement or by a progressive government of the people?

A possible development in the new South Africa could be a rehabilitation and revival of the ANC's writing of history, partly through professionalisation inside the organisation, but also as an inspiration and a field of research at the universities. Hopefully, this might encourage an open, democratic debate in the intellectual arenas, even if historiographical experiences from new African national states are somewhat discouraging.

If historical research is guided by a democratic movement, there will need to be some concordance between political priorities and fields of investigation. The ANC still demands analyses which can factually illuminate living conditions and strategic alternatives as well as documentation to international

aid donors. This is relatively unproblematic, as long as the researcher's attachment is openly declared. However, if the investigation is reduced to elaboration of working material in support of an already defined realpolitik, the autonomy of the intellectual work and its important, critical function are removed.

The defence of the intellectuals against that kind of socialisation, has often been the traditional and unrealistic argument for absolute autonomy. According to this argumentation, research is seen as ethically and politically neutral, a value-free, objective practice, which evolves within its own rationalism and logic. Research priorities are consequently constituted internally, not out of practical demands, and with no ideological considerations. According to this view, art and science should be totally shielded from any kind of political interference. Progressive academics have been sceptical of "value-free" research for a long time. They recognise that research must inevitably find itself in some kind of relationship with political and social realities.

Harold Wolpe, who at times had painful conflicts with both the ANC and the Communist Party, insisted that the independence of the progressive historian could be attained most blamelessly if the priorities of the liberation movement were kept in sight at the same time as simple dependence on its ideology and policy was avoided. According to Wolpe, this would be the best compromise for tackling the fundamental contradiction between absolute autonomy of the researcher and the reduction of the researcher to a predictable, ideological function.⁸²

In the more recent evolution of historical research topics, greater emphasis has been put on the lived, individual experience, on the shaping of consciousness, on history of identity and mentality and on historical processes of everyday life. Parts of this work have been performed in order to counterbalance static features "without human contact" in the early structural analyses of the radical historians.

The debate on partiality and priorities has become even more essential. The new democratic government, the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and progressive academics will continuously discuss research priorities. The limitation on resources for research will force the established research

⁸⁰ Lodge, Tom: *Black politics in South Africa since 1945*. Longman, London, 1983.

⁸¹ Rich, Paul B.: *White Power and the Liberal Conscience: Racial Segregation and South African Liberalism, 1921-60*. Manchester University Press, 1984.

⁸² Wolpe, H.: *The Liberation Struggle and Research, Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 32, 1985, p. 74.

institutions into an assiduous discussion of priorities. Signals from the ANC and the government might indicate that unless the universities understand how to make themselves more instrumental to the nation-building, they will simply be given a reduced economic priority compared with education on more basic levels.

The historians and the future

Even those liberals who have recognised economically derived elements in the racial system have depreciated the importance of the boundaries for human action determined by objective class relations. They still view each particular case on the basis of the specific, immediate motivations of individuals and groups. They regard the policy of racial discrimination as the root cause of economic inequalities. Thus their solution is simply liberalising apartheid's institutions. In their analyses of apartheid, they have not paid due attention to the fact that the economic basis constrains the scope of politics. At the same time, they are stuck in an instinctive belief that "economic realities" will annihilate the racial distinctions almost automatically.

For the few remaining, tenacious radical historians the situation is more complex. They are still attentive of the tight connections between capitalism and all kinds of discrimination. Until the end of the 1980s, they considered the apartheid reforms as "adaptive, rather than liberalising".⁸³ They still do not accept the argument that "capitalism has killed apartheid",⁸⁴ but seek the causes of apartheid's demise in the popular resistance, the international solidarity, the sanction policy and the rising maintenance-costs of the oppressive regime.

Johnstone believes that radical historiography could be credited for the constant pressure for reforms:

...the new, more radical and class-oriented way of looking at South African history and society, which emerged at the beginning of the decade, definitely influenced the shape and thrust of political

opposition to, and pressures upon, white domination in South Africa during the 1970s and into the present.⁸⁵

The radicals assert that the economic basis has to be changed more fundamentally if the social consequences of apartheid are to be overcome. This understanding has been somewhat muddled under the pressure of realpolitik.

It is hardly possible to predict what direction a future black history will take. Even if South Africa evolves in the optimum way (that is into a reasonable, harmonious and stable, pluralist system), which is probably a very optimistic expectation, the black population will still have to fight for their social rights, albeit from an improved position. It is likely that a protracted commitment to freedom and social justice will sustain topics such as black consciousness and nationalism, the formation of exploitation through internal colonialism and the organisational history of the freedom struggle.

Notwithstanding its anti-imperialist bearings, the early, post-colonial, historical writing of Africa was in fact based on European values, since it took its point of departure in the traditional, national writing of history with a special emphasis on government policy and the behaviour of elites. Inspired by development research and anthropology, African historians have demonstrated that Africa had great, ancient kingdoms, mine and trade centres and well-functioning infra-structures before the arrival of Europeans. New research has suggested that the real values might be found in the stateless community based on local autonomy, cooperation and openness.⁸⁶ Hopefully, black South African historians will be able learn from this source of experience without entirely renouncing universal, theoretical conceptions.

Black South Africans have been denied access to their own history. The history they were taught in school gave them no impression of a past with which they could identify. It will be difficult to establish a full picture of the ways that white history has been forced on black students and academics. However, the disparaged historical image of black people has made blacks uncomfortable with official history courses.

⁸³ Posel, Deborah: Rethinking the Race-Class Debate in South African Historiography, *Social Dynamics*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 1983 (Jun.), p. 63.

⁸⁴ De Villiers, Fleur: Hurt revisited: Capitalism and Apartheid. I Lewis, R. / Hurt, W.H. / de Villiers, F. / Gash, N.: *Apartheid - Capitalism or Socialism. The Political Economy of the Causes, Consequences and Cure of the Colour Bar in South Africa*. Institute for Economic Affairs, London, 1986.

⁸⁵ Johnstone, F.R.: *Most Painful to Our Hearts: South Africa Through the Eyes of the New school*, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 1982, pp. 19-20.

⁸⁶ 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.

Black historians still do not fill much space on the shelves of the university libraries. This is no doubt the most serious flaw in South African historiography, and a heavy responsibility rests both on the institutionalised historiography and on the popular movements. It is essential to raise the share of black contributions to the writing of history if the research milieu wishes to avoid presenting themselves as colonial reminiscences from the apartheid era. Such a situation would be the irony of fate for the liberal, English-speaking universities, who have been talking about racial integration for many years.

Everything seems to show that some of the more open-minded, radical historians are increasing their influence at the English-speaking universities in co-operation with undogmatic, political liberals. Thoroughgoing radical enclaves will still exist in university milieus, just as Afrikaner hedgehog positions, but perhaps the future for South African historical research lies in a new, symbiotic hegemony consisting of all progressive streams from liberal Africanism and radical, social history to ANC-informed strategic thinking.⁸⁷ This would certainly appear quite natural in an age of compromises.

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

⁸⁷ Bozzoli, Belinda (ed.): *Town and countryside in the Transvaal. Capitalist penetration and popular response. History Workshop*, Raven Press, Johannesburg, 1983, Bozzoli's introduction: *History, Experience and Culture*, p. 2. Posel, Deborah: *Rethinking the Race-Class Debate in South African Historiography*, *Social Dynamics*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 1983 (Jun.), p. 50.