Popular History in South Africa in the 1980s: the Politics of Production

Nicky Rousseau

Submitted in partial fulfilment of a Master of Arts degree, University of the Western Cape, April 1994.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

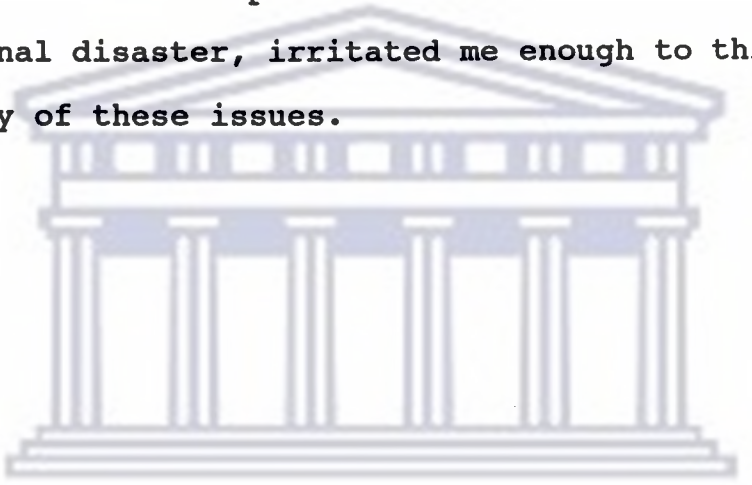
This work has its usual set of debts and acknowledgements.

From the late 1970s and through much of the 1980s I was involved in numerous projects aimed at `popularising' academic/political/theoretical material. To them and their `audiences' - in particular ERIC (now ERIP) and a short-lived discussion group convened by ERIC and CER - I owe a great deal intellectually. To a large degree this thesis continues old dialogues and debates and is thus both a debt to and a critical appraisal of that work.

With a few exceptions the projects that I was involved in positioned themselves differently from the WHW and - although not a formulation we agreed with - fell largely within the `people's history' of their categorisation. This thesis obviously engages with such a categorisation and thus may well be seen as a defence of old positions. It should be noted, however, that I chose to focus on the WHW not so much for this reason but because it enabled me the distance to work through a set of issues that were too close and uncomfortable in relation to the work with which I had been involved. For providing this distance, an acknowledgement is due.

Thanks to: My supervisors, Gary Minkley and Lesley Witz (the latter who magnanimously provided me with a sounding

board for the critique of his own work). To Naseegh and Marlene who provided time, support and a good deal of harassment to get done! To Maya who tolerated being schlepped across the sub-continent to boring meetings with her dad when I was working. To friends - in particular Brenda and Andre - who helped and provided support over the numerous periods when Naseegh was away. And, finally, to a long-time friend and comrade, whose glib version of history in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union and some or other internal disaster, irritated me enough to think through many of these issues.



ABBREVIATIONS

ANC	African National Congress
ANCYL	African National Congress Youth League
ASSA	Association of Sociologists in Southern Africa
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CPSA	Communist Party of South Africa
CST	Colonialism of a Special Type
ERIC	Education Resource and Information Centre
FOSATU	Federation of South African Trade Unions
ILRIG	International Labour Research Information Group
NUSAS	National Union of South African Students
PAC	Pan African Congress
RHR	Radical History Review
SACHED	South African Council for Higher Education
SACP	South African Communist Party
SACTU	South African Congress of Trade Unions
SAM	South African Movement
SPROCAS	Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society
SSD	Students for Social Democracy
UDF	United Democratic Front
WHW	Wits History Workshop
WYOHP	Write Your Own History Project

INTRODUCTION

In an important review article published in 1987, Luli Callinicos, suggests that

> "popular history is not new to South Africa. There is a rich tradition of liberal, national and radical popular history, as well as a vigorous right-wing tradition."[1]

Referring to the writings and teachings of a variety of intellectuals active in South African liberation and worker movements during the 20th century, Callinicos then provides some sort of lineage for the "exciting burgeoning of popular history writings"[2] during the late 1970s and 1980s.

Certainly there are important continuities between earlier popular history productions and those of the 1970s and 1980s. These would include a broad periodisation and framework of 20th century African resistance that has stretched from Roux's **Time Longer Than Rope** through to most subsequent popular *and* academic histories.[3]

Yet Callinicos' notion of a "tradition"[4] ignores what is arguably a major discontinuity: the different location of

---

1. Callinicos L, "The People's Past: Towards Transforming the Present" in Bozzoli B (ed), *Class Community and Conflict* (Johannesburg, 1987), 44
2. Callinicos, "The People's Past", 44
3. I am grateful to Martin Legassick for this observation.
4. There is, of course, also the question of how and why this `tradition' is invoked by Callinicos - a point that will be developed primarily in Chapter 3.

the authors/ producers.[5] For although many working in the area of popularisation were closely linked to organisational and political debates, most tended to be located in historically white and liberal universities or independent resource/ research or service structures until at least the mid-1980s.[6] In contrast, those from the earlier versions to which Callinicos refers - Roux,[7] Sachs, Jaffe, Taylor and Forman, among others - wrote primarily from within political and working class movements; while Plaatje, Nzula, Luthuli and others were located within the dominated classes as well as within the popular movements themselves.

The shift noted above is closely associated with the crushing of opposition in the early 1960s, the rise of the Black Consciousness movement and the related dislocation of white intellectuals from the political mainstream. This dislocation was to some extent alleviated by the growth of the independent trade union movement in the 1970s in which

5. This point is recognised by Callinicos herself in a later article. See Callinicos L, "Intellectuals, Popular History and Worker Education" in *Perspectives in Education*, Vol 11,1, 1989, 59-62
6. The WHW is the most important of the university-based groupings; Learn & Teach and the Community Research and Information Centre (CRIC) both based in Johannesburg, the Labour History Group, the Economic History Research Group, the Education Resource and Information Centre (ERIC) all based in Cape Town, and the nationally-based South African Council for Higher Education/Labour Committee (SACHED/LACOM) and Labour Research Commission are examples of off-campus resource/research structures. In addition groups such as the International Labour Research Information Group (ILRIG) straddled both university and `off-campus'.
7. While *Time Longer Than Rope* was written subsequent to Roux's departure from the Party and whilst an academic at Wits, his introduction to that book suggests that his earlier articles in *Umsebenzi* provided the impetus and basis for it. Roux E, Preface

university-linked intellectuals played a central role.[8] It was this base, in part, which allowed a `space' for a handful of intellectuals to begin playing a resource role, developing and providing a range of educational materials. A somewhat neglected but important factor as well were a few of the literacy groups, who not only generated popular materials but whose Freireian approach influenced educational as well as political thinking during the 1970s and 1980s.[9] To some extent as well, approaches to education and training were beginning to develop within left Christian circles whose membership and reach significantly crossed racial and ideological lines.[10]

---

to the Second Edition, *Time Longer Than Rope*, (Wisconsin, 1964 edition), vii

8. See Bozzoli B, "Intellectuals, Audiences and Histories: South African Experiences, 1978-1988" in *Radical History Review*, 46/7, 1990, 253; Callinicos L, "Intellectuals, Popular History", 55. Also see Friedman S, *Building Tomorrow Today*, (Johannesburg, 1987) and Baskin J *Striking Back*, (Johannesburg, 1991) for the development of the independent trade unions.
9. Examples of literacy groups in Cape Town are the Western Province Literacy Bureau (who although deeply critical of the `spontaneism' of Freire nonetheless broadly drew on much of his method in relation to teaching - see Anonymous, "Problems of Literacy", *African Frontline*, 3, 1980) and the Adult Literacy Project. I am uncertain to what extent Freire influenced Johannesburg groups but more generally groups such as Learn and Teach have, through their magazine, been at the forefront of popularisation through much of the period. Oral histories, life histories as well as histories of resistance have featured prominently in the magazine, *Learn and Teach*.
10. Examples of such circles were the Christian Institute, the Christian Education Leadership Training (CELT), the National Youth Leadership Training Programme (NYLTP) and the Churches Urban Planning Commission (CUPC). Although often framed by aspects of American behavioral psychology (such as `T-groups' and human relations training), they also crossed more radical educational approaches - again specifically Freireian and through SPROCAS connected to intellectuals such as Rick Turner. The experiences of these groups were later used by intellectuals involved in

Such interventions were gradually generalised in the post-1976 period and are associated with two separate but linked processes. In the first place, the period coincided importantly with significant shifts in political thinking. The internal debate around many of the central tenets of Black Consciousness that had begun prior to the banning of its primary organisations in 1977 gained momentum and was accompanied, as well, by the gradual re-assertion of the ANC and its policies and perspectives.[11] The issue of non-racialism became an important part of these emerging discourses. For some it was able politically to articulate the class/race debate through its demonstration, however marginal, of black exploiters/white allies. For others, despite its different meanings and forms, non-racialism was also able to `stand for' and evoke what was seen as earlier and more inclusive traditions of the Congress Alliance.

The `turn to class' by many black intellectuals and activists was mostly occasioned by the ruling classes' attempts to build and co-opt a black middle class from the latter half of the 1970s. At the same time, though, it was paralleled by the emergence of a sizeable group of left white intellectuals largely on the English-speaking campuses

---

popular education. For a discussion of CUPC see Messina E, "Die Churches' Urban Planning Commission: van Socio-Humanistiese tot Socio-Politiese Agent, 1968-1990", *Kronos*, 19, 1992

11. See Davies R, O'Meara D & Dlamini S, *The Struggle for South Africa*, Vol 2, (London, 1984), 307-8

and this forms the second process referred to above. Bozzoli and Delius sum up this period euphorically:

> "The stultifying atmosphere of the 1960s had, by the late 1970s, been replaced by an exhilarating sense of possibility and creativity. University life was transformed by the return of former exiles, by the vitality and commitment of students, and by the growing sense of many that academics could and should continue to make connections with the social movements which had arisen." [12]

The approach that characterised the development of organisation in the period under review was one that tended to emphasise organising on an area or sectoral basis and thus tended to be racially based. The issue of involving white[13] intellectuals was a vexed one: aside from the student movement, there were limited spaces in which they could be accommodated. The trade union movement, literacy and other similar projects were unable to absorb the

12. While recognising that this certainly captures important characteristics of this period, it presents an incredibly simplistic and one-dimensional view. Trade unions in the first place did not simply grow in leaps and bounds but experienced a real slump in the wake of 1973 and organisation only picked up again towards the end of 1970s (see Friedman, *Building Tomorrow*.) Similarly, while 1976 may well have shown the vulnerability of the apartheid government, it also showed a particularly vicious set of teeth - the massive loss of life, the banning of unionists and labour-linked students, the killing of Steve Biko and, more especially, the assassination of Rick Turner reverberated through white campuses. The wages and community commissions - that had been so central to the development of the trade union movement - collapsed. In short, the growth in academic and intellectual work owed as much to a sudden narrowing of political space and opportunity post-1976, as it did to the emerging vulnerability and crisis of state and capital!

13. By using the term `white intellectuals', I do not intend to suggest race as a natural category or to deny the social construction of race.

energies of this growing sector. Even where more direct organisational capacity existed such as in the range of women's organisations that began to emerge in the early 1980s, problems continued as the profile and nature of white branches differed vastly from their township counterparts.

`Providing resources' became one of the ways in which this issue was addressed and both within organisations and outside an enormous variety and range of `accessible literature' began to emerge. As education and training was also increasingly emphasised within organisations, they began to create an ongoing demand for popular materials. That popularisation provided a political home for many white intellectuals is perhaps attested to by the shrinking of potential popularisers in the post-1983 period as a range of more direct political and organisational opportunities opened up and along with a shifting emphasis of the importance of working in white areas themselves.

From the late 1970s then, what had been a handful of isolated publications[14] aimed at broader audiences now `burgeoned' as Callinicos suggests. Indeed by the early 1980s, some of the popularisation initiatives had been institutionalised and had developed into a range of resource structures in the major urban areas. Clearly not all the

14. Examples of these would be *Social Review*, as well as the many campus-based publications produced by NUSAS and the range of left political associations (eg, the South African Movement [SAM] at the University of the Witwatersrand and Students for Social Democracy [SSD] at the University of Cape Town).

above initiatives concerned popular history specifically but covered a variety of issues and disciplines. Thus popular productions emanating from these groups ranged from providing accessible information[15]; documenting struggles as they unfolded; discussing theoretical and conceptual issues; to more polemical and immediately political material. Indeed, encouraged by the emphasis on democratisation and grassroots participation (itself *in part* associated with the above initiatives), popularisation became not only a component of political work but a site of conceptual, theoretical and practical application.

That history became one of the areas focussed on relates in part to its vulgarly politicised status within apartheid education. At another level however, it reflected perhaps the depth of the breaks effected by the crushing of open resistance in the 1960s. While the continuity of political traditions is frequently attested to and the depth of popular memory perhaps if anything under-estimated, it is important not to generalise this too much. Much of the rebuilding of organisation and traditions at least up until 1984 was in the hands of relatively small groups of mainly young intellectuals whose various backgrounds in Black Consciousness, the Natal Indian Congress, or in Non-European Unity Movement schools had developed a propensity for intellectual pursuits. Building the underground as well

15. Such issues covered, eg, legal rights, rents and rates, industrial health, sewerage.

involved processes of reading, discussion and debate. Histories of South African resistance and national liberation struggles in far flung corners of the globe were extensively read, particularly by youth and student (both tertiary and secondary) sectors. `Recovering history' was seen to be central both to the rebuilding of Congress traditions or - from the other side - warning against the treachery of those traditions. [16]

To some extent, of course, organisation always generates a range of materials aimed at members or potential members, written in styles and languages deemed appropriate to that constituency. What the above account begins to suggest, however, are a range of other more complex factors whose interaction and intersections enabled the construction of a particular genre - popularisation - in the period under review and represents a new mode rather than the kind of continuity invoked by Callinicos.

The purpose of this historicisation then is to see popularisation not just as given or as a natural part of political activity but as a specific response at a particular moment. Although academics frequently stood outside and were sharply critical of many of the

16. Of course, there were other styles and agendas involved in this process of rebuilding and they differed sharply within and between regions. Although `older' people frequently played important roles in providing links and directions to underground structures, or being called upon `to give witness' to past political experiences, in the main Congress's revival relied less on popular memory or

organisational and political styles that were being built, they were nonetheless integrally part of a genre which not only had they to some extent `popularised' through the trade union and literacy structures but to which their own intellectual endeavors continued to feed. In relation to popular history, it was the overall frameworks and terminologies of radical historiography (at least until the CST debate reared its head in the mid-1980s)[17] that shaped understandings of South African society, even if they were deployed in ways that academics deplored. Thus, for example, Bloch's controversial 1987 Wits History Workshop (WHW) paper baldly states:

> "little original material [was needed]... there being a growing and extensive body of radical historiography which could be drawn upon..."[18]

Indeed, it is precisely this connection that draws attention to the academic site and provides much of the motivation for this study. By asserting popularisation as construction with partial origins in specific intellectual circles, it begins to suggest a process with serious

---

oral traditions, a point that will be developed at a later point in the thesis.

17. Colonialism of A Special Type - the analysis of South African society that underpinned the political strategies of the SACP. The differences between this and `racial capitalism', a perspective favoured by academic radical historiography and much more widely used in internal political circles in the early 1980s, became a sharply debated topic within student and youth circles circa 1983/1984.

18. Bloch G, "Popularising History: Some Reflections and Experiences", paper presented to the WHW conference, The Making of Class, 1987, 2

implications for how `the popular' itself is constructed. The concern that frames this thesis is thus one that seeks to interrogate the processes and politics of production rather than focussing on its products and tools.

With regard to the academic site, much of the work around popular history coincides with the period of the ascendence of social history in general and the WHW in particular. [19] Undoubtedly, this grouping has been the most influential on the English-speaking historically white universities for the past decade and a half. Moreover, the WHW is perhaps the only group within these universities to have maintained a consistent focus on popularising history in the period under review. Further, in fairly obvious ways, history `from below's' claim to the democratisation of the discipline resonates with many of the aims of popular history and thus lends itself to popularisation. For these reasons, this thesis pays greater attention to the WHW than other strands in radical historiography.

Finally, shifts in the WHW popularisation project are discernible from the mid-1980s. Following the formation of COSATU in 1985, trade unions began to take increasing responsibility for both their own education programmes and

19. It should be noted that WHW is not used in a strict and narrow institutional sense here; rather it is used in the sense that Bozzoli herself tends to project it, as leading and drawing together much of what constitutes the social history approach in South Africa. While this may well be problematic, it needs to be pointed out that with the possible exception of Bradford, social

the production of materials to service these programmes. [20] While this point will be developed more fully later on, what is of immediate relevance here is that the processes associated with this development undoubtedly led to a re-think of the WHW popularisation project. Although this re-think is alluded to at various points in the following chapters, the directions that it (or individuals within it) began to take have not been followed through. Thus although fairly recent work of the WHW has been cited, the processes that this study attempts to historicise are perhaps most reflective of the period up to circa the mid-1980s.

The following provides a brief outline of the structure of this thesis. **Chapter 1** begins to explore the frameworks in which popular history is cast. While suggesting that all such frameworks are centrally concerned with the relationship of history to political practice, it suggests that this relationship can be articulated in different although overlapping ways and that these conceptions affect the form and approach of the histories produced. It then proceeds to problematise these different conceptions and through this exploration to provide a framework in which to assess academic historiography's own productions of popular history. This framework suggests a need to understand the `site of production' of academic-popular texts; the subject

historians in general seem to have been perfectly happy to allow Bozzoli to `speak for' them.

20. See Callinicos, "Intellectuals, Popular History" on this - especially 59-62

position of the historian; and the interaction of academic productions of people's history with other sites of historical production.

Chapter 2 turns specifically to the debates and issues that underlie popular history texts, in particular those of the WHW. On the one hand, it suggests ways in which the rules of the historical discipline and the location on the university significantly shaped the form that WHW's popular history took. On the other hand, it attempts to show how the WHW's own political project is stamped on its popular history productions. Read together, a version of popular history is formed that is arguably not popular and that indeed ends up marginalising indigenous and popular forms of history and knowledge.

Chapter 3 continues the process of historicisation. In attempting to situate radical academic historiography, this chapter focuses on the social location of its historians and the nature of their academic and political project. It suggests that an understanding of these issues draws attention to a range of issues: the nature of the historically white universities in which radical academic historiography is located; the social production of intellectuals; disciplinary boundaries and rules; and, finally (but not exclusively) the construction (and contestation) of radical historiography's self-representation.

Finally, because the requirements of the academy and the discipline dictate, there is a **Conclusion** which attempts to problematise some of the argument used in this study.

CHAPTER 1: THE POLITICS OF HISTORY

Popular history, like indeed other histories, is informed by different ideas about the relationship between the past, the present and the political uses of history. However, a major problem in trying to explore these ideas as they developed in South Africa in the period under review, is that they remain for the large part embedded in popular history texts. A consistent and conscious theorisation has not been much evident - at least not at a published level.[1]

The triennial conferences of the WHW are thus perhaps unique in the opportunity they accorded to projects to reflect on their experiences and more generally to raise issues and debates relating to popularisation. At the same time, and perhaps precisely because it was one of the few arenas where such reflection was happening, the relative paucity of research to emerge from these quarters is particularly regrettable. While not all would agree with Crais' assertion that the programmatic separation of the popularisation section[2] from the mainstream academic one resulted in "exclusionary practices"[3], it does seem

1. There have been occasional articles, mainly in *Radical History Review*, *Perspectives in Education*, *SA Historical Journal* and *Critical Arts*.
2. I am here referring to the popularisation section of the conference, and not the Open Day.
3. Crais C, 1992, "Race, State and the Silence of History in the Making of Modern South Africa: A Polemic", paper presented to the African Studies Association, Seattle, 1992, 20. There has indeed been considerable debate around this - see for example, *Weekly Mail*, 20 - 25 February, 1987 and 27 February - 5 March 1987.

undeniable that they enjoyed a different and lesser status.[4]

For the most part, the popularisation section operated as a meeting and discussion ground for groups working in the field. Although papers were presented and there was a formal and separate programme from 1984 onwards, the majority of papers are best described as reflections on work in progress. Thus, despite the fact that tantalising and critical issues were often raised, there seems to be little evidence of either the WHW or other participants having taken these issues further and in a conscious way developing conceptual or theoretical approaches to the issues of popularising history.[5]

Perhaps some of the reasons for this lie in the nature of the groups participating (or potentially participating), the work and time pressures on such groups, as well as the aversion to theory among the historical discipline in general and in particular to the somewhat uncomfortable attitude to theoretical elaboration among sectors of the WHW.[6] More than this, concerns around accessibility are in

4. The popular history conference is generally characterised by haphazard attendance and participation of the academics; other than Callinicos' review articles and a handful of others, nothing substantial arising from this part of conference has been published - unlike the `academic' part which has seen, at the very least, a significant collection published for each of the triennial conferences.
5. A challenging and enormously suggestive exception to this is a brief summary of the proceedings of the 1990 popular history conference - see Hamilton C, "Academics and the Craft of Writing Popular History" in *Perspectives in Education*, Vol 12, 1, 1990.
6. Some would perhaps argue that the WHW has been more open to theory than most historians and that theoretical elaboration has indeed

part critiques of academic discourse, of `ivory towers' and `high theory', and perhaps have tended at times to develop into a reification of `the popular' in ways that suggested an opposition between theorisation and popularisation. Thus, although popular history was a remarkably visible and potent force in the 1980s, it has not been paralleled by a similar attention to conceptual and methodological issues.

An implicit but central assumption of almost all versions of popular history is an assertion of a direct and immediate relationship between history and politics[7] - indeed, the existence of such a relationship provides much of the raison d'etre for popular history. It would seem then, that any framework for understanding popular history must place this relationship at its centre. At the same time, however, there are differing conceptions of the history/politics relationship which suggest different models of the value of history for political practice and thus of the popularisation project itself.

