

**Review Article**

**Besprekingsartikel**

**Robert Ross, Anne Kelk Mager and Bill Nasson (eds), *The Cambridge History of South Africa: Volume 2, 1885–1994***

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**New Turks and Old Turks:  
The historiographical legacies of South African social history**

***Stephen Sparks\****

For all its advances over earlier scholarship, Leonard Thompson and Monica Wilson's *Oxford History of South Africa* quickly came to be seen in the eyes of a new generation of "revisionists" in the 1970s as epitomising an out-dated liberalism, ill-equipped to account for the resilience of racial capitalism.<sup>1</sup> Now, almost two decades into the post-apartheid era, the primarily materialist social history writing which rose to prominence in the last three decades of the twentieth century receives the Oxbridge stamp of authority. There is a certain irony to the "revisionist" *Cambridge* volumes now occupying an analogous position to their *Oxford* predecessors. While there have been some generally positive early reviews, there is a whiff of dissent in the air. The young Turks of old are now in the twilight of their careers and the New Young Turks are snapping at their heels, screaming: "the emperor has no clothes!" How the wheel turns. "Every generation is revisionist", as Leonard Thompson once remarked.<sup>2</sup> Helena Pohlandt-McCormick's recent piece in the *African Studies Review* is fairly representative of some of this scepticism.<sup>3</sup> She voices three main objections: i) the exclusion of Namibia's history as a dependent territory of South Africa in the twentieth century because of the nation-state framing; ii)

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1. M. Wilson and L.M. Thompson, *South Africa to 1870: The Oxford History of South Africa, Volume 1* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1969); and *South Africa, 1870–1966: The Oxford History of South Africa, Volume 2* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1971). Key critical "revisionist" reviews were A. Atmore and N. Westlake, "A Liberal Dilemma: A Critique of the Oxford History of South Africa", *Race*, 14, 1972, pp 107–136; and M. Legassick, "The Dynamics of Modernization in South Africa", *Journal of African History*, 13, 1, 1972, pp 145–150.
2. L. Berat, "Interview with Leonard Thompson", *South African Historical Journal*, 30, May 1994, p 24.
3. H. Pohlandt-McCormick, "The Cambridge History of South Africa", *African Studies Review*, 55, 3, December 2012. See also J. Soske, "Why does South African History Continue to be Written Primarily by White Scholars?" available at <http://africasacountry.com/2012/11/29/why-does-south-african-history-continue-to-be-written-primarily-by-white-scholars/>

a failure to reflect scholarship produced since the early 1990s; and iii) a lack of self-reflexivity about the “complicity of historical knowledge in the exercise of power” and insufficient questioning of “the disciplinary and institutional structures of exclusion” in post-apartheid South Africa.<sup>4</sup>

Although Pohlandt-McCormick’s implication that the (surely accidental) misspelling of Namibia in the index is symptomatic of imperial disdain is somewhat silly, the first charge about Namibia’s absence from the second volume stands. The decision to change the name of the South African Historical Society to a regional one; the hosting of this year’s bi-annual conference in Gaborone, and the upcoming conference in Basel on the “South African Empire” must therefore be welcomed. However, the second claim (about fore-shortened citations) is simply false. The footnotes cite scholarship deep into the 2000s. Is it too much to expect a close reading of the text under review? Claims about the epistemological naivety of South African social historians are of course not new; nor are anxieties (or polemics) about the racial composition of the country’s history departments.<sup>5</sup> The South African historical guild has engaged in much hand-wringing since the end of apartheid, bemoaning a sense of disciplinary crises and irrelevance; diminished student numbers; and the still thin presence of black historians in university departments.<sup>6</sup>

The post-structuralist critiques of social history which underpinned the “cultural”/ “linguistic” turns in the Western academy only really began to have significant impact in South Africa in the early 1990s. While many historians doubtless carried on going about their business as usual, a number also penned direct responses to the challenges posed by post-structuralist (“postmodernist” was a common, not always accurate, short-hand) currents of thought.<sup>7</sup> One of the earliest polemics attacking South African social history on classic post-structuralist grounds was written by Roger Deacon and published in the *South African Historical Journal* in 1991. Deacon argued that despite attempts at moving away from base/

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4. Pohlandt-McCormick, “Cambridge History of South Africa”, pp 180–181.
  5. Polemics include W. Worger, “White Radical History in South Africa”, *South African Historical Journal*, 24, 1991, pp 145–153; and L. de Kock, “People, Power and Culture and the Ethics of Historical Representation”, *South African Historical Journal*, 27, 1992.
  6. The sense of disciplinary crisis and questioning of purpose in the transition to a “post-anti-apartheid era” was recorded by leading American historian Eric Foner during his visit to South Africa in 1994. See E. Foner, “‘We Must Forget the Past’: History in the New South Africa”, *South African Historical Journal*, 32, 1, 1995, pp 163–176; P. Rich, “Is South African Radical Social History Becoming Irrelevant?”, *South African Historical Journal*, 31, 1, 1994, pp 191–197. See also A. du Toit, “The Owl of Minerva and the Ironic Fate of the Progressive Praxis of Radical Historiography in Post-apartheid South Africa”, *Kronos*, 36, November 2010, pp 252–265.
  7. N. Etherington, “Po-Mo and SA History”, *South African Review of Books*, 44, July/August 1996; P. Maylam, “Dead Horses, the Baby and the Bathwater: ‘Post-Theory’ and the Historian’s Practice”, *South African Historical Journal*, 42, 1, 2000; A. Copley, “Does Social History Have a Future? The Ending of Apartheid and Recent Trends in South African Historiography”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 27, 3, September 2001, pp 613–625.

superstructure Marxist thinking, and avoiding forcing the square peg of culture into the round whole of class consciousness, South African social historians held on to an “essentialist conception of history” where the “economic” was treated as the “ultimate and primary determinant of social reality”.<sup>8</sup> Questions also began to be raised about a general absence of self-reflexivity in social history texts about the subjective role of historians in the production of historical knowledge. Closely allied to these criticisms was the suggestion that the empiricist reaction against early “revisionist” structuralist abstractions had produced an unproductive anti-theoreticism among many social historians.<sup>9</sup>

Scholars such as Ran Greenstein and co-editor of the first *Cambridge History of South Africa* volume published in 2010, Carolyn Hamilton (and later, a number of historians based at the University of the Western Cape), started to draw particularly on work on the “production of history” by Ralph Trouillet and David William Cohen.<sup>10</sup> Cohen (who has trained a high number of South Africanists) demanded attention to the conditions of the production of historical knowledge by professional historians while insisting that historical knowledge is necessarily produced within a wider terrain of contestation and claims-making. “Post-colonial” scholarship, particularly the critiques of “Western” epistemologies in Edward Said’s scholarship and scholarship on “colonial knowledge” in British India (and the “post-structuralist” philosophy of Michel Foucault) also proved influential to claims that social historians in South Africa were reproducing “Western”, “rationalist”, even “colonial” forms of knowledge.<sup>11</sup>

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8. R. Deacon, “Hegemony, Essentialism and Radical History in South Africa”, *South African Historical Journal*, 24, 1, 1991, p 167. For another explicitly post-structuralist intervention see J. Robinson, “(Dis)locating Historical Narrative: Writing, Space and Gender in South African Social History”, *South African Historical Journal*, 30, 1994.
  9. This is a concern which was also expressed from within revisionist ranks. See M. Morris, “Social History and the Transition to Capitalism in the South African Countryside”, *Review of African Political Economy*, 41, 1988, pp 60–72; and Martin Legassick’s rendition of his falling out with Charles van Onselen, in C. Rassool, “History Anchored in Politics: An Interview with Martin Legassick”, *South African Historical Journal*, 56, 1, 2006, p 33.
  10. C. Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1998); R. Greenstein “History, Historiography and the Production of Knowledge”, *South African Historical Journal*, 32, 1, 1995, pp 217–232; D. William Cohen, *The Combing of History* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1994); R. Trouillet, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Beacon Press, Boston, 1995). The new cultural anthropology and historical anthropology of the 1980s emanating chiefly from the North American academy was a key influence in the case of Hamilton’s work. See C. Kros, “Interview with Carolyn Hamilton”, *South African Historical Journal*, 39, 1998, pp 199–205.
  11. Key texts include E.W. Said, *Orientalism* (Vintage Books, New York, 1978); M. Foucault, *The Order of Things* (Routledge, London, 1989); M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (Pantheon Books, New York, 1972); B.S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1996); D. Chakrabarty, “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for ‘Indian’ Pasts?”, *Representations*, 37, 1992; G. Prakash, “Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the