It should be noted that any attempt to separate out approaches or models is problematic. Most popular history

been a consistent concern. However, in the arguments against the structuralists an anti-theoreticism has often hardened into a hostility to theory. This is particularly evident in Bozzoli's work and in the Bozzoli and Delius piece where experience and theory are often set up in opposition to each other. See for example, Bozzoli B and Delius P, "Radical History and South African Society", *Radical History Review*, 46/7, 1990, 28-30.

7. Much of this underlies history generally, and I am not suggesting that such approaches are only applicable to popular history. Indeed, an argument of this thesis is precisely that popular

productions are informed by more than one approach and are not easily pigeon-holed: rather they "have ragged and interlocking edges, ... lean on each other and define themselves by what they are not."[8] More than this, an approach that begins to delineate different approaches and sets them in opposition to each other, repeats a set of analytic procedures that this study itself calls into question. In regard to both these problems, however, the approaches outlined are used to suggest broad lines of argument or debate rather than being a definitive or particularly useful way of categorising or classifying particular examples.

In a review of the work of the Communist Party Historians Group in Britain, Bill Schwarz suggests three different notions of historical practice: history as lesson; history as exhortation; and the study of history as politics.[9] At a glance, this conception would seem to resonate with some of the obvious approaches characterising popular history in South Africa. Thus, for example, popular historians across the board are agreed that a study of the past can usefully enrich and inform political

---

histories share, for the large part, the same framework as academic histories.

8. Jenkins K, *Re-thinking History* (London, 1991), 66
9. Schwarz B, "'The People' in History: The Communist Party Historians' Group, 1946-56" in Johnson R et al (eds), *Making Histories: Studies in History Writing and Politics*, (London, 1982)

practice in some way;[10] much of what the WHW refers to as `people's history' is also concerned with the ways in which history is used to build a sense of political identity and purpose;[11] while some of the more recent reviews of popular history[12] can be seen to suggest a position similar to Schwarz' notion of the study of history as politics. The following discussion, then, uses Schwarz as a starting point in exploring these conceptions of the history/politics relationship.

History-as-lesson

In history-as-lesson the value of history lies in its ability, as the term baldly suggests, to learn from it. This approach informs much of the way in which popular history texts were (and are) written and used, not only by academic historians but in countless education and training programmes run in organisations. The following critique does not take account of the way in which this approach frequently developed in vibrant and powerful directions. Rather it is an attempt to foreground that which is implicit

10. Eg Bloch, "Popularising"; Callinicos, "The People's Past"; Witz L, *Write Your Own History*, (Johannesburg, 1988) and "The Write Your Own History Project" in *Radical History Review*, No 46/7, 1990
11. Eg Bloch, "Popularising"; Cronin J and Suttner R, *Thirty Years of the Freedom Charter*, (Johannesburg, 1985)
12. Eg Witz "The WYOH Project"; Witz L and Hamilton C, "Reaping the Whirlwind: The Reader's Digest Illustrated History of South Africa and the Appetite for the Past in South Africa", paper presented to the World Archeological Congress 2, Venezuela, 1990; Hamilton "Academics"

but unacknowledged and through this to problematise an approach whose bona fides are rarely contested.

In the first place, history-as-lesson suggests that the past, the present and the future are tied together in a continuous and inextricable chain. Not only does the past enable us to explain our present day realities, but this understanding will better enable us to change our present and build a better future. Expressed simply, this view suggests that "if people read and understand history, they are more likely to make better history themselves"[13] or perhaps more concretely in the words of a young activist in the Write Your Own History Project (WYOHP), Myboy:

> "If you are organising in a factory, you need to know about past struggles in the industry to help you organise effectively. By asking why things happened we can learn from our mistakes and successes and build up strong worker organisation."[14]

In some versions - often particularly official histories - this past-present-future link is plainly teleological, a kind of `On the road to Damascus' narrativisation. In such versions, the past exists "as a central empirical resource, as the truth of the past for the present and the future".[15] In other words, the past is there to teach us better and so mistakes and even defeats

13. Labour History Group, quoted in Callinicos, "The `People's Past'", 45
14. Witz, *Write Your Own History*, 17

are often almost desirable in their capacity to lead to new insights or a better understanding.[16]

Of course, most professional historians on both the academic and popular side would reject such crudely historicist approaches. Indeed both the structuralist and social history projects can be seen partially as attempts to escape crude teleological notions of an endless chain of past, present and future, indissolubly and progressively linked to each other. At the same time, however, professional historians have by and large continued to hold onto the notion of time as naturally sequential and periodisation as central to historical discourse. Few would challenge Luckett and Nuttall's assertion that "a historian without chronology is a contradiction in terms".[17]

Increasingly, however, this supposedly common-sense view of time has been the object of a sustained critique.[18]

15. Schwarz B & Mercer C, "Popular Politics and Marxist Theory in Britain: The History Men" in Bridges G and Brunt R, *Silver Linings: Some Strategies for the Eighties* (London, 1981), 157
16. This problem is raised by Baskin J, "The Rise and Rise of COSATU", paper presented to the WHW Popular History Conference, 1990. See also Rassool's review of Baskin's book, *Striking Back!* that suggests that Baskin has not escaped from this problem himself - Rassool C in *Race and Class*, 34, 2, 1992, 102. See also Portelli A, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and other Stories* (Albany, 1991), 110-113 for a useful discussion of this in Italian Communist Party histories.
17. Luckett C and Nuttall T, "Teaching and Learning History as a Discourse: showing first year students how to read and write like historians", paper presented to the SA Association for Academic Development conference, Cape Town 1993, 130
18. See among others De Certeau M, *The Writing of History* (New York, 1988); Fabian J, *Time and its Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York, 1983); Jonathan D Hill (ed), *Rethinking History and Myth: Indigenous South American Perspectives on the Past*,

Far from being common-sense or universal, it has been suggested that such sequential notions represent an approach to time that is peculiarly Western and shot through with culture-bound assumptions. Briefly this critique suggests that the narrative of the West's own development is held to be a universal one, against which other societies are measured and into which both their prior and subsequent histories are appropriated and fitted. Thus it is precisely these assumptions that have been intimately tied to the ideas of progress and change that have been implicated in the West's view of the non-West as variously timeless, unchanging and backwards. In this regard then, the chain of history so integral to history-as-lesson must be seen as neither necessary nor universal but as a particular historical and cultural construction.

Frederic Jameson argues that one needs to understand why such historicist ways of seeing the world emerged and proved to be so deeply satisfying. He suggests the answer lies in the

> "conceptual hypostasis and phenomenological projection of a life experience unique to the industrialising nations of nineteenth century capitalism, of the gradual dissolution of the older pre-capitalist Gemeinschaften of traditional family life and their replacement, within the unity of a single lifetime and a single biographical

---

(Illinois, 1988); Said E "Orientalism Re-considered", in Barker F et al (eds) *Europe and Its Others*, (Essex, 1984)

> experience, by the nascent industrial city." [my emphasis][19]

In this regard then, a sequential and teleological image of time is a way of "resolving, by way of something like a conceptual narrative mechanism, the lived contradiction of `modernisation' itself"[20] and perhaps goes some way towards explaining its resonance with popular historical consciousness in South Africa.

It should, perhaps be added, that while Jameson's emphasis is on the experience of modernisation within a single lifetime, the point could perhaps be extended into other seemingly overwhelming experiences of rapid changes or shifts. Thus for example, in the 1980s, many youths' life experience had spanned seemingly intense shifts as the apparent silence of the 1960s was dramatically broken, followed by unrelenting repression and then a resurgence in the 1980s. In this context, it is perhaps not surprising that an approach which suggests that in order

> "[to] improve the way we live, we must understand how our lives came to be as they are. If we want to help build a better future, we must understand the things that shape the world we live in."[21]

---

19. Jameson F, *The Ideologies of Theory, Essays, 1971 - 1986*, Minneapolis, 1988, 156
20. Jameson, *Ideologies of Theory*, 156
21. Peter Garlake and Andre Proctor, quoted in National Education Crisis Committee, *What is History? A New Approach to History for Students, Workers and Communities*, Johannesburg, 1987, 8

Not only does this appeal give purpose and understanding to such experiences but, more importantly, evokes the possibility of a different future.

On a different but related tack, while much professional history continues to operate as though the object of history were to examine `the past', there is a strong groundswell within left historiography which acknowledges the present-mindedness of history and asserts that it is not so much `the past' as the `past-present' relationship with which history is concerned. At the same time, however, this `past-present' relationship can be operationalised in different ways.

Within history-as-lesson, the past is often seen purely as "a sort of `quarry' where long-lost positions are found and revived"[22] and thus is an approach that ends up ignoring the `pastness of the past'. History-as-lesson thus tends to ask questions of the past that are informed by the questions and choices of the present in a way that not only denies the difference of the past but appropriates and assimilates different histories into simple and apparently transparent `lessons'. Consequently, it often tends to pronounce on the past dogmatically as though this is in fact how things were, rather than consciously acknowledging the ways in which it is exploring present-day dilemmas.[23] Thus, for instance,

22. Schwarz & Mercer, "History Men", 161
23. While this often tends to privilege the present, the obverse can be the case - as when the past is used to beat the present over the

the characterisation in many popular history productions of the ICU or the ANC in the period under review began with the questions `ICU - trade union/or not', `ANC - conservative/or radical' respectively and the lessons gained (`Build industrial unions!' `Don't trust the petty-bourgeoisie!') served as sign-posts warning of what were seen as present dangers.[24] That the questions and choices posed have been made the same for `then' as for `now' is unacknowledged and unproblematised. [25]

But also - and seemingly paradoxically - through chronology and periodisation, a process of marking off and bracketing the past as the past is enabled. A case in point is the way in which the history of the ANC is narrativised

---

head. Examples would be the ways in which the 1950s were sometimes portrayed in some popular histories in the 1980s.

24. See for example, Labour History Group, *The ICU*, Cape Town, nd; Economic History Research Group, *The Struggle for the Land*, Cape Town, nd.

25. For a useful discussion of alterity and continuity, see Darnton R, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York, 1984) and debates around this book in the *Journal of Modern History*, 57, 1985 and 58, 1986. See also Rosaldo R, "Social Analysis in History and Anthropology" in Kaye HJ and McClelland K (eds), *EP Thompson: Critical Perspectives* (Cambridge, 1990): "In the play of distance and closeness, Thompson creates a Radical tradition within which an identification of past and present occupies the foreground, and strangeness remains hidden in an obscure background. The very identification which enables other voices to be heard in their full persuasive force as they speak to the present can at the same time muffle the distinctive tones of the past..." 120. It should be clear that this perspective is not the same as Harrison Wright's who sees that present as a `burden' in understanding the past (Wright H, *The Burden of the Present: Liberal-Radical Controversy over South African History*, Cape Town, 1977). While his objection is tied into notions of a `real and reconstructible past', the perspective being suggested here is rather concerned with the ways in which the `past-present' relationship is flattened and conflated in *history-as-lesson*.

where the emergence of nationalism is seen to mark off an earlier period of primary resistance and where an initial moderate leadership ultimately gives way in the 1940s to the more radicalised approach of the Youth League. While historians have and do challenge and police the boundaries of this periodisation[26], each period is seen as distinctive and fundamentally different from its predecessor. Within this context, processes such as rural responses to the ICU, Garveyism, or the Bulhoek rebellion are seen to demonstrate little more than the unevenness of this broadly universal move to national forms of struggle.

Read differently, and without the same concern for origin and development, nationalism can be seen as a series of `spaces' or locations across which a single identity is attempted to be spun. Within this problematic, both the so-called `old guard' and the Youth League represent the same but different modes of negotiating modernity over and at times against residually powerful oral and rural cultures. In their attempts to construct particular political identities, both can be seen to stitch together `traditions' from oral and rural cultures in order to re-construct the political domain in a way that simultaneously appropriates

26. Thus, for example, in a recent paper Bundy argues that the radicalisation of the ANC significantly begins in the 1930s rather than `[springing] fully armed from the forehead of Lembede in 1943." Bundy C, "Breaking the Midnight Slumber: Govan Mbeki in the Transkei, 1940-8", IHR and History Department Seminar, UWC, September 1993, 12 While this to some degree opens up new and important issues and areas, it seems to me not to significantly alter the overall narrative.

and - through periodisation - writes out or `tames' the identities associated with those cultures.

Thus, for example, in the case of the earlier leadership, their inclusion of `traditional leaders' is always seen as a mark of conservatism, and the restructuring of the ANC to abolish the House of Chiefs in the early 1940s as representative of the new spirit of radicalism and progressiveness that leads eventually to the adoption of the Programme of Action. While not attempting to deny the failure of the earlier leadership to interrogate the ways in which the chieftainship had been re-inscribed through successive laws and measures stretching back to the mid-19th century, nor that there may well have been a coalescence of conservative interests between chiefs, headmen and ANC leadership, the conservative/radical explanation has a number of shortcomings and silences. What this explanation presupposes on the one hand, is the total success of the state's project and thus an across the board negation of alternative capacities of re-inscription or subversion, and, on the other hand, it elides the assertion of a more aggressively urban nationalism. In other words, what this account would have us forget is the question of power and the ways in which traditional has come to stand for tribal, backward and even rural or regional.

But precisely because history, as De Certeau suggests, "is played along the margins which join society with its

past and with the very act of separating itself from the past..."[27] aspects of rural cultures and the identities associated with them are taken up and narrativised as `the warrior tradition' and this is held to reflect the depth and continuity of a pre-eminently national consciousness rather than representing different and possibly incommensurable histories.

When historians gloss these contested and overlapping narratives into a sequential and progressive development through periodisation/s, they thus replicate the same process. Struggle, power, the silencing and working over of other identities, as well as the failure to do so in any complete sense, are erased or at least pushed to the margins. Conversely, and again following popular historical conceptions, is the opposite process of `giving voice' to some identities in a way that fails to interrogate their role and place in such narratives.[28] Issues and identities, however do not vanish [nor, for those `written in', always lie down easily with other aspects of the narrative] simply because politics or periodisation has deemed them to have. Consequently, a national consciousness

27. De Certeau, *The Writing*: "... history is played along the margins which join society with its past and with the very act of separating itself from the past. It takes place along these lines which trace the figure of a current time by dividing it from its other, but which the return of the past is continually modifying or blurring." 37/8

28. An example of this is the way in which Shaka and a `Zulu tradition' was `given a voice' in popular historical narratives and the successive and ongoing contests over the meanings of such a

needs to be constantly renegotiated and re-constructed through processes of inclusion and exclusion, and the historical narrative similarly repeatedly comes up against these reworkings.

The reason for this somewhat long diversion is to indicate the ways in which history-as-lesson, rather than pointing to the contested, incomplete and ragged connections between history and politics both in the making and writing of history, suggests instead a neat and bloodless fit. What it tends to do, then, is to flatten the misfits and lapses referred to above into a seemingly rational account from which we can learn and prevent mistakes from recurring. In this regard history-as-lesson also functions as a "process of reading history `from left to right, across the page'".[29] Again, despite disclaimers to the contrary, the notion of a past reality that is plain and transparent, and from which lessons can be "simply `read off'" returns.[30] Further, as Schwarz and Mercer remind us, even if historians disclaim this, there remain strong strands of political thought and practice that reinforce such an approach.

These strands of political thought articulate a particular view about the relationship between education and politics. In this regard they suggest a study of the past

---

`tradition'. See in particular Hamilton CA, *Authoring Shaka: Models, Metaphors and Historiography*, PhD, John Hopkins, 1993.

29. Schwarz & Mercer, "History Men", 161
30. Schwarz and Mercer, "History Men", 161

as a route to improvement[31] - as Myboy suggests the route to better trade union organisation lies in our study of past experiences, in drawing up a balance sheet of successes and failures. Thus the solution to political problems and impasses can often be found simply by learning more and subjecting past experience to more rigorous study and debate.

What this approach ends up doing, though, is to suggest that politics - or rather better politics - consists of making a set of rational choices, based on a rational study of the past. Not only can this be interrogated for its inherently Western bias but its implication that good politics lies within people's grasp banishes constraints of structure and determination. Structure becomes simply an obstacle that is - through rigor and distance or "the public exercise of reason"[32] - possible to navigate. That much of this approach pervades radical academic historiography in South Africa and underlies the appeal for a critical approach to history, will be explored in greater depth later.

---

31. In a different context, but with useful insights for this argument, Comaroff Jean & Comaroff John, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa, Vol 1* (Chicago, 1991), raises the ways in which the missions articulated conversion as a route to self-improvement. What this comparison opens up again is the hidden bias of an approach which foregrounds objectivity, self-study and other forms of Western knowledge as inherently better and as part of the process of creating the colonial subject.
32. The phrase is Spivak's from a public seminar given by her at UWC, Bellville, 1992.

> critically by examining a variety of sources, detecting bias and evaluating evidence."[35]

That history is seen to operate as iconoclastic in these conceptions is evident.

Finally, and importantly, what is masked in history-as-lesson is the pre-eminently active political role of the historian in identifying and knitting together `the lessons'. It has been argued that "[historical] facts are timeless and discontinuous until woven together in stories".[36]

Again to suggest that an historical past is transparent and of itself offers up a set of lessons or pointers is deeply problematic and ignores the very real intervention and agency of those who make history speak. Or to put this slightly differently,

> "[there] is always a dislocation, a space between the `lessons of the past' and the imperatives for the construction of political strategies today. This space is never neutral: it is politically and theoretically strategic.."[37]

Whether the above critique should necessarily mean designating history-as-lesson to the dustbin is an issue that I will return to in the concluding chapter.

---

34. The specific metaphor of `inside-outside' came up in discussion with Martin Legassick.
35. Witz, "The WYOH Project", 378
36. Lowenthal D, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, 1985), 19

That this also privileges literate modes of knowledge and thought should be evident. Of course, on the face of it, there is no inherent reason why history-as-lesson cannot be founded on oral forms of memory and experience but that it does not is related to two factors. In the first place, memory itself is not structured in forms compatible to periodisation or notions of a transparent and rationally decipherable past.[33]

Secondly, history-as-lesson and the history of its conscious popularisation and transmission suggests that there is outside of popular memory another history that is more accurate, preferable and centrally more powerful than common-sense or popular historical consciousness.[34] Thus a conscious study of the past - which is surely what we believe we are doing when we do guild history - exists precisely in order to re-order such popular conceptions. Thus Witz, for example, asserts that:

> "[rather] than argue over how the past should be represented, ... it was far better to give people the historical tools to become producers of their own history .... producers who would engage with the past

33. Although historians such as Vansina argue precisely for both the need and possibility of fitting oral traditions into real/rational/verifiable notions of historical construction - see both his seminal book - Vansina J, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology* (Chicago, 1965) - as well as more recent work such as *Oral Tradition as History* (London, 1985). For more nuanced and different understandings of oral tradition see, for example, Miller J (ed) *The African Past Speaks*, Henige D, *Oral Historiography* (London, 1982), Cohen DW and Atieno Odhiambo SE, *Siaya* (London, 1989)

History-as-mobilisation

Luli Callinicos suggests that

> "[one] of the exciting (and problematic) things about being a historian in SA today is that history is so hotly contested. Passionate interpretations of the past emanate from a range of activists on the SA scene. To all, from the fascist leader of the AWB... to student comrades and worker poets, history is a resource of mobilisation, a political weapon activists use to advance current organisational strategies."[38]

Clearly what is being suggested here is the way in which history is actively seen to be used as a means of mobilisation - in other words, history-as-mobilisation or exhortation.[39] This approach is generally seen to be characterised by an assertion of a sense of tradition and continuity; the centrality of resistance; and the tendency to adopt a celebratory or even `triumphalist' approach.

Perhaps the most common variant of history-as-mobilisation is that associated with national movements. As Anderson and others[40] have pointed out an appeal to a supposedly common historical legacy is often pivotal to the construction of national cultures as `imagined communities'. The way in which this historical legacy is usually invoked

37. Schwarz & Mercer, "History Men", 154/5
38. Callinicos L, "Popular History in the Eighties" in *Radical History Review*, No 46/7, 1990, 285
39. That this perspective also founds a discourse of the `activist-historian' should be noted.
40. Anderson B, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London, 1983); Schwarz, "The People";

frequently suggests a conception of it as inherently and "already residing in some way in the hearts and minds of the people"[41] and waiting simply to unfold.

In many popular histories[42], for example, the period of primary resistance is frequently asserted as part of, indeed as intrinsic to, a singular and continuous African resistance tradition and identity. That this is self-evident is supposedly attested to by the frequency with which the language of the rank-and-file throughout twentieth century politics and worker movements is couched in the warrior traditions of the 19th century. In other words, despite the historical non-existence and, indeed, impossibility of an African identity during the period in which these struggles took place, they are seen to contain within themselves an essential Africanness that forms the foundation and core of a national African identity.

Much the same can be said of many other histories that chart the rise of national and particularly nationalist movements[43] and it can be argued that it is precisely this

Hobsbawm E and Ranger T (eds), *The Invention of Tradition*, (Cambridge, 1983).

41. Schwarz & Mercer, "History Men", 150
42. For example, see Meli F, *A History of the ANC: South Africa Belongs to Us*, (Harare, 1988); UWC History Department/Education Resource and Information Project, *Let Us Speak of Freedom, Vols 1 - 4*, Bellville, nd; as well as versions given in official ANC publications
43. Gyan Prakash, in a particularly useful article, shows how Indian nationalist historiography wrote of India as "an undivided subject... that ... possessed a unitary self and a singular will that arose from its essence and was capable of autonomy and sovereignty. From this point of view, the task of history was to

kind of triumphalism and hagiography that critical and largely academic historians warn against. This should not, however, mean - as it frequently does - that such histories should not be taken seriously and that no discussion is therefore needed or warranted. It is precisely such views that have prevented an engagement between academic and other kinds of histories.

More than this, however, it can be argued that academic histories themselves, and the popularisations that base themselves on those academic productions, at times reflect similar approaches. Thus, for example, the ways in which `the working class' is constructed frequently posits a similar notion of "a latent radical historical tradition" residing in the very experiences of the working class. Further, the supposed deep division between this class and the `petty-bourgeois politics' of a national movement is suggestive of a brand of Marxist politics that sees class as a "universal and essential [category] whose [history] can be recounted as one of continuity or of a direct tradition"[44], in this case, of a specifically working class tradition.

---

unleash this subjectivity from colonial control; and the task of historiography to represent this unleashing.... So, when politicians spoke of a nation in the making, *they were referring to the task of making the masses conscious of a nation already in existence as an objective reality*." (My emphasis) See Prakash G, "Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 32,2, 1990, 389/90

44. Schwarz & Mercer, "History Men", 156

Moreover, the notion that the roots of this `latent tradition' are to be found in the very experience of oppression, suggests that politics and resistance are themselves spontaneous and natural.[45] When experience is used in this originary way, the implication is, as Scott argues[46], that politics and resistance cease to require explanation. This precludes the necessity for an engagement with the ways in which resistance and its identities are constructed (or not constructed) in memory and discursively in the making and writing of history, and how resistance and its meanings shift over time. Put another way, experience, resistance and identity become so many words, synonymous and inter-referential, rather than opening a space that would allow for these to be explained and historicised not just `on the ground' but within political and historical discourse as well.[47]

Thus to continue the example used above, when the long and continuous tradition of African resistance is invoked,

45. See, for example, Scott Joan W, "The Evidence of Experience" in *Critical Inquiry*, 17, 1991 and Mohanty CT, "Feminist Encounters: Locating the Politics of Experience" in Barrett M and Phillips A (eds), *Destabilising Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates* (Cambridge/Oxford, 1992), for a critique of how the experience of being female is seen automatically and naturally to politicise and lead to resistance.
46. Scott, "The Evidence"
47. "The evidence of experience works as a foundation providing both starting point and a conclusive kind of explanation, beyond which few questions can or need to be asked. And yet is is precisely the questions precluded - questions about difference, discourse and subjectivity, as well as about what counts as experience and who gets to make that determination - that would enable us to historicise experience, and to reflect critically on the history

`African' is taken as a self-evident identity and the question of how and in what differing ways it is constructed is ignored. This view is thus blind to the fact that the categories of settler/ African cannot be said to exist in any absolute and Manichean sense. In other words, this version projects and takes as pre-existing a set of identities that have only been established precisely through the colonial impact. A number of processes get blurred here. `African' is seen as the sum of a range of identifiable ethnic identities and thus the emergence of these identities themselves - Xhosa, Sotho, Zulu and so forth - are taken as pre-existing and fixed. There is similarly a failure to explain how the boundaries of `African' were constituted in the first place and why, for example, Khoisan groups are frequently excluded from such definition (or, indeed, how the boundaries of Khoisan itself are constituted and contested).[48] This failure to point to the constructed nature of ethnic and national identities is arguably all the more glaring in a society where such identities have come to be seen as deeply natural.

At another level, it is suggested that the representation of the national and/or popular tradition as

---

we write about it, rather than to premise our history on it.", Scott, "The Evidence", 790

48. Attempts in the 1980s in the Western Cape to draw the coloured community closer to the national struggle tried, among other things, to create a tradition of resistance through reference to a supposed heritage of Khoi resistance.

continuous and somehow inherently progressive,[49] masks or sidelines the very discontinuities of `the tradition'. When histories attempt to `stitch up' one singular and continuous tradition, the processes that conflict with or belong to a different narrative genre must somehow be excluded, marginalised or appropriated[50] and thus potentially productive processes and divergent histories are side-lined. An example of this would be the cursory way in which the issues surrounding the formation of the PAC are

---

49. See Schwarz, "`The People'" and Schwarz & Mercer, "History Men" for a critique of the Communist Party Historians Group and their construction of the `English radical tradition'. Schwarz: "... by illuminating the revolutionary *continuity* of the popular tradition, the difficulties imposed by its very *discontinuities* should at least have been posed. This silence... almost amounts to a `stop in the mind' in the Communist historians of the period, an inability adequately to think through and overcome in the historiography the breaks and ruptures which punctuated the passage from plebeian radicalism to the modern labour movement... Theoretically ... the balance between continuity and rupture may raise decisive questions which lie right at the heart of the very concept of the national-popular." 71

50. Obviously this refers to the process of narrativisation that writers such as Hayden White suggest lie at the very heart of historical discourse - see, for example, White H, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore, 1987). See also Prakash "Post-Orientalist Histories" and "Can the Subaltern Ride? A Reply to O'Hanlon and Washbrook" in *Contemporary Studies in Society and History*, 34, 1992, for a critique of how the narrativisation of India's history into a Marxist framework has meant the appropriation and subjugation of incommensurable histories. However, it should be noted that a range of arguments using Bakhtin's notions of dialogical or Derrida's *differance* point to the `messiness' and `incompleteness' of this process: "whatever this ... understanding of the past holds to be irrelevant - shards created by the selection of materials, remainders left aside by an explication - comes back, despite everything, on the edges of discourse or in its rifts and crannies: `resistances', `survivals', or delays discreetly perturb the pretty order of a line of `progress' or a system of interpretation." De Certeau, *The Writing*, 4. See also La Capra D, *History and Criticism* (Ithaca & London, 1985)

frequently dealt with.[51] By viewing it as a mere hiccup, potentially interesting and divergent processes get written out in the name of non-racialism.

A further common feature of history-as-mobilisation is that it takes resistance as its organising frame. In South African histories, as Wright points out, resistance becomes quite literally the flip side of colonial and apartheid rule, the bipolar opposite of power. This framework is an essentially reactive one that

> "has emerged very largely in response to apartheid history. The directness of its engagement gives it, at its best, a great cogency, but at the same time, even where its propositions are diametrically opposed to those of apartheid history, tends to lock it into the same frame of reference. Popular history, in other words, has so far tended in many ways to emerge as a reverse image of apartheid history[52], to define itself not so much in terms of what it is proposing as in terms of what it is opposing."[53]

Thus Wright argues that if we look at apartheid histories and resistance histories side by side, they share

---

51. See, Frederickse J, *The Unbreakable Thread* (Johannesburg, 1990), for a good example of this.
52. Of course, it can be argued more generally that apartheid history is itself defined in opposition to British colonial history and so we have, in the end, a colonial framework stamping itself onto popular history.
53. Wright J, "Popularising the Precolonial Past: Politics and Problems", paper presented to the WHW, The Making of Class, 1987, 3. See also Rassool C and Witz L, "The 1952 Van Riebeeck Tercentenary Festival: Constructing and Contesting Public National History", paper presented to **African Studies Association** (Seattle 1992) for the way in which resistance gets `locked into' the terms of that which it is opposing.

very similar features: both pay little attention to pre-colonial history other than in broad, ethnographic terms; both focus on post-Great Trek history, the one celebrating white settler achievements, the other resistance to colonial encroachment; and, it may be added, both document twentieth century history in terms of the rise of national movements.

He further suggests that where resistance histories do look at the pre-colonial period, they do so in terms of a stereotype which has three broad features: they assume a false political unity and homogeneity among societies; they see all Africans as having been united against colonial rule and thus suppress histories of alliance; they assume that colonial rule relied entirely on force and thus fail to understand the complex ways in which colonial and precolonial societies articulated with each other.[54] The result of this stereotyping, Wright argues, is to project the present onto the past in a completely ahistorical way. More disturbingly, while such history "functions essentially to provide images of an idealised past which can be contrasted with the miseries of life under colonialism and apartheid"[55], it ironically casts pre-colonial societies in precisely the terms that colonial and apartheid history has cast them - as timeless and unchanging.

---

54. Wright, "Popularising", 4-7
55. Wright, "Popularising", 4

A further critique of histories of resistance is that they, by their very nature, focus on what is explicit and visible. Groups `hidden from history' in conventional histories remain largely hidden and silenced, leading - among other things - to a "supremely masculinist structuring of [the resistance] tradition".[56] Within South African resistance histories, the point can perhaps be most dramatically made in relation to the period of primary resistance: if we remove the warriors and the warrior tradition, indeed if we remove the men, what remains of those histories and what can possibly even be said?[57] But it is not only a question of women being `hidden from history' and much the same point, if not quite as starkly, can be made in relation to worker or political histories that focus largely on strikes, mass action and organisation and that mean that the vast majority of South Africans are -

56. Schwarz, "`The People'", 87
57. For a related argument, see Phillips A, "Universal Pretensions in Political Thought" in Barrett and Phillips, *Destabilising Theory*, that tracks the masculinist structuring of the concept of `citizen'. On a different tack, an interesting example of drawing attention not just to women but to their subjugation is Jeff Guy's attempt to signify gender as the basis for class divisions in precolonial African polities - see Guy J, "Gender Oppression in southern Africa's Precapitalist Societies" in Walker C (ed), *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945* (Cape Town, 1990). A similar point has been made about the `Che ethos' in Latin America - "[Women] recognise the unbalanced nature of a movement in which one gender constitutes revolutionary meaning and practice" - Franco J, "Beyond Ethnocentrism: Gender, Power, and the Third World Intelligentsia" in Nelson C and Grossberg L, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Basingstoke, 1988), 512

quite literally - left out of history except as some sort of contextual device.[58]

Indeed, it has been argued that the very ways in which people are constructed in the historical imagination and are granted "a categorical (and universal) subject-status (the worker, the peasant, the women, the black)"[59] functions to solidify and hide enormously complex processes of subject construction. Thus it is suggested that the very means used to `classify' people gives them more or less social and thus historical weight; while it simplifies and solidifies the identity of some, it allows other identities to be silenced or at times even to slip through the conceptual or historical nets.[60] In this regard, again this process is one in which knowledge and theory are imbricated in and replicate the same exercise of power and silencing.

---

57. See the debates around *sati* [Spivak, GC, "The Rani of Sirmur" and Mani L, "The Production of an Official Discourse on *Sati* in Early Eighteenth Century Bengal" in Barker F et al (eds), *Europe and Its Other, Vol 1* (Essex, 1984); Spivak GC, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Nelson and Grossberg, *Interpretation of Culture*; and a useful summary of this debate in Prakash, "Writing Post-Orientalist Histories"] and the impossibility of `recovering the voice' of women in colonial India.
59. Scott, "The Evidence", 792. Stuart Hall, quoted in Scott, makes a similar point: "The fact is `black' has never been just there either. It has always been an unstable identity, psychically, culturally and politically. It, too, is a narrative, a story, a history. Something constructed, told, spoken, not simply found." 792
60. See Spivak and her interpretation of `subaltern' as those whose "itinerary has not been traced so as to offer an object of seduction to the representing intellectual" in "Can the Subaltern Speak?", 285. See also Scott, "The Evidence", 792.

Finally, a further - and much quoted - feature of many popular histories that foreground resistance is their frequently celebratory nature. Rodinson repeats a common criticism:

> "Ideology always goes for the simplest solutions. It does not argue that an oppressed people is to be defended because it is oppressed and to the extent to which it is oppressed. On the contrary, the oppressed are sanctified and every aspect of their actions, their culture, their past, present and future behavior is presented as admirable."[61]

Again it should be noted that this tendency to ascribe a positive set of characteristics and attributes to the central characters - to make them into "mere representative allegories of `correct political practice'"[62] - is arguably not only a feature of non-academic popular constructions but is evident in much worker history, both academic and popular. Thus, productions concerned to expose the petty-bourgeois nature of national politics often end up evoking the gritty and sturdy worker[63] as counterpart; similarly,

---

61. Maxime Rodinson quoted in Harlow B, *Resistance Literature* (London/ New York, 1987), 29
62. Spivak GC, quoted in Harlow, *Resistance Literature*, 29/30
63. For an extemely evocative figure of the gritty and sturdy worker see especially Van Onselen - see, eg, Van Onselen C, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914*, Volumes 1 and 2 (Johannesburg, 1982). See also Smith K, *The Changing Past: Trends in South African Historical Writing* (Johannesburg, 1988), 186, who makes a similar point.

where national politics is seen to take a more radical turn, the figure of the working class is never far away.[64]

But to take Rodinson's point into a perhaps less charged and potentially more productive area, by raising the question as to whether `the people' or `the working class' can be treated "as if it were wholly unified, fully achieved and therefore capable of sustaining a memory wholly apart from the dominant constructions of the past."[65] There are two issues here of importance. Firstly, and to some extent covered in the above discussion, is the whole issue of `firming up' identities in ways that frequently centre on the existence, historically and contemporaneously, of a unified and homogeneous popular or, in other versions, working-class culture. In this process, difference be it class, gender, sexuality, location or generation is masked (indeed at times forcibly suppressed) and thus the whole question of power is elided. Secondly, this raises the argument about the ways in which dominant constructions themselves are inscribed on and within `the popular',[66] an area that again fruitfully opens the space for the need to

64. See, eg, Bonner P, "The Black Mineworkers' Strike: A preliminary Account" in Bozzoli B (ed), *Labour, Townships and Protests* (Johannesburg, 1979) as well as virtually all explanations for the processes of radicalisation in the 1940s.

65. Bommes M & Wright P, "`Charms of Residence': The Public and the Past" in Johnson et al (eds) *Making Histories*, 255

66. See Popular Memory Group for a particularly incisive argument on this - Popular Memory Group, "Popular Memory: Theory, Politics, Method" in Johnson et al, *Making Histories*. At the same time, however, it seems to me that the PMG ignore the ways in which these inscriptions are transformed often in creative and

historicise and locate resistance within, among others, its discursive construction.

To return again to the ways in which African nationalism has been constructed in different ways and at different moments within the South African liberation movement. While gender and class are inscribed in particular ways that will be elaborated at a later point, it was suggested that the ways in which attempts are made to found national identities across powerful rural and/or `traditional' cultures and the ways in which aspects of these cultures are appropriated needed to be tracked. Failing to do so allows for an unproblematic `speaking-for' that disguises the interactions, the confrontations and the overlap between particular urban, literate and at times, Western forms of nationalism and rural, oral and indigenous forms of knowledge and political thought. [At the same time, it must be noted that this argument in no way suggests the rural, oral or indigenous as necessarily pure, unified or free from dominant and/or colonial inscriptions. Nor that it exists as an entirely autonomous or separate sphere.]

A conception of nationalism as always involving the exercise of cultural power, as Hall suggests,[67] begins to open up questions of how hegemony and silencing are inscribed in the meanings of `African', `national',

oppositional ways - see Rowes W and Schelling V, *Memory and Modernity* (London, 1991) for different approaches to this process.

67. Hall S et al, *Modernity and its Futures* (Birmingham, 1992), 296/297

`nationalism' - and for that matter, `working class'.[68] Such an approach would thus begin to point "to the differences suppressed and the power exercised *even as colonial domination was challenged*."[69] [My emphasis] It would also point to the incompleteness of hegemony and the impossibility of total silence and thus to "the possibilities of `hidden transcripts'..."[70]

Before ending the discussion on history-as-mobilisation, the problematic way of separating it from history-as-lesson should be pointed out. In this separation, there is a tendency to see the former as principally propagandistic and that raises issues of political methodology whereas history-as-lesson is seen to be principally didactic, raising issues largely of educational and historical methodology. Two points need to be made in this regard. As pointed out previously, most popular histories are not easily separated into one or the other and cross over the `boundaries' at various points. However, more pertinently, history-as-lesson is equally engaged in the founding of particular identities that are

68. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Renan E, "Narrating the Nation" in Bhabha H (ed) *Narrating the Nation* (London, 1990), Hall, *Modernity and Its Futures* and others thus point to the ways in which a notion of `the British' is constructed on the basis of the linguistic and cultural hegemony of a particular southern region (`the English') over Scottish, Welsh, or Irish cultures. In a different context, a range of feminist theorists raise the ways in which notions of `citizenship', for example, are discursively masculine. Phillips A, "Universal Pretensions" in Barrett and Phillips, *Destabilising Theory*.
69. Prakash, "Post-Orientalist Histories", 390
70. Hamilton, *Authoring Shaka*, 66.

closely and intimately bound to particular and quite specific political positions. This latter point will be developed in Chapters 2 and 3.

A further, and more major, problem alluded to earlier is that of `universalising' history-as-lesson or history-as-mobilisation. What happens in this is again a process of `flattening' that is unable to register different genres or modes of expression. In this regard, an example would be the way in which popular historical conceptions are, at times, simply and unproblematically held to romanticise or glorify the past in similar ways to history-as-mobilisation. What is, in certain cases, hidden by this are the intersections between memory, life-worlds, orality and the production of the past.[71] Thus, for example, a stress on continuity functions differently in history-as-mobilisation from that to be found in oral tradition. Of course, this again is not meant to point to some `purer' or less problematic sphere but rather to the need to recognise and explore different modes and genres of expression.

71. See debates around izibongo which although different revolve around some of the same concerns. The literature is extensive but as a summary of some of the debates see Kromberg S, "The Role of the Audience in the Emergence of Durban Worker *Izibongo*" in Sienaert E et al, *Oral Tradition and Innovation: New Wine in Old Bottles?* (Durban, 1991)

History-as-politics

This brings us to the third version of history as outlined by Schwarz: that is, the study of history-as-politics. According to Schwarz:

> "[Conceptions] of the past have a hold on, and organise, contemporary `memories' and ideologies... `We ourselves are shaped by the past; but from our vantage point in the present we are continually reshaping the past which shapes us'. What distinguishes this third approach ...is the commitment to the conditions of the production of historical knowledge as a political question. It centrally locates `making histories' and the production of `memories' as a constituent moment in the struggles within ideology and culture. This is vital in order to understand the active construction of conceptions of the past as a continual and defining moment in political practice, engaging with and deconstructing reactionary `memories' and histories.... it includes as a site of struggle, and thus as problematic, popular culture itself. It stresses the need to theorise the connections and disjunctures between professional or academic histories and the complex amalgam of public and private `common-sense' conceptions of the past."[72]

While this approach is itself not without problems, it begins at a number of levels to provide a productive conceptual framework for exploring popular history. Firstly, while many academic historians concede that history is not written in stone, Schwarz's approach places contest centre-stage. Thus the process of active construction, rather than the reconstruction of historical knowledge is emphasised.

---

72. Schwarz, "The People", 95

Secondly, history-as-politics foregrounds the positionality of the historian and thus enables the subject position and role of the historian to be opened as an important question. Again, while `bias' and `interpretation' are allowed by the professional historical establishment, positionality is then generally, through a set of manoeuvres lumped together as `the historian's craft', pushed to the margins as a lesser question. In South Africa, such an approach would demand opening up for debate the issue alluded to in some popular history articles about the fact that popular historians are mostly products of a "white, middle-class culture"[73] in ways that historicise and explore its implications.[74]

A problem with this approach, though, is its failure to recognise what Hamilton suggests are the `limits of

73. Callinicos, "The `People's Past'", 58. See Crais "Race, the State, ... A Polemic": "(South African historiography) neither confronts some of the psychological issues involved in (mainly) whites writing about themselves and others in a colonial society, nor explores in much detail the historical implications of a discipline dominated by the dominant." 36 (footnote 136)

74. De Certeau: "...one can, of course, maintain that the personal status of the author is a matter of indifference (in relation to the objectivity of his or her work) or that he or she alone authorises or invalidates the discourse (according to whether he or she is `of it' or not). But this debate requires what has been concealed by an epistemology, namely, the impact of subject-to-subject relationships (men and women, blacks and whites, etc) on the use of apparently `neutral' techniques and in the organisation of discourses that are, perhaps, equally scientific. For example, from the fact of the differentiation of the sexes, must one conclude that a women produces a different historiography from that of a man? Of course, I do not answer this question, but I do assert that this interrogation puts the place of the subject in question and requires a treatment of it unlike the epistemology that constructed the `truth' of the work on the foundation of the speaker's irrelevance." (Quoted in Scott, "The Evidence", 798)

invention.' Hamilton argues that while the link between history and politics is generally accepted and few would deny the ways in which political power is inscribed in historical interpretation, new versions of the past cannot simply be imagined and manipulated at whim, as history-as-politics would suggest. Rather, they are constrained and limited by previous histories and earlier voices.[75]

Thirdly, history-as-politics begins to raise the interaction of professional, academic history and other forms of historical consciousness. Although, this conception continues to be framed in a way that arguably privileges the former (knowledge) over the latter (common-sense), it nonetheless seems to take the debate outside the hallowed walls of the academy in a way that not only legitimates other ways of knowing the past but recognises

75. Hamilton, *Authoring Shaka*. Of Hobsbawn and Ranger's use of `the invention of tradition', Hamilton suggests: "The notion of `invention' loses sight of the history of the tradition, of the way in which the tradition's (or elements of the tradition's) own past shapes its present. It further places full control over content and form in the hands of the `inventors' - usually political elites - and ignores the ways in which their versions of the past are shaped by contesting and conflicting versions of the past. It loses sight of the struggles between existing, often opposed, bodies of knowledge, and the ways in which such contests are related to the social conditions which prevail in the worlds inhabited by their promoters. It denies the possibilities of `hidden transcripts' and `subjugated knowledges,' and the effects these subversive texts have on the versions of the past promoted by those with political power." (65/6)

their interaction and contestation in the writing of history.[76]

A more productive way of picking up on this would seem to be to recognise "multiple locations of historical knowledge"[77]. In this regard, the "notion that `academic history is the real and only history' is itself opened to study rather than defining the field itself".[78] Again this highlights the subject-position of the historian and whether professional historians can be regarded as "outside the ideological fray"[79]. More than this, it begins to challenge their authority in determining not just "the interpretations ... but ... the terms of resolution"[80] as well. In other words it removes the privilege of the academic site in favour of calling attention to the processes of creation on both sides and thus raises the relationship between the two as an important area of exploration and debate.