Many of these criticisms coalesced in Ciraj Rassool and Gary Minkley's response to the publication of Charles van Onselen's monograph, *The Seed is Mine*.<sup>12</sup> Rassool and Minkley argued that Van Onselen's attempt at "recovery" of the experience of the sharecropper Kas Maine deepened his subjugation; of his heavy-handed authorial voice; of an extractive, scientific and un-reflexive oral history methodology, indifferent to the poetics of memory. They charged Van Onselen with ventriloquizing Maine and inserting him into a nationalist narrative where he stands in as a universal symbol of rural suffering and resilience. These criticisms were part of a larger intervention claiming that initiatives of historical "recovery" and making history more "accessible" were wedded to an elitist, top-down (not "bottom-up") sociology of historical knowledge privileging professional historical authority.<sup>13</sup>

Of course, like many such interventions, these critiques shaded into overstatement, particularly regarding social history's construction of nationalist meta-narratives. First, there were historians working under the "social history" rubric who did not identify with more dominant strands of "revisionist" leftist orthodoxies. Certainly a number of "revisionists" were intimately involved in or strongly sympathetic towards the ANC or affiliated anti-apartheid organisations. But they also tended to populate organisations which worked to retain a certain autonomy vis-à-vis the ANC and SACP

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Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 32, 2, 1990, pp 383–408. Their influence in South Africa is most visible in P. Lalu, "When was South African History ever Postcolonial?" *Kronos*, 34, 2008, pp 267–281; and P. Lalu, *The Deaths of Hintsa: Postapartheid South Africa and the Shape of Recurring Pasts* (HSRC, Cape Town, 2009); C. Rassool, "Power, Knowledge and the Politics of Public Pasts", *African Studies*, 69, 1, 2010, 79–101; C. Rassool, "The Individual, Auto/biography and History in South Africa", PhD thesis, UWC, 2004; and C. Hamilton et al (eds), *Refiguring the Archive* (David Philip, Cape Town, 2002).

12. G. Minkley and C. Rassool, "Orality, Memory and Social History in South Africa", in C. Coetzee and S. Nuttall (eds), *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa* (Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1997).
13. It is out of these critiques that the emphasis on "public history" and "heritage" at the University of the Western Cape grew in the 1990s. American historian Clifton Crais is another scholar who has self-consciously adopted the identity of a "post-structuralist" and critic of South African social history writing. His criticisms and enthusiasm for later-period "subalternist"/postcolonial approaches are clearly stated in the introduction to his *The Politics of Evil: Magic, Power and the Political Imagination in South Africa* (CUP, Cambridge, 2002.) Crais penned two reviews of Van Onselen's *Seed is Mine*, published within a few months of each other in different journals, but of rather different tenor. See C. Crais, "Review: *The Seed is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper 1894–1985* by Charles van Onselen", *Journal of Social History*, 32, 4, 1999, pp 1000–1002; C. Crais, "Review: *Singing away the Hunger: Autobiography of an African Woman* by Mpho M'atsepo Nthunya"; and K.L. Kendall, "Review: *The Seed Is Mine* by Charles van Onselen", *African Studies Review*, 42, 3, 1999, pp 154–156. For a more recent incarnation of critiques informed by self-consciously "postcolonial" approaches, see Lalu, "When was South African History ever Postcolonial?"; and Lalu, *Deaths of Hintsa*. Brian Rutledge responded critically to Lalu's intervention in B. Rutledge, "Premesh Lalu's Post-colonial Push: Is it Time to Dismantle the Discipline?", *South African Historical Journal*, 63, 1, 2011, pp 148–167.

during the struggle. These included the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS); the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU); and later, the United Democratic Front (UDF). Phil Bonner, a leading social historian (who features in the Cambridge volume) was detained without trial for his role in FOSATU. Many scholars expressed their ambivalence towards nationalism through insistence on the analytical primacy of class (and gender) over race; personal investment in the politics of non-racialism and involvement in independent trade union organising.<sup>14</sup> Minkley and Rassool's critique of Van Onselen on nationalism is imprecise, because, as Jon Hyslop has noted, "his scepticism toward all forms of nationalism led to an early and profound hostility to the ANC".<sup>15</sup>

What of the charge that social historians did violence to "culture" and were insensitive to difference? Keith Breckenridge has argued that while "revisionist" social historians sought out evidence of class consciousness amongst African workers, they quickly discovered the "rural origins" of their identities: witchcraft and the ancestors, ethnicity, cattle and homesteads, while maintaining more typically structuralist interests in the development of the state and capitalism.<sup>16</sup> In a sense, then, social historians of South Africa couldn't help but end up taking a "cultural turn". But it was a "cultural turn" of a *particular sort*, because revisionist social historians held onto Marxist analysis for longer than proved the case elsewhere. This, as many observers have pointed out, had a great deal to do with the instrumentalisation of cultural differences under apartheid, which made it "very difficult to make or endorse appeals for cultural or epistemological rupture".<sup>17</sup>

A brief sketch of the lineaments of the "cultural turn" in our historiography might be of use here. Early structuralist accounts dealt mostly in abstractions, presenting Africans as passive victims of racial capitalism.<sup>18</sup> From early in their respective careers social historians William Beinart, Patrick Harries and Peter Delius qualified structuralism by tracing the rural roots of migrant cultures and emphasising the agency of African societies

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14. Legassick's expulsion from the ANC is germane to this discussion. These tensions recently burst into view again in the fight about SADET and "patriotic history". See M. Legassick, "Debating the Revival of the Workers' Movement in the 1970s: The South African Democracy Education Trust and Post-apartheid Patriotic History", *Kronos*, 34, 2008, pp 240–266; and J. Hyslop, "South African Social History and the New Non-Fiction", *Safundi, The Journal of South African and American Studies*, 13, 1/2, 2012. For one of the most explicit statements delineating the lines between the politics of the ANC in exile and internal non-racialist organising, see the speech by Philip Bonner at book launch of *A History of FOSATU*, 17 February 2011. At <http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/docs/fosatu/BonnerrspeechFosatuBookLaunch.pdf>

15. Hyslop "South African Social History and the New Non-Fiction", p 64.

16. K. Breckenridge, "Promiscuous Method: The Historiographical. Effects of the Search for the Rural Origins of the Urban Working Class in South Africa, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 65, Spring 2004, p 26.

17. Breckenridge, "Promiscuous Method", p 28.

18. Exemplified by F. Johnstone, *Race, Class and Gold: A Study of Class Relations and Racial Discrimination in South Africa* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1976).

and migrants.<sup>19</sup> Jeff Guy and Motlatsi Thabane pioneered work which took ethnicity and its relationship to identity construction seriously on its own terms, rather than treating it as epiphenomenal of class relations, as in Phimister and Van Onselen's classic earlier study of faction fights.<sup>20</sup> Dunbar Moodie used E.P. Thompson's "moral economy" concept to challenge teleological claims about the proletarianisation of black mine workers on the Witwatersrand.<sup>21</sup> He further broadened labour history's horizons (with a little help from Foucault) by beginning to explore masculinity and desire.<sup>22</sup> Deborah Gaitskell illuminated the powers and contradictions of Christianity and domesticity in the lives of African women in South Africa and Helen Bradford, Belinda Bozzoli and Jacklyn Cock's Marxist-feminist interventions underlined the importance of attentiveness to the intersection of race, class and gender difference.<sup>23</sup> In the process they fundamentally reconfigured standard revisionist narratives. Although her historical sensibility attracted

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19. W. Beinart, "Joyinilkomo: Cattle Advances and the Origins of Migrancy from Pondoland", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 5, 2, 1979, pp 199–219; P. Delius, "Migrant Labour and the Pedi", in S. Marks and A. Atmore (eds), *Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa* (Longman, London, 1980); P. Harries, "Kinship, Ideology and the Nature of Pre-Colonial Labour Migration: Labour Migration from Delagoa Bay Hinterland to South Africa, to 1895", in S. Marks and R. Rathbone (eds), *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa: African Class Formation, Culture and Consciousness, 1870–1930* (Longman, London, 1982).
  20. J. Guy and M. Thabane, "Technology, Ethnicity and Ideology: Basotho Miners and Shaft-Sinking on the South African Gold Mines", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 14, 2, 1988, pp 257–278; I. Phimister and C. van Onselen, "The Political Economy of Tribal Animosity: A Case Study of the 1929 Bulawayo Location 'Faction Fight'", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 6, 1, 1979, pp 1–43.
  21. T.D. Moodie, "The Moral Economy of the Black Miners' Strike of 1946", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 13, 1, 1986, pp 1–35.
  22. T.D. Moodie, V. Ndatshie and B. Sibuyi, "Migrancy and Male Sexuality on the South African Gold Mines", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 14, 2, 1988, pp 228–256. Moodie (and Harries and Van Onselen) were later critiqued from a more stridently Foucauldian position by Zachie Achmat who argued that they were reductionist in their treatment of desire with regard to same-sex sexual relationships among men in South Africa's mine compounds and prisons. See Z. Achmat, "Apostles of Civilised Vice: 'Immoral practices' and 'unnatural vice' in South African Prisons and Compounds, 1890–1920", *Social Dynamics: Journal of African Studies*, 19, 2, 1993.
  23. D. Gaitskell, "Housewives, Maids or Mothers: Some Contradictions of Domesticity for Christian Women in Johannesburg, 1903–39", *Journal of African History*, 24, 2, 1983, pp 241–256; B. Bozzoli, "Marxism, Feminism, and South African Studies", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 9, 2, 1983, pp 139–171. H. Bradford, "'We are now the Men': Women's Beer Protests in the Natal Countryside, 1929", in B. Bozzoli (ed.), *Class, Community, and Conflict: Southern African Perspectives* (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1987); J. Cock, *Maids and Madams: A Study in the Politics of Exploitation* (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1980). Two particularly forceful later demonstrations of the contribution of gender analysis to revising standard revisionist narratives are H. Bradford, "Women, Gender and Colonialism: Rethinking the History of the British Cape Colony and its Frontier Zones, c. 1806–70", *Journal of African History*, 37, 3, 1996, pp 351–370; and H. Bradford, "Peasants, Historians and Gender: A South African Case Study Revisited, 1850–1886," *History and Theory*, 39, December 2000, 86–110. Another key text was S. Marks, *Not Either an Experimental Doll: The Separate Worlds of Three South African Women* (The Women's Press, London, 1987).