To summarise then: the recognition of history as active construction; the centrality of the subject position of the historian; and the acknowledgement and legitimation of different ways of `processing the past' are strong points of

76. It should be noted that this `contest' happens not only between academic/professional and other forms of historical knowledge but within and between those latter forms as well.
77. Cohen DW, "The Production of History", paper presented to the Fifth International Roundtable in Anthropology and History, Paris, 1986, 20
78. Cohen, "The Production", 29
79. Jenkins, *Re-thinking*, 20
80. Cohen, "The Production", 45

what has been short-handed as history-as-politics. Taking into account the criticisms and reformulations suggested above, this approach would seem to provide a productive framework for understanding popular history as constructed within the academic site during the period under review. It is this approach then that forms the framework for the rest of the mini-thesis.

CHAPTER 2: `UNPALATABLE TRUTHS' AND `POPULAR HUNGER'

The sense of construction and contestation that framed *history-as-politics* forms the central thrust of this chapter. The following review focuses on the issues and emphases of popular history as conceived by the WHW in the period under review.[1] As noted before, by the end of the 1980s the conceptions of some of those associated with the WHW seemed to have shifted significantly. These shifts will be discussed later in this chapter.

Callinicos represents the first attempt to begin to define and elaborate an approach to popularisation. Intended in part as a survey and way of pulling together a variety of papers presented at the 1984 popular history conference, "The People's Past"[2] points to a number of issues being raised and debated within and between the groups who had participated. Issues of language and translation, audience, history as propaganda or debate, accountability, the white and middle class nature of most writers of popular history, are some of the issues raised,

1. Aside from a few general remarks, this chapter, and indeed the mini-thesis as a whole, focuses on the handful of articles where positions around popular history have been explicitly and consciously advanced. It thus does not attempt to explore popular history texts themselves. While such an exploration would undoubtedly be useful, I have felt that the constraints on a mini-thesis do not allow for the kind of close textual reading that would be necessary. Further, I would suggest that a more extended study would not substantially alter the broad lines of argument suggested here, although it could significantly contribute to an understanding of how positions are `operationalised' in texts and the contested and incomplete nature of this process.
2. Callinicos, "The `People's Past'"

all of which suggested an enormously exciting potential for enquiry.

Most of these issues, however, are not followed through and the conception of popular history that emerges is a skeletal one:

> "Popular history is ultimately located in the present; it seeks to examine the conditions on which contemporary dilemmas and struggle rest, and to trace the origins of our particular capitalist world as far back as it is necessary to go."[3]

Crudely then, this conception suggests present-mindedness as a necessary condition; capitalism as the defining characteristic of South Africa and thus the need for a broadly class-based approach; and, in its unfolding of history from past to present, history-as-lesson.

At the same time, though, Callinicos recognises that not all popular history situates itself within a materialist framework: indeed she suggests that examples occur right across the political spectrum. It is, however, class that enables a distinction between what she describes as `worker education' on the one hand, whereas other versions - both left and right - are referred to as`people's history.'

3. Callinicos, "The `People's Past'", 54/5

Finally, although not explicitly raised, `experience' operates both as part of Callinicos' conceptual historical armoury[4], as well as a heuristic device.

There is also, fleetingly, an attempt to ask what it is that popularisers in fact do, but beyond an assertion that popularisation is not just a version of complex historical research simplified for mass consumption, this argument is not taken further.

Subsequent articles by Callinicos,[5] confirm many of these earlier conceptions. The two approaches, raised by the previous article between `people's history' and `worker education' are further elaborated and remain, for Callinicos, simply and unproblematically linked to different political strands: the former to nationalist and popular movements; the latter to trade unions and more explicitly class-based movements. Curiously, although there clearly have been new issues with which to grapple - popular memory, folklore, identities are some that are alluded to - these like others in the previous article remain purely suggestive and are not consciously developed or even explored.[6]

---

4. But interestingly, she also suggests that it is through popularisation that the divide between structure and agency can be bridged - see "The `People's Past'", 62
5. Callinicos, "Popular History", "Popular History in a Changing South Africa", South African Historical Journal, 25, 1991
6. In fairness, it should be noted that in her own work Callinicos has taken some of these issues seriously. A comparison of Gold and Workers (Johannesburg, 1981) and A Place in the City (Johannesburg, 1993) for example, shows a far greater engagement with memory and identity in the latter, as well as a significantly

Where Callinicos sees her task as drawing together and making sense of different strands, Bozzoli eschews this `fairmindedness' for a more aggressive style. In her hands, popular history is yet another arena to demonstrate both the theoretical sterility of structuralism and the bankruptcy of nationalism. Indeed, "**Intellectuals, Audiences and Histories**"[7] remains largely trapped within this project and a number of useful and perceptive points are lost as they fall outside of this hegemonising narrative.[8]

Related to the above point, much of Bozzoli's article is concerned with the importance of developing a class-based approach to popular history in the face of what she sees as a popular culture that "[tends] to engender and sustain ideologies of a nationalist, populist, `motherist', or racially-defined character."[9] For intellectuals working within historical materialism, then, the central problem is how to "...convey... class analysis to audiences who define themselves firstly in racial or ethnic terms, and only secondly or even thirdly in class terms."[10]

---

different way of narration. How these aspects affect the overall framework within which she works remains debatable in the absence of a closer study. It would be my contention that there is a greater degree of interpretive openness (that is associated as well with a political re-positioning) but that Callinicos remains fairly comfortably within the bounds of the historical methodology espoused by the WHW.

7. Bozzoli, "Intellectuals", 1990
8. In particular in relation to rural/urban and issues of orality and language - see Bozzoli, "Intellectuals",
9. Bozzoli, "Intellectuals", 239
10. Bozzoli, "Intellectuals", 239

The issue of `independent' vs `organisationally-bound'[11] intellectuals is a further major concern of Bozzoli's and she argues strongly for the importance of "remaining relatively, if not absolutely, independent."[12] This Bozzoli suggests is necessary in order not to dilute the commitment to historical materialism, as well as being a mechanism to attract and establish links with a variety of groupings for whom political alignment may well be a problem.

This commitment to the independence of intellectuals, although not explicitly elaborated, underpins much of Witz' approach in the **Write Your Own History Project** (WYOHP).[13] The role of the popular historian in this project is seen not so much as the active producer of history but rather as a facilitator for popular history production. In other words, the popular historian would "give ordinary people the historical tools to engage with the past; to empower ordinary people to become producers of their own history..."[14]

11. This is in fact Callinicos' formulation - or at least one that she consistently used. Although she herself seemed to develop a degree of sympathy to the position of the `organisationally-bound' intellectual, the counter-posing of independent/bound usefully delineates the debate as seen from the WHW perspective. Outside academic circles, the debate was represented as one of `accountability'. For more on this debate, Naidoo J "Speech to Health and Safety Conference", South African Labour Bulletin, 12, 3, 1987
12. Bozzoli, "Intellectuals", 248
13. See Witz, Write Your Own and Witz, "The WYOH Project"
14. Witz, "The WYOH Project", 378

This process of developing the capacity of groups to write their own histories is framed broadly by several interlocking (although sometimes uncomfortably) concerns. In the first place, and most importantly, the WYOHP sought to develop and nurture an approach that emphasised "a *critical* engagement with the past."[15] The importance of such an approach, it is suggested, is that it goes beyond competing claims about how best to represent the past, to enabling those traditionally `outside history' to make those determinations themselves. In other words, engaging with the past critically is a route to empowerment.

Secondly, at a pedagogic level, and closely related to the above point, the WYOHP situates itself within a participatory educational model in which "..the underlying premise [is] that learning is *not* the filling of empty vessels but, rather, the mobilisation of the vast resources and skills people have at their disposal, which have not yet found expression."[16]

Thirdly, by engaging critically with the past not only will `ordinary people' be empowered in terms of skill and understanding but this process will enable a different and deeper kind of resistance to emerge:

> "South Africans are starting to realise that writing history will give them power, `power

15. Witz, "The WYOH Project", 377
16. Witz, "The WYOH Project",380/1

> to understand, power to resist and power to work towards change.'"[17]

Implicit in this is the conception that a critical understanding of historical processes is associated with the capacity to transform history itself.

Although there are a number of differences in emphasis and, at times, conception, an attempt to synthesise their work would suggest three main concerns framing the WHW approach to popularisation: a conscious commitment to transmitting class-based approaches; the centrality of experience as both method and tool; and the need to engage critically with the past.[18]

In the next section, this chapter begins to engage with some of the issues raised above. In so doing, it makes no attempt to comprehensively work through the contributions outlined above; rather it fairly explicitly roves through and raids them in trying to capture or illuminate particular positions and debates.

17. Witz, "The WYOH Project", 387
18. Differences in emphasis can be seen in the way in which, although sharing, and indeed placing greater emphasis on history as a critical discipline, the conceptions underlying the WYOHP project differ in some respects. For example, the same didacticism is not evident and there is a greater fluidity around medium and open-endedness towards Marxism.

Academic excellence, rigor and popular history

As suggested above, Callinicos begins to take issue with those for whom popularisation is little more than simplification.

> "[Popular] history can be a rigorous discipline in its own right... the writers of popular history have to be particularly scrupulous in researching sources and analysing them - mainly because the populariser has a responsibility to pursue careful and thoughtful scholarship on behalf of readers who do not have the resources to follow up the research, but also because, like academic radical scholarship, their work is apt to be subjected to sharp attacks by hostile critics..."[19]

This conception of the popular historian as original, innovative and rigorous reflects, in many ways, a major concern of popular history as it located itself - or at least intersected - in the late 1970s and early 1980s within academic discourses. This insertion was not without tension or effect in defining and shaping in significant ways some of popular history's trajectories.

At the outset, this discussion needs to be inserted into a broader process and politics in which critiques of the bourgeois university during the late 1970s gave way to struggles to transform, if not the institution, then some of its spaces. In unmasking the supposed disinterestedness and neutrality of the university, left intellectuals claimed a legitimacy for a different kind of interest and a different

19. Callinicos, "The `People's Past'", 57

kind of scholarship. Callinicos's assertion that "the task of the writers of `people's' and workers histories to start from the need to understand and directly *confront* not the past for its own sake, but present day situations and problems"[20], should then be seen as part of this struggle.

It goes almost without saying that this challenge was met by academia in general and the historical profession in particular with a great deal of unease, scepticism and, sometimes, outright hostility. Against this, the careful arguing by Callinicos and others[21] asserted that popularisation was not just a version of complex historical research simplified for mass consumption but involved innovative and original research, a mastery of a range of different kinds of knowledge - language, media, pedagogics, and so on - and an ongoing and intensely demanding engagement with its consumers.

It is partially this attempt to win real academic legitimacy for popularisation that perhaps explains the outrage around Bloch's more assertively activist notions, in particular his assertion that in the context of a mass upsurge,

> "History is called upon to directly service the ongoing drive, and increasingly conscious interventions, of the masses....

20. Callinicos, "The `People's Past'", 55
21. See for example Bloch, "Popularising"; Edgar R, "Writing Because They Chose the Plan of God" and Wells J, "Bringing Women Out of the Fog" both in Perspectives in Education, Vol 12, 1.

> while this cannot supplant traditional academic modes of historical research and debate .... criteria of `academic excellence' are, perhaps, only secondary to the task of integrating a historical consciousness in the daily lives of the oppressed majority."[22]

The sharp exchange that Bloch's comments occasioned - in particular, the response by Bozzoli in seeking to defend the integrity of the historical profession by asserting the historian's craft as some sort of talisman against `populist excess' - brought to the fore a process closely connected to the perceived need for accuracy. For, if the populariser was forced to be extremely cautious and rigorous because of an often hostile academic scrutiny, that was only one side of the equation; the other side was that the populariser would in making popularisation more palatable to the academic community at large, stick to at least some of the rules of the game.[23]

---

22. Bloch, "Popularising", 1/2. Aside from the above, his clear political partisanship and his perceived slide into relativism - admittedly major differences - there is in fact a considerable amount of common ground between Bloch, Callinicos and other WHW conceptions. These would include that the starting point of popular history is the present; that history `from below' and the category of `experience' connect powerfully with popular consciousness and thus are also heuristically useful; that a participatory approach to learning is essential; and, finally, that a critical engagement with the past can transform not only historical understanding but action as well.
23. I'm not suggesting an explicit and conscious `horse-trade' but more that the power of the institution and the discipline are not inconsiderable and without effect. Another obviously important factor in establishing academic credibility relates to, in the end unsuccessful, attempts to get popular histories established as accredited publications.

Thus, for the WHW a commitment to popularisation has never meant letting go of the idea that historical production is a highly skilled enterprise and articles in the RHR are peppered with comments about `the craft', `the guild', `critical historical skills' and so forth. While some of these issues will be picked up later, it should also at this stage be noted that the notion of the historian's craft worked alongside a related but different process whereby a line was drawn between `people's history' and `worker education'.

As suggested earlier, Callinicos asserts that within the long tradition of popular history, two strands are identifiable: the one, `people's history', is for her clearly linked to popular and multi-class perspectives and nationalist movements, while worker's education is associated with class-based analyses and organisations, especially the trade unions.[24] While Callinicos commends the `sensitivity' of `people's history',[25] in WHW conceptions `people's history' is generally characterised as romantic, triumphalist, seeking to rouse the masses emotion, and in this sense is principally ideological[26] - in short, clearly *not* what the WHW productions were about.

24. Callinicos, "The `People's Past'", see especially 60/1. The CPSA as "proponents of [a] popular alliance" fall into the category of `people's history' - see 60
25. Callinicos, "The People's Past", 61
26. In Witz' formulation, "the content of the history being promoted was generally an uncritical, romanticised view of the past to achieve political goals." Witz, unpublished draft, "The Write Your Own History Project", 1989, 1

Worker's education, on the other hand, was given infinitely more impeccable credentials in its evocation of discussion, critique and rationality.[27] Thus the figure of the readers who have no resources of their own to check on the historian's accuracy. Again clearly this process enabled the WHW to distance themselves from what the academic community viewed with some distaste, and to assert an impartial and principally *educational* approach more in line with the functions and role of a university.

This distinction between people's history and worker education needs also to be seen as part of a claim to hegemony that will be covered in the next chapter. While situating itself within the supposedly `long tradition of popular history,' but *at the same time* separating itself on the basis of its materialist and critical approach, the WHW lays claim to both political but more importantly *radical* credentials.

The process of demarcation outlined above relates closely to and criss-crosses a number of other issues - in particular, conceptions of `audiences', the positionality of both historian[28] and the discipline itself.

---

27. Callinicos' formulation of what is needed is "the expansion of concepts and a developing of the deductive processes of reasoning, which are facilitated by referring to empirical work examined in history." Callinicos, "The People's Past", 61
28. Eg the `bound/ unbound' intellectuals debate

Audiences, `taste' and `the face of popular indisposition'

The "... development of a popular taste, indeed, a hunger, for an alternative version of the past"[29] is the dominant representation of `the audience' throughout this period. At the same time, however, much of the literature is concerned to explicate on who and what this audience - or rather audiences - is about and what the implications of this are for popular historians. While Callinicos's assertion that "[more] than in any other craft, it is the audience that shapes the content"[30] is arguably way off mark, it captures to some extent the search for connection, for greater effectivity and, above all, for a meaningful insertion into popular consciousness.

It is this last mentioned aspect - the ability of popular histories to impact on and be absorbed by audiences - that in many way frames the discussions around audiences. For Bozzoli, there is a need to "provide the already conscientised masses with [the] greater self-insight and understanding"[31] that the new revisionist history offers. This `self-insight and understanding,' however, is clearly meant to work against popular historical conceptions in a way that refracts people's experience as *class* experience.

29. Witz and Hamilton, "Reaping the Whirlwind", 5; See also Bundy C, "An Image of its Own Past: Towards a Comparison of American and South African Historiography" in Radical History Review, No 464/7, 1990, for similar metaphors
30. Callinicos L, "Report: `The People's History Workshop', University of the Witwatersrand, February 1987", Perspectives in Education, 10, 1, 1988, 86
31. Bozzoli, "Intellectuals", 242

Bloch, writing outside of the WHW, is concerned to develop an approach that works with identity and situates learners as "products of processes - as people with roots ....by enabling them to see themselves as bearers of specific traditions, thus as carrying historical responsibility".[32]

If Bozzoli's and to a lesser degree Bloch's `audiences' are passive, those of the WYOHP, on the other hand, are cast in far more active terms and the WYOHP, as already suggested, aims to `empower ordinary people' to write their own histories. However, even in those versions that cast `audiences' as active, they all continue to assume that while there may well be a sense in which people possess a consciousness, there is, as was suggested in Chapter 1, outside of this another more real and more complex history.[33] Access to this history can be either in a ready-made and popularised form or via entry to the specialised and privileged craft of historical production. Within this conception, sophistication and complexity end up invariably on the historian's side of the equation rather than being

32. Bloch, "Popularising", 3/4
33. While this is common to virtually all of popular history - indeed it can be said to form its founding moment - it is perhaps most evident in Bozzoli's discussion which posits a remarkable separation between audiences and intellectuals. While audiences can be "already conscientised" (241), assertive, live (indeed, even drunk!), they exist almost as a playground for competing intellectuals and again it is the craft and integrity of the professional historians that protects against "... the glorification of oppositional and revolutionary movements, and the elevation of heroes"(253), that is perpetrated by those `other intellectuals'. All in "Intellectuals"

recognised as a particular language or mode of thought.[34] Indeed, even where consciousness or understanding is held to be complex, there is an implicit inference that popular history and historians are able to offer something that `audiences' lack or need to be made fully conscious and thus the effect remains the privileging of the academic site . A further effect is that this approach precludes an exploration of the interaction between different modes of discourse and the ways in which such interaction is criss-crossed with power and positionality.

However, arising from these apprehensions of a `real', more sophisticated history, much of the discussion around audiences throughout the period attempts to situate itself on the need, at one level, to `know' the audience and, at another level, around issues of accessibility.[35] Thus

34. On this: "All propaganda or popularisation involves a putting of the complex into the simple, but such a move is instantly deconstructive, for if the complex can be put into the simple, then it is not as complex as it seemed in the first place; and if the simple can be an adequate medium of such complexity, then it cannot, after all, be as simple as all that. A mutual transference of qualities between simple and complex takes place, forcing us to revise our initial estimate of both terms and to ponder the possibility that a translation of one into the other was made possible only by virtue of a secret complicity between them..." Eagleton T, "The Critic as Clown" in Nelson & Grossberg, Marxism and... 619

35. An interesting area to explore is that of the intersection between different discourses and practices. In part, popularisation cannot be apprehended without an understanding of how it connected to other discourses such as participatory learning and empowerment; conscientisation and Freireian approaches to pedagogy; understandings of media and ideology; political education, and so forth. Some of these circulated largely within academic circles; others within emerging popular organisations. The ways in which these various ideas and discourses are appropriated into popularisation is often uncomfortable and

various writers note the complex and divided nature of the society and the effects of this in understanding the nature of its audiences. This highlighted issues such as the divisions between urban and rural; workers and youth, as well as other divisions around race, ethnicity and gender. In this sense, audiences are generally `read off' a broader theory of society and fairly mechanistically follow the schisms and tension lines of those discourses, in particular those of a class discourse. Thus, while other issues - such as orality and literacy; popular memory and its forms and genres - are also raised, they are seldom followed through.

In relation to accessibility, much discussion was generated around issues of language's suitability; issues of presentation and visual imagery; participation and feedback. There was little discussion about accessibility as it applies *to the populariser*.[36] This importantly would open an area about the relationship between language and popular discourse and the extent to which `the audience/s's' life-world is transparent to popularisers.[37] Instead, in the

contradictory. For example, what are the connections/ non-connections between `participatory learning', `the historian's craft' and `the politically correct line'?

36. An exception is Bonner's input in the 1990 workshop and Hamilton's article both of which are picked up towards the end of this chapter - see Hamilton, "Academics and the Craft".

37. Hamilton, "Academics and the Craft" makes a similar point: "Evaluation of and engagement with powerful forms of popular historical knowledge outside of `western' scientific discourse demands of academic historians familiarity with the circumstances of the production of that knowledge, its intellectual lineage, its tropes and modalities, indeed the very conception of `history' on

quest for effective popularisation, the gaze remains fixed on `knowing the audience' and discussions more comfortably centred around language level and pitch; graphics and design.

`The facts', `detecting bias' and `history's new narratives'

As noted not all popular historians cast `the audience' in the role of passive recipients. In particular, it was suggested that the WYOHP operated within a framework of empowerment and aimed to mobilise "the vast resources and skills [`ordinary people'] have at their disposal."[38] However, while this conception may well see a somewhat different role for participants, its notions of history remain fixed. Specifically, it remains concerned to transmit a particular approach to history - that which would "promote a *critical* engagement with the past."[39] Again within this approach the process of demarcation and assertion of disciplinary rules noted in an earlier section is evident and thus the question remains of whether control of the `means of historical production' have indeed been transferred.

---

which it is based." (128). Although perhaps implicit in this comment, she does not specifically draw attention to the fact that this is questionable until historians begin to access non-English languages!

38. Witz, "The WYOH Project", 381
39. Witz, "The WYOH Project", 377

This need for a `*critical* engagement with the past' is central to much of the literature on popular history . In the conceptions that underpin Callinicos, Bozzoli and Bonner's approach, for example, the critical approach that is to be transmitted is principally a class-based one. Not only are academics - and quite explicitly white academics - portrayed as the privileged bearers of the Marxist tradition and thus able to interpret the working masses `true experience', critical thinking operates in fact as a simile for Marxism but a selective one on two scores.

Firstly, those working in the area marked off as `people's history' are almost definitionally excluded from the category Marxism. Secondly, not all Marxisms are appropriate for the task of transforming national into class consciousness and it is here that what Bozzoli sees as the inherent superiority of the WHW approach is apparent. While other Marxisms may well be "culturally vacant"[40], social history is able to "[enrich] and [make] relevant the categories of historical materialism..."[41] by locating them within "culture, experience and community ...".[42] Thus, in Bozzoli's view, popular history becomes yet another arena to demonstrate the bankruptcy of the national-popular and the alleged theoretical sterility of structuralism and another way of building the hegemony of the social historians.

---

40. Bozzoli, "Intellectuals", 260
41. Bozzoli, "Intellectuals", 261
42. Bozzoli, "Intellectuals", 260

The WYOHP remains similarly framed by its concern for the "uncritical, romanticised view of the past"[43] adopted in many popular histories and felt that "[crudely] put, the debate was whether the history produced [is] a critical or romantic representation of the past."[44] In addition, there are at least two major and, it will be argued, related positions that underlie *both* conceptions of `engaging critically with the past.' The first is the notion of `the craft' of doing historical work; the second that of the quintessentially independent and critical historian.

As pointed out previously, the sign of the historian's craft is central to those popular productions situating themselves within academic discourses. Unlike some of the versions which drew vivid and alarming parallels with brain surgeons[45], the WYOHP asserted the possibility of `barefoot historians' and was thus committed to "giving ordinary people the historical tools to engage with the past"[46]. These barefoot historians "would engage with the past critically by examining a variety of sources, detecting

43. Witz L, rough draft for "The WYOH Project", 2 Paradoxically, the WYOHP drew fairly extensively from British popular histories which themselves had been attacked for `romanticism' and `nostalgia' - see, for example, the essays in Samuel R (ed), People's History and Socialist Theory (London, 1981). However, it should perhaps be noted that these histories focussed specifically on working class life and presumably this emphasis enables their inclusion in the WYOHP. Whatever, the reason, it remains an interesting ambiguity.
44. Witz, rough draft "The WYOH Project", 2
45. Plenary session discussing Bloch's paper at the 1990 WHW.
46. Witz, "The WYOH Project", 378

bias, and evaluating evidence"[47] and the project thus set out to explore the research and writing skills needed "to craft their respective histories".[48]

The particular skills identified - "making notes, chronological sequencing, defining questions, conducting interviews, and evaluating evidence"[49] - are themselves instructive. Skills in this conception are seen as being technical and neutral issues; similarly, in almost all versions, despite operating within a framework that recognises the bias of all histories and historians, the role of the populariser as well is almost always perceived at the level of skill as some sort of technical input person.[50] There is thus no sense in which the particular package of skills outlined embodies a particular kind of history (not just guild history, but social history - such a package could equally, for example, be replaced by theory, structure, conjuncture)[51], nor that the trainer has an interested stake in defining these skills. More substantively, `skills' and the idea of history as a craft ground history in a veneer of scientificity. The skills that are required to produce history do not, on the one hand, include `imagination', `creativity' or any such criteria

47. Witz, "The WYOH Project", 378
48. Witz, "The WYOH Project", 380
49. Witz, "The WYOH Project", 380
50. For this at work, see particularly Witz, rough draft
51. Similarly, see Keith Jenkin, Re-thinking, who usefully explodes the unhistoricised `heartland concepts' of history - time, evidence, empathy, cause and effect, continuity and change - as having only

that unmask the extent to which history is equally a process of creating and making stories; nor do they begin to pose the kinds of skills participants may possess in relation to other ways of processing the past.

Two kind of results flow from an approach that while supposedly focussing on issues of historical production, does so largely within the terms of the academic discipline. In the first place, it not only transmits and reproduces a particular kind of approach to history[52] but masks this transmission and the particular interests of which such an approach is part.

In the second instance, it again operates effectively to draw lines, to validate particular approaches while excluding others variously as emotionalism/ propaganda/ triumphalism/ hagiography. It should be clear by now, that this process of demarcation includes both *other* popular history productions - the `people's history' of Callinicos's formulation - as well as the forms of popular understanding and consciousness against which `critical historians' must work. Thus Bozzoli is able to say:

> "It should not be assumed that just because black culture contains its own versions of history .... that these versions are

---

been around since the 1970s and owe more to educational thinking at the time than historical thinking.

52. "[The] transmission of a certain type of historical culture... so that what is crucial is that, within the academic articulation of that preference, you begin to copy such academics effectively. At

> necessarily valid. Often popular versions of the black past consist of myths about classless precapitalist society, and the exploits of numerous heroic great men."[53]

Marking off myth from history also results in a failure to recognise or even entertain the possibility that its own approach may too create and use its own myths. In this way then, some myths become `history'; others merely propaganda or anecdotes. More than this, its appeal to validity suggests that some neutral and objective criteria exist whereby histories can be measured and that such measurement is above contestation[54] thus again masking its own positionality and the extent to which it, too, is engaging in the construction of political subjects.

Further, and to repeat and re-emphasise an earlier point, such views impose a particular conception of what history is/should be against which other versions are to be measured. Thus different views or debates about how the past is represented or constructed are effectively closed off and the ability to interrogate other ways of representing the past is lost. Rather, a particular view is naturalised and validated. Above all, though, the linking of a `critical approach' with the notion of `the historian's craft' places not just the definition but the terms of resolution in the

---

these levels ... you are being inducted into a specific type of discourse", Jenkins, Re-thinking, 53

53. Bozzoli, "Intellectuals", 263

54. "The production of history, as discourse, is clearly about more than the construction of the `true account'... It is a discourse engaged in struggles for power, deference, and property." Cohen, "Production of History", 64

hands of the academy. Thus, in the end, it is the expert historian who is able to define and control what is regarded as properly critical.

Finally, following similar procedures, `critical' frequently operates in tandem with the principle of the independence of the historian. Thus Bozzoli asserts the importance of "remaining relatively, if not absolutely, independent"[55] and in response to debates around the limits of academic work asks: "Would we abandon our class analysis for the sake of popularity? And what would happen to our independence as intellectuals if we took such a course?"[56] Again, the joining of the two, `class' (or `critical engagement') and `independence', serves to link them in a way that implies that without independence - a privileged and desirable state - there can be no critical approach.

Obviously the issues of accountability and independence are complicated and important ones but the ability to engage in debate around such issues is marked by the terms in which the debate is set up. Far from arguing against critical approaches, what is being suggested is the need to open `critical' to multiple meanings - or at the very least, to recognise that this claim is a *political* one, a partisan one both in relation to the discipline and more broadly. All too often, a critical attitude is conflated with criticism

55. Bozzoli, "Intellectuals", 248
56. Bozzoli, "Intellectuals", 248

of particular, largely political positions or moments and is used, at the same time, to defend and hegemonise others.

`Indigestibility' and `history's new narratives'

Yet, despite all attempts to make history `accessible', to create `critical thinkers' and despite the `hunger for history', by the end of the 1980s it was apparent that "[while] the ideas of the revisionist historians were rapidly becoming hegemonic within the academies, they were enjoying a more limited success among the masses of ordinary people."[57] Audiences, while they seemed to eat with great relish, chose to digest more selectively and, much to the dismay of some historians, "[racial] oppression [remained] ... the central focus of anti-apartheid struggles, despite their strong anti-capitalist rhetoric."[58]

While some popular historians continued to grapple around this and re-explored notions of indigestibility and accessibility, others began asking a different set of questions that to a large degree began to question the WHW's popularisation project if not its political agendas. Thus Bonner suggests that popular historians' attention was perhaps misplaced and that "[concern] with language level and the liberal use of visual material ... may be to

57. Witz and Hamilton, "Reaping the Whirlwind", 7
58. Witz and Hamilton, "Reaping the Whirlwind", 7

misapprehend the notion of accessibility".[59] Instead, he suggests that "in the face of popular indisposition"[60] popularisers need to engage with the "quite different notions of causality and languages of explanation that prevail in popular understanding"[61].

Bonner, however, remains committed to the need for popular historians to "[feed] in unpalatable truths"[62] and his answer to recalcitrant audience's is to motivate historians to persist in "presenting what people in the short run don't want to hear ... [because] misdiagnoses result in wrong solutions."[63] In order to succeed, he suggests that ideas may be more permeable if

> "appropriate images are used, which resonate with popular knowledge. Recalling Gramsci's emphasis on the `granite solidity' of popular culture and popular beliefs, Bonner posits that historians may have to recognise such features as independent material factors in struggles as they develop on the ground, and to draw them into their own explanations."[64]

A different response to the seeming impasse that popular history had reached is one which begins to work interestingly around the nature of critical history. Thus in a 1991 paper, Witz and Hamilton present a slightly more

59. Hamilton's summary of Bonner in Hamilton, "Academics and the Craft", 126
60. Hamilton, "Academics and the Craft", 126
61. Hamilton, "Academics and the Craft", 126
62. Bonner in Hamilton, "Academics and the Craft", 126
63. In Hamilton, "Academics and the Craft", 126
64. Hamilton, "Academics and the Craft", 126.

conflictual and internally divergent approach to the issue of `critical history' than had characterised earlier WHW conceptions and they argue that the very contestation of history in South Africa has led to "a readiness to look not simply at `the facts' but also at the writers and producers of history."[65] This `readiness' indicates a potential `paradigmatic shift' in which

> "evidence and the history of knowledge about the past, are beginning to become the very content of history's new narrative.... The challenge for producers of history must be... to reflect this latest shift ... and, through a focus on evidence and the process of history production, to open up the channels of contestation.... Such an approach will empower readers to read a history in its particular social and political context, and thereby help to build a future democratic South Africa through full participation in decision-making, through *questioning, understanding, and critical debate*."[66] [My emphasis]

However, while its focus on the production of history potentially moves popular history out of purely academic productions into the intersections of such histories with both indigenous and other `alternative' histories, its focus on evidence suggests that this conception is still tied in important ways to guild history. Thus despite their enormously suggestive comment about the ways in which oral memories and indigenous productions of knowledge are suppressed and displaced "through the assertion of the

65. Hamilton, "Academics and the Craft", 18
66. Hamilton, "Academics and the Craft", 20

scientific accuracy of western thought"[67], they then proceed to repeat that move through their assertion of history as evidence and debate.

This version of critical history is at times associated with a view that interprets contestation as argument.[68] Where critical history focuses on awakening a questioning and sceptical attitude, *history-as-argument* emphasises the capacity for `audiences' to use evidence in choosing and constructing their own historical arguments. Superficially, then *history-as-argument* can be seen to begin to open history more explicitly to contestation and further to focus on transforming the notion of a passive and consuming `audience' into an active and intentional role. Indeed, this version, similar to the Witz and Hamilton version above, sometimes goes as far as to suggest a capacity to open different forms of historical production and approaches to `processing the past' themselves to debate.[69]

At a number of levels though, this conception differs little from earlier versions of `critical history'. Firstly, *history-as-argument* clearly functions within the

67. Witz & Hamilton, "Reaping the Whirlwind", 5
68. See especially, Cornell C and Witz L, "The Debate Continues: Critical Perspectives on the Development of the History I Curriculum at the University of the Western Cape", paper presented at the South African Association for Academic Development, UWC, Bellville, 1993
69. "The debates also have the potential to develop different histories with different rules... For instance, debates could become a forum where storytelling is developed, or where arguments about different forms of history and historians are contested." Cornell and Witz "The Debate Continues", 176 (Conference Proceedings)

same disciplinary rules outlined above (again, particularly the rules of evidence and interpretation). Secondly, by glossing contestation as argument, it limits the meaning of contestation in the direction of an epistemology based on the supposed opposition of rationality/ irrationality, logic/ emotion, history/ myth and so on. In this regard, it needs to be seen as part of those discourses that are deeply part of a `Cartesian epistemology' and needs thus to be interrogated for its `white', `western' and `male' bias.[70]

Finally, as suggested above, its willingness to debate issues of historical production, far from opens the rules of its own disciplinary procedures for debate in a disinterested way. On the contrary, it quite clearly reaffirms the dominance of the former by holding *its* procedures for the construction of knowledge as the `ground' on which the contest is supposed to occur. In this sense, it can be said to appropriate and subjugate other ways of knowing the past to the terms of `guild history.'

The above chapter has been concerned to draw out a number of processes critical to an understanding of popular history within South Africa in the period under review. These processes point to the ways in which the specific

70. See again Phillips, "Universal Pretensions". At the same time though, needs to be a process of seeing how such approaches meet supposedly `indigenous' and frequently similarly masculine discourses.

location within the universities and the agreement to work within the disciplinary boundaries of academic history interacted and intersected with each other to form a particular and dominant approach to popular history. This approach involved, among other things, an insistence on the absolute primacy and correctness of class (more narrowly, WHW conceptions of class) and it is suggested that asserting this approach involved an exiling both of what was termed `people's history' as well as popular historical conceptions and knowledge.

More than this, academic conceptions of popular history in the period under review have generally proceeded and reaffirmed disciplinary boundaries. At the same time, there has increasingly been a recognition of the need to open the discussion to new directions, an important one of which has been to begin questioning the absolute authority of the academic texts themselves. Thus Hofmeyr and Hamilton[71] suggest that more than Bonner's simple notion of popular consciousness, there are instead different ways of processing the past and thus different forms of popular knowledge.

Hofmeyr thus refers to the "appropriateness, nuance and logic"[72] of such forms while Hamilton argues that an acknowledgement of "the strength and complexity of forms of

71. Hofmeyr and Hamilton, both in Hamilton, "Academics and the Craft",
72. Hamilton's summary of Hofmeyr, Hamilton, "Academics and the Craft", 127

popular knowledge raises ... questions about the very essence of the popularisation project as conceptualised and promoted by History Workshop"[73]. Challenging the conception of the audience as `consumers' and the historians as producers of a privileged and superior form of knowledge, Hamilton suggests rather that "the `audience' ... are themselves actively engaged in the production of knowledge about the past ... making use of their own elaborate discourses for debating the meaning of history, culture and society."[74]

At the same time, though, as suggested earlier, this direction itself is not without problems and even where the production of history has become the focus of contestation, there has been a tendency for popularisation to remain bound and circumscribed by the rules and procedures of guild history.

73. Hamilton, "Academics and the Craft", 127
74. Hamilton, "Academics and the Craft", 127

CHAPTER 3: `INADEQUATE PROGRESSIONS'

In 1990, the prestigious American Radical History Review published a special issue on South African historiography,[1] focussing largely on the achievements of the social historians, in particular those associated with the Wits History Workshop. The centre-piece of this issue was an important review article written by two leading academics of the WHW, Belinda Bozzoli and Peter Delius, outlining developments in radical South African historiography over the previous two decades. This reconstruction (some would argue *construction*) of the radical tradition provoked something of an outburst among both liberal and radical South African historians, with the South African Historical Journal devoting a special issue to responses.[2]

Briefly, Bozzoli and Delius suggest that, while its roots are to be found in a set of earlier historical interpretations,[3] contemporary radical history in South Africa emerges as a composite of different historiographical strands that developed in the 1970s and 1980s. Specifically it represents a `coming together' of "revisionist, localist

1. *Radical History Review*, 46/7, Winter 1990.
2. *South African Historical Journal*, 24, 1991. See also *South African Historical Journal*, 27, 1992 and *South African Review of Books*, May/June 1991, for further responses.
3. These interpretations they suggest are to be found in black writers such as Plaatje, Molema and Soga; intellectuals associated with the CPSA; similarly those attached to the NEUM; and, finally, a `form of social democratic thought' implicit in the work of

and Africanist concerns to develop a more `decolonised' scholarship, which questioned imported categories and metropolitan paradigms."[4]

There are three dominant motifs organising the account given by Bozzoli and Delius. The first is that of exile and the importance of international intellectual and political trends in explaining the paradigmatic shift in South African studies. The second is that of internal political developments and it has been suggested that the relationship of scholars to the debates surrounding these has been "close and important."[5] The third (and, it may be added, privileged) motif is that of indigenisation. While a range of historians[6] have commented on the interweaving of international left-wing thought and internal political struggles in the development of radical historiography, the strong claim to indigenisation is perhaps unique to the Bozzoli and Delius piece.

Yet it is precisely this claim that has been challenged by Clifton Crais who suggests that, far from being

professional historians, Macmillan and De Kiewet. Bozzoli and Delius, "Radical History", 14-16

4. Bozzoli and Delius, "Radical History", 34
5. Freund B, "Past Imperfect" in *South African Review of Books*, December 1988/ January 1989, 9
6. See for example Saunders C, *The Making of the South African Past: Major Historians on Race and Class* (Cape Town, 1988); Smith K, *The Changing Past: Trends in South African Historical Writing*, (Johannesburg 1988); Marks S, "The Historiography of South Africa: Recent Developments" in Jewsiewicki B, and Newbury D (eds), *African Historiographies* (Beverley Hills, 1985); Tatham K, "Interpretations of racism/ segregation/ apartheid in South

decolonised, South African historiography is "still in many respects dominated by the colonizer"[7] and written in "exhausted `borrowed' languages"[8].

The attempt to explore the connections between radical historiography and its social context suggested by various writers and more recently, the Bozzoli and Delius article, can be seen to begin the process of historicisation called for in Chapter 1. Yet suggestive and important as these accounts may be, arguably they go little beyond contextual detail and cannot be said to explicate the ways in which, as Crais points out, "those who create representations of the past are, like their subjects, historically constituted." [9] Rather, there are significant silences. These include the social location of academic historiography and its historians; the nature of their academic and political projects; and the construction of their self-representation. This chapter works along these registers.

African historiography", paper presented at WHW *Structure and Experience in the Making of Apartheid*, (Johannesburg, 1990)

7. Crais, "Race, the State, and the Silence of History in the Making of Modern South Africa: Preliminary Departures", paper presented to Centre Of African Studies, UCT, Cape Town, 1992, 20
8. Crais, "Race, the State...Preliminary Departures", 21
9. Crais, "Race, the State...A Polemic", 20

`Ruled by constraints, bound to privileges'[10]

It has been suggested that in regard to South African studies it is

> "simply beside the point that the knowledge transmitted is increasingly of a `radical' slant... Where blacks were once the recipients of knowledge generated and transmitted by white `liberal' intellectuals, today black intellectuals have moved on to transmit knowledge generated by `radical' white intellectuals. The movement from passive recipient to active transmitter is an inadequate progression."[11]

This observation applies dramatically to the historical discipline in South Africa, as a cursory glance through journals and publications - including the special issue of the **Radical History Review** referred to above - would signify. Indeed, a number of historians and conferences have commented on the "remarkable absence of black historians in South Africa ... (despite) their growing presence as the object of historical research and writing."[12] Yet, while constantly conceding this `gap', radical historiography has continued to seek purely external and empirical answers. Thus, for example, Bozzoli and Delius suggest that the reasons need to be sought in the nature of black education and the until fairly recent denial

10. De Certeau, *The Writing*, 58. The piece from which this quote is taken is concerned to explore the ways in which the rules of the discipline and the etiquette of the profession intersect in ways that are bound up with power - and its restrictions.
11. Evans I, "The racial question and intellectual production in South Africa", *UWCADE Forum*, 1, 1990, 16
12. Freund, "Past Imperfect", 9

of access to institutions such as libraries and archives[13] and this kind of explanation would seem to be a representative one. Even Crais, despite some trenchant criticism, in the end seems to accept the dominance of white historians by doing little else than calling on historians to pay "greater attention to the historical consciousness of the oppressed, their etiologies, their chronologies, their epistemologies."[14]

There also has been little focus on what Crais elsewhere refers to as "the psychological issues involved in (mainly) whites writing about themselves and others in a colonial society, nor explores in much detail the historical implications of a discipline dominated by the dominant."[15] Indeed, only Freund, Worger and Taylor suggest that radical historians and/or the profession itself are in some way complicit in the failure to extend significantly `the craft' to include potential black historians.

Thus Freund, for example, argues that lack of access to the `tools of the trade' is not a sufficient answer. In comparing the WHW with ASSA, he suggests that, while the WHW wins hands down when it comes to academic quality, ASSA's consistent and painstaking attempts to reach out to homeland

13. For other comments on the absence of black historians see Saunders, *The Making of...*; Smith, *The Changing Past*; and Freund "Past Imperfect" as well as Freund B, "Radical History Writing and the South African Context", in *South African Historical Journal*, 24, 1991
14. Crais, "Race, the State... A Polemic", 22
15. Crais, "Race, the State...A Polemic", 36

universities has been an important and perhaps more radical credit.[16] Worger[17] makes some suggestive comments about the ways in which a class dynamic continues to preclude a focus on issues such as black consciousness and African nationalism and asserts that "the radical endeavour is primarily a white enterprise."[18] Taylor, in an otherwise disappointing and confused article, usefully suggests the need to explore the social location of academics.[19] Unhappy with Worger's uncritical use of race, Taylor further begins to raise issues of Eurocentrism and the colonial Other.

Although some of these formulations seem problematic,[20] they can provide a springboard into this discussion. At one level, it is possible to raise the whole notion of history as white mythology[21] that has only significantly begun to impact on South African studies fairly recently. At a different but arguably related level, is the assertion

---

16. Freund, "Radical History Writing", 158
17. Worger W, "White Radical History in South Africa", in *South African Historical Journal*, 24, 1991 and Worger W, `White' Radical History: A Response" in *South African Historical Journal*, 27, 1992, 262/3
18. Worger, "White Radical History", 147
19. Taylor R, "Is Radical History `White'?" in *South African Historical Journal*, 27, 1992
20. See Taylor and Worger in *South African Historical Journal*, 27, 1992. While Taylor may well be correct about Worger's uncritical use of race, his own contribution, as Worger in turn points out, is confused and confusing. For useful criticism's of the perspective that presumably underlies Taylor's, see debates around Eurocentrism and its construction of the colonial Other. For a useful summary and South African version, see Hamilton *Authoring Shaka*, especially 67-84.
21. Similar issues as suggested above re the colonial Other can be raised about history as white mythology. I will return to these in the Conclusion

that the place and production of white intellectuals is a peculiar and specific one and that the absence of black historians and the dominance of white historians can be tied *together*.