criticism, anthropologist Jean Comaroff's work on the Zion Christian Church suggested the value of symbolic analysis.<sup>24</sup> Harries, perhaps more any other scholar, appears to have been particularly influenced by ur-texts of the cultural turn, including the new Geertzian cultural anthropology and historians heavily indebted to it.<sup>25</sup> His vocabulary and methodology became especially attentive to symbolism and treating culture as "text".<sup>26</sup> Robert Ross, the historian of the colonial Cape, did not share the archetypal "revisionist" disposition, but wrote explicitly (and earlier than most) about the necessity of a history of "mentalité" in South Africa and produced a monograph which still probably conforms best to Anglo-American ideas of what the new cultural history should look like.<sup>27</sup>

Isabel Hofmeyr's background in literature seems to have enabled constructive, rather than defensive engagement with key post-structuralist texts, as reflected in her work on language and Afrikaner nationalism and her critique of reductionist use of oral history, some years before Rassool and Minkley's critique of *The Seed is Mine*.<sup>28</sup> Tim Couzens similarly worked at the interface of literary studies and history to produce an evocative intellectual and cultural history of the "New African" movement among the black South African intelligentsia.<sup>29</sup> Liz Gunner, David Coplan and Veit Erlmann's work at the intersection of anthropology, ethno-musicology and history also underlined the potential of cultural analysis.<sup>30</sup> Another important

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24. J. Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1985).
  25. R. Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre* (Basic Books, New York, 1984); L. Hunt (ed.), *The New Cultural History* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1989); and R. Chartier, *Cultural History: Between Practices and Representations* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988); M. Taussig, *Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1980); C. Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight", in C. Geertz (ed.), *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Basic Books, New York, 1973); W. Sewell, *Work and Revolution in France: The Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848* (CUP, Cambridge, 1980); J. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1988); D.W. Cohen, "Doing Social History from Pim's Doorway", in O. Zunz (ed.), *Reliving the Past: The Worlds of Social History*, (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1985), pp 191–235.
  26. P. Harries, "Symbols and Sexuality: Culture and Identity on the Early Witwatersrand Gold Mines", *Gender and History*, 2, 3, 1990; and P. Harries, *Work, Culture and Identity: Migrant Labourers in Mozambique and South Africa, c. 1860–1910* (Heinemann, Portsmouth, 1994).
  27. R. Ross, "Culture in the Historiography of Modern South Africa"; and R. Ross, *Status and Respectability in the Cape Colony, 1750–1870: A Tragedy of Manners* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999).
  28. I. Hofmeyr, "Building a Nation from Words: Afrikaans Language, Literature, and Ethnic Identity, 1902–1924", in S. Marks and S. Trapido (eds), *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa* (Longman, London, 1987), pp 95–123; I. Hofmeyr, "The Narrative Logic of Oral History", Paper presented to African Studies Institute, University of Witwatersrand, May 1988.
  29. T. Couzens, *The New African: A Study of the Life and Works of H.L.E. Dhlomo*, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1985).
  30. D. Coplan, "The African Musician and the Development of the Johannesburg Entertainment Industry, 1990–1960", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 5, 2, 1979, 135–164; D. Coplan, "The Emergence of an African Working-Class Culture",

strand was the work of scholars such as Paul Rich, Saul Dubow and John Lazar whose intellectual histories expressed dissatisfaction (as, of course, did liberal and Africanist critics) with the “revisionist” emphasis on class at the expense of race.<sup>31</sup> Another outlet for such frustration was a new interest in psychological dimensions, as in work by Dubow and Jeremy Krikler.<sup>32</sup>

If, as Breckenridge argues, social historians of South Africa took the “cultural turn” without shedding class as a central analytic, they were also reluctant to conform to another aspect of the post-structuralist intervention: explicit self-reflexivity. This may have to do with the fact that loudly voiced self-reflexivity gave the appearance of a relinquishment of professional authority at odds with the oppositional political (and personal) projects which many social historians committed themselves to under apartheid. Historians have been reticent to adopt the self-reflexive voice, as Jon Hyslop recently pointed out in an exchange with Ciraj Rassool: “Most working historians are deeply sceptical of their sources and are fully aware they themselves are constructing a narrative.”<sup>33</sup> There is no need to throw out the baby with the bathwater!

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in Marks and Rathbone (eds), *Industrialisation and Social Change*; D. Coplan, *In Township Tonight! South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre* (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1985); D. Coplan “Eloquent Knowledge: Lesotho Migrants' Songs and the Anthropology of Experience”, *American Ethnologist*, 14, 3, 1987, pp 413–433; L. Gunner, “Power House, Prison House: An Oral Genre and its Use in Isaiah Shembe's Nazareth Baptist Church”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 14, 2, 1988, pp 204–227; V. Erlmann, *African Stars: Studies in Black South African Performance* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1991); and V. Erlmann, *Nightsong: Performance, Power and Practice in South Africa* (Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1996).

31. S. Dubow, *Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid in Twentieth Century South Africa, 1919–36* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1989); J. Lazar, “The Role of the South African Bureau of Racial Affairs in the Formulation of Apartheid Ideology, 1948–1961”, Paper presented at Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th centuries, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, 21 October 1988; J. Lazar, “Verwoerd versus the ‘Visionaries’: The South Africa Bureau of Racial Affairs (SABRA) and Apartheid, 1948–1961”, in P. Bonner, P. Delius and D. Posel (eds), *Apartheid's Genesis: 1935–1962* (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1993); and P. Rich, *White Power and the Liberal Conscience: Racial Segregation and South African Liberalism, 1921–60* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1984).
32. S. Dubow, “Wulf Sach's Black Hamlet: A Case of ‘Psychic Vivisection’?”, *African Affairs*, 92, 1993, pp 519–556; J. Krikler, “Social Neurosis and Hysterical Pre-Cognition in South Africa: A Case-Study and Reflections”, *South African Historical Journal*, 28, 1, 1993, pp 63–97. In 1991, leading South African novelist J.M. Coetzee engaged critically with “revisionist” explanations of apartheid arguing that they paid insufficient attention to “irrationality” in history and were overly reliant on a model of the “thinking, devising subject animated by self-interest”. See J. Coetzee, “The Mind of Apartheid: Geoffrey Cronjé”, *Social Dynamics*, 17, 1991, p 6. In an article a few years later, Jonathan Hyslop conceded that historians could benefit from greater attention to psychological dimensions, but rejected Coetzee's more strident post-structuralist position. See J. Hyslop, “White Working-Class Women and the Invention of Apartheid: ‘Purified’ Afrikaner Nationalist Agitation for Legislation against ‘Mixed’ Marriages, 1934–9”, *Journal of African History*, 36, 1, 1995, pp 57–81.
33. J. Hyslop, “On Biography: A Response to Ciraj Rassool”, *South African Review of Sociology*, 41, 2, 2010, p 107.



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How, then, does the new *Cambridge History of South Africa* bear up under close scrutiny? Undoubtedly the book's greatest utility will be as a starting point for those unfamiliar with the historiography of modern South Africa. Who among us hasn't despaired at the number of scholars keen to impose fashionable theoretical approaches (Foucault remains a firm favourite) on South African history without due regard for existing historical scholarship? Evidently wary of some of the critiques I have delineated, the editors insist in the introduction that while scholars may have "been activist [they] were rarely partisan, in the sense of providing an intellectual gloss to the struggles of this or that component of the liberation struggle" (p 8). The introduction also reflects on the state's embrace of "simplistic Africanist writings" and Manichean struggle histories (p 11).