With regard to the latter issue an exploration would need to pursue two main tracks. The first relates to the production of historians in general and the intersections of discipline and institution and would include importantly the power/ knowledge relationship of which Foucault speaks - "`the three great exclusions which forge discourse' - the *prohibitions* on what we can speak about, on who may speak and when..."[22] More than this, it needs to take seriously the *place* of intellectual production. De Certeau thus suggests that

> "The institution does more than give the doctrine a social position. It makes it possible and surreptitiously determines it... (the institution refers) the `state of (history)' to a social situation which is its unspoken condition. It is therefore impossible to analyse historical discourse independently of the institution in respect to which its silence is organised; or to dream of a renewal of the discipline that would be assured by the mere modification of its concepts without an intervening transformation of acquired situations."[23]

---

22. Barrett on Foucault in Barrett M, *The Politics of Truth: From Marx to Foucault* (Cambridge, 1992), 142 See Jenkins, *Re-thinking*, for a useful introduction of some of these prohibitions as they apply to history, 18-20; 32. See also De Certeau, *The Writing* (Part 1), for a nuanced and critical perspective.
23. De Certeau, *The Writing*, 62/3

This brings us to the second track - one that would far more closely pursue the production and location of left historians and intellectuals within South Africa.[24] Arguably, such a focus would, among other things, begin to explore the issues alluded to above by Crais and Freund - viz the complex effects of historians of the dominated who nonetheless emerge and continue to inhabit concretely the interstices of the dominant culture. In this respect they are like "Memmi's coloniser who refuses and thus exists in a painful ambiguity."[25] Again, the particular nature of the institutions where most historians received their undergraduate training and to where, again almost without exception, most returned would require attention. Such a focus would need to delineate the ways in which these institutions' historical function has been, at least until recently, to produce *white* intellectuals and the particular and peculiar space occupied by such intellectuals. Similarly, the critical role which the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London played in providing post-graduate training and its central role in South African studies needs exploration.

---

24. This again is what gets missed by Taylor's rejection of the use `white' in favour of calling attention to Eurocentrism and processes of `othering' insofar as they are implicated in systems of knowledge. This would seem to preclude a focus on the difference and specificity of intellectual production.
25. Hartsock N, "Foucault on Power: A Theory for Women?" in Nicholson LJ (ed) *Feminism/Postmodernism*, (London/New York, 1990), 164. [Hartsock uses this analogy to describe Foucault]

There is a counter argument that suggests that, aside from race, intellectuals universally tend to come from the dominant classes and thus the alienation experienced is not unique to South African white historians. Similarly, this argument goes, all universities in capitalist societies function primarily (but incompletely) to produce functionaries and intellectuals of the dominant classes and again neither those produced in the mould nor those who resist it are fundamentally different whether in London, Nairobi or Johannesburg.

What this ignores, however, are the complex ways in which a particular colonial heritage has lead to unique ways in which race intersects with and affects the production of intellectuals that goes beyond the simple fact of historically segregated universities. For example, for most of the 1970s and in lesser but still important ways in the 1980s, those resisting the logic of the bourgeois university faced a set of barriers that were not simply cultural or class-based but institutional and legal as well. These include importantly the physical and legal geography of cities and their universities; the absence of above-ground political structures;[26] and the strictures of language. In this regard, just as the physical geography of the universities segregates intellectuals, so too language keeps

26. While campus-based politics provided some with a political home, it is noteworthy that many of those who were later to enter academia were those for whom the experience of campus politics was alienating in the extreme.

'outside'. Indeed, language is a critical structure that has arguably placed important constraints on both the political and historical imagination of white intellectuals.[27]

Finally, as suggested above, while most accounts point to a range of international and national political intersections, these are again seen simply as universally radicalising 'influences' and there has been no attempt to explore how they mesh together and their effects on these particular groups of intellectuals. Thus while many accounts *do* point to the attractiveness of a class perspective for young white intellectuals in the face of black consciousness - indeed Bozzoli and Delius suggest that this in part accounts for the "stark privileging of class over race"[28] - there has been an inability to explore the ramifications of this.

One such ramification is the apparent suspicion with which white radical historians tended to regard black intellectuals not connected to the union movement or who did not espouse what was seen as a clear class position.[29] This is perhaps not surprising in the context of a perspective that ascribed a different theoretical value to race and

27. Unlike their counterparts in the United States, for example, knowledge of an African language has never been considered an important, let alone necessary, requirement for post-graduate South African studies.
28. Bozzoli and Delius, "Radical History", 23

class, and that, moreover, drew fairly sharp political lines accordingly. While Callinicos, for example, does not come near Bozzoli's crass dismissal of intellectuals outside of a fairly narrow class discourse[30], her worker's education/popular history opposition that was discussed in the previous chapter effectively reinforces such approaches.

A further ramification is perhaps the lack of engagement with africanist study, particularly on the rest of the continent.[31] What is striking about articles reflecting historiographical debates within radical history during the 1970s and 1980s is the extent to which they are dominated by the structuralist/ culturalist contestation, despite the fact that the structuralist impact, although significant, was of relatively short duration. While Bozzoli and Delius point to a dialogue with South African africanist scholars and even suggest that part of the radical project is to confront "..the nature of the South African economy and its peculiarly *African* version...", [my emphasis][32] their reading, as Worger points out, "stops short of the Limpopo..."[33] Indeed, as John Wright has argued, the whole area of African studies in South Africa has since the mid-1970s been primarily concerned with "the

---

29. See also Worger, "White Radical History" for a similar point. See also Bozzoli, "Intellectuals", for a particularly blatant and crude distrust.
30. See, for example, Bozzoli "Audiences", 244, 255, 263.
31. See Freund, "Radical History Writing", 158
32. Bozzoli and Delius, "Radical History ", 13
33. Worger, "White Radical History", 152

effects of capitalist penetration"[34] and thus the desire to understand the development of capitalism has largely `shouldered out' other issues and concerns, including the whole area of precolonial societies.[35]

Of ghosts and parties

Yet, if the historiography reflects a situation in which the structuralists and the social historians seem locked in mortal combat, this is perhaps only within the narrow confines of a left academic discourse. Indeed, the extent to which these are the central two strands dominating South African historiographical debates, is indicative of the ways in which they both were able in the late 1970s and 1980s successfully to shift the ground from other theoretical and political sites. This forms part of the second register suggested at the beginning of this chapter - viz, the importance of situating the radical historiography of this period in relation to its political project.

Aside from the work of Jack Simons, radical interpretations of South African society emanated, as was

34. Wright J, "Political Mythology and the Making of Natal's Mfecane", unpublished mimeo, 18. See also Freund, "Radical History Writing", 158

35. Prakash looks at this from the perspective of a critique of Marxism's totalising claims, and argues that a range of incommensurable histories and processes are appropriated into the narrative of the development of capitalism. He also suggests, contra O'Hanlon and Washbrook, that while this may well be the path that capitalism seemingly takes, the uncritical appropriation in theoretical and historical discourse merely replicates the same procedures. Prakash, "Can the Subaltern Ride?"

noted earlier, from largely non-academic circles. These interpretations developed largely within the politics of national liberation and were thus intimately and often transparently connected to sharp debates over political strategy between sometimes deeply opposing `traditions'. While some have attempted to draw these `pioneers' into the radical tradition, it is also generally observed that these interpretations can hardly be said to be properly Marxist and even their radical credentials are at times questioned.[36] Consequently, they receive at most a genuflection.[37]

Without wanting to romanticise these groups of intellectuals and their supposedly organic links to political movements[38], the labelling of such interpretation as unMarxist or unradical is problematic on at least two scores. In the first place, it draws a neat line of separation between theory and politics with the former being granted the privileged and determining status. In the

36. See Rassool C, "History and the `Independent' Left in the 1950's: Towards Uncovering a Marxist Intellectual Tradition", paper presented at WHW, Johannesburg 1990, and for an extended argument his mini-thesis, *Aspects of Marxist and Radical Thought and Politics in South Africa, 1930 - 1960*, Northwestern University, 1987.

37. Callinicos, as suggested in the Introduction, uses them primarily as part of constructing a `tradition of popular history'.

38. Rooting `radical interpretations' in those responsible for theoretical elaboration ignores not only the range of material not `seen' to be radical or theoretical - eg that of musicians or writers - but also reflects assumptions steeped in a literate-intellectual world. Further, the relationship of intellectuals to national movements in that period can hardly be seen as unproblematic and Cape Town, rightly or wrongly, serves as icon for that!

second place, it fails to historicise the development of Marxist studies itself. In this regard, we need to be reminded that while the 1960s and 1970s may well have seen a flowering of Marxist theory, it also saw a remarkable expansion and, indeed in places, institutionalisation of Marxist academia. Given that much of this development was linked to a strong anti-Stalinism, it is perhaps ironic that in place of the Comintern/form, theory became the privileged arbiter of what constituted a `proper' or essential Marx against which deviations could be judged.

What this alienated (in the sense of separating theory from politics) and unhistoricised sense of Marxism allows, though, is for the founding of a radical tradition in South African studies that is able to *push aside* earlier radical interpretations.[39] In particular it allows for a casting aside of the issues connected to national oppression - indeed this vocabulary disappears completely for the whole of the 1970s to the mid-1980s when the CST debate is revived - and the central conceptual debate is re-cast as the `race/class debate'. Indeed, the substitution of `race' for `national oppression' neatly sidesteps the central theoretical thrust of previous theories that had asserted

39. Certainly this is not applicable to all radical historiography. While the work of those such as Legassick and Wolpe may be said to situate themselves more closely within these debates, later versions, it will be argued, set themselves against and apart from these traditions, in ways that cannot simply be accounted for by reference to repression. At the same time, and closely tied to the dual claims of political relevance and indigenisation, a link

the *colonial* nature of racial oppression and class exploitation - in particular, the theory embodied in the SACP's formulation, Colonialism of a Special Type.

For if the ghosts of Cory and Theal are said to haunt South African historical writing generally,[40] the ghosts of the CPSA/ SACP, on the one hand, and the more corporeal figures of an assertive Black Consciousness movement and the rising popular movement of the 1970s and 1980s on the other, can be seen to haunt the pages of left-wing academic scholarship.[41] Both present political projects that, for the 1970s and 1980s at least, are in stark contrast to that of radical academic historiography.

De Certeau refers to the process whereby any historical work is defined, among other things, by its relationship to other works[42] and La Capra situates the writing of history firmly within a rhetorical approach where "a `conversation' with the past involves the historian in argument and polemic - both with others and with the self - over approaches to

---

is drawn with certain earlier writers/thinkers. This will be elaborated later in the chapter.

40. This is a reference to Crais, "Race, the State.... A Polemic", 20
41. Both the CPSA/SACP and Black Consciousness for the most part remain absent and unacknowledged adversaries: in the case of the SACP, its illegal status and general repressive conditions probably account, at least initially, for its unacknowledged adversarial position; the Black Consciousness movement, again initially, was never accorded the status of a serious intellectual challenge and consequently dismissed as emotional, petty-bourgeois and essentially cultural in a perjorative sense. The rise of the popular movement, on the other hand, is more explicitly engaged with but largely in the writings around popularisation.
42. De Certeau, *The Writing*, 64

understanding that are bound up with institutional and political issues"[43]. In this regard then, while radical historiography and the SACP can perhaps be said to share a class discourse, the core of both the structuralist and social historians' project lies in their attempts to construct a class discourse distinct and in opposition to that of the SACP and, more obviously perhaps, to the universalising discourse of race offered by the Black Consciousness Movement.

This is not merely a knee jerk response. Nor should it be seen as another attempt to draw the radical historiography of the 1970s and 1980s into a supposed `workerist' camp. To do so would not only result in getting bogged in, what is surely by now, a sterile debate but, more importantly, misses the central point that is being asserted - that of the contested and internally dialogised process of writing history. For, what La Capra and De Certeau point to are, ultimately, the ways in which discourse is constructed within power and the extent to which dominant historical constructions are an attempt to erase and efface other different and potentially threatening voices. To see the assertion of a class-based approach in a purely teleological[44] way is to deny the contested way in which

43. La Capra D, *History and Criticism*, Ithaca, 1985, 36
44. In this version, the revisionists are seen to overturn liberal interpretations and then subsequent `turns' in interpretation are explained by reference to political `moments' - ie trajectory of radical historiography is affected by political `moments' but in a way that ignores the sense of an ongoing and systematic dialogue.

class - and a specific version of class and class-based politics - is being founded in SA studies.

On the one hand, the need to oppose the increasing fragmentation and ethnic racism of apartheid is answered by positing an essential unity - *the* working class for many white left-wing academics and certain Trotskyist groupings; *the* Black masses in the case of black intellectuals in the early to mid 1970s; and increasingly from the late 1970s, as the Congress-aligned national-democratic perspective gained momentum, *the* people. These competing perspectives do not simply form some sort of backdrop or context but are grounded in a nexus of power relations and are continually in dialogue with each other. Although situated in different totalising narratives, they nonetheless exist and need to be understood in relation to each other. Class is present in all of these perspectives but is conceived and constructed in sharply differing and competing ways.

Arguably, the class that is being constructed by an academic and predominantly white intelligentsia is over-determined by the context of the spectacular growth of non-communist social movements in the 1960s and the flowering of Western Marxist (and again, largely non-communist) thought in the 1970s. Politically, Western Marxism's concern to develop a non-Stalinist socialism was translated into the broad theoretical project of *both* Althusserian Marxism and social history, to construct a sense of class and class

politics that broke away from the reductionist and stultifying conceptions associated with the international communist movement.[45]

Within South Africa, similarly, both structuralist and social history continues a dialogue with the politics of the Comintern and the CPSA/SACP.[46] What is seen as the subjugation of local needs to the dictates of the Comintern, and arising therefrom, the subjugation of class and class politics to race and the politics of national oppression from 1928 onwards becomes all the more urgent as the working class takes centre stage in 1973. The attempt then to construct a class theoretically and politically in the 1970s and 1980s is equally an attempt to found a working class subject, not simply in opposition to the nationalism of Black Consciousness, but one freed from the politics of national oppression as exemplified by the SACP/ANC alliance.[47]

---

45. In this regard see British debates in *History Workshop Journal*, nos 6-10, 1978-1980. Also see the particularly useful set of essays in Kaye HJ and McClelland K (eds), *EP Thompson: Critical Perspectives*, Cambridge, 1990.
46. Much of this is evident, in particular, in historical writing on the 1930s and 1940s - see for instance Labour History Group, *Workers at War*; Lodge T, *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945*, (Johannesburg, 1983)
47. While I would argue that this indeed characterises radical history's central political project in the period under review, it obviously does not apply in a blanket way to all historians in or associated to the WHW. For example, Jeff Peires, author of the Eastern Cape section in *New Nation, New History* and Rob Lambert, presumably author of the section on SACTU in the same publication, hold (and held) significantly different positions. Also, increasingly in the post-1985 period as WHW intellectuals attempt to understand the shift to popular politics by the trade union

By reading the CPSA/SACP through the anti-Stalinist metanarrative, the Party's attempts, however flawed, to read both class and colonial/national oppression together is completely ignored. Indeed, so completely that Bozzoli can assert quite glibly in 1991 that "our experiences with our open days had led us to ask a much more interesting question - what happens to Marxism when it seriously engages with popular consciousness? This question cannot be answered on the level of theory alone?" [48] That this question lies not just at the heart of much of the CPSA/SACP's history but has been a central focus of political and theoretical debate since at least 1928 seems to have passed Bozzoli by. Yet this non-recognition effectively marginalises and effaces such voices from mainstream academic discourse.

The narrative of how class has been subjugated to the needs of national struggle epitomised by the ANC/SACP alliance becomes a central thrust of much radical South African historiography and is translated into the theory and politics of the 1980s. It is thus not only against the

---

movement itself, as exemplified in the formation and subsequent policies of COSATU*, new perspectives begin to be generated. What is important to emphasise though is the way in which their class discourses enabled a re-reading of resistance history that foregrounded the role of workers in what were seen as the crucial shaping decades (1940s and 1950s; 1970s and 1980s) in a way that continued to elide the colonial emphasis suggested by CST. It should be noted that this perspective applies almost equally to non-WHW popular productions at least until 1983. * The sharpness of the political shift from FOSATU to COSATU is seen in Bozzoli's incorrect dubbing of COSATU as "UDF-affiliated" - Bozzoli, "Audiences", 254

48. Bozzoli, "Intellectuals, Audiences", 262

structuralists but also against and because of the pull of popular politics in the 1980s that the WHW, in the struggle around constructions of class, attempts to create a sense of class that is both cultural and popular.

In "Audiences..", Bozzoli argues that from the 1981 Open Day, two strands of popular consciousness were evident: "one related to nostalgic non-racialism and nationalism, with an orientation towards the local urban community as the origin of subjectivity; and the second coming from the pragmatic and forward-looking trade unionism, with the factory as the focus and the union as the source of private meaning as well as public presentation of self.. Which was `authentic' we wondered"[49]. For the WHW, not until the latter part of the 1980s was there any real sense of doubt - clearly, the latter was not only more `authentic' but more desirable and it is this figure - of an independent, forward-looking (into the socialist future) and self-consciously working class militant - that is being constructed both theoretically and politically. The FOSATU cultural networks perhaps provide the clearest and most useful example of the attempt to found and nurture an identity that while opposed to the symbols of national oppression, are nonetheless culturally rich.[50]

---

49. Bozzoli, "Intellectuals, Audiences", 247
50. For more about these cultural networks, see, among others, Von Kotze A, *Organise and Act: The Natal Worker's Theatre Movement 1983-1987*, Durban 1988; Petersen B, "Performing History Off the

One of the ways in which this shaping of class and identities happens is by setting up a series of dualisms such as community/factory, nationalism-populism/class consciousness, nostalgia/forward-looking, with the latter as always privileged.[51] These operate as oppositions to each other, thus what is claimed for the one is denied the other. The task then is to develop a cultural and political identity, "guided by the tenets of working class initiative, participation, leadership, and accountability..."[52] emanating from the factory and trade union.

Yet despite all attempts to separate these out as two distinct strands, in the political as in the cultural arena, the worker figure is constantly crossed with national and other identities,[53] and the theoretical project itself is constantly forced to recognise this. Thus, for example, although trying to work around more complex notions than false consciousness, Bozzoli is reduced to repeatedly making statements such as

> "..how do you convey your class analysis to audiences who define themselves firstly in racial or ethnic terms, and only secondly or even thirdly in class terms?"[54]

Stage: Notes on Working-Class Theatre", in *Radical History Review*, 46/7, 1990

51. Interestingly, Bozzoli's recent work changes this formulation somewhat - see Bozzoli B, *Women of Phokeng*, Johannesburg, 1991
52. Petersen B, "Performing History", 321
53. This realisation becomes particularly apparent following the 1984 November stay-away and the formation of COSATU in 1985.
54. Bozzoli, "Intellectuals, Audiences", 239

Or

> "... only rarely does `class' form the significant element in cultural formations. This is not, of course to deny the analytical value of class as a concept but rather to note that `culture' and `class' are rarely co-terminus categories in South Africa."[55]

Ultimately, this incapacity of the political arena to sustain the worker-subject as an untarnished and pure figure, and precisely because of the close links of the WHW to that broad political arena, the theoretical project itself begins to crack. Tellingly in 1991, reflecting on the 1987 open day, Bozzoli refers to

> "the spirit of common opposition to an oppressive system. Workers, peasants, men, women, youth, and the elderly, were part of it. The former separation between `populism' and `workerism' had become blurred".[56]

Indeed, as Deacon points out, the gist of the Bozzoli and Delius article operates to "establish [radical history's] nationalist credentials".[57]

---

55. Bozzoli, "Intellectuals, Audiences", 239. Again see Bozzoli's "Women of Phokeng" for shifts in this formulation.
56. In attempting to explain this, and remaining unwilling to concede to the `populists', Bozzoli reverts to structure - "The strength of this nationalism", she writes, "was not derived from the resilience and longevity of the organisations through which it found expression, but from the structure of racism, community encapsulation, and experience..." Bozzoli, "Intellectuals, Audiences", 260
57. Deacon R, "Hegemony, Essentialism and Radical History in South Africa" in *South African Historical Journal*, 24, 1991, 168. Note, however, that Deacon does not pick this up as a shift but rather as the general position of the social historians.

Setting aside for the moment these claims as well as the political and theoretical impasse[58] that radical history had reached by the end of the 1980s, it is perhaps useful to visit briefly the academic projects of the WHW although, as the above has attempted to demonstrate, much of the academic project is situated in and "haunted by political presuppositions."[59]

In the first and final instance

Central to the Bozzoli and Delius article and, indeed, to the very claim of being `radical' is the mark of oppositionality. This oppositional status in relation to the discipline is staked out conceptually (the centrality of class and `experience'); methodologically (the use of sources, in particular oral history); and, politically (both in terms of again its class content but, more importantly, its commitment to popularisation).

What links social history and the WHW to the other strands of radical historiography is the assertion of a materialist approach in South African studies. It has been suggested - and to some degree acknowledged - that the assertion of class as the central explanatory or

58. That an impasse had been reached is very much evident in the way in which prominent academics such as Bundy and Krikler began to worry at a range of issues. See Krikler J,"Waiting for the Historians", in *South African Review of Books*, Aug/ Oct 1990 as well as reviews in the *South African Historical Journal*, 24, 1991, which pick up on these `worries'.

59. De Certeau, *The Writing*, 23

foundational factor led to `a stark privileging' of class and effectively displaced a vigorous engagement around issues of race. Thus, for example, Crais suggests that

> "in a country replete with racial hatred and racist policy the history of race and racial discourse remains an astounding lacuna, a ragged puncture at the centre of the production of SA history."[60]

At the same time, however, it is important to see this as a process of displacement rather than excision as Crais' metaphor tends to imply: race continues to exist as the site against which particular notions of class are being constructed and indeed, South African history remains grounded in a race/class nexus.[61] What is elided, though, as previously suggested, is the substitution of race for the more complex and less universalising assertion of South Africa's particular colonial heritage.

Clearly, though, it is not only race or, in a different perspective, colonial/national oppression that is subsumed by the insistence on the absolute primacy of race but a range of other identities and subject positions. Thus, for example, while considerable work has been done on rural relations in the Transvaal, there has been little attempt to explore notions of how rural and regional discourses construct identities outside of the notion of an evolving and culturally complex *working class*.

60. Crais, "Race, the State...A Polemic", 14

The status of gender issues within South African studies fares little better, although the lack of attention has been recognised as one of the main weaknesses. Bozzoli and Delius thus refer to the "apparent weakness...in the field of gender studies"[62] and Bundy to "the meagre presence of feminist history in South Africa today".[63] Yet despite this recognition, where gender is used it is largely used in the sense of `filling a gap' or `recovering women's voice' rather than providing a challenge to other shapes and outlines of historical explanation.

Bozzoli and Delius attribute the weakness of gender studies to

> "the absence of a strong women's movement...White and African cultures are both powerfully male-dominated; African nationalism is notorious for its tendency to place women's issues low on the agenda..the structure of intellectual life itself is archaic; and..many socialists show a concern not to separate gender from other issues."[64]

Salo[65] argues against the ways in which an a priori and dominantly Western discourse of feminism is used against

---

62. Bozzoli & Delius, "Radical History", 33
63. Bundy, "An Image of its Own Past", 135 To some extent, the recent focus by several leading historians on these issues has been seen to counter this - see Walker C, *Women and Gender*; Berger I, *Threads of Solidarity: Women in South African Industry 1900-1980* (London, 1992); Bozzoli, *Women of Phokeng*. It would still seem though that while gender may well be accorded greater focus, it does not detract from the general point being made here.
64. Bozzoli and Delius, "Radical History", 33/4
65. Salo E, "South African Feminism: Whose Struggles, Whose Agenda?", seminar paper, South African and Contemporary History Series, UWC, Bellville, 1994. See also Mannicom L, "Ruling Relations:

which to measure the shape and nature of women's agendas and struggles in South Africa. In this regard, for example, references to the ways in which black cultures sustain ideologies of `motherism'[66] takes such ideologies as given and in no way begins to tackle the complex ways in which `family' itself has no fixed or necessary meaning and can be characterised by different strategies and shapes.[67] Nor does it begin to explore the potential *gendered* identity that is suggested by the figure of the socialist worker subject as it is evoked in versions of East Rand militance.

Further, social history's project is very much caught in a model that seeks to `recover' and `draw in' lost voices rather than using them to trace the `architecture of silence', on the one hand, or to explode the myth of an undivided and dominant identity (viz, a class identity) on the other. Again, in all these examples, gender is `naturalised' rather than being problematised and historicised in ways that allows an understanding of it as not only constructed and contested, but also the particular and different ways in which it is operationalised across time, regions, classes, and cultures.

Rethinking State and Gender in South African History", *Journal of African History*, 33,3, 1992

66. Bozzoli, "Intellectuals, Audiences", 239
67. For a different approach see Minkley G, "Married to the Beer: Gender and Class in the East London Locations, 1930-1960", unpublished seminar paper, Centre for African Studies, UCT, 1992. See also bell hooks on such difference in AfricanAmerican families, hooks b, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*, Boston 1989.

More than this, perhaps, gender remains conflated with the `woman's question' and exists interior to the making/ shaping of class. Thus, for instance, the ways in which sexuality constructs subject positions or the differing ways in which `maleness' is created are simply not even on the agenda, despite the "typically colonial `mixed economy' of domination in terms of sexual desire and racial domination"[68] and even when it impacts directly on issues of class as in migrant labour, for example - or, as suggested above, in the male figure of the East Rand militant.

Thus despite all attempts to take the site of culture seriously, there has been a refusal to relinquish the foundational nature of class and class continues to have the first *and* final determining value. But even within the framework of class, it has been suggested that there has been a continued and problematic hold on an ahistorical and pre-existing sense of class. Thus, on the one hand, "regardless of what actually happens in the `making' process, the *identity* of the class... (remains) inviolate...".[69]

This failure to explore and historicise the construction of identities is, as Joan Scott suggests, closely linked to the ways in which social historians use experience as an explanatory framework. In some respects,

---

68. Sommer (1984), 35.
69. Deacon, "Hegemony, Essentialism", 174

experience can perhaps be seen as important in enabling a Marxist discourse that is less tied to Eurocentric versions of class formation and thus able more easily to respond to a greater degree of heterogeneity. In this regard, as well, in its substitution for a narrow focus on *class* struggle, experience is perhaps more sensitive to explaining a wider range of consciousness and struggle. Indeed, the category of `experience' has also been suggested by the WHW as important in narrowing "the cognitive gap ... between those who write about capitalism and those who bear the brunt of it."[70]

Mostly, however, in the ways in which it has been deployed by the social historians, experience simply has taken on the burden of subsuming and explaining all `non-class' elements or has been used to explain what is seen as the dichotomy between a class's objective position and its subjective perceptions. Further, it is largely through setting up a set of oppositions that `experience' is accorded a privileged status. It is alive, engaging, complex, as opposed to the abstraction and rigidity of theory and thus is again used by the social historians as a whipping block for the structuralists.

Moreover, as has been pointed out elsewhere, the explanatory value of experience has generally been severely diminished by a usage that suggests it as natural and

70. Bozzoli, "History, Experience", 16

transparent and thus takes it at face value.[71] In other words, there is a refusal to accept experience as constructed and thus needing explanation itself. This construction needs to be understood at on least two levels: firstly, its construction through both culture and language, and secondly, its construction by historians. [72]

In this regard, the issue of language looms large in South African historiography. Despite the fact that white radical historians for the most part are completely reliant on translation or on documents that themselves have gone through multiple processes of translation, they have clung to an approach that suggests that language houses meaning in an apparently neutral and transparent way. This lack of attention is all the more remarkable given the particularly charged nature of sources in a colonial and racially dominated situation and is accompanied by a lack of

71. See Joan Scott, "The Evidence" and Robert Gray, "History, Marxism and Theory" in Kaye and McClelland, *EP Thompson*, for a useful critique of the ways in which experience is used within social history.

72. "[As] an originary point of explanation - as a foundation on which analysis is based - ...weakens (its) critical thrust...It (locates) resistance outside its discursive construction and (reifies) agency as an inherent attribute of individuals, thus decontextualising it. When experience is taken as the origin of knowledge, the vision of the individual subject (the person who had the experience or the historian who recounts it) becomes the bedrock of evidence on which explanation is built. Questions about the constructed nature of experience, about how subjects are constituted as different in the first place, about how one's vision is structured - about language (or discourse) and history - are left aside. The evidence of experience then becomes evidence for the fact of difference, rather than a way of exploring how difference is established, how it operates, how and in what ways it constitutes subjects who see and act in the world." Scott, "The Evidence", 777

conscious and explicit attempts to come to grips with a range of related issues such as `giving voice', `speaking for' and the multiple sites of domination and cultural difference. [73]

Part of the answer to this blindness again lies in the way in which a foundational class dynamic elbows out such concerns and partly to the ways in which the denial of radical difference and alterity must be seen as a response to a racist state and colonial society. In other words, in the face of racism, there has been an eagerness to make the Other into the Same and an unwillingess to explore issues that open the possibility of "... the resistance of a reality genuinely different from our own."[74] It should be noted that this extends into the intellectual arena as well. There has, for instance, been no acknowledgement of the potentially different ways in which language and culture shapes the intellectual and historical imagination and thus, the unchallenged assumption of a universal historical discourse and a universal historian comes into play.

A corollary of the almost exclusive interest in class, combined with social history's general antipathy to `event-oriented' and political history, has also meant that outside

73. For a discussion on language and domination in history see La Capra's discussion of Ginzburg's *Cheese and the Worms* and Leroy Ladurie's *Montaillou* in his *History and Criticism*. Also see a similar critique of *Montaillou* in Rosaldo R, "From the Door of his Tent: The Fieldworker and the Inquisitor" in Clifford J and Marcus G (eds), *Writing Culture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1986).
74. Jameson, *The Ideologies of Theory*, 150

of the pre-industrial period, little attention has been given to exploring issues of resistance outside of what are seen as class struggles. This has meant that the conventional, empirical framework reflected in earlier radical and liberal histories has remained largely unexplored. This framework, as suggested in Chapter 1, broadly traces the origins of `modern' African resistance to the rise of an educated elite in the Eastern Cape, the period of moderation followed by the crucial shaping decade of the 1940s (industrialisation, the ANCYL) that transformed resistance politics into the mass-based, popular struggles of the 1950s. While sharp debate may occur over how each period is interpreted, the basic shape and periodisation remains unchallenged.

The second claim for oppositionality is a methodological one: social history's commitment to interdisciplinarity and its use of sources (in particular oral evidence) are held to challenge the conventions of the discipline. Within a traditionally conservative university milieu, the WHW's attempts to cross strict disciplinary boundaries have generally been seen as pioneering. Yet closer examination shows in fact a conservative and ultimately narrow approach to interdisciplinarity.

Interdisciplinarity often means nothing more than a willingness to use novels, poems and other cultural artifacts as evidence or `mood'. Social history's

uncomfortable relationship to theory has meant, largely, an unwillingness to engage in debates around contemporary social theory.[75] While literature has thus been `mined' both for evidence and context, historians generally "see no reason whatever to become familiar either with the work of academics in literary and cultural areas or the cultural practices and productions with which they deal"[76]. It is not, however, only contemporary social and critical literary theories but psychoanalysis[77], critical geography, language studies - indeed, virtually any discipline where it is not possible "to `strip-mine' or `gut'"[78] for useful empirical facts or context.

This narrow definition of interdisciplinarity is intimately connected to the discipline's seeing its primary task as one of collecting evidence where issues of representation and textuality are unacknowledged and ignored. LaCapra has referred to this model as a `documentary' one where the

---

75. Certainly some social historians - most notably Van Onselen, Bundy and Bradford have worked and elaborated specific Marxist concepts - but generally from Marx himself rather than with contemporary Marxist theory let alone critiques
76. Visser N, "Towards a Political Culture" in *Pretexts*, 2,1, 1990, 71. For more around this debate see both *Pretexts*, 2,1 and 2,2. 1990.
77. Cutting off, perhaps most critically, issues of subject-constitution and much psychoanalytic material around racism and colonialism. Part of why Black Consciousness is not taken seriously initially is because it is seen to deal with issues of largely psychological/ cultural importance - ie, not class struggle. Thus writers such as Fanon and Cesaire are not explored.
78. La Capra D, *Rethinking Intellectual History* (Ithaca, 1983), 339

> "basis of research is `hard' fact derived from the critical sifting of sources, and the purpose of historiography is either to furnish narrative accounts and `thick descriptions' of documented facts or to submit the historical record to analytical procedures of hypothesis-formation, testing and explanation." [79]

Similarly, the approach to sources in South African historiography is a remarkably narrow one. While adherents of the WHW may well have, like their foreign counterparts, expanded the notion of sources enormously, they have equally displayed the discipline's usual blindness to the construction and textuality of sources. "In history", argues De Certeau, "everything begins with the gesture of *setting aside*, of putting together, of transforming certain classified objects into `documents'".[80] This process is a profoundly technical one that "exiles them from practice in order to confer upon them the status of `abstract' objects of knowledge. Far from accepting `data', this gesture forms them."[81]

Much the same can be said of the uses of oral history. Oral history has evinced limited methodological engagement as La Hausse acknowledges although he suggests that South African historians *are* beginning to "confront a range of complex methodological issues... the structure of memory and its relation to social process, narrative forms, and conventions; issues of representation; the role of the

79. La Capra, *History and Criticism*, 18
80. De Certeau, *The Writing*, 72
81. De Certeau, *The Writing*, 72

unconscious in oral history."[82] While Bozzoli's recent contribution bears this out to some degree, there remains a tendency to use oral history in a way that not only suggests its unmediated capacity to access experience, but as an inherently radical method.

A third major area bearing the tag of oppositionality is that of popularisation but this has been dealt with more extensively in Chapter 2.

Constructing a bloodline

Finally, the third register that this chapter sets out to explore is that of radical history's self-representation. On the one hand, the WHW frequently claims that it is given more authority by critics than is warranted. In this regard, they argue that it consists of little more than a small and inter-disciplinary group of between 12-14 members who commit themselves voluntarily to do work on conferences and publications. Indeed in terms of employment, the WHW only employs an administrator and one full-time researcher. On the other hand - and the review as a whole and the Bozzoli and Delius piece particularly attests to this - there is a claim to hegemony. The frequent references to the absence of black historians suggests, however, that this claim to dominance is a nervous one. (Here Derrida's notion

82. La Hausse P, "Oral History and South African Historians" in *Radical History Review*, no 46/7, 1990, 353

of supplementarity or differance could be usefully deployed!)

In addition, as pointed out earlier, many of the reviews of the **RHR** special issue pointed to Bozzoli and Delius's "very selective process of retrieval and synthesis..." [83] What this section attempts to do, then, is to go beyond a simple narrativisation of South African radical historiography, in particular that offered by the aforementioned review, to interrogating the claims that this narrativisation implies.

Far from being a detached account, this narrativisation is centrally concerned with the claim to hegemony and certainly part of the outcry over the Bozzoli and Delius piece relates to the particular meanings they have inscribed in their account. In this regard, the way in which radical history's development has been periodised in the narrative is not neutral and through a series of skillful moves, many of the criticisms that would seem to be part of the WHW's own history are neatly deflected onto `other' strands. Thus, for instance, in its re-working of radical historiography the charge of workerism is removed, or at the very least considerably softened, from social history's own history and deflected onto the structuralists and one or two other renegades who maintain a hard proletarian stance.

---

83. Deacon, "Hegemony, Essentialism", 167

Bozzoli and Delius thus write of the

> "contradiction between the theoretical analyses which proclaimed the death of `race'..and ...the social movements of 1976 onward - movements which were based in communities as well as workplaces, which erupted in townships as well as through trade unions, many of which were black, youthful and ...nationalist in orientation....But the context of diverse forms of struggle and the engagement with oral history and the `view from below'...helped make it impossible for old paradigms to continue unchanged." [84]

What they fail to acknowledge is that this `impossibility' continued way through the 1980s and the theoretical and political importance of race appears virtually for the first time in academic South African historical studies in this particular article.

Throughout the RHR article, Bozzoli and Delius make a number of similar concessions, but as in the above example, the way in which the article is constructed - in particular its misleading chronology - allows the WHW to claim these as their pioneering discoveries rather than as self-criticisms. In the process, they claim a continuity for themselves - a classic move in staking hegemony - and thus not only maintain their own intellectual leadership role but effectively silence the struggle over how this `tradition' has been constructed.

---

84. Bozzoli and Delius, "Radical History", 28/9.

Finally the hegemony that is constructed relies less on historiographical claims than on a political claim. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, most reviews of radical history have been organised around the interaction of two dominant motifs: that of exile and that of internal political developments and it was noted that, to these, the Bozzoli and Delius article suggested an additional and privileged motif, that of indigenisation.

Indeed, it is in this respect that the historiographical strands are delineated, `named' and appropriated. Of the four strands mentioned - viz, revisionist, structuralist, localist and africanist - it should be noted that they too are not obviously and transparently `there'.[85] This particular genealogy, however, enables both a claim to being radical *and* indigenous: in this respect, the inclusion of the revisionists in the `new milieu' not only enables the claim to Marxist and thus radical credentials but also allows for the dismissal of the structuralists. Similarly, it is through the intertwining of `africanist' and `localist' that they are able to stake their claim to indigenisation.

More than that it interestingly points to the extent to which a connection with the dominated, both in theory and

---

85. In particular, the term `localist' which appears to stand for `social history' is a new one and is certainly not an obvious way to describe the social historians or - for that matter - the WHW

practice, is sought in order to legitimise supposedly left discourses. In this regard La Capra is instructive:

> "If a certain level of culture represents primordial reality, then it is a very short step to the assumption that those who study it are the `real' historians, those who focus on the most important things... The result is a bizarre and vicious paradox whereby a vicarious relation to the oppressed of the past[86] serves as a pretext for contemporary pretensions for dominance."[87]

Finally, it is through indigenisation that the WHW attempts to banish the persistent worry about their whiteness; but it is precisely the persistence of this worry that reveals their anxiety about indigenisation. This in itself points to the distance that has been covered: from the confident dismissal of Black Consciousness and, in effect, a significant sector of black intellectuals, to a reluctant admission of the `inadequate progression' that underlies Evans's argument.

86. And, in this case, the present.
87. La Capra, *History and Criticism*, 69.

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

As suggested in the introduction, this study has been concerned to interrogate the politics and processes of popular history production from the late 1970s to the mid-1980s. In so doing, it has stressed the need to situate and historicise these productions and their producers, rather than seeing them as a natural outgrowth of political work, or as part of a long tradition of popularisation. Indeed, it has been argued that such representations of popular history function to obscure issues of power and positionality - precisely those issues with which this study has attempted to work.

In a study this short, it seems unnecessary to repeat the main lines of argument that have been put forward. These concluding remarks serve, then, to pick up on criticisms, unresolved dilemmas and potential directions in a fairly random way.

While the constraints of a mini-thesis have not allowed for an elaboration of the theoretical assumptions and approaches underlying this study, my use of, and to some degree reliance on, various `post'[1] discourses should be apparent. Given the centrality of the history/politics

1. I am not suggesting that post-modernism/post-structuralism /post-colonial theory is all one and the same. While I am aware of the debates around definition this serves rather as a shorthand way of referring to a range of elements drawn from various approaches.

relationship to this study, it seems appropriate then to acknowledge the critique that ascribes an inherently reactionary politics to such theories. An emphasis on heterogeneity and difference, a seemingly endless deconstructive mode, an apparent unwillingess to effect closure are all seen to be the hallmarks of, at best, a dangerous relativism; at worst, bourgeois indulgence.

While this is obviously a large debate, and one that is not possible to entertain in any sort of depth here, those criticisms that impact directly on some of the positions taken in this study will be briefly entertained. Thus, this critique of `post' discourses would undoubtedly suggest that my attempts to problematise the history/politics relationship ends up emasculating both history and politics. In particular, the critique of *history-as-lesson* is seen to disable critical approaches, while criticisms of the unified ways in which identities are represented, is held to lead to atomisation and individuation, thus undermining the potential and base for political action.

Such critiques would seem again to arise from approaches to knowledge that are uncomfortable with ambiguity and that operate within sets of clear and definable oppositions. Certainly these approaches resonate, to a large degree, with broader political perspectives: and the translation from the various `post' positions to political practice *is* a difficult one. However, the needs

of intellectuals and political activists to organise their worlds in ways that are comprehensible and actionable does not necessarily mean a denial of the constructed and thus potentially contested nature of these processes. To continue to deny this, as has been argued, is to deny the operation and exercise of power within both left historiography and political practice.

In this regard, the criticisms of *history-as-lesson* advanced in this study do little more than interrogate the lines of construction and point to the pre-eminently active role of the historian in formulating apparently transparent `lessons'. To indicate this exercise of power and to point "historiography in the direction of indiscreet questions that must be opened within the immense movement of praxis"[2] would thus hardly seem to be antithetical to critical thought - although it may well question its meanings and authority. Rather, it opens the possibility of enabling *self-criticism*, or reflexivity, on the part of historians and - possibly - enables those assigned to being `the audience' to challenge their status as the objects of historical explanation.

Similarly, the issue of atomisation which is meant to result from approaches that call attention to difference and heterogeneity, is not a call that in itself disallows collectivity. Rather, it is an attempt to open up

2. De Certeau, *The Writing*, 49

questions, issues and identities that have become fixed and naturalised. It should also be noted that tracing the lines of domination and zones of silence within what supposedly constitutes the dominated classes is not only the preserve of `post' discourses. Indeed, as suggested earlier, Marxist analysis itself within South Africa has been quite comfortable to do exactly this and it has pointed to the supposed past and potential dominance of other popular classes over the working class. More pertinently, though, to silence the differences and ways in which power is exercised over, for example, women or rural identities in popular and other histories in the name of some unified national or class identity is to naturalise the fact of oppression and to replicate it in historical explanation.

A different critique occurring largely within `post' discourses themselves is around the claim that history is `white, western and male'. Crudely put, in terms of this conception, history cannot be epistemologically freed from its historicist roots and it is argued that it is precisely this historicism that has taken one particular - Western - path of development as universal. Moreover, with regard to history, it has turned this path with its focus on change into a disciplinary necessity, making the historical gaze itself profoundly caught up in a colonising movement. Similarly, the universal subject of both the historical

narrative and its production is held to be the rational, detached and gendered individual of western philosophy.

Clearly a number of the issues raised in this study begin to allude to this notion of history as `white mythology'. In this regard, the critiques of `white mythology' are immediately relevant. These critiques begin to suggest that, like orientalism, history as `white mythology' ascribes too much power to the dominant and too little to subaltern agency. It thus has no space for what has been referred to as `hidden transcripts' and `subjugated knowledges.'

What this critique of `white mythology' enables is, among other things, a focus on the intersections and incongruities between different ways of processing the past and the multiple ways in which those subjected to dominant forms of power are able to create and maintain new forms of subjectivity and knowledge. At this level, it must be acknowledged that this study has largely failed, except at the most suggestive level, to explore the ways in which productions of popular history have indeed intersected with other popular history productions and/or different ways of knowing the past. Such an exploration would, no doubt, enable a far more nuanced and rich interpretation than that developed here and would begin to suggest unintended readings, different contestations and new shapes of historical explanation.

New directions?

There have been frequent allusions in this study to shifts in emphasis, beginning in the post-1985 period, but more consistently evident from 1990 onwards. While these shifts are important, and have not been adequately dealt with in this study, the question arises as to whether they indeed take popular history (and historiography) in new directions or whether they remain comfortably within conventional disciplinary frameworks. Part of the answer lies in a broader context and the ways in which this context impinges on or is brought into relation with popular history production. Indeed, this context begins perhaps to question the salience of the term `popular history' itself.

In the post-1985 period, the boundaries and audiences of popular history have been redrawn to include, on a significant scale, the traditional purveyors of historical knowledge - teachers and, more recently, those responsible for the production of public history. While still retaining an oppositional focus, popular history has, more and more, set its eyes on the transformation of history in these spheres. This process has, of course, been accelerated in the post-1990 period, and is accompanied by a decline in popular history within organisations, as policy issues and perspectives take centre-stage.

Until now radical historiography has enjoyed a hegemonic presence on most English-language campuses in

South Africa. Within the political sphere, much of the oppositional thrust has turned to issues of governance. Similarly, historians associated with radical historiography (and, prominently, the WHW) increasingly seek hegemony in both educational and public history spheres. While by no means assured, should this battle be won, the translation from `frontline status' to `classroom and museum practice' will be an interesting one.

Arguably, the shape of historical explanation will remain largely unchallenged and it is likely to continue to be a narrative one that incorporates, on the one hand, `moments' or `interludes' explicating the richness of social history's contribution, and, on the other hand, some focus on the production of history. While Witz and Hamilton may well be correct in suggesting that "[the] 80s have seen ... the routing of crude white supremacist history"[3] and that this has led to "contests over the representation of the past"[4], what is less certain is the terms on which these contests will take place. In this regard, a central thrust of this study has been the ways in which, in even its most radical guise, both popular and left historiography have continued to assert disciplinary rules of evidence and procedure. The effect of this, it has been argued, is to reproduce an approach to history that is not popular and,

---

3. Witz and Hamilton, "Reaping the Whirlwind", 12
4. Witz and Hamilton, "Reaping the Whirlwind", 20

indeed, ends up marginalising other ways of knowing the past.

At the same time, I would by no means exempt the kinds of approaches used in this mini-thesis from this critique, or even suggest that these approaches are inherently more able to open up new possibilities and directions. Writing of post-modern history, Jenkins suggests that it is able to "destabilise the past and fracture it, so that, in the cracks opened up, new histories can be made."[5] He points out, however, that the multiplicity of histories that such cracks enable, apply to the dominant as well as the marginal. In this regard, he suggests, problematising foundations can prove more damaging to newer historical constructions than to those who are backed by the power of the academy and who are steeped in the traditions of western epistemologies.

In this regard, it is perhaps well to note that as varieties of `post-ist' thought seep into historiographical discourse in South Africa, this seepage happens precisely in the same institutions and/or among the kinds of intellectuals who have formed the subject of this study. More specifically, as suggested earlier, historical production remains the preserve of white intellectuals. While historians working in these `new' frameworks have been keen to explore the implications of destabilising

5. Jenkins, *Re-thinking*, 66

foundational approaches to history, they have been arguably less eager to interrogate the processes and politics surrounding the historiographical subject - ie themselves - in the "undefining of South African history as `white history'"[6].

In this vein, to end with De Certeau, who suggests:

> "the plurality of these philosophical subjectivities had ... the discreet effect of retaining a singular position for intellectuals. As questions of meaning had been discussed *among them*, the clarification of their differences of thought came to bestow upon the entire group a privileged relation to ideas. None of the interference of production, of technique, of social constraint, of professional or political position could bother the harmony of this relation: a silence was the postulate of this epistemology ... `Relativity' was only at stake within the closed perimeters of this field. Far from calling the area into question, relativity indeed defended it ...(and) re-inforced the `exempted' power belonging to the knowledgeable. A place was marked `off limits' *just when the fragility of what was being produced therein was revealed*."7 [Latter emphasis mine]

6. Jenkins, *Re-thinking*, 20
7. De Certeau, *The Writing*, 59

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Secondary Sources

Anderson B, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, 1983

Anonymous, "Problems of Literacy", *African Frontline*, 3, 1980: 13-17

Attridge D, Bennington G and Young R (eds), *Post-Structuralism and the Question of History*, Cambridge, 1987

Attwell, "Political Supervision: the Case of the 1990 Wits History Workshop", *Pretexts*, 2, 1, 1990: 78-85

Barker et al (eds), *Europe and its Others*, Vols 1 & 2 Essex, 1984

Barrett M, *The Politics of Truth: From Marx to Foucault*, Cambridge, 1991

Barrett M and Phillips A (eds), *Destabilising Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*, Cambridge/Oxford, 1992

Baskin J, *Striking Back*, Johannesburg, 1991

Bhabha H, *Narrating the Nation*, London, 1990

Bozzoli B & Delius P, "Radical History and South African Society" in *Radical History Review*, 46/7, Winter 1990: 13-45

Bozzoli B, "Popular History and the Witwatersrand" in *Labour, Townships and Protest*, Bozzoli B (ed), Johannesburg, 1979

----------"History, Experience and Culture" in *Town and Countryside*, Bozzoli B (ed), Johannesburg, 1983

----------"Class, Community and Ideology in the Evolution of South African Society" in *Class, Community and Conflict*, Bozzoli B (ed), Johannesburg, 1987
----------"Intellectuals, Audiences and Histories: South African Experiences, 1978-88" in *Radical History Review*, 46/7, Winter 1990: 237-263
----------*Women of Phokeng*, Johannesburg, 1991

Bradford H, "Highways, Byways and Cul-de-Sacs: The Transition to Agrarian Capitalism in Revisionist South African History" in *Radical History Review*, 46/7, Winter 1990: 59-88

Bundy C, "An Image of its Own Past? Towards a Comparison of American and South African Historiography", *Radical History Review*, 46/7, Winter 1990: 117-143

Callinicos L, *Gold and Workers, Vol 1*, Johannesburg, 1981
----------*Working Life: Townships, Factories and Popular Culture on the Rand, 1886-1940, Vol 2*, Johannesburg, 1986
----------"The People's Past: Towards Transforming the Present" in Bozzoli B (ed), *Class Community and Conflict*, Johannesburg, 1987
----------"`The People's History Workshop', University of the Witwatersrand, February 1987", *Perspectives in Education*, 10, 1, 1988: 84-86
---------- "Intellectuals, Popular History and Worker Education" in *Perspectives in Education*, Vol 11,1, 1989: 51-64
----------"`We Are Not Alone' - The Making of a Mass Movement: 1950-1960", *Staffrider*, 8, 3/4, 1989: 88-104
----------"Popular History in the Eighties" in *Radical History Review*, No 46/7, 1990: 285-297
----------"Popular History in a Changing South Africa", *South African Historical Journal*, 25, 1991: 22-37

----------*A Place in the City: The Rand on the Eve of Apartheid, Vol 3*, Johannesburg, Cape Town, 1993

Clifford J and George E. Marcus (eds), *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1986

Cohen DW and Atieno Adhiambo SE, *Siaya*, London, 1989

Clifford J, "On Orientalism" in *The Predicament of Culture: 20th Century Ethnography, Literature, Art*, Cambridge, Mass, 1988

Comaroff Jean & Comaroff John , *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa, Vol 1*, Chicago, 1991

Cronin J and Suttner R, *Thirty Years of the Freedom Charter*, Johannesburg, 1985

De Certeau M, *The Writing of History*, New York, 1988

Deacon R, "Hegemony, Essentialism and Radical History in South Africa", *South African Historical Journal*, 24, 1991: 166-184

Dickie J, "Review of Hobsbawm, *Nation and Nationalism since 1780* & Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*", *History Workshop*, 31, Spring 1991: 189-192

Edgar R, *Because They Chose the Plan of God*, Johannesburg, 1988

--------"Writing Because They Chose the Plan of God", *Perspectives in Education*, 12, 1, 1990: 121-124

Economic History Research Group, *The Struggle for the Land*, Cape Town, undated

Evans I, "The Racial Question and Intellectual Production in South Africa", *UWCADE Forum*, 1, 1990

Fabian J, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*, New York, 1983

Fanon F, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Harmondsworth, 1967

Frederickse J, *The Unbreakable Thread*, Johannesburg, 1990

Freund, B, "Past Imperfect", *Southern African Review of Books*, Dec 1988/Jan 1990: 8-9

----------"Radical History Writing and the South African Context", *South African Historical Journal*, 24, 1991: 154-159

Friedman S, *Building Tomorrow Today*, Johannesburg, 1987

Genovese E, *In Red & Black*, Harmondsworth, 1971

Grosz E, "Contemporary Theories of Power and Subjectivity" in Sneja Gunew (ed), *Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construct*, London, 1990

Guha R and Spivak GC (eds), *Selected Subaltern Studies*, New York, 1988

Hamilton C, "Academics and the Craft of Writing Popular History", *Perspectives in Education*, 12, 1, 1990: 125-128

Hamilton C and Webster H, "The Struggle for Control over the Voices of the Past and the Socialising Role of Precolonial History: Perspectives on the Production of Precolonial Education Materials", *Perspectives in Education*, 10, 2, 1988/9: 53-60

Harlow B, *Resistance Literature*, London/New York, 1987

Hartsock N, "Foucault on Power: A Theory for Women?" in Nicholson LJ (ed), *Feminism/Postmodernism*, London/New York, 1990

Henige D, *Oral Historiography*, London, 1982

Hill Jonathan D (ed), *Rethinking History and Myth: Indigenous South American Perspectives on the Past*, Illinois, 1988

Hobsbawm E and Ranger T (eds), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, 1983

Hofmeyr I, "History Workshop Positions", *Pretexts*, 2,1, 1990: 61-71

hooks b, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*, Boston 1989

Hunt L (ed), *The New Cultural History*, Berkeley, 1989

Jameson F, *The Ideologies of Theory, Essays 1971-1986*, Minneapolis, 1988

Jenkin K, *Re-thinking History*, London, 1991

Jeppie S, "Write Your Own History" (review), *Perspectives in Education*, 11, 1, 1989: 85-87

Johnson R et al (eds), *Making Histories: Studies in History Writing and Politics*, London, 1982

Johnstone, F "`Most Painful to Our Hearts': South Africa Through the Eyes of the New School", *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 16, 1, 1982: 5-26

Kaye Harvey J and McClelland K (eds), *EP Thompson: Critical Perspectives*, Cambridge, 1990

Keegan, T, "Mike Morris and the Social Historians: A Response and a Critique" in *Africa Perspective*, 1, 7/8, 1989: 1-14

Kleinberg S Jay (ed), *Retrieving Women's History*, Oxford & Paris, 1988

Krige S, "Organisational History from Above", *South African Historical Journal*, 26, 1992: 244-250

Krige S and L Witz, "Changing History in the Classroom and University", *Perspectives in Education*, 12,1, 1990: 69-71

Krikler, J, "Waiting for the Historians", *South African Review of Books*, Aug/ Oct 1990: 16-17

Kromberg S, "The Role of the Audience in the Emergence of Durban Worker *Izibongo*" in Sienaert E et al (eds) *Oral Traditions and Innovation: New Wine in Old Bottles?*, Durban, 1991

Labour History Group, *The ICU*, Athlone, undated
----------*The 1922 White Mineworker's Strike*, Athlone, undated
----------*Workers at War*, Athlone, 1983
----------*Garment Workers Unite!*, Athlone, 1983
----------*Asinamali! Organising in the 1950s*, Athlone, 1985

La Capra D, *History and Criticism*, Ithaca, 1985
----------"Marxism and Intellectual History" in La Capra D, *Rethinking Intellectual History*, Ithaca, 1983

La Hausse P, "Oral History and South African Historians" in *Radical History Review*, 46/7, Winter 1990: 346-356

Lindenberger T and Wildt M, "History Workshops as a Practical Critique of Knowledge", *History Workshop*, 33, 1992: 73-99

Lodge T, *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945*, Johannesburg, 1983

Longxi Z, "The Myth of the Other: China in the Eyes of the West", *Critical Inquiry*_15, Autumn 1988: 108-131

Lowenthal D, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge, 1985

Mah H, "Suppressing the Text: the Metaphysics of Ethnographic History in Darnton's Great Cat Massacre", *History Workshop*, 31, Spring 1991: 1-20

Manicom L, "Ruling Relations: Rethinking State and Gender in South African History", *Journal of African History*, 33,3, 1992: 441-466

Marks S, "The Historiography of South Africa: Recent Developments" in Jewsiewicki B and Newbury D (eds), *African Historiographies: What History for Which Africa?*, Beverley Hills, 1985

Martin-Barbero J, "Communication from Culture: The Crisis of the National and the Re-emergence of the Popular",_*Media, Culture & Society*, 10, 4, 1988

Mason P, *Deconstructing America: Representations of the Other*, London, 1990

Meli F, *A History of the ANC: South Africa Belongs to Us*, Harare, 1988

Memmi A, *The Coloniser and the Colonised*, New York, 1965

Messina E, "Die CUPC: Van Socio-Humanistiese tot Socio-Politiese Agent, 1968-1990", *Kronos*, 19, 1992: 135-160

Miller D, Rowlands M & Tilley C (eds), Domination and Resistance, London, 1989

Miller J (ed), *The African Past Speaks: Essays on Oral Tradition and History*, Folkestone, 1980

Minkley G, "Re-examining Experience: The New South African Historiography", *History in Africa*, 13, 1986: 269-281

Morris, M, "Social History and the Transition to Capitalism in the South African Countryside" in *Africa Perspective*, 1, 5 & 6, 1987: 7-24

Murray, MJ, "The Origins of Agrarian Capitalism in South Africa: a Critique of the `Social History' Perspective", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 15, 4, Oct 1989: 645-665

Naidoo J, "Speech to Health and Safety Conference", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 12, 4, 1987: 33-35

Nandy A, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*, Oxford, 1983

Nasson B, "New History for the New South Africa", *South African Historical Journal*, 26, 1992: 236-244

Nelson C and Grossberg L (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Basingstoke, 1988

National Education Crisis Committee, *What Is History? A New Approach to History for Students, Workers and Communities*, Johannesburg, 1987

New Nation/History Workshop, *New Nation, New History, Vol 1*, Johannesburg 1989

Odendaal, A, "Developments in Popular History in the Western Cape in the 1980s", *Radical History Review*, 46/7, 1990: 368-375

O'Hanlon R and Washbrook D, "After Orientalism: Culture, Criticism, and Politics in the Third World", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 34, 1992: 141-167

Palmer Bryan D, "The Eclipse of Materialism: Marxism and the Writing of Social History in the 1980s" in Milliband R and Panitch L (eds), *The Retreat of the Intellectuals: Socialist Register 1990*, London, 1990

Peterson B, "Performing History off the Stage: Notes on Working Class Theatre", *Radical History Review*, 46/7, 1990: 321-329

Portelli A, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and other Stories* Albany, 1991

Posel D, "Re-thinking the `Race-Class' Debate in South African Historiography", *Social Dynamics*, 9, 1, 1983: 50-66

Prakash G, "Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 32, 2, 1990: 383-408

----------"Can the Subaltern Ride? A reply to O'Hanlon and Washbrook", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 34, 1992: 168-184

Ranger T, "Audiences and Alliances", *South African Review of Books*, May/June 1991: 4-5

Rassool C, "Striking Back: a history of COSATU by Jeremy Baskin", *Race and Class*, 34, 1992: 100-103

----------"Foundations of a New Mythology", *South African Historical Journal*, 26, 1992: 251-254

Roux E, *Time Longer Than Rope*, Wisconsin, 1964

Rowe W and Schelling V, *Memory and Modernity*, London, 1991

Said E, *Orientalism*, London, 1978
--------"Representing the Colonised: Anthropology's Interlocutors", *Critical Inquiry*, 15, Winter 1989: 205-225

Samuel R, "History Workshop Methods", *History Workshop*, 9, 1980: 162-176
---------"Reading the Signs, Part I", *History Workshop*, 32, 1991: 88-109
--------"Reading the Signs, Part II", *History Workshop*, 33, 1992: 220-251

Saunders C, *The Making of the South African Past: Major Historians on Race and Class*, David Philip, Cape Town, 1988
----------"Radical History - the Wits Workshop Version Reviewed", *South African Historical Journal*, 24, 1991: 160-165

Schwarz B & Mercer C, "Popular Politics and Marxist Theory in Britain: The History Men" in Bridges G and Brunt R, *Silver Linings: Some Strategies for the Eighties*, London, 1981

Scott JW, "The Evidence of Experience", *Critical Inquiry*, 17, Summer 1991: 773-797

Selbourne D, "On the Methods of History Workshop", *History Workshop*, 9, 1980: 150-161

Smith K,_*The Changing Past: Trends in South African Historical Writing*, Johannesburg, 1988

Sole K, "Real Toads in Imaginary Gardens: a Response to David Attwell", *Pretexts*, 2,1, 1990: 86-93

Spiegel GM, "History and Post-Modernism", *Past & Present*, 135, May 1992: 189-208

Spivak GC, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, New York, 1987

Stone P and MacKenzie R (eds), *The Excluded Past*, London, 1990

Taylor R, "Is Radical History `White'?" in *South African Historical Journal*, 27, 1992: 259-261

Tompkins J, "`Indians': Textualism, Morality, and the Problem of History, *Critical Inquiry*, 13, Autumn 1986: 101-119

UWC History Department/Education Resource and Information Project, *Let Us Speak of Freedom, Vols 1 - 4*, Bellville, undated

Van Onselen C, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914, Volume 1 & 2*, Johannesburg, 1982

Vansina J, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology*, Chicago, 1961
----------*Oral Tradition as History*, London, 1985

Visser, "Towards a Political Culture", *Pretexts*, Vol 2, 1, 1990: 69-77

Von Kotze A, *Organise and Act: The Natal Workers' Theatre Movement, 1983-1987*, Durban, 1988

Wells J, "Bringing Women Out of the Fog", *Perspectives in Education*, Vol 12, 1, 1990: 117-119
----------*We Have Done With Pleading: the Women's 1913 Anti-pass Campaign*, Johannesburg, 1991

White H, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, Baltimore, 1987

Winant H, "Rethinking Race in Brazil", *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 24, 1, 1992: 173-192

Witz L, *Write Your Own History*, Johannesburg, 1988
--------"The Write Your Own History Project" in *Radical History Review*, No 46/7, 1990: 377-387

Worger W, "White Radical History in South Africa",_*South African Historical Journal*, 24, 1991: 145-153
----------"`White' Radical History: A Response" *South African Historical Journal*, 27, 1992: 262-263

Wright H, *The Burden of the Present: Liberal-Radical Controversy over South African History*, Cape Town, 1977

Theses, conference and seminar papers

Bloch G, "Popularising History: Some Reflections and Experiences", paper presented to the WHW conference, *The Making of Class*, Johannesburg, 1987

Bundy C, "Breaking the Midnight Slumber: Govan Mbeki in the Transkei, 1940-8", IHR and History Department Seminar, UWC, Cape Town, September 1993

Callinicos L, "Factories and Townships", paper presented to the WHW conference, *Class, Community and Conflict*, Johannesburg, 1984

Cohen DW, "The Production of History", Fifth International Roundtable in Anthropology and History, Paris, July 1986

Crais C, "Race, the State and the Silence of History in the Making of Modern South Africa: Preliminary Departures", Centre for African Studies, UCT, 1992

-------"Race, the State and the Silence of History in the Making of South Africa: A Polemic", African Studies Association, Seattle, 1992

Hamilton CA, "`An appetite for the past'; the re-creation of Shaka and the crisis in popular historical consciousness", paper presented to the WHW Popular History Workshop, Johannesburg, 1990

----------*Authoring Shaka: Models, Metaphors and Historiography*, PhD, John Hopkins, 1993

Luckett C and Nuttall T, "Teaching and Learning History as a Discourse: showing first year students how to read and write like historians", paper presented to the South African Association for Academic Development conference, Cape Town, 1993

Minkley G, "`Red Alert': Questioning the Working Class in South African Historiography from East London, c1930-c1960", unpublished, 1990

----------"Married to the Beer: Gender and Class in the East London Locations, 1930-1960", paper presented to Centre of African Studies, UCT, 1992

Rassool C and Witz L, "Creators and Shapers of the Past: Some Reflections on the Experiences of the Khanya Oral History Projects", paper presented to the WHW Popular History Workshop, Johannesburg, 1990

----------"The 1952 Van Riebeeck Tercentary Festival: Constructing and Contesting Public National History", paper presented to African Studies Association, Seattle, 1992

Rassool C, "History and the `Independent' Left in the 1950's: Towards Uncovering a Marxist Intellectual Tradition", paper presented at WHW, Johannesburg 1990

Tatham K, "Interpretations of racism/segregation/ apartheid in South African historiography", paper presented at Wits History Workshop, *Structure and Experience in the Making of Apartheid*, Johannesburg, 1990

Witz L and Hamilton C, "Reaping the Whirlwind: The Reader's Digest Illustrated History of South Africa and the Appetite for the Past in South Africa", paper presented to the World Archaeological Congress 2, Venezuela, 1990

Wright J, "Popularising the Precolonial Past: Politics and Problems", paper presented to the Wits History Workshop *The Making of Class*, Johannesburg, 1987

----------"Political Mythology and the Making of Natal's Mfecane", unpublished mimeo (subsequently published in the *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 23, 2, 1989)