All the contributors to the volume are "South Africans, either by birth and/or by long residence", something which the editors point out would certainly not be the case for a similar country specific volume for elsewhere in Africa. There is evidently also a certain diffidence (and disappointment) about the generally pale complexion of the contributors to the volume. Wary of both Afro-centric and "postcolonial" critiques that "colonially created archive can have nothing of value to say about the reality of African life", the editors insist that "whatever their identity, historians [of South Africa] have generally felt the need to give prominence to African stories" (p 13). "Postmodernists" are similarly rebuffed in a potted history of the historiography in the introduction: the "brief ascendancy" of "heavily structuralist Marxism" in southern African studies in the early 1970s "had the beneficial effect of increasing the basic empiricism of the historiography" by provoking the growth of social history as a reaction to structuralism's abstractions; an empiricism which forced "even Marxist theorists to confront the challenging results of archival and other research." A rather perfunctory footnote suggests that "postmodernists are slowly meeting the same fate" (p 12).<sup>34</sup>

Appropriately enough, Saul Dubow's opening chapter explores the changing ways in which South Africa and South African-ness has been delineated over time. It is written with keen awareness of "the stress on nation building in contemporary South Africa, as well as growing sensitivity around issues of citizenship, race, belonging, and entitlement" (p 17). Those frustrated by the insufficient attention in the volume to South Africa's position as a regional hegemon will doubtless argue that this was the place to ponder some of the problems with the Cambridge "nation-state" framing. The chapter's chief virtue is precisely in underlining the ways in which the geographic and cultural entity of South Africa cannot be taken for granted.

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34. This rather sharp rebuke is markedly different in tenor to the introduction of the first volume, whose title (*The Production of Pre-industrial South African History*) bears the traces of the "production of history" paradigm which (as was discussed above) the first volume's co-editor Carolyn Hamilton employed in her *Terrific Majesty* monograph.

Dubow traces the nineteenth-century dialogue between metropolitan and colonial South African elites out of which “South Africa” as a pre-Union discursive object emerged, the complicated ways in which Boers figured as foils in these imaginings; the emergence of “South Africanist” forms of identification; and the efforts of elite Africans towards countering the hardening of racial thinking associated with the ascendancy of Social Darwinism. Dubow’s argument that “scientific and intellectual developments played an important part in the process of familiarisation, acquaintance, and control that British colonialism sought to archive” resonates in perhaps rather too easy a fashion with scholarship strongly influenced by Edward Said’s work (p 25). Dubow draws African and Afrikaner nationalisms together (this is a persistent strength throughout the volume), noting how “both drew support from farming and religious organisations; both were shaped by their respective constituency’s varied experiences of political incorporation in, as well as marginalisation from, the centres of power; and both found outlets in journalism and in cultural and language movements” (p 29).

The chapter by the late founding “revisionist” Stanley Trapido will be familiar to readers of *Historia*, having been originally published in a *feestschrift* volume dedicated to his memory in 2008. Trapido traces the importance of “diamond economics” to the long-term run-up to the war and provides a particularly perceptive reading of “Krugerism”, insisting that neither mine magnates nor the ZAR political elite were “above buying political and administrative favours” (p 88). Trapido’s interpretation complicates the tendency to read the “uitlander” controversy as indicative of entrenched ethnic politics on the Rand. Instead, Trapido gives us a vision of fluid and changeable identities. A key theme is the tenuousness of British imperial authority among British immigrants on the diamond and gold fields, where, as in the Cape, British “loyalists” could just as likely be “Afrikaners”, while the anti-imperialists were just as likely British. All of this on a stage increasingly populated by newly arriving mining capitalists and predominantly European immigrant workers.

Trapido’s fellow-traveller Shula Marks contributes two chapters to the volume. The first provides a wide-ranging analysis of the cultural history of the same period covered by Trapido: the final two decades of the nineteenth century. Marks argues that “the mailed fist of force and the velvet glove of ‘bureaucratic modernity’” were central to the making of the modern state in South Africa – together these “forged its economy, formed its institutions and helped to fashion the ideology of all its inhabitants” (p 103). The reference to “bureaucratic modernity” warrants a footnote nod to the work of the self-conscious post-structuralist and social history critic, Clifton Crais.<sup>35</sup> Crais’ work has been much critiqued, including by Marks herself, for underplaying the importance of the mineral revolution to the making of the racial order (and modern state) in South Africa.<sup>36</sup> Indeed Marks’ footnote

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35. Crais, *The Politics of Evil*.

36. S. Marks, “Racial Capitalism: A Cultural or Economic System”, *South African Historical Journal*, 28, May 1993, pp 309–317.

may muddy the theoretical waters unnecessarily by slotting the country's history too neatly into fashionable metanarratives about the role of what Foucault called "knowledge/ power": the voracious appetite of the rationalising modern state for knowledge about its subjects. As Marks quickly notes, there was in fact a "profound ambiguity" at the core of colonial attempts at reforming African societies and subjectivities "in the interests of the colonial political economy" (p 104). This ambiguity lay precisely in the quandary of how to incorporate Africans into labour and consumer markets while nonetheless retaining "those elements of African society essential to the maintenance of law and order" (p 104). Many of the epistemological impulses which Foucault and Said wrote about have certainly been present in South Africa, but (as elsewhere in Africa) they did not take deep or geographically extensive root. It is possible to convincingly do studies of particular institutions (missions, hospitals, asylums, mine compounds, government ethnology departments) demonstrating the importance of something close to a knowledge/ power logic, but as Keith Breckenridge has recently argued, as one moves out of these domains, one quickly sees that one of the defining features of the modern South African state's relationship with the majority of its population, has been serious bureaucratic indifference, even ignorance rather than a generalised "will to know".<sup>37</sup> The colonial reforms which might have been expected to refashion African subjectivities in the image of colonial, capitalist modernity were seriously attenuated in South Africa.<sup>38</sup> There is a major theoretical argument lurking here, but it is not one which Marks pauses to explore further.

It is worth noting the sophistication of Marks' cultural analysis. Witness her take on the complexities of forms of identification: "workers, peasants and farmers, as well as the growing numbers of professionals and entrepreneurs, experienced themselves simultaneously as male or female, rich or poor, white or black, English or Afrikaner or Zulu or Xhosa or Sotho or Tswana." In her discussion of the emergence of "Ethiopianism", Marks admits (following a citation of Jean and John Comaroff's *Modernity and its Malcontents*) that the "host of millennial dreams and fantasies" typical of "Ethiopianism" are "most difficult for the historian to picture and present" (p 199). Instead, she employs the language of another anthropologist, James Ferguson, from his *Expectations of Modernity*: these modes of "self-representation" (p 199). Marks delineates distinctions between Anglophone

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37. K. Breckenridge, "No Will to Know: The Rise and Fall of African Civil Registration in 20th Century South Africa", in K. Breckenridge and S. Szreter (eds), *Registration and Recognition: Documenting the Person in World History* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012).

38. In addition to Breckenridge's recent work, this attenuated modernising project is perhaps most explicitly worked through in Nafisa Essop Sheik, "Colonial Rites: Custom, Marriage Law and the Making of Difference in Natal, 1830s–c. 1910", PhD thesis, University of Michigan, 2012. N. Etherington has also recently provided a very clear exposition of the death of the Christian modernising mission in colonial Natal in the face of entrenched settler racism and anxieties about "Ethiopianism". See N. Etherington, "Religion and Resistance in Natal, 1900–1910", in A. Lissoni, J. Soske, N. Erlank, N. Nieftagodien, O. Badsha (eds), *One Hundred Years of the ANC: Debating Liberation Histories Today* (Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 2012).

“progressive” and “traditionalists” among both white and black farmers, highlighting the investment of the former in the colonial modernising project (such as it ever attained serious traction) and their betrayal with the retreat of the “tenuous liberalism” embodied in the Cape liberal tradition (p 126). Drawing on work by the likes of Rob Turrell, William Worger and, more recently, Jon Hyslop, Marks tracks the emergence of “white labourism” on the mines, the infusions it received from Australia and the UK, and the making of racial hierarchy and segregatory labour and housing regimes in Kimberley and Johannesburg. Marks’ discussion of African migrant labour draws heavily on Patrick Harries’ work to argue that “the notion that the Randlords totally controlled every aspect of a worker’s life can no longer be sustained” (p 133).<sup>39</sup> Marks, like other contributors, moves across the rural-urban divide and across the boundaries of previously often racially segregated historiographies with alacrity. White and African (and Indian and coloured) have rarely been written about in the same analytical frame in the sustained manner in which they are here.

Marks’ second contribution to the volume picks up where Trapido’s earlier chapter left off arguing, *pace* her seminal 1979 article with Trapido on Lord Alfred Milner, that the South African war represented “the anvil on which the modern South Africa state would be forged” (pp 154–157).<sup>40</sup> The movement from the war to Union, through reconstruction and the project of making a modern state was of course a tumultuous one. The decision to import indentured Chinese labourers as the answer to the inability of the Randlords to secure a sufficiently cheap and disciplined workforce, helped clarify the stakes entailed in the elaboration of labour hierarchies on the Rand and the colour bar was soon embraced by “white labour” and its organisers as the way forward. Thus, it was the “exclusion of blacks from the new South African body politic and segregation” which provided “the cement of the new White South Africa” (p 174).

Bill Freund’s chapter on the “political and economic foundations” of the Union period is historiographically refreshing because it draws on newer research conducted by its author on the political history of the role of the South African state vis-à-vis social and economic planning.<sup>41</sup> Freund traces the post-Union attempts at establishing a hegemonic order in South Africa, with the state lying at the centre of the analysis. While Milner and company laid critical foundations, the challenges facing the new state remained considerable. The Randlords needed to be placated on various fronts, and the mines harnessed for a racialised “generalised prosperity”. Urban infrastructure remained under-developed, as did agriculture, where the superiority of white farmers vis-à-vis an aspirant black peasantry was not yet

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39. Harries, *Work, Culture and Identity*.

40. S. Marks and S. Trapido, “Lord Milner and the South African State”, *History Workshop*, No. 8, Autumn, 1979, pp 50–80.

41. Freund has presented a number of seminar and conference papers from this new research but the only piece which has been published to date is B. Freund, “The South African Developmental State and the First Attempt to Create a National Health System: Another Look at the Gluckman Commission of 1942–1944”, *South African Historical Journal*, 64, 2, 2012, pp 170–186.

fully secured (p 211). Manufacturing had barely begun. Against this backdrop, Freund outlines the elaboration of a “regulated system for capitalist development”, and a “hesitant but growing confidence in the ability of the national state to play this regulatory role” (p 211).

Employing a noticeably transnational perspective, Freund’s chapter presents much more than the usual story of the development of a racially segregatory state and society over the course of the first half of the twentieth century. It is a vision of the South African state and the country’s political economy as a developmental project. Freund, in other words, is less interested in narrating the racial injustices flowing from this history than he is with the pragmatics of state formation and economic development. The chapter resonates with recent scholarship looking afresh at South Africa in the 1940s.<sup>42</sup> Freund admits that the period leading up to the National Party victory in 1948 is the “hardest to characterise, marked as it was by a mixture of conservatism and reform” (p 216). White supremacy and segregation were never fundamentally called into question. Most important for Freund’s purposes, the 1940s marked an especially key period “in terms of the industrialisation of South Africa and the creation of critical national institutions” (p 216). Freund demonstrates that Smuts reflected the global political temper of the time in his Keynesian belief in state-directed development. While anti-black racism was never seriously questioned, the 1940s were characterised by what Freund calls a “genuine belief” that the material conditions of black South Africans could be “substantially improved” without any substantial political enfranchisement (p 241).

Phil Bonner’s chapter tackles “South African society and culture” in the same period covered by Freund. He begins by outlining the more conventional terrain of Union-period political development. Bonner identifies two “complementary and closely related programmes” at the core of official politics in this era: “the upliftment of poor whites and the subjugation of Africans” (p 254). As Bonner correctly notes, these two themes have “generally been treated separately from each other and have their own segregated historiographies” (p 254). One of the greatest virtues of this chapter is precisely this insistence on bringing these segregated historiographies together to show the ways the poor white question and the status of Africans were inextricably intertwined with each other. Like Marks, Bonner’s description of African migrant cultures draws on the insights of the pioneering cultural histories produced by Patrick Harries and Dunbar Moodie.<sup>43</sup> The claim that migrant-sending African societies were “as responsible as the framers of the 1911 NLRA [Native Labour Registration Act]” for “forging and sustaining” (p 256) migrant cultures would have been sacrilege in the eyes of early structuralist revisionists like Frederick Johnstone, with his “downtrodden black labour army” – or even social

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42. S. Dubow and A. Jeeves (eds), *South Africa’s 1940s: Worlds of Possibilities* (Double Storey, Cape Town, 2005).

43. Harries, *Work, Culture and Identity*; T.D. Moodie and V. Ndatshie, “Going for Gold: Men, Mines and Migrations”, *Journal of African History*, 39, 2, 1998, pp 338–339.

historian Charles van Onselen's early depiction of mine compounds as "colleges of colonialism" which helped "mould servile black personalities".<sup>44</sup>

Bonner takes us on *tour-de-force* through key aspects of Union-era social history: quickening urbanisation; the emergence of multiracial slums; Afrikaner nationalist attempts at disaggregating poor whites from Africans to prevent racial slippage and the instrumentalisation of swamping fears. Once again, the greatest strength of the analysis is both its broad sweep and a keen eye for sociological parallels breaking the historiography out of its racial compartmentalisation. Thus, in ways deeply resonant with African migrant cultures, Afrikaner *bywoner* patriarchs are described sending their sons to work on the mines "so that they could jointly retain a foothold in the land; most dreamt of returning to the self-sufficient, independent life of the countryside and geared their efforts toward that end" (p 264). While describing the lengths some Afrikaners took to hold onto their land amidst the general drift towards towns, another parallel catches Bonner's eye via Freund's work on the emergence of an Indian "working class" in Natal:

in a not entirely dissimilar way, Indian ex-indentured labourers, once released from the sugar plantations of Natal, moved in large numbers to smallholdings around Durban, where they practised market gardening ... before being unevenly drawn into the expanding secondary industrial sector (p 286).

Bonner reminds readers of the volatility and radicalism of Afrikaners pushed off the land into cities, and the "fluid and fickle" nature of political allegiances in this context – again often eluding the grasp of cultural entrepreneurs working under the aegis of Afrikaner nationalism desperate to enclave poor whites from communism's deracinating influences (p 272).

While Bonner grants that Christianity acted as a "solvent of rural society", his chapter is keenly attuned to the role of migrant cultures in encapsulating male African mine workers in rurally oriented networks while they worked on the Rand (p 278). "Retribalisation" initiatives backed by official segregationist state policies and rural elites reinforced these tendencies. But the urban experience also threw up mutations which straddled the rural and urban such as *amalaita*, *isitoshazi* and *indlavini* gangs. Trans-Atlantic influences were also reflected in the role of Garveyism in fuelling millenarianism among Africans during this period. Bonner evaluates census data from the mid-1930s which supposedly indicated accelerated urbanisation among Africans sceptically, concluding that the great majority of new arrivals were "rural born, rurally rooted and intended to return to rural areas" (p 286). Radicalism resembling class struggle was hard to find – including in the ultimately aborted ICU, and by far the greatest challenge to the hegemony of the post-Union state was the 1922 Rand Revolt: white working class unrest "disfigured" by a white labourist agenda and some instances of anti-black vigilante violence (p 269).

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44. Quoted in Harries, *Work, Culture and Identity*, xiii-xiv.



Bonner argues that the violent repression of the Rand Revolt by the state made the early African National Congress (ANC) leadership and the general black population on the Rand “more defensive”, outlining the emergence of a slum-yard culture which he characterised as “politically passive and neutral, representing highly unpromising material for either national or local political organisations” (p 295). Maybe so, but there is a preoccupation here, in a manner redolent of an older Marxist social history, with identifying and measuring forms of associational life against a yardstick of political radicalism – and lurking behind it are hints of a teleology of political struggle. After the ICU “implodes” in Natal, Bonner notes almost disapprovingly that its members were “increasingly preoccupied with cultural activities, such as *ngoma* dancing, dance halls and sport” (p 304). He speaks of a “broader failure of the black political imagination” in the 1930s, “numbed” political thinking and “drained” political initiative. Politics was “conducted at and confined to the level of the local” (p 305). The “tenacious urban location women” who Bonner wrote about in Cheryl Walker’s *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945* focused on “domestic and parochial” concerns unless the authorities “excessively intruded” upon them (p 306). There is a certain impatience with politics of everyday life here which disappoints and surely inhibits cultural analysis. This does not detract from the depth of insight and sweep of Bonner’s analysis in the larger chapter, but it is one of the rare points in the volume where revisionism’s slightly blunter edges of old are visible. Since one of the criticisms of the volume has been its rather “socio-economic” focus at the expense of fuller discussion of black intellectual and cultural worlds, one does wonder why the editors did not commission a chapter by the likes of a Tim Couzens or David Coplan.

Deborah Posel’s chapter on the “apartheid project” is undoubtedly the most forcefully theoretical chapter of the lot. Posel places apartheid in international comparative perspective as an antidote to the “insular and inward looking” character of the historiography of apartheid “in the thick of the anti-apartheid struggle, when the specificities of the South African experience dominated both the analytical and the political agenda of debate” (p 319). Posel recapitulates her long-standing insistence on the incoherence and complexity of apartheid.<sup>45</sup> Drawing on the work of key scholars of “high modernism”, such as James C. Scott and Timothy Mitchell, Posel seeks to draw out the “more generically modern and/ or colonial facets” of apartheid as political project (p 320).<sup>46</sup> Posel argues for the value of a Foucauldian reading of “apartheid’s central and defining biopolitics”, i.e. “the exercise of power on the regulation of large units of population, designating spaces for authorised residence, pathways of authorised migration, channels of authorised employment and the terms of political and communal organisation” (p 323). In a manner reminiscent of older liberal

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45. D. Posel, *The Making of Apartheid 1948–1961: Conflict and Compromise* (Clarendon, Oxford, 1991).

46. J. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1998); T. Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-politics, Modernity* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 2002).

critiques of apartheid's relationship to capitalism, she identifies a "foundational contradiction" within apartheid – a dependence on black labour which contained the seeds of apartheid's destruction: "apartheid's demographic conundrum meant, therefore, that the project of coupling white prosperity and white supremacy was inherently tenuous" (p 324). Posel discusses the ways in which apartheid racial classifications relied on social judgements (a racial common sense) rather than biological markers of race. Again echoing Foucault (and surely also Jacques Donzelot<sup>47</sup>), she discusses the moral regulation of family, gender and sexuality under apartheid, something which is perhaps especially clear in relation to the rehabilitation of poor whites.<sup>48</sup>

However, Posel qualifies the thrust of the Foucauldian argument by noting that while "apartheid proliferated higher orders of coercive regulation and surveillance in some spheres, it was also marked by remarkable disinterest and incapacity in others" (p 348). South Africa's history would look very different if our modern state had indeed engaged more earnestly in a bio-political project. Both the "will-to-know" and disciplinary power in Foucault's sense have been very unevenly present in this society's history. As Posel notes, the apartheid labour regime signally "failed to produce 'modern' workers: workers whose work ethics were shaped by aspirations to rise up the social and economic ladder, stay the course, save and improve their skills" (p 362). Instead, until it was much too late, apartheid "set cast-iron ceilings on black aspirations; low levels of skill and inferior education created a different calculus of interest and priorities for work seekers, contributing to what employers experienced as a problem of diminished labour productivity" (p 362). It is a legacy we are still grappling with today.

Anne Kelk Mager and Maanda Mulaudzi's chapter on "Popular responses to Apartheid" covers the same period as Posel's chapter, but instead fleshes out the social history of the first two decades of apartheid. Like Posel's, the chapter stands out in the volume for the explicit theoretical engagement at its commencement. The authors note some of the key criticisms of radical social history which I have addressed above, before indicating that the chapter "draws on the force of the social history tradition rather than on expanding its critiques", and underlining the way in which this tradition "was able to talk back to apartheid, to read against the grain of the colonial archive and to amplify African voices" (p 369). The chapter is notable, in comparison to Phil Bonner's chapter, for a somewhat lighter analytical touch when it comes to cultural analysis, providing a quite lovely discussion of the role of *manyano* and *isillilo* religious practices to African women's sense of spirituality and femininity. Women's membership of credit associations and thrift clubs are treated respectfully in their own right, rather than implicitly disparaged for failing to measure up against a radicalism yardstick.

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47. J. Donzelot, *The Policing of Families*. (Pantheon Books, New York, 1979).

48. For more recent work on the rehabilitation of poor whites see N. Roos, "Work Colonies and South African Historiography", *Social History*, 36, 1, 2011, pp 54–76.

Similar ambiguities of political struggle are elucidated in discussion of Group Areas removals in Durban, where working class tenants welcomed the opportunity to leave rack-renting landlords behind; of romanticised renderings of Sophiatown's history; and of the 1959 Cato Manor protests (pp 386–388). There is no slavish ANC-centric narrative here. The ANC is frequently portrayed here as taken by surprise, out of step, divided and unable to contain or predict the political volatility of its alleged constituencies. Indeed the chapter sets itself up against conventional political narratives, pausing upon the “undercurrents of political wrangling and the vicissitudes of oppositional activity” and “tales of acquiescence and complicity, power and corruption” as the Bantustan era begins (p 406). It also flags critical underlying cultural changes involving consumption and “trendy urban lifestyles” which the authors describe allowing youth to “construct new ways of imagining modernity and of performing masculinities and femininities” (p 399).

Tom Lodge's chapter traces the vicissitudes of resistance and reform in the late apartheid period, through to apartheid's end. Lodge describes Bantu education as having created a “new literate constituency for nationalist revival”, with the Black Consciousness Movement initially proving a key energiser, before nationalist politics “acquired a huge following in an insurrectionary movement animated by the preoccupations of a mutinous generation of school children” (p 409). Echoing work by the likes of Owen Crankshaw on the “floating colour bar” over the course of apartheid, Lodge underlines the importance of the movement of increasing numbers of Africans into more skilled manufacturing work during the 1960s and 70s and the cultural changes accompanying urbanisation and industrialisation for “encouraged new awareness of injustice and prepared a fresh constituency for revolt” (p 411).<sup>49</sup> In addition to longer-term cultural changes (the greater confidence of Philip Mayer's informants is a key citation), a generally more propitious political climate (with even top government officials suggesting that workers should be viewed as “human beings with souls”) provided the context for the 1973 strikes. His discussion of the Janus-faced character of P.W. Botha's administration is particularly perceptive – noting that the rise of the repressive security state coincided with a less censorious period in other realms of cultural and political life; what Nadine Gordimer described as “brutality with tolerance” (p 425).

How does Lodge account for the upsurge in “resistance” in the late apartheid period after the seemingly quiescent 1960s? He begins by acknowledging that at the end of the 1960s ANC networks within South Africa were “very rudimentary”; that the ANC's apparently successful attainment of hegemony in oppositional politics owed more to the “effectiveness” of its “armed propaganda”, than to actual internal organisational work (p 425). Like Stephen Ellis, Lodge highlights the important role which the SACP played in shaping the privileging of the goal of military victory in ANC strategy. Perhaps the most critical explanation

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49. O. Crankshaw, *Race Class and Changing Division of Labour under Apartheid* (Routledge, London, 1996).

offered for the ANC's "internal reconstruction" proved to be its ability to leverage "externally derived resources" which flowed to it from the wider international anti-apartheid movement "on an unprecedented scale" (p 426). The ANC may have been anointed as the sole legitimate representative of popular sovereignty in South Africa by global anti-apartheid organisations, and Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) was central to the symbolics of ANC propaganda, but its activities "scarcely represented a serious threat to South African security" (p 463).

The formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) proved a watershed, and while it was certainly "influenced by the ANC's clandestine internal presence" and "loyalty to or sympathy for the ANC was a given in UDF ideology", the two organisations were products of "quite distinct trajectories" and there were quite serious ambivalences and tensions between them at times, as between populists and workerists in the union movement (pp 437–445, 458). A great deal of this had to do with the reality that what the ANC "represented varied considerably according to constituency" (p 445). As the country became increasingly ungovernable from the late 1970s, Lodge shows how "generational, consciousness, an anti-authoritarian iconoclasm and a susceptibility for brutal violence" combined, at times resulting in "sadistic purification" of local communities through necklacing, people's courts, and, as Peter Delius has shown for Sekhukuneland, ritual murders of alleged witches (pp 446–449).<sup>50</sup> He concludes with insightful analysis of the ANC's "hesitant embrace of liberal democracy" (p 466); its realisation of the impossibility of overthrowing the state; the decreasing hold of apartheid ideology with the *embourgeoisement* of Afrikaners; and the financial difficulties which, together with the end of the Cold War, provided the impetus behind the state entering into negotiations.

Clive Simkins' chapter analyses the evolution of the South African population over the course of the twentieth century. His subject is twentieth-century South Africa's "incomplete and disfigured demographic modernisation" (p 514). Demographic modernisation entails the movement from a "wasteful" to a more "efficient" demographic regime: fertility and mortality must decline; general education level increases, together with urbanisation; and agricultural employment declines. All of these boxes were ticked in South Africa but this "demographic transition" was, according to Simkins, both "stretched out over more than a century" and remains "incomplete" (p 514). Our fertility levels still have further to drop, HIV/AIDS has resulted in a mortality spike; the "relatively high levels of education achieved by the youngest cohorts of the South African adult population have yet to move through the system"; while urbanisation is "far from complete" (p 515). These criteria are given greater meaning when Simkins talks about how apartheid disfigured both education attainment and the spatial distribution of the population. As Jon Hyslop noted some time ago, it is important to recognise that whatever its reputation, Bantu Education did in fact massively increase access to education among Africans in the second

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50. P. Delius, "Migrants, Comrades and Rural Revolt: Sekhukuneland, 1950–1987", *Transformation*, 13, 1990.

half of the century. But this was a crude caricature of educational modernisation. And, of course, although apartheid ultimately failed to substantially prevent urbanisation, it undoubtedly *slowed* it. Rather than simply a fight about the relationship between apartheid and capitalism the old liberal-revisionist fights were disagreements over temporality – over this “disfigured modernisation”. One of the chapter’s most original insights is Simkins’ explanation for the unemployment problem: not the job losses of “de-industrialisation”, nor “neo-liberalism”, but rather underlying demographic changes. Notwithstanding white supremacy and the absence of a thoroughgoing biopolitics and bureaucratic indifference, the African population in South Africa substantially increased over the course of the twentieth century (until HIV/AIDS). Simkins identifies a “golden age” of sorts between the mid-1930s and mid-1970s when the “non-agricultural sector was absorbing a great deal of the labour released by agriculture and of labour created as a result of a rapidly increasing population” (p 509). This had fundamentally changed by the last quarter of the century as there were increasing numbers of people (especially women) “wanting to work”. As a result, “a major unemployment problem has been bequeathed to the twenty-first century” (p 509). A key aspect which Simkins does not touch upon here is the acceleration of farm mechanisation from mid-century, which began the process of pushing black labour tenants, whom labour regulations had previously sought to hold down on farms, into Bantustan “dumping grounds”.<sup>51</sup>

Nicoli Nattrass and Jeremy Seeking’s chapter on economic development and poverty in the twentieth century covers similar ground to that covered by Freund earlier in the volume, though in the form of an overview of the entire century, with a much wider sweep. Quick to make international comparisons, they note the ways in which our modern interventionist state established “labour market institutions and an embryonic welfare state” in the manner of other modern states in the twentieth century, alongside “unusually coercive and discriminatory policies and institutions” that placed a ceiling on economic opportunities, wages and skill development for Africans: South Africa’s *sonderweg* (p 518). The chapter is a fantastic synthesis, navigating the Byzantine complexities of the race/ class debate, while thankfully no longer beholden to its pieties. We start (as one must) with the problem of the Witwatersrand’s deep gold-bearing rock, with its capital (and labour) intensive entailments; a large African population whose labour energies proved very difficult to extract and discipline, and who (following Fred Cooper’s elucidation of the importance of the “exit option” in African history<sup>52</sup>) initially had “sufficient access to land to be able to exercise some choice over whether to provide industrial labour” (p 520). On top of all of these factors, the chapter makes a particularly compelling case for the importance of a “high wage institutional and cultural framework” from Great Britain and the empire more broadly – the legacy, in other words, of white labourism and the (racialised) radicalism of the

51. C. Murray, “Displaced Urbanization: South Africa’s Rural Slums”, *African Affairs*, 86, 344, 1987, pp 311–329.

52. F. Cooper, “Africa’s Pasts and Africa’s Historians”, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 34, 2, 2000, p 321.

imperial working class which Jon Hyslop has so ably captured. The commitment to maintaining white South African standards of living at levels comparable to Australia and the British motherland “shaped both the path and pace of economic growth and change”. In fact, the white working class came to expect “a domestic worker and large house” (which would have been deemed luxuries elsewhere) as what American historian David Roediger called the “wages of whiteness” (p 530).<sup>53</sup> This set the country on a “path-dependent” course, bequeathing a legacy of inequality and “long-term economic inefficiencies” (p 568).

The chapter more explicitly confronts the realities of post-1994 South Africa than any other contribution, helping the reader draw a (fairly) straight line between the politics of the past and the predicaments of the present. Seekings and Natrass have an eye for historical ironies, noting that as newly legal black trade unions entered the industrial council labour structure towards the end of apartheid, the “civilised” labour discourse of earlier in the century was reconfigured to secure privileged and protected status for a new black labour aristocracy vis-à-vis the growing legions of unemployed African workers; a shift which the post-apartheid era has only served to entrench. By the early 1990s, the racial inequality previously inscribed in differential welfare payments and the redistributive economy of state support which we live with today evidently came into being in its fundamental outlines shortly before the transition such that evidence suggests that welfare grants and pensions were already “considerably reducing the extent of poverty in South Africa” (p 563).

Tihalo Radithalo’s chapter on the arts in twentieth-century South Africa is ambitiously titled: “Modernity, Culture and Nation”. Radithalo works from the presumption that one of the defining features of our cultural history has been a lack of anything approaching a unifying national arts culture. The chapter endeavours to capture the varied terrain of the country’s divergent cultural traditions in the arts; in some ways it is an unenviable task and Radithalo has to do rather a lot of heavy lifting here – partly in compensation, one suspects, for the more socio-economic feel of the rest of the volume. Early black literature emerged from Christian mission stations, where members of the new intellectual African elite attempted to rework Christianity and “civilisation” on their own terms; to “rewrite modernity” à la David Attwell’s work (p 574).<sup>54</sup> In a similar manner, the “New African” movement, drew on increasingly American rather than Anglophone influences to construct a more assertive and autonomous African identity than that which initially emerged on mission stations. Similarly, in the early twentieth century “South Africanist” and Afrikaner nationalist cultural productions quickly emerged in the early twentieth century out of the shadow of archetypal imperial figures like John Buchan and Rudyard Kipling.

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53. D. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (Verso, London, 1991).

54. D. Attwell, *Rewriting Modernity: Studies in Black South African Literary History* (University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 2005).



As African urbanisation quickened in the early twentieth century urban areas witnessed an efflorescence of popular entertainments such as *isicathamiya*, whose poetics explored the vicissitudes of African migrant experiences. Choral groups grew out of missions and provided self-consciously “respectable” Africans with avenues for assertions of dignity and distinction. The Sophiatown and *Drum* renaissance represented another high-water mark for the construction of a self-consciously modern, urban and effervescent blackness. As Triomf was constructed on the ruins of Sophiatown, staid and conformist “apartheid theatre” was institutionalised through the construction of dozens of theatres in designated white areas, although more complicated and challenging cultural work also emerged from the world of the Sestigers. Productions such as *Ipi Tombi* emphasised traditionalist visions of African identity, at the same time that Black Consciousness thinking began to exercise increasing influence over anti-apartheid black cultural productions.

One is struck by the variety of cultural production, from the deadening Manichean cul-de-sac of “protest” theatre in its crudest, most didactic form to the oblique allegories of J.M. Coetzee’s apartheid-era fiction. Indeed this very diversity was politically contentious within the broad anti-apartheid struggle. Fuller reflection upon debates and controversies about the relationship of art to politics would perhaps have spoken more directly to the relationship between nation, modernity and culture flagged in the title. There is also little in the way of “reception analysis” in relation to cultural productions, except some that can be indirectly inferred. The chapter nonetheless provides a highly useful overview of the cultural history of the arts in South Africa, which will be welcomed by those among us less familiar with some of its broad outlines and key achievements.

The final chapter of the volume, co-authored by Albert Grundlingh, Chris Saunders, Sandra Swart and Howard Phillips, discusses “newer historiographical directions” in historical writing about South Africa and identifies four key tendencies: environment, heritage, resistance and health. The end of apartheid may have coincided with a quickly developing sense of disciplinary crisis, but, as the authors of this chapter note, it also allowed fresh air to blow through a historiography whose guiding purpose was an oppositional relationship to apartheid. The “environmental turn” is positioned here as a response to “the more extreme reifications of the ‘textual turn’ within the discipline” and a means towards “escaping the overreliance on the nation-state paradigm in which South African historians are largely trained” (pp 601–604). In their discussion of the “heritage turn” the authors are careful to draw a distinction between heritage as practice and the study of heritage; they give voice to a wider scepticism within the South African guild about the insufficiently critical character of the heritage industry in post-apartheid South Africa, while signalling out the work on “public history” emanating from the University of the Western Cape, in particular, for praise. The new interest in “resistance” has not the faintest whiff of the romance of resistance about it; but is rather pragmatically welcomed for its relevance to contemporary preoccupations, including understanding the “consequences for post-apartheid political culture of the limitations on democratic practices

in the ANC in exile” (p 617). New pressures seeking to impose an ANC-centric national meta-narrative are again noted with concern. Few will quibble with the additional inclusion of health here as a particularly fertile area of recent research – though this subject has also had a longer presence in the historiography.

One senses that a new historiographical common sense has now come into view about the importance of escaping from the restrictions of the nation-state frame and the necessity of a “post-nationalist” historiography more generally. Two main ways of attacking this problem appear to have emerged: the first, “local history”, has emerged complicatedly from the History Workshop at Wits in the last few years. In the same way that social historians were inspired by the township unrest in the mid-1970s, these new “local histories” have come to be imagined as offering new counter-hegemonic histories vis-à-vis the ANC’s nationalist meta-narrative, against the backdrop of post-apartheid “service delivery” protests.<sup>55</sup> Like some of the less impressive social history practitioners associated with the History Workshop at Wits in the 1980s, the new “local history” occasionally risks retreating into parochial, empiricist wastelands. The other route around the nation-state frame has been via the “transnational turn”. There are ways in which some earlier social history writing adopted a wider transnational view long before talk of a “turn”. One thinks of Tim Couzens’ 1982 essay on Johannesburg’s “transatlantic connections” and his *Tramp Royal*; Van Onselen’s *New Babylon New Nineveh* and Jim Campbell’s *Songs of Zion*.<sup>56</sup> It has now become commonplace to talk of a “transnational turn” and its value is underlined in more recent work by Charles van Onselen, Jon Hyslop and Isabel Hofmeyr, as well as a new edited collection by Nigel Worden on the early Cape in its trans-oceanic context.<sup>57</sup> It is really rather puzzling that this tendency does not warrant a mention.

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The volume’s greatest weaknesses, then, lie in two aspects: its over-determined “nation state” framing and a general lack of explicit engagement in larger theoretical debates. As I suggested at the beginning of this review, criticisms relating to the lack of discussion of South Africa’s relationship to

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55. N. Nieftagodien, “The Place of ‘The Local’ in History Workshop’s Local History”, *African Studies*, 69, 1, 2010, pp 41–61.
56. T. Couzens, “Moralizing Leisure Time: The Transatlantic Connection and Black Johannesburg”, in Marks and Rathbone (eds), *Industrialisation and Social Change*, pp 314–337; T. Couzens, *Tramp Royal* (Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 1992); C. van Onselen, *New Nineveh, New Babylon. Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand*, 2 volumes (Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 1982); J.T. Campbell, *Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1995)
57. C. van Onselen, *The Fox and the Flies: The World of Joseph Silver, Racketeer and Psychopath* (Jonathan Cape, London, 2007); J. Hyslop, *The Notorious Syndicalist: J.T. Bain, a Scottish Rebel in Colonial South Africa* (Jacana, Johannesburg, 2004); I. Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan: A Transnational History of The Pilgrim’s Progress* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2004); N. Worden (ed.), *Cape Town Between East and West: Cultural Identities in a Dutch Colonial Town* (Jacana, Johannesburg and Verloren, Hilversum, 2012).

Namibia post-1915 are hard to refute. This history barely registers beyond a small handful of passing references.<sup>58</sup> Bill Nasson has suggested that the insularity of South African historians is in large part a legacy of the fact that our historiography has largely been defined by the “continuation of politics by other means”.<sup>59</sup> This simply won’t pass muster anymore, particularly in a moment when many historians of South Africa (including key revisionists) are self-consciously writing with a more transnational vision. There are certainly places in the book where the wider southern African context is more visible – most obviously with respect to the movement of labour migrants from across the region to the Witwatersrand, and in relation to the border wars. But one gets the sense that a real opportunity has been missed here, not just to place South Africa in its regional context, but to pull out “transnational” aspects of our history.

If radical social historians tended not to self-reflect noisily, this might also be symptomatic of the “anti-theoretical” disposition which they are again being accused of having exhibited through their work. Neo-Marxist and materialist approaches may have underpinned their scholarship, but as Cynthia Kros has noted, even these theoretical leanings were rarely explicitly articulated.<sup>60</sup> Much of this has to do with the fact that revisionist social history emerged in explicit response to its structuralist cousin and its perceived abstractions. Martin Legassick, a key early revisionist social historian, recalls Van Onselen’s rejection of theory with the legendary put-down: “I’d rather write about donkeys fucking!” with evident frustration.<sup>61</sup> But then it is probably fair to say that this kind of “anti-theoreticism” is a kind of default setting for very many historians.

While some of the volume’s contributors approach theory with greater enthusiasm than others, as I argued in my discussion of Shula Marks’ allusion to “bureaucratic modernity”, we are mostly thrown half-baked theoretical scraps, only hinting in the direction of larger theoretical arguments. There are missed opportunities to join debates about, for instance, the character of colonial power and the specificities of South Africa’s “modernity” – and in the process, I have suggested, refute various postcolonial orthodoxies. South Africa’s remarkable history can speak directly to larger theoretical discussions. Is it not our job to forcefully

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58. This historiography is comparatively small at present. A selection of examples include: P. Hayes, “Cocky Hahn and the ‘Black Venus’: The Making of a Native Commissioner in South West Africa, 1915–46”, *Gender & History*, 8, 3, 1996, 364–92; M. McCullers, “‘We do it so that we will be men’: Masculinity Politics in Colonial Namibia, 1915–49”, *Journal of African History*, 52, 2011, pp 43–62; L. Rizzo, “The Elephant Shooting: Colonial Law and Indirect Rule in Kaoko, Northwestern Namibia in the 1920s and 1930s”, *Journal of African History*, 48, 2007, pp 245–66; P. Hayes, J. Silvester, M. Wallace, W. Hartmann and B. Fuller (eds), *Trees Never Meet’’: Mobility and Containment in Namibia, 1915–1946* (Ohio University Press, Athens, 1998).

59. B. Nasson, “How Abnormal is South Africa?” *Quarterly Bulletin of the National Library of South Africa*, 66, 1, 2012, p 45.

60. C. Kros “Considering the Legacy of Radical/Social History in South Africa”, *African Historical Review*, 39, 1, pp 41–58, 2007.

61. Rassool, “Interview with Martin Legassick”, p 33.

demonstrate on the basis of one of the particular strengths of our historiography – the depth of our empirical research – how our history illuminates larger theoretical questions about the character of colonialism and modernity? Should we leave such interventions to the work of those in our number who would suggest that archives are irredeemably colonial?<sup>62</sup> If we do not insert carefully detailed and complicated histories into larger discussions in explicit ways, then we have no right to complain (as we invariably do) when scholars with little sense of our historiography run wild with Michel Foucault et al.

The two major weaknesses I have discussed do not detract from the fact that this book finally presents the revisionist synthesis which so many of its number long bemoaned the absence of. This historiography (in all its diversity) was a truly remarkable achievement, for which future generations, including the current one of which I am a member, have much to be thankful. Of course there will be those who feel there are problematic omissions and areas of weakness and I have pointed to some in this review. There is a lengthy bibliography at the back of the volume but the scarcity of footnoting in the volume is a great disappointment. While a highly entertaining game of historiographical bingo ensues, a book intended to be an entry point to the historiography such as this one should really do a better job of directing the reader to individual authors and texts.

It seems appropriate, however, to finish on Anne Kelk Mager's invitation to a "new generation of historians less encumbered by their own memories of apartheid, by fear of its consequences or by a desire to contribute to bringing about its demise" to explore new research areas and develop fresh insights (pp 406–407). As a member of just such a generation, I read this book deeply appreciative of the fact that whatever insights my cohort of historians might produce will only have been possible because we have been able to stand on the shoulders of giants.

### **Abstract**

This article places the production and reception of the second volume of the *Cambridge History of South Africa* in broader historiographical and political context, outlining some of the criticisms directed at the volume and at the "revisionist" scholarship which the content of the volume largely reflects. After a discussion of the specific trajectory of the "cultural turn" in South African social history writing, a close reading and critical evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the new volume is provided. The review agrees with criticisms about the limiting effects of the "nation state" framing of the volume, and the failure of the majority of authors to engage with larger theoretical debates about South Africa's history. The review nonetheless welcomes the volume as a long overdue synthesis of the "revisionist" social history writing which did so much to advance South African historiography over the last quarter of the twentieth century and

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62. Lalu, 'When was South African History ever Postcolonial?'

which will doubtless continue to provide the foundation for new historical scholarship for years to come.

**Keywords:** apartheid; historiography; new cultural history; radical history; revisionism; social history; South African history.

### Opsomming

Hierdie artikel plaas die produksie en ontvangs van die tweede band van die *Cambridge History of South Africa* binne sy breër historiografiese en politiese konteks, en dui sommige van die kritiek aan wat teen die boek, én die “revisionistiese” historiografie wat so duidelik uit die inhoud van die boek blyk, geopper is. Ná ’n bespreking van die ontwikkeling wat die “kultureleommekeer” in die Suid-Afrikaanse sosiale geskiedskrywing geneem het, volg ’n gedetailleerde lesing en kritiese evaluering van die sterk en swakpunte van die nuwe boek. Die resensie stem saam met die kritiek oor die beperkende effek van die “nasiestaat”-raamwerk van die boek, en die gebrek van die meeste skrywers om die groter teoretiese debatte oor Suid-Afrika se geskiedenis te betrek. Die resensie verwelkom nogtans die boek as die lang-agterstallige sintese van die “revisionistiese” sosiale geskiedskrywing wat soveel gedoen het om die Suid-Afrikaanse historiografie gedurende die laaste kwart van die twintigste eeu vooruit te bring, en wat sonder twyfel sal voortgaan om in die toekomstige jare die grondslag vir nuwe historiese werk te verskaf.

**Sleutelwoorde:** apartheid; historiografie; nuwe kulturele geskiedenis; radikale geskiedenis; revisionisme; sosiale geskiedenis; Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis.