WRITING HISTORY

South Africa's urban past and other essays

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WRITING HISTORY
South Africa's urban past and other essays

Christopher Saunders

Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria

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PREFACE

This collection of papers had its origin in a report I was asked to write for the Human Science Research Council's Centre for Research Methodology on method in urban history. Those who read the report, which was completed in 1990, recommended that it be published. When it had been revised, and submitted for publication, Dr Mouton of the HSRC kindly suggested that I should add to it some of my other writings relating to method in South African history. The result is the present volume. The report and the papers that follow all have something to say about methods and approaches in the study of South African history.

Following my urban history report, I include, as a case-study, a review of a recent book on Cape Town's District Six. Then in Part 2, I first offer a general survey of different approaches adopted by some leading historians of South Africa who have written in English. I then consider three key areas of keen debate in South African history: the so-called Mfecane of the early nineteenth century; the origins of the South African war of 1899-1902; and the relationship between capitalism and apartheid. I conclude by reflecting on questions of style in writing in English on South African history.

Of the five essays in Part 2, four were first written in the late 1980s. I have made slight changes to them, mainly to bring them up to date. I am pleased to think that a new readership may now discover these essays. The review of *The Struggle for District Six* was first published in *The South African Historical Journal*, May 1992. The essay on changing approaches in South African history was commissioned by the editor of *South Africa International*, and appeared, under a different title, in the October 1988 issue of that journal. The paper on the Mfecane was published in the December 1991 issue of *Social Dynamics*. The paper on the origins of the South African war has not been published before; it was prepared for a meeting in Stellenbosch of a working group of the South African Historical Society's investigation into the state of history in South Africa. The paper on the capitalism/apartheid debate was delivered as a lecture at Cambridge University in January 1988, and was published, in its original form, in John Lonsdale, ed., *South Africa in Question* (Cambridge: African Studies Centre, in association with James Currey, London, 1988). The paper on style in the writing of South Africa history was first published in *KLEIO,* 1986. I am grateful for permission to reprint these articles here.

Christopher Saunders

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This study began life as a report for the Human Science Research Council's Investigation into Research Methodology. I wish to thank Johann Mouton, Director of that programme, for his interest and support, and those who commented on the draft of the report which I circulated in December and January 1989-90: Jane Carruthers, Greg Cuthbertson and Nicholas Southey of the University of South Africa; Vivian Bickford-Smith, Kenneth Hughes, Howard Phillips, Elizabeth van Heyningen and Digby Warren of the University of Cape Town; Gordon Pirie of the University of the Witwatersrand; and Gary Baines of Rhodes University. Rodney Davenport kindly read the section on the history of urban history. Lastly, I wish to thank the two anonymous readers of the report which I submitted to the Human Sciences Research Council in June 1990; it was they who recommended that this work be published. Opinions expressed in this publication and conclusions arrived at are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Human Sciences Research Council.

Christopher Saunders
Department of History

PART I
SOUTH AFRICA'S URBAN PAST
Methods and approaches in urban history

come to be called the "borderlands", places where "houses are so far apart that even in winter they cast shadows only on their own lots" (Stilgoe, 1988: 11). They fade into the countryside, so that, it has recently been said of "sprawls", that they are not urban, not rural and not suburban (Fishman, 1991). One study defines the urban "as any activity carried on at fixed locations and divorced from the tilling of the soil. Thus, all locations providing goods, services, processing or manufacturing are considered urban" (Dahms, 1987: 254). Even with such a broad definition, the limits of the "urban" remain problematic.

Besides the difficulty of establishing the spatial boundaries of the urban, there exists another, more important set of problems. Is it sufficient merely to say that an urban area is any concentration of population above a certain size? If not, what else is involved? Should we accept the definition of the city advanced by Max Weber, one which emphasised specialisation and division of labour? Should urban history embrace anything and everything that has occurred in an urban area? What of the processes which occur both in cities and towns and also elsewhere? There may not necesssarily be anything special or peculiar about the fact that such processes take place in urban centres. Relations of power, or class, or culture, in a society may crucially be shaped by, but obviously cannot be reduced to, what has happened in cities.

Most urban historians would agree that "urban history" should not be used to include all writing about anything that happened in one or more urban areas. In order to fall within "urban history" as it is usually defined, a work must have an urban focus and be concerned with the specifically urban experience. If we accept such a definition, a book such as *City, class and culture. studies of social policy and cultural production in Victorian Manchester* (Kidd and Roberts, 1985) would fall outside urban history, for despite its title that book does not have such a focus.

We can hardly exclude from urban history the processes by which people have settled in cities, and the growth of those cities. "Urban history", the history of towns, is often distinguished from urbanisation, the process of people moving to towns; but the latter will here be taken to be part of the former. Urban history will also, somewhat arbitrarily, be assumed to include those ways in which cities have shaped society in general, and also the study of attitudes to the city. It will include,by this broad and inclusive definition, both the study of urban consciousness and the changing "image" of the city in the national consciousness. And the scope of "urban" will be taken to encompass both the towns and cities mentioned at the beginning of this Introduction and the dorps and villages - often with a much longer history than larger urban areas, but now including the communities created in recent decades by apartheid forced-removal policies - that are so much a feature of the South African landscape.

Chapter 1

Introduction

It is not difficult to justify the study of urban history. Together with the closely associated process of industrialisation, the growth of towns and cities lies at the heart of the great transformation to modern society.

Urbanisation is one of the most basic of all social phenomena. In South Africa a relatively few metropolitan centres have played a decisive role in the country's development, even though, with the exception of Cape Town, the "mother city", they are relatively recent creations. Urban protest by blacks after the First World War led directly to the implementation of a systematic policy of segregation (Dubow, 1989: 3); another bout of protest in the 1980s helped produce the radical change of state policy in 1989-90. Today over half the people of this country live in our large towns and cities, and there, it is frequently asserted, our future will be decided. Understanding the complex history of urban areas should help us identify those forces which have promoted, and those which have hindered, change in the society as a whole. And as people are naturally interested in knowing more about the places in which they live, there will always be a popular demand for works on the histories of cities. Popular writing will be of little value unless based on scholarly research in urban history.

What is urban history?

If there are many good reasons for studying urban history, what then are its scope and limits? To this there is no easy answer, and a vigorous debate has taken place on this issue among leading urban historians in Britain, America and elsewhere. Some of the most eminent scholars working on the history of cites prefer not to be called urban historians, and see themselves rather as social historians *tout court* (cf.Thernstrom in Stave, 1977). Many articles and chapters - not monographs, surprisingly - have been devoted to what Fraser and Sutcliffe, in the title of Book One of their important collection of papers on "urban history", call *Defining the Urban* (Fraser and Sutcliffe, 1983).

Part of the problem in "defining the urban" is saying what is "urban". Where does the urban stop and the non-urban - what is usually called"rural" - begin? In the American literature on suburbanisation, the outer suburban areas have

Method in urban history

In part because the subject matter of urban history is so contested and such different definitions are possible, method in urban history is far from straightforward. Much of the methodology which urban historians employ is common to all historical research, such as the attempt to ensure that evidence is reliable, and that all possible relevant sources are used. This study will not try to discuss general issues of historical methodology. Urban historians have employed a very wide range of techniques to find out more about the past, and the emphasis here will fall on those which have a particular contribution to make to urban history. The main focus of attention will be on methodological issues which arise from the nature of the sub-field: the type of approach to be adopted, and the kinds of questions to ask about the urban experience. This will involve reference to issues of theory and empiricism, objectivity and subjectivity, the appropriateness of comparisons in this sub-field, and sources. It will also lead us to consider priorities in research, and so to set out something of an agenda for urban history in South Africa.

In the space available, this enquiry cannot be comprehensive in its discussion of methodological issues relating to urban history; urban history is too extensive and varied a field for that to be possible. Many of the examples cited will be drawn from Cape Town because the writer is most familiar with what has been written on the history of that city, but in researching this study an attempt was made to sample the immense literature on urban history in many different countries. What is said here must necessarily reflect a personal view of what the central issues and concerns are and should be, and of the way the sub-field should develop. Let those who disagree explain why they disagree. The aim of this study is to make those concerned with urban history in South Africa reflect on the methods and aims of their work. If it helps to do that, it will have served its purpose.

South African urban history and method

Few historians of South Africa have tried to raise questions of method and approach in the writing of the urban history of this country. In a a paper delivered in 1968, Maynard Swanson devoted two pages to this subject (Swanson, 1969 and 1970) and briefer comments on methods and approaches have appeared in articles published more recently (e.g. Smit, 1987: 27-29). When preparing the report for the Human Sciences Research Council on which this study is based, I began by surveying the now vast literature on urban history in South Africa, and, to my surprise, found that only three scholars had published contributions which explicitly tackled the question of methodology.

No-one has done more to promote the study of urban history among Afrikaans-speaking historians than the eminent, and extremely prolific, F.A. van Jaarsveld. He has written widely on the historiography and methodology of urban history, as well as on the urbanisation of Afrikaners, without himself producing any major work on the history of an urban centre (Van Jaarsveld 1973, 1974, 1978, 1982, 1985). Secondly, J.J. Fourie, while a colleague of Van Jaarsveld at the Rand Afrikaans University, drew the attention of South African historians to work on urban history in England and America in a useful but little-known booklet published in 1974 as a by-product of research for a major book on the history of Afrikaners on the Witwatersrand (Fourie, 1974; Stals, 1978). The third scholar to mention is Jane Carruthers. After completing a thesis for the University of South Africa on an aspect of the peri-urban history of the Witwatersrand, she published a nine page survey of problems in the writing of contemporary urban history (Carruthers, 1982). In the past decade nothing similar has appeared. Editorials in the Human Science Research Council's *Contree, Journal for South African Urban and Regional History*, have concerned regional and local history rather than urban history, while the articles which have appeared in that journal have tended to be narrowly focused; none has devoted attention to the systematic study of methods and approaches in urban history.

That there has been hardly any systematic attempt to discuss methodological issues in urban history in South Africa is doubtless in part a consequence of the empirical bias of the majority of South African historians. Like urban historians elsewhere, they have wanted to get on with the task of writing history, have tended to dismiss theory as unhelpful, and have viewed the study of method as unnecessary, because method has been associated with straight-forward common-sense and seen as something acquired through practising the craft of history, almost as if by osmosis.

More might have been written about methods and approaches in urban history in this country had the intrinsic difficulties already mentioned not existed: if even the leading scholars in the sub-field disagree about whether it should be regarded as a distinct field of study, then defining a separate methodology for it is no straight-forward task; if it is not a distinct sub-field, it can hardly have its own methodology.

My view on this is that a distinct sub-field *can* be identified, one having its own particular concerns and agenda, and one which, to some extent, has its own methodology. Because of the nature of the subject-matter being explored and, in lesser measure, because of the sources which urban historians use, one can discuss issues of method and approach that apply specifically to urban history. This monograph attempts that, and has been prepared in the belief that practitioners of urban history in South Africa have not always adopted the most

appropriate methods and approaches, nor shown sufficient awareness of the variety and range of possible methods and approaches.

Unless issues of methodology are raised, existing trends in this sub-field of history are likely to be perpetuated. The present study originated from a sense of unease about some of the current work being done in urban history in South Africa. This unease is reflected in reviews of recent works in the sub-field, a number of which have commented critically on the methods and approaches adopted. Reviewers have charged, for example, that the works under scrutiny have been too descriptive, and lacked the appropriate analytical direction (e.g. Van Heyningen, 1986: 305). Work done at the University of Cape Town over the past decade has been criticised for being too eclectic, and for having insufficient focus (e.g. Bickford-Smith, 1987: 32; Swanson, 1989). It is important that the sub-field should, on the one hand, be rescued from antiquarianism, and on the other that it should have a clear and integrated focus. This study addresses issues of method and approach to help provide direction and to encourage urban historians of South Africa to direct their work in ways which will promote greater understanding of the key processes that have shaped the urban environment in this country.

After sketching the emergence and development of urban history in South Africa, and identifying some methodological shortcomings in recent work, I proceed to discuss a number of particular issues of method and approach, and to note areas for future research. What will necessarily be a incomplete survey may nevertheless alert urban historians in this country to ideas and works in this sub-field of which they may be unaware. It is also hoped that this booklet may encourage historians to devote themselves to the study of urban history. There is certainly no shortage of important topics to be tackled.

Chapter 2

The development of urban history in South Africa

In 1985 Gordon Pirie, a human geographer attached to the University of the Witwatersrand, published the first survey of recent urban history research in South Africa. His admirable article, which appeared in the annual *Urban History Yearbook*, the leading journal in the field, discussed the massive expansion in urban history research at South African universities in the 1970s (Pirie, 1985). It did not, however, examine the earlier history of the sub-discipline, and no attempt has been made to try to write an overall history of urban history in South Africa. Recent trends in this particular sub-field can, however, only be understood against the background of its earlier history in this country. That history, in turn, needs to be related to developments in the field in Britain and America. I shall therefore attempt an outline of a history of urban history in South Africa, seen in the context of developments in the field elsewhere.

Beginnings

In discussing the beginnings of South African urban history - and this would also be true for a number of other branches of the discipline - the first name to mention is William Miller Macmillan. While lecturer in history and economics at Rhodes University College in the second decade of the century, Macmillan wrote two short works about the small town he lived in. The more important of these was *Economic conditions in a non-industrial South African town: A preliminary survey* (Grahamstown, 1915). These publications were not primarily historical in focus; Macmillan's main concern was to uncover the extent of poverty in Grahamstown. They do, however, mark the first attempt by a professional historian in this country - for Macmillan had read history at Oxford, and he occupied a university post in the subject - to try to get to grips with social processes occurring in an urban centre in South Africa. In this he followed closely the methods used by B. Seebohm Rowntree in his classic work on York, *Poverty, a study of town life* (London, 1901).

Had Macmillan remained in Grahamstown, one can speculate that he might have continued his interest in the problems of urbanisation and written urban

history proper. In the event, he moved to the metropolis of Johannesburg, where, ironically, he turned first to agrarian history and then, after being allowed access to the voluminous papers of John Philip of the London Missionary Society in 1920, to the Cape eastern frontier in the early nineteenth century (Butler, 1989).

In the 1930s probably the most significant work on the history of any South African city was that done by John Maud. An Oxford don who was not an historian, but an expert in local government, Maud was asked by the municipality of Johannesburg, then about to celebrate its jubilee, to write about municipal government in that city, He produced two works which, for elegance of style and comparative insight, continue today to have few rivals (Maud, 1937, 1938). In the 1930s others who were not professional historians also did work which touched, albeit peripherally, upon the history of cities. One thinks of Abel Coetzee, a scholar of literature (Potgieter, 1974), and of the American Board missionary Ray Phillips, whose *The Bantu in the city* (1938) was a pioneering study of African life on the Witwatersrand. Among amateur urban historians of the period perhaps the most important was P.W. Laidler. In *The growth and government of Cape Town* (1939), Laidler expressed his intention, despite his title, of trying to get away from the "political history of the few" to the "more intimate and absorbing study of the many" (ix). But his book remained essentially antiquarian and anecdotal in its approach.

Afrikaner professional historians in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s tended to work on rural questions, and on the Great Trek; they ignored what the politician D.F.Malan on 16 December 1938 called "the new Great Trek": that from the land to the cities (cf. Van Jaarsveld, 1973: 33). English-speaking historians concentrated on imperial policy, and political and constitutional issues. In their general histories of South Africa, Eric Walker (1928) and C.W. de Kiewiet (1941) made only brief reference to the rise of cities, while in more specialised work Walker stressed the role of the frontier and of environment as shaping forces in the country's history, allowing no similar role to urbanisation (Saunders, 1990). Most professional historians lived in major urban centres, yet worked on aspects of the frontier, and gave little consideration to the history of cities. One exception was the extremely prolific Alan Hattersley, Professor of History at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, who, in the course of investigating almost all aspects of the history of whites in Natal, turned his hand to the history of his own city (Hattersley, 1938; 1951). But neither he nor any other historian studied the history of cities systematically before the 1970s.

This was for various reasons. Perhaps professional historians shared an anti-urban bias in the society at large. With a few notable exceptions - such as P.J. van der Merwe, the University of Stellenbosch historian of the eighteenth

century trekboer frontier - they tended to be elitist and political in their concerns. General histories of towns seemed immensely complicated, and therefore very difficult to write. Before the 1970s most professional historians were methodologically conservative and averse to drawing on evidence from other disciplines, which urban history seemed to require. Urban studies was left to sociologists, anthropologists and geographers.

Cape Town apart, the urban tradition in South Africa was a relatively new one. Large African settlements, such as the great eleventh century city of Mapungubwe next to the Limpopo River or the Tswana town of Dithakong, described by the first literate travellers to reach it in 1801 as comparable in size to Cape Town, were not thought to be urban centres in any proper sense, for they had not been permanent settlements. The development of the major new urban areas that had come into being in the late nineteenth century, on the other hand, long appeared to historians to be a theme for which adequate written sources were not readily available, and therefore not suitable subjects of study. Where, unusually, the records of municipalities and other archives relating to the history of towns were open for study, they seemed to concern only the most trivial matters. Conceived of as merely the history of municipal affairs, such as sanitation and rates, urban history, not surprisingly, seemed extremely boring.

The new urban history

In America, Arthur M. Schlesinger Sr. followed his pathbreaking *The rise of the city* (1933) with a paper in 1940 which boldly rejected the Turnerian frontier hypothesis and asserted the importance of the city in American history (Schlesinger, 1940). But this breakthrough, which received little enough response among professional historians in America, produced no reaction among the extremely small number of professional historians in South Africa. It was not until the early and mid 1960s that the study of urban history as an academic sub-field "took off" in Britain and America, in part as a response to a new concern about contemporary problems of urban areas, such as housing, poverty and race. The Americans Handlin and Burchard (1963) and Hauser and Schnore (1965) edited seminal collections of essays on cities and urbanisation, while Thernstrom published one of the first major works in what became known as "the new urban history" (Thernstrom, 1964). H.J. (Jim) Dyos of the University of Leicester, until his sudden death in 1978, did more than any other single individual to promote the new subject, and he was responsible for major conferences in the sub-discipline and for establishing the *Urban History Newsletter* (from 1963) and then the *Urban History Yearbook*, which from 1974 was the single most important serial publication in the field.

In the mid and late 1960s this work began to have an impact on South African historical scholarship. The first to argue for the importance of the shaping force of urbanisation in South Africa was Maynard Swanson, an American aware of the new work being done on the history of cities in his own country. His doctoral thesis for Harvard University, on "race policy" in Durban (1965), was never published, but in articles which appeared in 1969 and 1970 he drew upon recent American literature to urge the importance of the study of urban history in South Africa (Swanson, 1969, 1970). Swanson was the first historian to claim that many of the crucial origins of apartheid could be found in South African urban policy (Swanson, 1968). Independently, T.R.H. Davenport of Rhodes University, who was encouraged to enter the field of urban history by Keith Hancock in Australia, began work on the history of urban segregation in twentieth century South Africa, work which led to a number of important articles (Davenport, 1969, 1970, 1971). And at the newly established Rand Afrikaans University a major team project was inaugurated on the history of Afrikaners on the Witwatersrand between 1886 and 1961. Those involved in this project investigated both the process of urbanisation of Afrikaners on the Rand and what had happened to Afrikaners once they were resident in the city. These scholars were naturally led to consider the meaning, limits and scope of urban history (e.g. Potgieter, 1974). F.A. van Jaarsveld mapped out the terrain of the new sub-field and first brought to the attention of his fellow Afrikaner historians the exciting new work being done in urban history abroad (Van Jaarsveld, 1973). His colleague J.J. Fourie undertook an even wider literature search, and offered his own reflections on the field, in the annual bulletin of the RAU project (Fourie, 1974).

The other important work of the late 1960s was that of David Welsh of the University of Cape Town. He attempted a general history of urbanisation, both African and Afrikaner, in a chapter written for the second volume of the *Oxford history of South Africa* (Welsh, 1971). Welsh possessed a strong historical sense, but he worked in a Department of African Government and Law, and he drew heavily on the work of the anthropologists Ellen Hellmann, Philip Mayer, Monica Wilson and Archie Mafeje, work which tended to present a rather static picture of African life in urban areas. He did not use archival sources, and only touched briefly on urban culture (219). The bulk of his chapter was concerned with the reasons for, and the consequences of, people moving into, or being excluded from, towns, not the way in which life in the towns changed over time. His chapter was not, as it claimed, a "history of South African towns" (175) but primarily an analysis of urbanisation and of the way Africans were governed in towns.

Some of the early momentum given to urban history in the late 1960s was lost in the 1970s. The RAU project led, eventually, to two substantial volumes

(Stals, 1978, 1986) and Van Jaarsveld's interest in the subject continued long after he had left RAU: he was to edit an important collection of articles under the title *Verstedeliking in Suid-Afrika*, published in 1985. But neither Swanson nor Davenport produced major syntheses or monographs. Based at Miami University in the United States, Swanson did publish sporadically on aspects of South African urban history (Swanson, 1977; 1980; 1983; 1984), as did Davenport, but when Davenport was given leave to go to Cambridge University as a Smuts Fellow in 1973, he decided to devote his time to writing a history of modern South Africa, which was published in 1977 and revised a number of times thereafter. For him, and others, access to important Johannesburg material had been cut short in the early 1970's when a doctoral student from London University, researching African policy in Johannesburg, was accused of stealing material from the archives, which were then closed to researchers. This student's thesis was never completed, and his only contribution to this field remained one suggestive seminar paper on "the urban and industrial context of southern Africa" before Union (Hyman, 1971). Davenport's teaching at Rhodes University helped divert him from urban policy to land issues, though there was an urban section in the documentary collection on *The right to the land* which he edited with Keith Hunt (Davenport and Hunt, 1974), and his years as a spokesman for African affairs on the Grahamstown City council enabled him to write a short history of *Black Grahamstown* (Davenport, 1980). In retirement he produced a short overview of urban areas policy (Davenport, 1991).

In their work of the late 1960s and early 1970s, Welsh, Davenport and Swanson were mainly concerned with the history of urban African policy, an approach also followed by Paul Rich (1978), Noreen Kagan (1978), Robin Bloch and Peter Wilkinson (1982) and others. Richard Moorsom planned a different approach, focusing not on policy but on the activities of working people. In the mid 1970s he collected a vast amount of archival data on the history of the working class in Port Elizabeth, for what was to have been a Sussex University doctorate, but on his return to England he resumed work on Namibia, and his study of Port Elizabeth was never completed. Shirley Judges wrote a pioneering master's thesis on poverty in Cape Town in the 1830s (Judges, 1977), but then returned to England and abandoned her interest in South Africa; her thesis was never published.

Social history

It was not until the late 1970s that a number of English-speaking scholars at South African universities, not all of them historians by training, turned from policy to the experience of people - more accurately, of some people, for their

work was almost entirely confined to Africans - who had lived in our cities. These scholars, influenced by developments in the discipline overseas, tried to write history "from the bottom up" or "from below", focusing on the history of "ordinary people". Such "ordinary people" - whether formally employed or not, whether policemen or criminals, whether living in their own homes or renting, whether experiencing relative comfort or poverty - have always constituted the majority of those who have lived in towns. The great expansion in, and reorientation of, urban history in this country in the late 1970s is intimately connected with the rise of the new social history, which sought to capture the everyday experiences and consciousness of "ordinary" residents of towns.

This development in South African urban history was only in part a response to the growth of the subject abroad, for events in South Africa itself were at least as important as overseas influences on the new work. The serious study of the history of the African townships and of urban experience developed after, and in response to, the township uprisings of 1976. The History Workshop at the University of the Witwatersrand, founded the year after the Soweto revolt, held its first conference in 1978 on the theme of " Labour, Townships and Protest" . In the same year the History Department at the University of Cape Town organised the first conference to be held on the history of Cape Town. From these conferences appeared the first volume of papers under the title *Studies in the history of Cape Town* (Saunders, 1979) and the first of the more focused History Workshop volumes edited by Belinda Bozzoli of the Sociology Department at the University of the Witwatersrand (Bozzoli, 1979).

In the Bozzoli book the emphasis fell strongly on class. In one of the key papers in her book, André Proctor analysed class struggles, and the growth of segregation, in relation to Sophiatown from 1905 to 1940. In the following years, numerous social historians - most of them attached to the University of the Witwatersrand, and including human geographers, such as Gordon Pirie, Keith Beavon and Chris Rogerson - linked class to culture (e.g. Bozzoli (ed), 1983; Coplan, 1985) and to consciousness (e.g. Bonner, 1988) in urban areas. Charles van Onselen had turned his attention to the early history of the Witwatersrand even before the Soweto uprising, and he eventually published an extraordinarily rich two-volume work on topics in the early social and economic history of the Rand. He was especially interested in what happened to groups who were marginalised in the metropolis (Van Onselen, 1982).

The emphasis which Van Onselen and other social historians gave to culture and consciousness, and the minutiae of lived experience, came under attack from "structuralists", who claimed, in effect, that the social historians were concerning themselves with trivia and ignoring the central processes of economic change (e.g. James, 1984). In the 1980s, however, the social history

appraoch was by far the dominant one in the work of English-speaking historians.

The most innovative contributions in South African urban history in that decade concerned the history of Johannesburg, but by 1988 six volumes of *Studies in the history of Cape Town* had appeared and in 1988 and 1989 two major doctorates on aspects of Cape Town's history were completed (Bickford-Smith, 1988; Van Heyningen, 1989). Other urban centres also received scholarly attention. Bloemfontein, for example, had its history written by Karel Schoeman, librarian and novelist (Schoeman, 1980), while detailed studies of aspects of the early years of Kimberley were written by Mabin (1986b) and Worger (1987). The break-down of influx control and the growth of massive informal settlements on the outskirts of major metropolitan areas helped direct a number of historians to issues relating to the history of access to the towns and to squatting (e.g. Maylam, 1983; Cole, 1987; Edwards, 1989). Lodge uncovered a lot of detail about black politics in the cities (Lodge, 1983) and Hirson investigated community struggles before and during the Second World War (Hirson, 1989). Neither Lodge nor Hirson confined their attention to the towns, but both their books made major contributions to urban history.

Within two decades, then, the situation was transformed. Whereas in the early 1970s urban history in South Africa was virtually virgin territory, with very few people working on any aspect of it, by 1990 there was a very sizeable academic literature in the sub-field, and a large number of researchers doing important academic work. Among those exploring aspects of the history of Port Elizabeth, for example, were Joyce Kirk (Ohio University), Gary Baines (Rhodes University), Jenny Robinson (Cambridge University), Janet Cherry (University of Cape Town) and A.J. Christopher and A. Appel of the University of Port Elizabeth. Anne Mager (University of Cape Town), Gary Minkley (University of the Western Cape) and Keith Tankard (Rhodes University) were all working on aspects of the history of East London. Paul Maylam, Iain Edwards, Louise Torr, Bill Freund and other academics at the University of Natal were researching topics in the history of Durban. Philip Bonner was leading research into the history of the East Rand at the University of the Witwatersrand. And the Human Sciences Research Council was funding a major project on the history of Cape Town, co-ordinated by Nigel Worden, Vivian Bickford-Smith and Elizabeth van Heyningen of the University of Cape Town. At that University alone close to a dozen postgraduate students were in 1990 completing theses on aspects of the history of the mother city.

Limitations

Despite all this work, it could nevertheless be said with considerable justification, that urban history in South Africa remained poorly developed (Phillips, 1990: 232). The above incomplete sketch of the history of urban history in this country highlighted academic work on the "cutting edge" of the subject. Some of this work received international acclaim, such as that by Charles van Onselen on Johannesburg. But much writing on urban history in South Africa, academic as well as lay, remained heavily descriptive and highly empiricist. Amateur historians continued to adopt an anecdotal and antiquarian approach, and too frequently even professional historians did little more than chronicle events in a particular town or city, if somewhat more systematically than an amateur would have done. Where academic work was analytical, it too often remained narrow in its focus. Urban historians failed to identify the significant questions to ask of the urban experience. Often only one or more aspects of that experience were considered, and those were not related to other processes in the city. Or only one section of a town's population was studied, and the rest ignored. A recent reviewer of a work which did this made the comment that it might be "legitimate to write the history of only a part of the total community, but the intention to do so must be clearly set out and defended". That had not been done in the work under review. The result was that, as the reviewer pointed out, what was said of life in that particular town was not always correct (Butler, 1987: 248).

Even work with a limited focus may have its uses, such as providing a history for a section of the people of a particular town or city, and instilling a sense of pride of place and heritage. But if urban history is to continue to make advances in this country it must follow the best of the new work and not slip back into mere description and anecdote. To avoid having merely an ever expanding number of local, narrowly-focused and heavily descriptive studies, it is essential that urban historians ask the right questions.

In the middle and late 1980s much important work was done on South Africa's rural history, by Tim Keegan, William Beinart and others (e.g. Keegan, 1986, Beinart *et. al*, 1986). Besides writing specialised pieces, these authors produced generalising essays, which attempted to synthesise the new research (e.g. Keegan, 1991). Urban history fell behind this work on the history of the countryside, for while specialised studies of varying quality proliferated, the best of the new work was not brought together in any way, and hardly any attempts were made at general syntheses (Maylam, 1990(a), was an exception). The relative poverty of urban history in South Africa was at once apparent if one turned, say, to the pages of the *Urban History Review* published by the Institute of Urban Studies at the University of Winnipeg in Canada. That

impressive journal reveals Canadian urban history to have reached a general level of sophistication and development far in advance of what has been achieved in South Africa.

The purpose of this study is to help promote the study of urban history in South Africa. It tries to define the questions urban historians should be asking, and directs attention to the need for synthesis. It is hoped that it may help ensure that the study of urban history in South Africa does not slide back into what one recent critic has called its "antiquarian tradition" (Van Heyningen, 1986: 305), but instead advances to new triumphs of scholarship.

Chapter 3

Methods and approaches

Many precepts and principles relating to method and approach in urban history are well-known and non-controversial. The more self-conscious urban historians are about the aims and purpose of their work, however, and the methods they use, the better that work is likely to be. What follows is presented as a set of guidelines, without implying either that practising urban historians are necessarily ignorant of them, or that these guidelines should necessarily all be adhered to at all times. Urban history cannot be fitted to any straitjacket: it takes many forms and employs a great variety of methods and approaches. Nevertheless, if South African urban historians reflect on these guidelines, they may more easily be able to identify the best methods and approaches to adopt, and so write better urban history.

As has already been noted, much work done in South African urban history has been, and some continues to be, heavily descriptive. Merely telling the story of the development of a town or village may have its purpose, but just "letting the facts speak" will mean that relatively uninteresting facts will speak, and that they will not explain much. The replication of largely descriptive histories of different cities and villages will add to our data-base of information, but will not necessarily help our understanding of general processes at work.

This does not mean, of course, that urban historians should throw empiricism to the winds and engage in abstract theorising. Theoretical insights may be invaluable, and many urban historians would produce more valuable work were they more aware of theoretical perspectives and concepts. All good history, however, must interact with, and remain closely in touch with, the evidence which has come to us from the past. Urban historians will leave abstract theorising to non-historians - such as the social geographer David Harvey (e.g. Harvey, 1973, 1976, 1978), one of the most prominent such theorists - while noting his conclusions and seeing whether or not they can make any use of them.

The crucial point is that urban history should always be analytical as well as descriptive. It should, in other words, seek to explain why processes occurred, and should probe the causes and consequences of events and actions. To escape parochialism and antiquarianism, urban history must ask the larger questions: even micro-studies, concerned with narrow aspects of the urban

experience, should transcend the mere examination of the particular, and see the particular within the context of the city as a whole.

When they select research topics, urban historians make a choice. Making a choice, they should consider what their goals and priorities are. Those selecting narrow topics, even if they do much more than replicate existing work, should consider their importance relative to other possible topics. When we know so little about the major re-structuring of so many of our cities and towns in the 1950s and 1960s, is it not a luxury to embark on the study on, say, the minutiae of administration in late nineteenth century Cape Town? The former topic has both intrinsic importance and at least potential contemporary relevance, providing basic information for those now concerned with the desegregation of our cities. The latter, on the other hand, however well researched, will interest at most a few specialists. If such a study of administration is to be undertaken, one should at a minimum ask what contribution it will make to our understanding of the history of the particular city and of the general history of municipal administration in the country.

Units of analysis and questions of focus

It may seem self-evident to say that the city is the proper subject of the urban historian. Such a statement has many implications, however, and therefore needs constantly to be borne in mind (cf. Rabb and Rotberg, 1981: 249). It obviously does not mean that the city as a whole must always be the central focus of the urban historian, for relatively few works in urban history focus on the city as a whole rather than a section of it. But for a work to be urban history as here defined, the topic under examination must be considered within the context of the city as a whole, even if the city itself is not the central focus. So whatever unit of analysis is chosen, urban historians should always have the city as a whole in mind and should see their particular unit - whether the central business district, a suburb, a neighbourhood or even a single street - in relation to the city of which it is part. Work which merely has the city as a backdrop and focuses on some other theme has been excluded from what is here considered urban history.

Let us reject the assertion by the sociologist Oscar Lewis that "The city is not the proper unit of comparison or discussion for the study of social life." The reason Lewis gave for his view was that "the variables of number, density and heterogeneity ... are not the crucial determinants of social life or of personality ... Social life is not a mass phenomenon. It occurs for the most part in small groups, within the family, within households, within neighbourhoods ... Any generalisations about the nature of social life in the city must be based on careful studies of these smaller universes ..." (quoted Rabb and Rotberg, 1981:

320). For the urban historian the city as one organic entity is an appropriate unit of analysis; its study is one of the highest aims of his or her work, and, as we have noted, smaller units of analysis should be related to the city as a whole. It is the city as a whole that is the site of greatest interaction, where the greatest diversity of people have been brought together; it has been the goal of immigrants, from the countryside or from abroad. And it is with the city as a whole, rather than any part of it, that immigrants and long-time residents alike come to identify. It is cities that have produced culture and ideas, have developed their own micro-economies and had their own systems of government. The lives of the inhabitants of a city have been shaped by policies devised specifically for that particular city or for it and other cities.

Too many urban historians in South Africa, trying to present a general history of a city or town or dorp, have treated the particular urban area they have chosen to investigate in compartments, discussing economic aspects separately from social, political, religious and cultural ones. Separate chapters are devoted to aspects of urban life, each chapter bearing little or no relation to each other, for each has considered an aspect in isolation from the others. The urban historian should constantly be concerned with inter-relationships. No aspect of the city can be understood in isolation, without the larger whole being taken into account and related to the particular aspect under investigation.

Relatively few South African urban historians have successfully achieved the goal of presenting the city as an integrated whole. In his studies of certain forms of change on the early Witwatersrand, Charles van Onselen did skilfully interweave social and economic themes to produce an integrated account (Van Onselen, 1982). Other work to show admirable awareness of economic context includes that by Alan Mabin on Kimberley (Mabin, 1986b) and by Vivian Bickford-Smith on Cape Town (Bickford-Smith, 1988). In a limited, but nevertheless penetrating micro-study, Lance van Sittert situated the lives of fishermen at Hout Bay within the context of changing relations of production in the fishing industry and the growth of a monopoly in that industry (Van Sittert, 1988). But van Sittert did not contextualise Hout Bay within the regional economy, or in relation to the Cape Town metropolitan area. The urban historian needs constantly to be aware of such different contexts, and to take all of them into account.

There is today a growing consensus among urban historians that the relationship between economic change and other processes occuring in the city should be central to urban history. Van Onselen explicitly states that his work is an "exercise in historical materialism" (1982: Vol. I: xvi), but other urban historians who reject historical materialism may still agree that economic processes, while not necessarily determining other changes in the city, are

nevertheless more important than any other. To understand such processes, urban historians will increasingly need to acquire skills in economic analysis.

The need for synthesis

Most work on urban history in South Africa has investigated aspects of the history of particular cities, or areas within cities. Alongside such studies, we need general works of synthesis which span the entire history of cities and see them as a whole, from their origins to the present. The urban historians who have attempted this in South Africa have mostly studied smaller urban settlements. The few general accounts that have been published of the history of larger centres - Karel Schoeman's history of Bloemfontein, for example (Schoeman, 1980) and the edited collection on Pietermaritzburg (Laband and Haswell, 1988) - have, like the studies of smaller urban units, all been less than comprehensive, With the obvious exception of Cape Town, our larger cities are all relatively recent creations. Yet there is no adequate general history of any of these urban centres, taking them from their establishment to recent times, treating them comprehensively and integrating the various strands of their development into one holistic, rounded synthesis. Writing such a history is, admittedly, a tall order, and one very rarely achieved for any city in the world, but it should rank high among the aims of South Africa's urban historians.

How is such an aim to be achieved? Such a general history of a city can only be produced by a team of historians working together over a period of years, or by an individual devoting much of his life's work to the subject, as Blake McKelvey did for the history of Rochester in New York State (cf. Stave, 1977: 60). Over seventy people contributed to the recently-published history of Pietermaritzburg edited by Laband and Haswell, and even then the volume was patchy in its coverage of themes in the history of that city. That volume exhibits other shortcomings as well: its chapters were not well integrated, and, in part because many of the authors were not trained historians, the standard of the contributions is uneven. In planning their book, the editors sought out those working on various aspects of the history of Pietermaritzburg and enlisted their services. This had the advantage that the volume was ready in time for the anniversary it was designed to mark, but the consequence was that the end-product lacked coherence.

The ideal approach is probably a relatively small, close-knit team of trained historians, each committed to researching a part of the history of a city, each part being designed to fit into what is planned to be a rounded history. A final synthesis is probably best produced by one person, an historian able to integrate a mass of work into a coherent whole. The first history of Pietermaritzburg, for

instance, was given coherence by the shaping hand of Alan Hattersley (Hattersley, 1938 and cf. Laband and Haswell, 1988).

If an overall synthesis is deemed too ambitious, then alternative approaches can be adopted. Those now involved in writing a history of Cape Town propose to follow the "slice" approach used in the multi-volume history produced for the Australian bicentennial in 1988. But instead of looking only at particular years - the Australian historians chose 1788, 1838, 1888 and 1938 - the history of Cape Town will probably examine decades: Cape Town in the 1830s, 1880s, 1930s, 1950s and perhaps other decades as well. The problem with the slice approach is the danger of distortion and lack of process, for however important any particular year or decade may be, not all significant developments can be analysed adequately if one is limited to mere slices of past time. Any other approach, however, may prove unmanageable for the history of large and complex cities.

It is obviously much easier to produce a general study of a smaller urban centre than of a larger, more complex metropolis. A number of scholars acquainted with recent advances in urban history have recently begun the relatively neglected task of writing the history of South Africa's smaller urban centres. Jeffrey Butler of Wesleyan University in the United States has begun publishing detailed articles on aspects of the history of Cradock between the wars, as a prelude to a promised book which will look at that small town as a whole between the wars and after (Butler, 1985, 1989). Sean Redding has written a doctoral thesis for Yale University on the history of Umtata from the late nineteenth century (Redding, 1987). Historians based at the Human Sciences Research Council in Pretoria have been commissioned to write histories of smaller centres from their establishment to recent times, and the H.S.R.C. has published a number of such studies (e.g. Minnaar, 1984, 1987; Snyman, 1983, 1987; Liebenberg, 1990). Generalisations made about larger centres may well not apply to smaller ones (cf. Rabb and Rotberg, 1981: 249), but the approach of the urban historian should essentially be similar in both cases. Most of the methodological points made in this study apply to villages and dorps as much as they do to towns and cities.

The regional context

Cities must be studied from the inside, but they cannot be understood in isolation: the history of all cities must be related to wider processes in society, for all cities are components of larger regional, national and even international systems. That means that the urban historian must be concerned with the region to which the city is attached, the national context, and even the global economy. In an article entitled *The new international division of labour and urban develop-*

ment in the contemporary world-system Jeff Henderson writes: "It is no longer possible to understand the economic, social, political and spatial aspects of urban development in any intellectually serious way except by means of a method which embeds the city in its wider structural context." And he goes on to speak of how recognition of this point has produced an "intellectual revolution" in urban studies in recent decades (Drakakis-Smith, 1986: 63).

In Britain and the United States attempts have been made to develop models of how cities have either been dependent on their region, or have contributed, say, to agricultural development in particular hinterlands (e.g. Roberts, 1978: Chapter I). In South Africa the relationship between city and hinterland has taken a particular form, because of the migrant labour system and the way the segregationist and then the apartheid state prevented the "natural" process of urbanisation, turning many of those who worked in the cities into long-distance commuters. Yet little historical work has been done on this issue.

A hinterland may be the rural area immediately adjacent to the city, from which food may be obtained, or it may be distant. Cape Town, for example, has a number of hinterlands: not only the nearby Boland and Swartland areas, from which there has been in-migration for at least two centuries, but also the distant Ciskei and Transkei, from where the bulk of the relatively recently arrived African migrants left to move to the city, some for short periods but others permanently. We need to know not just why migrants came to the city at particular times, what kinds of people they were, and in what numbers. We must also find out what happened to them in the city: to what extent did they lose their ethnic or other identity in the urban "melting pot", or retain links with their rural places of origin, even if they were distant? Why were new urban identities forged in some places but not in others? South African urban historians have yet to tap the rich British and American literature on questions relating to urban-rural links. A recent article in the *Urban History Yearbook*, to take just one example, considered temporary sojourners, as against permanent newcomers, in the English border town of Ludlow, and assessed the impact these sojourners had on the urban population over time (Wright, 1990). Kerry Ward is working on similar questions involving the village of Mamre, fifty kilometres north of Cape Town, and the migration of its residents to town, sometimes for a season, sometimes for good (Ward, 1990 and in progress).

The movement of people does not constitute the only link between a hinterland and a city or town. Water sometimes had to be obtained for the city from a distance, and the politics of water is a topic which South African historians are only beginning to tackle. The struggle for water rights was almost as crucial to the development of Cape Town as to Los Angeles; the water available on Table Mountain soon proved insufficient, and the municipality

began to look further and further afield for water. Duncan Grant's work on late nineteenth century Cape Town is only in part concerned with the question of the supply of water; more interesting for urban historians is what he says of the conflict over water, which reflected and helped to determine the divisions within Cape Town society, and did much, for instance, to influence the evolution of Cape Town's municipal government (Grant, 1990: 23-24). Cities have increasingly obtained their electricity from a distance, and hardly any work has been done either on the urban politics of electricity in the major cities or on the supply from outside. Jane Carruthers's study of electricity in Cape Town, focusing on the years after 1918, when E.H.Swingler was City Electrical Engineer, is a pioneering contribution, which has not been replicated for other cities, and a model of how to set the story of the supply of electricity within the context of the general development of the city (Carruthers, 1983).

The role of the state

In the late 1980s social history was all the vogue on the leading South African university campuses; institutional history tended to be neglected. Few significant contributions were made on the role of either non-governmental institutions or the government itself. Clearly in the history of any city the role of the state is crucial, and considerable work has been done recently to try to distinguish the often competing roles of the local and central state. How did the local state - the municipal or provincial governments - shape the development of the city? Who comprised the colonial elite, and how and why did the function of that elite change over time? Recent work on Cape Town, which begins the task of analysing the urban oligarchy in the nineteenth century, tries to relate the politics of the city to the interests of local officials in property and land (Warren, 1988; Bickford-Smith, 1988). For other urban centres, and for twentieth century Cape Town, we still know all too little about the changing nature of urban government and the interests of the people who dominated it. Municipal authorities should not be studied on their own, but also in relation to provincial bodies, which had wider interests, as well as to the central or national ones. The city's relationship to the central or national state, indeed, and how that relationship changed over time, must be a central issue in urban history.

Much theoretical work has been done within the Marxist tradition on the question of the relative autonomy of the local state from the central state, and the extent to which it can be said to act in the interests of capital. In the 1970s the emphasis in this work fell on "capital logic", the idea that the needs of capital dictated all else, including what happened in urban areas. More recent work has been more nuanced, breaking with the functionalism and determinism

inherent in a structural approach and recognising the importance of non-class as well as class struggles over the future of the city. In such studies the role of the local state is often highlighted (cf. Wilkinson, 1983).

While the study of the city itself should always remain the main focus of attention, the urban historian will on occasion be led far from the city in the task of exploring the forces that have shaped it. Just to take one example, the massive influx of Africans to the cities during the Second World War, and again in the 1980s with the breakdown and eventually the formal abolition of influx control from July 1986, must be related to economic pressures in the rural areas (cf. e.g. Sapire in Bonner *et. al*, 1989).

The wider context

Urban historians should place cities not only in the history of the region in which they are situated, but also in a national and an international context. To take the Cape Town example again, its history cannot be understood adequately without considering national developments: witness the importance, say, of Union in 1910, which meant that decisions were increasingly taken in Pretoria by officials of the central government, officials who consequently did much to structure the social, physical and economic profile of the city. Such intervention of the central state in shaping South African cities was particularly strong in the apartheid era, as the history of Group Areas legislation will reveal. Such intervention was sometimes indirect: intervention in the rural reserves, as just noted, had much to do with the growth of squatter communities on the outskirts of cities from the 1940s, for example. As with the impact of the local state on the city, the influence of government policy, however direct or indirect, should not be seen, as it often has been, as something merely imposed on urban residents. Much of the recent work done on the Witwatersrand and on Durban stresses the importance of the struggles that took place over urban space, in which ordinary people challenged state policy, and were sometimes able to change it (e.g. Edwards and Eales in Bonner, *et. al*. 1989).

Yet by the end of the 1980s over 90 % of all urban residents lived in areas demarcated for specific racial groups. Through a massive exercise in social engineering, beginning in the 1950s and gaining momentum in the 1960s, the state produced highly segregated urban areas. The abolition of the Group Areas Act in 1991 did not change this fundamental reality, and without some future major redistribution of wealth there was no likelihood that desegregation would proceed in anything but an extremely gradual and piecemeal way.

Nor can the international context be ignored. Some Marxist urban historians claim that changes in the global economy, above all else, determine the way all cities are structured. The assertion that the history of any particular city

must be related to global capitalism is, Henderson concedes, "a methodological prescription at a high level of abstraction", but nevertheless one which he, working within the tradition of Marxist urban studies, has no doubt should be central to urban history, at least for work on cities in the modern period (Drakakis-Smith, 1986: 64). Working within such an approach, some have developed a model of what they have called dependent urbanisation. First elaborated for Latin America, this concept - which sees urbanisation as a product of the relationship between a capitalist periphery and a heartland - has obvious application in South Africa. All South Africa can be seen as such a periphery, or one might analyse, say, the underdevelopment of Grahamstown in the eastern Cape in relation to the development of Port Elizabeth and other centres. Mabin has begun to explore the history of urbanisation from that perspective (Mabin, 1989), but to date others have not followed his lead.

One does not have to work within the Marxist tradition to accept that in the history of any city international economic connections are crucially important. R.S. Neale showed that sectarianism in Liverpool can only be comprehended when set within an Irish context, for Ireland existed in a colonial relationship to England (Neale, 1985: 166-67). And it has been argued that the development of ports and hinterland towns in the American South must be explained in terms of the movement of staples from the hinterland to metropolitan markets (Earle and Hoffman, 1976). No-one has related this to South Africa in any systematic way.

Yet no-one is likely to dispute the fact that the history of Cape Town can only be understood in the context of the maritime links which connected it to other centres in the Atlantic world, or that the history of Durban can only be written with reference to the Indian Ocean trade. One can only understand why large numbers of immigrants came from abroad to settle in those port cities by tracing changes in the world economy. The great mining centres of Kimberley and Johannesburg were linked to the world economy in other ways, for people flocked to them because of the exploitation of diamonds and gold for the world economy, and because of the consequences of that exploitation in terms of the growth of local markets and production. These are fruitful themes for the urban historian to explore.

Cities and the nation

Urban history is not only the history of particular cities; the study of the histories of such cities, even if set within their wider contexts, should not exhaust the energies of urban historians. For the study of those cities should lead on to questions about the development of cities in general within a national framework, and how the process of urbanisation - growth in the proportion of the

population of a country which lives in cities - relates to other processes, such as industrialisation. Urban historians should be concerned, for example, with the relationship between urbanisation so defined and and urban growth, which in many countries has continued after urbanisation has stopped. Has urbanisation promoted economic growth, and if it has, in what ways? How did the development of capitalist industrialisation shape the urbanisation process? Why did urbanisation take different forms at different times and in different parts of the country? What was the influence of the opening of mines on urban development? How did state policy at different periods shape the nature of urban development? The list of such questions is almost endless, and they have rarely, if at all, been addressed in urban historical work in South Africa.

In his seminal chapter on "The growth of towns" in *The Oxford History* (1971), Welsh began to place urban development in a national context. Comparing Afrikaner and African patterns of urbanisation, he pointed out that whereas Afrikaner families migrated to the cities in large numbers in the early decades of this century, it was predominantly single Africans who, until the Second World War, moved to the cities and remained there for relatively short periods. The impact of different patterns of migrancy on cities was explored at greater depth in the book which F.A. van Jaarsveld edited in 1985 under the title *Verstedeling in Suid-Afrika*, but even that volume only scratched the surface of a topic demanding much more attention.

There has also been hardly any work done on the overall role of cities in the context of our national history, and no equivalent for South Africa of Schlesinger's sweeping essay on "The city in American history" (on which cf. Stave, 1977: 17). In reaction to Frederick Jackson Turner's stress on the frontier as the shaping force in American life, many American urban historians have argued that the city was at least as important as the frontier in moulding the American character and defining America's particular historical development. In Canada, there has been considerable debate among historians on the role of "metropolitanism" as the shaping force in that country's history. Careless, in particular, has claimed that it did more than anything else to influence the evolution of a distinctive Canadian identity (e.g. Careless, 1989). In Australia, too, where the proportion of the total population which lives in a few great cities is, and since the early nineteenth century always has been, one of the highest in the world, urbanisation has been accorded a central role in the nation's history (e.g. Berry, 1984). But no-one has yet presented similar arguments for South Africa, or been bold enough to attempt a general, systematic assessment of the role of the city in South African life. The closest is perhaps Swanson's work on the urban roots of apartheid (Swanson, esp. 1968).

Comparisons

The comparative method may raise new questions or reveal what the study of a particular city does not, such as unsuspected variations. It may illuminate the way the same issue may take different forms in different cities, either within the same country, or in different countries. Or processes of urbanisation may be compared. A comparative exercise of a somewhat different kind will investigate an aspect of the history of a particular city, in different places or at different times, or both. One may ask, for example, how patterns of crime varied, from suburb to suburb within a particular city, or in a particular area from one period to another.

Comparisons should always be appropriate ones, and should have a clear purpose in view. All cities are shaped to a considerable degree by their particular geographical and ecological setting, so it is always possible to point to differences between them. But these may be so great as to make comparisons meaningless, if not impossible. Merely to contrast one city with another may result in no more than a description of differences in form and content; such a comparison may lack any significant analytical value (cf. Drakakis-Smith, 1986: 63). Comparisons are best undertaken where there are obvious features in common between the cities being compared, or where there are other reasons for comparison, such as rivalries of one kind or another, as that which has long existed between Sydney and Melbourne for influence in Australia (Davidson, 1986).

Australian urban historians have shown how it is possible not only to make comparisons of analytical value between their cities, but also significant generalisations. Writing about Australian capital cities in the nineteenth century, for example, J.W. McCarty has pointed to similar patterns of suburbanisation: none of the Australian cities developed inner zone ghettos on the North American model (McCarty and Shedvin, 1978: Chapter 2; Buenker, 1989).

South African cities have all been influenced by common processes - evolving national state policy is perhaps the most immediately obvious example - which may provide a basis for comparison. In a major study, now published in the *Archives Yearbook* series, Howard Phillips has been able to show how the Spanish Influenza epidemic of 1918 affected Cape Town, Kimberley, Bloemfontein and the Rand in different ways, in large part because of the particular local circumstances in each town (Phillips, 1984). H.C. Hummel's exploration of four themes in Grahamstown in the First World War - anti-German sentiment, white poverty, black degredation and protest, and the Spanish Influenza epidemic - opens the way for others to compare the Grahamstown experience with that of other urban centres in the war (Hummel, 1990).

That direct comparisons between cities in different countries may be enlightening is shown by Brian Kennedy's study comparing Johannesburg and the mining town of Broken Hill in New South Wales between 1885 and 1925. Like mining towns elsewhere, Johannesburg and Broken Hill were "instant cities", demonstrating extremely rapid growth. In Johannsburg, however, the workforce was from the beginning divided on lines of colour, and the contrasts between wealth and poverty were always greater than in the Australian mining town (Kennedy, 1984: 119). In both cities fear of disease produced anti-alien sentiments among whites, but nothing like Johannesburg's rigid system of racial segregation developed at Broken Hill. Many such studies might be undertaken involving different cities.

Cape Town in the nineteenth century more closely resembled other colonial port cities, such as Melbourne in Victoria (cf. Briggs, 1968: Chapter 7), than the mining towns which developed in the South African interior. John Western, an American social geographer who studied the impact of the Group Areas Act on Cape Town, has pointed to parallels, and differences, between Cape Town and the port city of Tientsin in mainland China (Western, 1985). Concerned with race in nineteenth-century Cape Town, Bickford-Smith has suggested comparisons with the New World port cities of Buenos Aires and New Orleans, for both of which outstanding scholarly studies are available illuminating the role of race (Bickford-Smith, 1988; 1989: 47). For historians of squatter (informal) settlements in South African cities, the history of the favelas on the outskirts of Brazilian cities is likely to be instructive, but no-one has yet attempted a comparative historical study. None of the recent work on the history of squatter movements in South Africa tries to get to grips with the available literature on the favelas in English, let alone that in Portuguese.

Comparative work should not only focus on similarities between South African and overseas urban processes, but also on differences. A survey of our cities in comparative perspective would reveal that, as in Canada, almost all South Africa's urban growth took place in relatively empty economic space. Unlike Britain, industries did not move from the country into the towns. As in Canada, too, our cities acted as units of entrepreneurship, but they were less weak in relation to capital. (cf. Morris, 1989). And in South Africa, again unlike Canada, the central state played a major role in social engineering, keeping the cities as places where the indigenous population ministered to the needs of whites, and where blacks were regarded as but temporary sojourners, without rights. From the 1950s in particular, the central state acted through the Group Areas Act to divide large towns and small into rigid racial compartments. In few other countries has the central state intervened so massively to remould its cities and attempt to check urbanisation, though as already noted, the state did

not always get its way, and ordinary people were not always unsuccessful in their attempts to resist its impositions (cf. e.g. Maylam, 1990(a), 1990(b)).

The expansion of urban historical work in South Africa in the past decade and a half has made possible comparative work which previously would have been impossible. Now that we have studies on the history of many African townships, including Ndabeni in Cape Town, New Brighton in Port Elizabeth, Lamontville in Durban (e.g. Saunders, 1979; Baines, 1989; Torr, 1987) and many on the Reef, it is possible for urban historians to begin exploring the relative importance of, say, the role of the different local states in retarding or facilitating the development of townships, and why controls and resistance took different forms in different parts of the country. Comparative work should also be able to illuminate how and why urban culture varied from place to place. It should reveal, for example, what aspects of the Marabi culture of the Johannesburg slumyards between the wars - so well described by Eddie Koch (in Bozzoli, 1983; Koch, 1983) - found echoes in the working-class areas of Cape Town.

Different approaches

Urban historians should accept that different methods produce different insights, and therefore should always be open to the use of a variety of approaches. This point may be illustrated from work done on crime in Cape Town. Robin Hallett (in Saunders, 1979: Volume 2) drew upon newspaper and court records to tell the story of a number of dramatic violent crimes in early twentieth century Cape Town. He did this primarily to produce "history from below", wishing to hear "ordinary person" speaking. No other type of record known to him opened so large a window into the past of such people, though, as he was well aware, neither criminals themselves nor those who give evidence at criminal trials are necessarily representative of the society at large. Hallett's approach has been criticised by Andrew Bank for its empiricism and subjectivity. Bank used the same records to determine, objectively, what patterns of crime existed (Bank, 1989). Using statistical methods, Bank can show what Hallett did not: the patterns of crime committed by different segments of the population. This work has been carried further by Patricia van der Spuy, who has produced even more detailed work on violent crimes committed by women in nineteenth century Cape Town (Van der Spuy, 1989).

We must remember that the seemingly "objective" sources used by Bank were themselves both limited and biased. Newspapers tend only to print news of sensational crimes, and Bank did not use magistrate's court records to supplement those of the Supreme Court. Not all criminals are caught. For Bank fully to substantiate his generalisations about urban crime in Cape Town, he

would have to compare Cape Town's crime records with those in rural localities. For all its limitations, however, there is no doubt that the work of Bank and Van der Spuy has greatly enhanced our understanding of crime in late nineteenth century Cape Town. Their work adds to, but does not destroy, Hallett's earlier, different contribution. Both subjective and objective approaches can enrich our understanding of any aspect of urban history.

Race, class and gender

Liberal historians tended to highlight race, believing it to have been the most important dividing factor in South African society. For Marxist historians, by contrast, class is central, and some downgraded, or even ignored, racial cleavages altogether. Few, however, focused directly on cities; like E.P. Thompson, in his great classic work on *The making of the English working class*, they used urban examples but did not write urban history (cf. Neale, 1985: 151). No South African study follows, say, John Foster's study of class consciousness in English industrial towns (Foster, 1974). The best of the new South African urban history has been centrally concerned with the inter-relationship of race and class in our society. Van Onselen wrote about both poor whites and poor blacks in early Johannesburg, and how they were separated from each other, as well as inter-class struggles (Van Onselen, 1982).

Bickford-Smith has argued that in the 1880s Cape Town underwent a transition from being a class-based society with ethnic undertones to one based primarily on race, where poor whites were seen to be the deserving poor, and poor blacks were not (Bickford-Smith, 1988). More recently, historians have accorded weight to gender (e.g Van der Spuy, 1989). It is safe to predict that the inter-relationship of race, class and gender will long continue to be a dominant theme in South African urban history. And all urban historians should be sensitive to race, ethnic, class and gender cleavages and relationships, even if the focus of their work lies elsewhere.

None of these relationships can be studied in isolation, to the exclusion of the others. Race has seemed to loom so large in South African history that many historians have privileged it over the others. If it was indeed more important than class and gender, however, that must be proved in particular settings, including cities. Bickford-Smith has asked what substance there was in practice to the "tradition of multi-racialism" which supposedly set Cape Town apart from other South African cities in the early twentieth century. To find the answer, he combed the records to find evidence for racial segregation in the city, especially from the late nineteenth century onwards (Bickford-Smith, 1988, 1989). The evidence produced by Welsh (1971), and in particular the impressions of Maurice Evans, which George Fredrickson used in *White*

Supremacy (1981) to argue that Cape Town was different from other South African cities, cannot be dismissed out of hand. But while the older argument cannot be entirely overturned, Bickford-Smith has produced the most sophisticated argument yet on the question of the relative exceptionalism of Cape Town.

The role of women in all history had been ignored until very recently. This is now being rectified in urban as in other branches of South African history. Julie Wells, for example, has investigated women's anti-pass actions in Potchefstroom (in Bozzoli, 1983), Kathy Eales the question of night passes for African women in Johannesburg in the 1920s (in Bonner, *et. al*, 1989). The role of women in towns is a particular focus, but all urban historians need to take account of gender in their work. Bonner's recent paper on family, crime and political consciousness on the East Rand, which explores the role of gender in shaping urbanisation (Bonner, 1988), is an outstanding example of how this can be done. African women did not move to the Rand and Cape Town in large numbers until the 1940s. Then and later, they played an important part in the creation of the squatter settlements on the outskirts of the built-up areas. The central role they played in the Crossroads settlement outside Cape Town in the late 1970s and early 1980s has received considerable attention (Cole, 1987; Frater, 1989). But there is much still to be done by South African urban historians; we have no study, for any South African city, comparable to those which have, say, traced the spatial geography of prostitution in late eighteenth century New York, or uncovered the extent of infanticide, baby-farming and abortion in late nineteenth century Adelaide, South Australia (Sumerling, 1983).

New issues and questions

Periodisation, central to the historian's task, is often a highly contested issue. For the historical materialist, economic change will always be fundamental in shaping the history of the city, while non-materialists will suggest that other forces are as, if not more, important. To take Cape Town as an example, some of the turning-points in its history are clearly related to economic changes - the discovery of diamonds in the interior of the country at the end of the 1860s brought new prosperity to the city, the main gateway to that interior; the depression of the 1930s is a critical transition period in the city's development. But other influences may have been more significant than economic ones in shaping the history of the city: the impact of disease, for example, which on more than one occasion decimated the population (Phillips, 1984; Van Heyningen, 1989), or the fact that from 1910 Cape Town was brought within the new Union of South Africa, which meant that a crucial role in shaping the modern

city was taken by officials and politicians in Pretoria. It can be argued that 1948 is an even more important date than 1910, for the National Party government which took over in that year seized the initiative in imposing central control over the town, seen above all in the implentation in the city of the Group Areas Act of 1950 (esp. Western, 1981).

While much of the attention of urban historians must fall on the movement of people to cities and the consequent growth of those cities - on change over time - urban historians should also analyse the structure of cities at different points in time: how they function and work as organic entities, to use a metaphor especially dear to some American urbanists.

The Chicago school of Robert E. Park drew explicit analogies between the growth of cities and biological processes, suggesting that large agglomerations of people inevitably divided according to specialisation and function. As critics have rightly pointed out, such an approach tends to suggest that cities come into being naturally, according to laws of nature, and misses the way city-dwellers have acted to influence their world (e.g. Rex and Moore, 1967). Much recent social history has been concerned to explore the role of human agency in larger social processes, to show that ordinary people helped shape those processes. As has already been noted, this trend has been reflected in recent work by South African social historians on aspects of urban history.

To these social historians, highly structuralist neo-Marxist work which virtually eliminates the human factor appears arid and stultifying, and so abstract that it seems to bear little or no relationship to any actual city. A more flexible approach, which stresses class struggle as a motor of history, has been influential in much recent urban history, but most urban historians working in South Africa remain highly empiricist and suspicious of theory. The insights which come from theory are, however, ignored at a cost, for they often open fruitful new avenues for exploration and raise vital new questions, quite apart from providing focus and coherence to work which otherwise might lack direction.

Urban historians should be aware of relevant theoretical issues and seek to test the questions they raise through empirical research. Was influx control - to take an example of an issue explored in the work on Cape Town's history by Barry Kinkead-Weekes (1985; in progress) - a product of concern on the part of whites to prevent domination, or a direct response to the needs of capital? To what extent was urban development shaped by the way in which this country was integrated into the world capitalist system? Did each stage of such integration have a characteristic impact on urban spatial organisation, as Berry has tried to show was the case in Australia? In the second half of the nineteenth century the Australian colonies emerged as dependent capitalist societies, and the triumph of capital in those societies led to significant changes in urban

development, both nationally and within particular cities. Economic change, Berry shows, determined the dynamics of suburbanisation (Berry, 1984). While Marxist scholars have stressed class conflict in the city between capitalists/the bourgeoisie on the one hand and the working classes on the other, non-Marxists have instead pointed to the significance of non-class factors, and have called on urban historians to tease out the specificities of the local articulation of non-class and class factors (cf. Wilkinson, 1983: 11).

All urban historian should constantly be asking new questions of the urban past. There is no end to such questions. In South Africa, the list would have to include the following:

* how can the history of pre-colonial urban settlements, such as the Tlhaping capital of Dithakong near present-day Kuruman, be integrated into an overall history of urbanisation in the region? What common features are exhibited by pre-industrial cities in South Africa, and to what extent do they correspond to those identified by Gideon Sjoberg in his classic work on *The Preindustrial City?* (1960)

* what happened to the core of our cities? How did neighbourhood patterns alter over time? Were the middle-class white suburbs formed primarily because of new methods of transport, or because the bourgeoisie followed overseas models, especially British ones, as Greg Cuthbertson has showed happened in the case of the Cape Town "garden city" suburb of Pinelands (in Saunders, 1979: Volume 1). Much recent work concerned with the everyday experience of people in the city has tended to focus on townships and squatter settlements; suburbs at the other end of the social scale, such as Bishopscourt in Cape Town or Parktown in Johannesburg, have been neglected. We now know much about the history of particular townships and suburbs, but we still lack any general study of patterns of suburbanisation in South Africa of the kind available for the United States (cf. Fishman, 1987). In what different ways did outwardly-expanding urban areas swallow up surrounding rural space? Jane Carruthers has investigated one case of suburban development on an urban-rural fringe; her work on the creation of the new towns of Randburg and Sandton north of Johannesburg (Carruthers, 1980) needs to be followed by, and contrasted with, other case-studies.

* we now know a certain amount about the state's provision of housing for poorer blacks and whites, thanks, say, to the work done on this theme in relation to Johannesburg by Susan Parnell of the University of the Witwatersrand (e.g. Parnell, 1987). Less is known of the role of land specu-

lators and developers, housing-construction companies and real estate agents in shaping the urban environment. The destruction of Sophiatown in the early 1950s and of District Six in the late 1960s and early 1970s have been relatively well documented (e.g. Lodge in Bozzoli, 1983; Van Tonder, 1990; Hart in Jeppie and Soudien, 1990), but the role of private developers in forcing people out of their homes, and the social engineering of town planners, medical officers of health and architects, not to mention city engineers such as Solly Morris of Cape Town, were much less obvious and consequently have been little explored (for one attempt see Pinnock, 1989). Very little work has been done on the fiscal base of South African cities, and how the available financial resources were used to the advantage of some and the disadvantage of other sections of the urban community (for one example, see Maylam, 1988).

* while Gordon Pirie has written numerous articles about segregation and transport in Johannesburg, Cape Town and elsewhere (e.g. Pirie, 1987, 1988, 1989), we do not have any major study of the ways in which railways and roads have broken up communities on the one hand, or made possible the development of industrial areas within cities on the other. What effect did such processes have on the overall urban environment, either to improve the quality of life, or to promote urban pollution?

* what forms of leisure and popular culture developed in our cities? What David Coplan has done for African music, Eddie Koch for the distinctive Marabi culture of Johannesburg between the wars, and Paul la Hausse for the history of the struggle over beer in Durban (Coplan, 1985; Koch in Bozzoli, 1983; La Hausse, 1984) should be replicated for other forms of cultural expression.

As urban historians embark on these and other topics, they will use old as well as new sources. The next chapter considers the question of sources.

Chapter 4

Sources

All historians should aim to draw upon as wide a range of relevant sources as possible. Urban historians use the same range of sources as other historians, though there are individual sources peculiar to cities, such as street directories. Here it is possible only to highlight some of the types of sources available to urban historians in South Africa, and to comment briefly on their potential.

Historians constantly find new types of documentary sources to exploit, and use old ones in new ways. Antonia Malan has recently explored the use of probate inventories - lists of the possessions of deceased persons, drawn up to facilitate the fair division of an estate between heirs - for understanding how houses in eighteenth century Cape Town were laid out, and about their contents (Malan, 1990). She uses this new source imaginatively, for example compiling graphs of the changing number of rooms in houses in the Table Valley in the course of the eighteenth century, information of potential use to the urban historian.

In other countries, urban historians have tapped primary documentary sources as yet unexplored in South Africa. Tax assessment rolls, for example, have provided crucial evidence for the study of urban wealth in, say, late eighteenth century Bristol (Bargent, 1988). The records of property transfers, if available, would yield important data on who owned what, and might enable the historian to trace, for example, the distinction between ownership and occupation in an area such as Cape Town's District Six. How valuable this kind of evidence will be in practice for South African urban historians remains to be demonstrated. Warren has already shown that bank records - and for most South African towns the records of the Standard Bank, housed at the headquarters of that bank in Johannesburg, are the most voluminous and useful (cf. Conradie, 1985) - and the records of wills and estates can shed much light on wealth and investment in Cape Town in the nineteenth century (Warren, 1988). Other records, such as those of hospitals, have only just begun to be used (esp. Burman and Naude, 1991). In England and Australia hospital records have helped urban historians to study, say, family relationships in the city.

Unutilised or underutilised documentary sources are chiefly to be found in archives and other depositories, but also exist in printed materials. *The South African Architect, Engineer and Surveying Journal*, for example, is a journal little

explored by urban historians in this country, yet its pages reveal much about the buildings and infrastructure of our cities not readily available elsewhere. The same is true for many other serial, as well as individual, publications. Who would think to look in the pages of *The Tembuland News* during the First World War for articles on Cape Town? Yet that obscure Transkeian Newspaper printed a regular Cape Town column which is a useful source for the city in that period.

The study of urban history in this country would be promoted were more bibliographical work to be done, listing, say, articles and secondary sources on particular towns. Not one of our towns can boast a first-rate bibliography. A recent bibliography of printed and other secondary sources on Cape Town from 1806 (Saunders and Strauss, 1989) received a dismissive response in the pages of the only journal which caters specifically for urban history in this country (*Contree*, April 1989). This bibliography was produced to meet an expressed need by local researchers, and from local reaction to it there is no doubt of its value. It is now being revised and extended. It was a working document, as the title made clear. That it could have been made more useful, had greater resources been available at the time, is not in dispute. It would be a great pity if such a review were to put off potential bibliographers from producing similar "working bibliographies", to bring together a range of sources on a particular town in cheap and accessible format.

Other potentially valuable documentary sources for South African cities remain little exploited. The voluminous religious records available for Cape Town and other centres, for example, have not been combed for information on, say, in-migration into cities. Peter Clark has shown how much can be learned on that topic for seventeenth century Britain from the church records available at Canterbury (Clark and Slack, 1972). The study of Cape Town history has been handicapped by the fact that the local Anglican records were all transferred to the archives of the Church of the Province at the University of the Witwatersrand in the 1970s; efforts currently underway to obtain copies of at least some of the Cape Town material for researchers in Cape Town itself will make it easier for many important themes in the city's history to be explored by those who cannot visit Johannesburg.

Important sources for almost all our cities, however, lie far away. The historian of nineteenth century East London has to obtain material from the Archives Depot in Cape Town, Cape Town being the capital of the colony in which East London was situated, and the historian of twentieth century Cape Town finds crucial records in the Central Archives Depot in Pretoria because Pretoria became, with Union, the administrative capital of the country. New technology, and the willingness of the Archives Service to move documents from one Depot to another, may help bring sources to the local researcher, but

the problems caused by the scattered nature of the records for urban history will not easily disappear.

It may be noted here that the future study of the social history of our cities - and not only of them, but my concern here is the urban environment - has been irreparably harmed because the Archives Service has insisted on using retired magistrates, unaided by professional historians, to weed records, and they have ordered the destruction of a great amount of material which would, without doubt, have thrown much new light on the urban underclasses in particular. Protests on this issue by the South African Historical Society and others appear to have had no effect.

New sources

More than most other branches of history, urban history has in recent decades moved away from the use of documentary sources alone. In America the "new urban history" of the 1960s and early 1970s was "new" chiefly in its use of quantification. A seminal work of that school used census data to study social and economic mobility in the small town of Newburyport in Massachusetts (Thernstrom, 1964). Leo Schnore's edited collection on *The New Urban History* was sub-titled *Quantitative Explorations by American Historians* (Schnore, 1975). These new urban historians believed that their method was far superior to the traditional, more random use of documentary sources, which they claimed produced at best an impressionistic view of the past.

In South Africa relatively little use has been made of the huge amount of statistical information available on our cities. Peter Buirksi has pioneered the use of the Cape Town Medical Officer of Health's records to plot changing mortality rates in the city over almost a century (Buirksi, 1983); how valuable such work could be was shown by R.S. Neale in his classic article on "Life and Death in Hillgrove, 1870-1914", which analysed patterns of mortality and fertility in a small town in northern New South Wales (Neale, 1985). In South Africa, some of the best statistical work to date has been done on Port Elizabeth, where A. Appel and A.J. Christopher have used statistics to chart changing socio-economic contours and the development of racial segregation over time (e.g. Appel, 1984; Christopher, 1987). Using census data, Charles Simkins has traced the changing forms of African urbanisation in the 1930s and 1940s (Simkins, 1983). And in trying to estimate what the urban population would have been had influx control not existed, Simkins has pioneered the use of counterfactual arguments to make historical points, a technique used in many highly stimulating ways by Robert W. Fogel and other American historians.

South African urban historians able and willing to do statistical work have innumerable avenues to explore. Some might consider trying to follow the example of the Philadelphia Social History Project, which has attempted to put the entire population of that very large American city in the late nineteenth century on computer, using a variety of data bases. For the history of Cape Town, a project begun by the late Clare Laburn to computerise the street directories showed the possibilities (Laburn, 1985-6, 1986). Digby Warren conducted a computer analysis of De Lima's 1848 street directory of Cape Town to compile a socio-economic profile of the different areas of the city (Warren, 1986, ch.I and Appendix A). Cape Town is fortunate in having large numbers of records suitable for computerisation, including, say, for certain periods, street assessment rolls; other centres are less well-off, and, alas, for almost all cities and towns it would seem that the records of the individual census enumerators - so important a source for American urban historians - have been destroyed.

Number crunching in itself may, of course, reveal little; urban historians have to know what questions to ask of the numbers. Here again they can learn from work done elsewhere. Analysing tax returns can reveal, say, how the distribution of wealth in the city changed over time. Crime statistics can tell us what kinds of crimes were committed in different areas of the city, and how patterns of crime altered over the years. Such information can then be correlated with other records to reveal who lived where, and changing patterns of social mobility. The possibilities are virtually limitless.

In the South African case, one of the most sensitive areas in urban history is the plotting of the distribution of ethnic, and more especially racial, residential and occupational patterns over time. Shirley Judges used the Cape Town street directories to chart, street by street, where people who were regarded as white, and those who were not, lived and worked in the 1830s (Judges, 1977). More general work of a similar kind had been done for Cape Town twenty years earlier (Scott, 1955). The plotting of changing racial residential patterns remains a major task for South African urban historians. Computerisation may help say, in the assessment of what happened to individual victims of the Group Areas Act: where they were moved to, and what material losses they suffered. But such work will be immensely complicated by problems inherent in the sources. It is not always clear whether what the sources reveal is really worth knowing. For Cape Town of the 1830s, Judges could assume that people with certain names were "white" or not "white", but much of her work was guess-work. The printed lists of voters by street in the various Cape Town constituencies in the early decades of this century - the only copies of which exist in the South African Library - are undoubtedly an extremely valuable, and to date a neglected, source, but historians who use them will have to be sensitive to the

fact that they may be incomplete, and in some respects unreliable. And the use of racial classifications in later source-material may similarly cause problems, especially in so-called "mixed" areas, and where people "passed for white". In some Cape Town street directories, those regarded as "white" are named, and other people are left out entirely, as if they did not exist.

Oral evidence

Another crucial source for urban history in South Africa is oral evidence. This is not the place to consider the special contribution of oral evidence, above all in providing an entry into the everyday lives of the mass of the people. In recent years oral evidence has become increasingly important for urban historical work in this country. The Western Cape Oral History Project, based at the University of Cape Town, and the Kaplan Centre of Jewish Studies, also at the University of Cape Town, have collected large amounts of oral data on the history of Greater Cape Town, and this is beginning to be exploited (e.g. Keeton, 1987; Nasson, 1988; Nasson in Bonner, et al, 1989; Jeppie, 1990). The major collection of oral material in Johannesburg, held at the African Studies Institute at the University of the Witwatersrand, has agrarian history as its main focus, but includes much of value to the urban historian. Many individual urban historians have collected oral material for their particular projects; one of the most striking examples of the skilful use of oral material for a topic in urban history is the work of Iain Edwards on Cato Manor in Durban (Edwards in Bonner, et al, 1989; Edwards, 1989). A number of oral history projects - such as that of the Killie Campbell Library in Durban - have set out deliberately to interview old people who had especially interesting and important lives. The Western Cape Oral History Project has also tried to interview anyone who could provide information on, say, religion and culture in interwar District Six. Ideally both approaches should be employed, so as to assemble, as comprehensively as possible, a collection of oral material, properly transcribed, indexed and documented, most likely to be of use to future urban historians.

Other disciplines

South African urban historians have been slow to use evidence from other disciplines. The work of geographers and architects is particularly relevant to their concerns. The sub-discipline of historical archaeology, which has only very recently "taken off" in South Africa, under the leadership of Martin Hall of the Department of Archaeology at the University of Cape Town, will undoubtedly enrich the study of urban history. It will not be able to uncover motivation, but it promises to provide new evidence on the lives of those previously "hidden from history" because they left no written records.

Geographers bring to bear on the study of the city a special concern for the changing history of spatial relationships, and the symbolic significance of residential space, along with particular technical skills. Architects and planners are concerned with the history of the built environment (e.g. Japha, 1989). Urban history should draw upon the work of those in related fields who do research on the city, especially those interested in changes in the city over time. While some urban geography is so abstract as to be of little practical use to historians (e.g. McCarthy and Smit, 1984), the work of human or social geographers is often very little different from that of urban historians (e.g. Western, 1984; Beavan and Rogerson, 1986; Mabin, 1989; Pirie, 1989; Rogerson and Hart, 1989). Close co-operation and collaboration between urban historians and such scholars will benefit all involved.

Urban history cannot be left to practitioners of other disciplines, however. Only historians have both a concern with change over time and a sufficiently eclectic methodology to write urban history. Only they are concerned primarily with continuities as well as changes. So they will take from others what they need, and adapt it to their own purposes. To take just one example: members of the Development Studies Department of the Rand Afrikaans University have collected valuable data on racial mixing in Mayfair in Johannesburg (Fick, De Coning and Olivier, 1988). A future historian of Mayfair, or of racial segregation and integration in Johannesburg, will use their data along with material from the archives and elsewhere. But he or she will have a greater sense of how things have changed over time than the non-historians, and will place his or her findings in a broader context. Urban historians should be aware of methods used by those in other disciplines, and should borrow from their work where appropriate. But the approach of urban historians must always be primarily historical (Fourie, 1974: 42-43).

Chapter 5

Recommendations

A centre for the study of urban history in South Africa should be established at one of the leading universities. This would have various functions. It should have on file information on research already completed and on current projects. It should be able to make available bibliographical information on past and present work, and serve as a clearing-house for new projects. It could also issue a South African Urban History Newsletter, which would give news of work in progress, recently completed projects, conferences and other activities.

The survey of work done on urban history in South Africa which was compiled by Gordon Pirie six years ago (Pirie, 1985) should be updated periodically. This could be done in the proposed South African Urban History Newsletter, or in a separate publication. This survey of the state of the sub-field should be extended to include consideration of methodological issues and new topics of research.

The South African Historical Society might be asked to consider the establishment of an urban history group, which might meet at the biennial gatherings of the Society to further the study of the sub-field. Urban historians often do not know what work is being done on other urban centres. Such a meeting of urban historians would bring together people working on common themes - such as the impact of changes in transport - in the histories of different cities and towns. This would facilitate comparative work, and enable urban historians to share new thinking on methods and approaches. Until recently, the number of academics engaged in the study of urban history in this country was probably too small for such a gathering to have been viable. Now, however, there is a "critical mass" of people sufficient for such a meeting. A pooling of knowledge among people working on different centres would greatly stimulate and advance the interests of the sub-field. A number of urban historians have met at the triennial History Workshops organised at the University of the Witwatersrand, the most recent of which was held in February 1990, but those Workshops only appealed to those with an attachment to a particular social history approach to urban history. A more inclusive meeting, bringing together urban historians of different approaches and persuasions, would be invaluable. Who will take the lead?

Chapter 6

A case study: The struggle for District Six

A review of *The Struggle for District Six Past and Present*, ed. Shamil Jeppie and Crain Soudien (Cape Town: Buchu Books, 1990)

The Struggle for District Six Past and Present is not, and was not intended to be, a major contribution to urban history. It is not a monograph or a work of synthesis, let alone what is even more needed, a comparative work. It is a useful collection of papers on a special, relatively small, urban area, one with a "significance far beyond its size" (13). The limitations of the volume which I shall point to below are to a large extent inherent in the state of the sub-field and are to be found widely in the literature, and an assessment of the book will allow me to comment not only on where urban history in this country has got to, but where it should be going.

The book emerged from a conference organised in District Six in July 1988 by the Hands Off District Six committee, which had been formed to protest against the proposal by a leading oil company to put money into the redevelopment of part of the District. It contains some of the papers delivered on that occasion, five of them by academics at the University of Cape Town, three by activists long involved with the District. The volume is designed to serve a general audience as well as an academic one. Its chapters range over the entire history of the District, from its earliest days to the activities of the Hands Off District Six committee itself in the late 1980s, and so almost to the "present" of the title. The chapters include contributions on language and literature, and the volume opens with a set of striking photographs, supported by extracts from oral testimonies. All the chapters are very readable, so that the volume is accessible to the general reading public, and the presentation is attractive.

Given the notoriety of the forced removals from District Six in the late 1960s and 1970s, it will probably surprise some readers that the editors can call their book "the first serious attempt" to "illuminate the historical record of District Six" (13). In the 1970s John Western, a social geographer based in America, wrote a long and somewhat uneven book about the impact of the Group Areas Act in Cape Town, but his main focus was not District Six: *Outcast Cape Town* was mainly concerned with the forced removal of the smaller Coloured com-

munity of Mowbray in the southern suburbs (Western, 1981). The one major scholarly study to have focused on District Six itself is by an anthropologist, contains little history, and remains unpublished.[1] The book under review does take us closer to a coherent picture, but also reveals how far there is to go before one is obtained. The basic research has not yet been done to enable a scholarly general history of District Six to be written, let alone one of, say, the impact of the Group Areas Act on the Cape Peninsula as a whole.[2] What is happening is that, piece by piece, knowledge is being assembled, in what is necessarily a collective enterprise. It is unfortunate, therefore, that some of the scholars who have contributed to this book show themselves to be ignorant of relevant work that has been published by others.[3]

Fully to understand the history of District Six, we have to see it in context. The forced removals from it, which play so important a part in its history, have to be placed within the context of forced removals elsewhere. This is not attempted in this volume, though in their rather slight contributions both the late Richard Rive and the activist lawyer Dullah Omar allude to this point. They cite, in other South African cities, Pageview and South End, as well as Claremont, another example of a Cape Peninsula removal, and Simonstown, where a stone monument in the main street serves to remind the visitor to that naval town of what happened when the Group Areas Act was implemented there.[4] No attempt is made in this book to consider the literature on other forced removals. Western's book is especially valuable because its main focus is on an area which was not a centre of attention when Group Areas removals took place, and one where houses were gentrified rather than bulldozed: the forced removals in Mowbray, as in Newlands and other southern Cape Town suburbs, left few if any physical traces. In District Six, on the other hand, a barren wasteland replaced what Rive, who grew up there, insists was "a ripe, raw and rotten slum" (111),[5] as well as being the most vibrant community in Cape Town.

A general history of Group Areas in the Cape Peninsula will not only have to trace the different patterns of removals from Sea Point to Simonstown, but also to record the as-yet-almost totally unwritten history of the areas to which people were sent, from Hanover Park to Ocean View. It will use the archival records on Group Areas to understand what was in the minds of those who perpetrated such deeds, and will draw upon accounts of what happened lodged in the memories of those who were uprooted. It will set the removals within the context of the histories of the communities affected, and will make clear that removals did not begin in the 1960s. In the case of District Six, the first major forced removal occurred in 1901 (Saunders, 1979), and there were even earlier removals of Africans from nearby Woodstock (e.g. Kinkead-Weekes, 1985). There is no mention in this book of the fact that in 1940, many years before the

National Party government came to power, the Cape Town City Council proposed the elimination of District Six, in the interests of slum clearance and a grandiose town planning scheme.[6]

Some future urban historian, comparing the Cape Town experience with, say, that of Johannesburg, will no doubt draw upon Deon van Tonder's work on the Western Areas Removal Scheme for interesting comparisons. In both cases the City Council proposed a removal scheme which it later opposed when implemented by a National Party government. Barnett gives major weight to the Cape Town City Council in the move to segregated housing in the 1930s and 1940s, while van Tonder shows that the Johannesburg City Council wished to destroy Sharpeville, Martindale and Newclare as part of its post-war reconstruction plans. In both cases, it would seem, the communities would have been destroyed even without a National Party in power.[7]

The first chapter in *Struggle for District Six* sketches the early history of the District. Drawing on the work of Digby Warren, Vivian Bickford-Smith looks back to the "Kanaladorp" - as the District was known in the late 1830s and after - and then outlines its late nineteenth century history. He knows what is so often ignored in writing on the history of cities: that the particular unit of study must be related to the wider entity of which it is a part. In this case, the history of District Six can only be understood within the context of the changing political economy of Cape Town as a whole. Bickford-Smith argues that the fact that the Cape Town municipality was from the late nineteenth century dominated by merchants concerned with trading in the central business district helps explain why the District was so neglected for so long. This relationship between the District and the city of which it was part is a theme which needs much more attention than is paid to it in this volume.

The political agenda

As the District is still, despite recent building, an open wound in Cape Town's side, one could not have expected this volume to be an entirely sober, dispassionate account of its history. The editors do not hide the fact that their agenda is political as well as scholarly, though they see no necessary contradiction between the two. Many of the contributors write with passion. The result, however, is not merely another sentimental tribute, or cry of outrage, for the volume does make a serious attempt to get to grips with aspects of the history of the District. Occasionally, however, the political agenda does get in the way of the scholarly purpose.

The editors find in the history of the District what they hope a future South Africa will look like (7). With other contributors, they claim that the District was a unique part of Cape Town, distinctive because of the extent of its

cosmopolitanism, the strength of the sense of community and identity to be found there, and the absence of racial, ethnic, class or religious antagonisms (e.g. 37, 43, 64, 65, 112, 119). It was, we are told, a vital place, a "melting pot of class, race, and culture" (119), where there was a tradition of "co-operativeness and sharing" (7). It constituted, then, an alternative to the "racially ordered and legislated society" to be found elsewhere in the city and in the country generally (43). That was why the District was destroyed, it is claimed, and why it should now be remembered, as a place of symbolic significance for a new, reconciled South Africa. The District was - as the activists Omar and Richard Dudley, in particular, stress - a seedbed for political opposition to the regime, and they wish it to be remembered for its contribution to "the struggle".

There is truth in all this. No one can dispute the evidence of remarkable social, cultural, political and religious creativity in the District. Part of the purpose behind its destruction was indeed to put an end to the racial cosmopolitanism to be found there. Some of those forced out were sent to the African township of Guguletu (esp. 199), others to the suburb of Rylands, set aside for Indian occupation, the majority to the "Coloured" townships on the Cape Flats. "Verwoerd het alles gesort", said one old man (89), not strictly accurately, but the general point holds.

Yet the stress in this volume on the uniqueness of District Six and its positive characteristics is surely overdrawn. In many respects District Six was not unlike, say, neighbouring Woodstock or the Bo-Kaap on the slopes of Signal Hill. Bill Nasson is right to warn in his chapter, as van Tonder did in writing about Sophiatown (Van Tonder, 1990, e.g. 107), against romanticisation. Nasson emphasises how important it is to take full account of "the living contradictions" revealed by the evidence to understand the full history of the District (49). The fact is that we do not really know the extent of, say, the sense of community, separate from other parts of the city, to be found in District Six, and how it changed over time. No generalisations about the texture of life there can possibly be valid, for it varied depending on who one was and when one is talking about. Many of the general statements in this volume still presuppose a homogeneity among the inhabitants of the District which we know did not exist, though exactly what social and economic strata existed and how they changed over time still needs to be teased out of the available evidence. Was the gang activity of the late 1940s really a form of internal policing, conducted in the interests of the inhabitants, as Don Pinnock has suggested?[8] Or, to take an example from this volume, which picks up on its title, was the District "always ... a place in which struggles have occurred" (13)?

This volume provides evidence of struggles of various kinds. The never-ending struggle of poor people to survive is one; the struggle of the people of the District against outside forces another. The latter included, first and foremost,

the government, which ultimately succeeded in destroying the District. In this volume there is an attempt to lump with the state those who, in more recent years, following the lead of the oil-company, have tried to recreate, in a new form, in what is now known as Zonnebloem and is already partly built over, the District of old. But big business is here much too easily linked to those who destroyed, and those who "connived" at the demise of the District (14-15). And elsewhere in the volume there is plenty of evidence of "non-struggle".

Let us consider some examples. Bickford-Smith reminds us that when the Africans were forced out of the District at gun-point in 1901, the other residents of the District did not protest (42). For a long time, even after the proclamation of District Six as a white area in 1966, protest against Group Areas was muted. This is in part understandable in terms of the political repression of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the fear of police harassment, but, as Deborah Hart notes in her chapter, reprinted from *Urban Geography,* some residents of the District accepted its destruction as a *fait accompli* about which they could do nothing, and saw advantages in moving out as soon as possible. The "ordinary people" of the District were, it is clear, mostly passive and fatalistic in the face of the threat of being ordered out of their homes (11, 154-55, 180). For some, moving from the District to the Cape Flats meant the opportunity to exchange rented property for ownership of their own homes for the first time. Doubtless many did not anticipate that life on the Flats would be as bad as it turned out to be.[9] It must be remembered, too, that the Group Areas Act was applied piecemeal in the Cape Peninsula and by the time District Six came under direct threat, other communities, such as Mowbray and Newlands, had already been destroyed and the idea that Coloured and Indian people should be forced to relocate was no longer novel.

Rive, however, speaks of District Six as the "nucleaus of opposition to Group Areas" (111), and Hart - like Western, with whom she worked in America, a social geographer - says the District offered a "level of protest unmatched in the history of South Africa" (118). When protest did grow, in fact, it came mainly from outsiders, protesting on behalf of the people of District Six: the Black Sash, the Progressive Party and - though it played an ambiguous role - the Cape Town City Council.[10] Only in 1979 did it come to light that the ironically-named Department of Community Development was acting illegally in evicting people before suitable alternative accommodation was available for them. (Could an active Legal Resources Centre or equivalent have won significant delays, one wonders?) By the time the most imaginative protests were made, most of the people of the District had gone. District Six had no Trevor Huddleston, and it was not until the late 1970s that the Catholic priest Basil van Rensburg took up the fight, sending sachets of soil from the District around the world and inspiring the activities of the Friends of District Six. By the time

the more popular and political opposition of the late 1980s took place, most of the District was what Soudien calls a "desolate moonscape" (163). What he does not adequately explain is why it remained like that for so long, and why there was not more opposition, especially in the 1980s when the Cape Technikon began to encroach on it, at a time when there were mass protests in many other parts of the country. The new buildings, like Jewish settlements on the West Bank, established claims which would be very difficult, if not impossible, to overturn.

Sources

One of the major strengths of this book is the use it makes of a variety of sources, from photographs to language. It reveals the potential, not only of visual and oral testimonies for urban history, but also of imaginative literature - in this case particularly the works of Peter Abrahams, Alex la Guma, Richard Rive himself and, now to be added to the list, Reshard Gool[11] - and of language. Kay McCormick's fascinating chapter suggests that the extent of language mixing was greater in District Six than elsewhere in Cape Town, and that more people there used that special patiois known sometimes as "kombuistaal", "Afrikaans en Engels gemix" (93). She provides evidence to support her argument that communal norms existed for using the most appropriate language on particular occasions. As in any urban situation, her chapter reminds us, there are many voices to listen to, many histories to write.

Shamil Jeppie, Nasson's successor as leader of the Western Cape Oral History Project, brilliantly uncovers the symbolic meaning of the New Year (Coon) Carnival, which he sees as "the pre-eminent expression of working-class culture" (72-73, 77). During the Carnival, the working-class for a brief moment occupied public space in central Cape Town and inverted the usual social and moral order. While Jeppie notes that cinema-going was the most popular form of urban working-class recreation in the District, that theme is not explored at any length here, perhaps because both Jeppie and Nasson have written about it elsewhere (Jeppie, 1990; Nasson in Bonner, et al, 1989). The as-important role of the shebeen and the gang, about which Pinnock has written, but which demand further work, are but hinted at. Nor do we learn from this volume about such key questions as who lived in the area, how its inhabitants were housed, what political activity they engaged in at different periods, or how their economic life changed over time. The Afrikanerisation of the District after the Second World war is just one of the many topics which are touched upon (90, 187-88), and which await future research.

The urban historian should be particular sensitive to the importance of space and spatial relationships. Social geographers - Western is a good example

- can teach them much in this regard. This volume is vague as to geography: District Six is by no means always used as the map on page 9 suggests: which pieces were "retrieved" in 1978 and 1983 (157, 136), and exactly what that meant, is not explained. Some chapters seem to include Walmer Estate and part of Woodstock as if they were in the District, others do not. Yet other chapters are not specific to the District at all. Much of what Jeppie says about the Carnival, or McCormick about attitudes to the use of English and Afrikaans and the reasons for switching from one to the other, is not related directly or exclusively to District Six. Nasson's focus is more clearly on the District, but he is less than specific about the period he writes about. There is too much generalising in this volume about the people of the District: future work will have to tease out what van Tonder, writing of Sophiatown and Newclare, speaks of as "the nexus of gender and ethnicity" (Van Tonder, 1990: 202). None of the contributors to the Jeppie-Soudien collection assess the symbolic significance of the District, or analyse its strategic position in the town as a whole. No attempt is made to assess the implications of the enormous economic potential its land held for those who gained the power to redevelop it.[12]

In its very patchiness, this volume serves to show up some of the gaps in our knowledge, and directs attention to areas where research is needed. Eventually, a detailed, scholarly general history of District Six will both synthesise what is known and fill the gaps, and relate the District to the political economy of the town as a whole. Such a history should ideally be as accessible to a general readership as this book is. The writing of such histories, however difficult to achieve, must remain at the top of the agenda for urban historians in this country, for only if that ultimate goal is kept in mind will South African urban history be carried to new heights of scholarship.

Notes

1 R. Ridd, "Position and Identity in a Divided Community: Colour and Religion in the District Six, Walmer Estate, Woodstock Area of Cape Town", unpublished D.Phil. thesis, Oxford University, 1981.

2 Dr Uma Mesthrie of the Group Areas Project, Department of Sociology, University of Cape Town, is currently investigating historical aspects of the impact of Group Areas legislation in the Cape Peninsula.

3 E.g. Hart is ignorant of the important article by L. Le Grange, "Working Class Housing, Cape Town 1890-1947: Segregation and Township Formation" in A. Spiegel, ed. **Africa Seminar Collected Papers**, vol. 5 (Cape Town, 1988). Saunders and Strauss, 1989, though not comprehensive, lists most of the recent work on Cape Town to c. 1987.

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4 See the unpublished work of C. Elias on African removals, and M. Whisson, **The Fairest Cape? An Account of the Coloured People in the District of Simonstown** (Johannesburg, 1972).

5 District Six was notorious as a slum long before 1948, but the threat to it helped make conditions much worse before it was proclaimed "white" in 1966.

6 N. Barnett, "A Chapter in the History of Cape Town's District Six" unpublished paper, 1987. Cf. D. Pinnock in James and Simons, 1989, and, for Johannesburg, Parnell, 1988 (a).

7 Barnett, work in progress; Van Tonder, 1990.

8 D. Pinnock, "From Argie Boys to Skolly Gangsters: the Lumpen Proletariat Challenge of the Street Corner Armies in District Six, 1900-1951" in Saunders, 1979-1988, vol. 3.

9 Cf. D. Pinnock, "Breaking the Web: Economic Consequences of the Destruction of Extended Families by Group Areas Relocations in Cape Town", Carnegie Conference Paper, 1984.

10 This has yet to be explored, but note C.Lakey, "An Analysis of the Response ... of the Cape Town City Council to Group Areas Legislation of the 1950s", B.A.(Hons) essay, History Department, University of Cape Town, 1990.

11 R. Gool, **Cape Town Coolie** (Cape Town, 1990). Gool's novel is set in the District in 1947.

12 Future research will, in exploring the reasons for Group Areas, consider what economic pressures were exerted in the early 1960s for declaring District Six White under the Group Areas Act. Did segregationist pressures from the white working class play a significant role? Cf. R. Johnson, "Colouring in the map of an ideal city", **New Society**, 15 April 1982.

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PART 2
METHODS AND APPROACHES IN SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORY

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Chapter 7

Changing approaches in South African history: Trends in writing in English

For well over a century historians have been trying to describe and analyse the complex South African past. In the late nineteenth century amateur writers - by far the most important of whom was the remarkably prolific George McCall Theal - presented a procolonist picture, often in the form of a relatively uncomplicated chronicle, in which whites were seen as the agents of progressive change and the bearers of civilisation and the blacks were savages, enemies, inferiors. Beginning in the second decade of this century, professional historians began to probe deeper, seeking to move beyond a mere chronicle of past events to raise, and suggest answers to, problems in relation to the development of South African society. Among the concerns of W.M. Macmillan and C.W. de Kiewiet were the history of agricultural capitalism, the role of the "imperial factor" (the British government), the influence of the missionaries on the evolution of racial policy, and the process of proletarianisation, which had, these historians argued, brought impoverishment to the majority of the country's population.

By the early 1960s most of the countries of Africa had become independent and a new nationalist history told of the struggles of the African peoples against colonialism and of the history of the new states. In South Africa, the nationalist movement won no similar victories, but critical historians began to realise how Eurocentric their predecessors, including even Macmillan and De Kiewiet, had been, and began to speak of the need to "decolonise" the country's history. Leonard Thompson left the University of Cape Town at the beginning of the 1960s to take up a post in America, and he remained the key figure in this historical "decolonisation", editing with Monica Wilson the new *Oxford History of South Africa* and promoting the study of aspects of the history of Africans in South Africa, both through his own work and by encouraging postgraduate students to follow his lead. Having emigrated from South Africa decades earlier, Macmillan and de Kiewiet did not undertake new research abroad, but from the 1960s historians at overseas universities - mostly ex-South Africans, but including in their number some foreign scholars attracted to South African history because of the special fascination of the country's past and present -

were able to do research on South Africa while based abroad. In part because they were in much closer touch with broader developments in historiography than their colleagues inside the country, and were distanced from it, these historians made key breakthroughs to a new understanding of the way South Africa had evolved over time.

Though Thompson and the "liberal Africanists" of the 1960s made a vital advance towards a decolonised history that encompassed black as well as white, their history remained largely top-down in its approach and blind to the importance of economic forces (economic history being regarded as something separate from "history proper", and taught in separate departments at the universities). From the early 1970s a new group of revisionists, most of them émigrés from South Africa at British universities - the leading figures initially were perhaps Martin Legassick, Stanley Trapido and Frederick Johnstone - began to formulate a radically different approach to the South African past. The main forum for this new work was the Institute of Commonwealth Studies at the University of London, where from 1969 Shula Marks ran a research seminar at which much of the new revisionist work was first presented.

Before the 1970s the dominant tradition in professional history writing in English had been a liberal and empiricist one; its practitioners liked to believe that the past should be approached without preconceptions, including theory of any kind. The radical revisionists, who pointed out that the liberals worked from certain premises even if they did not acknowledge them, believed theory to be essential in the formulation of historical questions. Drawing on variants of Marxism, they turned to the examination of what they called political economy - the relationship between the political and the economic - and of class relations and class conflict. Their materialist approach opened a new window on the South African past and helped make the decade of the 1970s a "golden age" for the production of historical knowledge of South Africa.

Various influences shaped the new work. Intellectual developments in history in general were clearly important: from the late 1960s neo-Marxism gained ground in universities in western Europe and America, while a "people's history" or "history from below" movement began both to uncover the history of "ordinary people" and to popularise that history outside the universities. The new work was also influenced by developments in South Africa itself, and in particular the growth of extra-parliamentary opposition in the 1970s. The mushrooming of African trade unions stimulated the study of labour history, which now included not only the history of the organised movement but also the origins of "worker consciousness", explored by Charles van Onselen, Ian Phimister and others. In the aftermath of the Soweto uprising of 1976 a number of historians began work on the history of particular townships and on earlier urban struggles, while the growth of massive squatter settlements in the major

metropolitan areas spurred Paul Maylam of the University of Natal in Durban, Philip Bonner of the University of the Witwatersrand and others to research the long history of African migration to towns and the relationship between that history and political action (e.g. Bonner, 1988).

The History Workshop conferences held at the University of the Witwatersrand, the first in 1978 and then at three-yearly intervals, had as their concern not the history of "great men" and elites, and certainly not the old-style political history. Instead, the participants sought to recover the experiences of those who had, until then, slipped through the net of history, and in particular the marginalised and dispossessed, from sharecroppers and peasants to gangsters and childminders. As Belinda Bozzoli, the chief organiser, made clear in the three collections of Workshop essays she edited, the focus on "grassroots history" involved a deliberate attempt to democratise the study of history (Bozzoli, 1979, 1983, 1987). In this "social history" enterprise the collection and use of oral evidence was of central importance. Not only did individual historians go out into the field to interview relevant people, but a number of institutions began to collect oral evidence systematically. The African Studies Institute at the University of the Witwatersrand was the single most important centre for this; in 1979 it began an Oral Documentation Project which employed field-workers to record the lives of black people, many of them in the countryside. One of those lives was briefly described by Malete Nkadimeng and Georgina Relly (1983); it is to be told at much greater length in a major biography by Charles van Onselen, and Tim Keegan has published a volume based on interviews from the Wits Project with four black farmers (Keegan, 1988). Other major oral history collections were assembled by the South African Institute of Race Relations, the Killie Campbell Library in Durban and, some years later, the University of Cape Town, where District Six was initially the special focus of attention of the Western Cape Oral History Project.

In the 1980s contemporary concerns continued to influence the way historians looked at the past. As class and ideological divisions in Afrikaner society grew more prominent, for example, so historians looked for, and found, similar divisions in the past. Stanley Trapido had shown how in Kruger's Transvaal a class of notables had become wealthy on the spoils of office, and the bywoner class became increasingly impoverished (Trapido, 1972, 1978). Historians soon found class to be important almost everywhere they looked. In his study of competition and co-operation in the agricultural district of Middelburg between 1900 and 1930, for example, Rob Morrell pointed to sharp differentiation among the farming community between the relatively wealthy maize and tobacco farmers in the northern areas, who supported Botha, Smuts and the South African Party, and the poor farmers to the south, who came to give their support to the Nationalists (Morrell, 1986). Brian Willan examined

the African petty bourgeoisie in late nineteenth century Kimberley, with its exaggerated adherence to Victorian customs, from tea parties to cricket (Willan, 1982). Jack Lewis charted in depth the growing impoverishment of the mass of people in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century Ciskei (Lewis, 1989).

By the mid 1980s the vast bulk of the new work was no longer being written outside the country, as had been the case for much of the 1970s, but within. This was partly because in the 1980s there were fewer opportunities for Africanists overseas, with universities in Britain, North America and elsewhere no longer promoting African studies. Despite relatively heavy teaching loads, and having to work in a pressure-cooker atmosphere hardly conducive to scholarly contemplation, a relatively small group of historians and social scientists at the English-medium South African universities showed remarkable creativity in their work on their country's past. Seeking a "relevant", a "usable" past in a society in crisis, they made South African historiography among the liveliest anywhere in the world. But as the numbers involved were small, the project remained fragile; too many in the profession continued to indulge themselves by researching along virtually antiquarian lines.

The boom in historical work in the 1970s and early 1980s meant not only that many topics were explored for the first time, but also that new questions - and above all questions relating to the relationship between ideological, religious, political or social processes on the one hand and the changing material base on the other - were asked about almost every aspect of the South African past. Such has been the volume and variety of recent work that no short survey could describe it adequately. All that can be done here is to identify a few leading trends and make some general comments about the strengths and limitations of the new work.

Not new myths for old

Much of the new work has deliberately sought to counter the myths embedded in received versions of the past. In many respects what was for so long taught in the schools has been turned on its head. The myth of a past in which whites were the only dominant actors has been demolished. Drawing on the work of archaeologists and anthropologists, historians have written at length about the precolonial, precapitalist past, for blacks did not, of course, enter South Africa at the same time as, or shortly before, whites, as one of the central myths of our past claimed (cf. Hall, 1987). Black resistance to colonial penetration has been shown to have been sophisticated and not unsuccessful; in most of what is today South Africa the balance of power did not finally tilt towards the whites until the 1870s, and then only as a result of major interventions by

the British army. Afrikaner nationalism was now seen as a product of the early twentieth century, and in large part to have been "invented" by an Afrikaner intelligentsia (e.g. Hofmeyr, 1987). As Leonard Thompson and others showed, Afrikaner nationalism had drawn heavily upon a series of historical myths about the past (Thompson, 1986). Historians now argued that the economic development of the country did not take place alongside, and separate from, the evolution of state policies of racial segregation; instead, economic growth had been underpinned by segregationist policies (chapter 10 below). And in many other ways old ideas were overturned: any list of these which attempted to be comprehensive would be an extremely lengthy one. Analyses began to appear on the ways in which views of the South African past have changed, often fundamentally, over time (Saunders, 1988; Smith, 1988).

By the late 1980s historians were more aware than they had previously been of the way in which what was written about past events was often distorted by the prevailing ideas of the time. Because whites had regarded blacks as inferior, for example, black achievements had often been downplayed or gone unrecognised. Many nineteenth century sources suggest that the Xhosa were beaten relatively easily in battles on the Cape eastern frontier. Recent work suggests that the Xhosa put up fierce and prolonged resistance and were not in fact defeated in battle; rather, it was a combination of white ruthlessness and intrigue, and the virtual collapse of their economic system, which helped lead to their eventual conquest (cf. Peires, 1989).

Such new interpretations are not as likely to be proved wrong as earlier ones. History may be an "argument without end", in the words of the famous Dutch historian Pieter Geyl, but it advances towards greater truth about the past through the application of the techniques of scholarship. Thus the new work is often based on incontrovertible evidence, or at the least on a sophisticated sifting and assessment of conflicting evidence. While much will undoubtedly be reinterpreted in the future, certain myths - those versions of the past advanced for political purposes and inspired by ignorance and prejudice - have been destroyed, at least among historians, for good.

The triumph of social history

The bulk of the new work has explored themes and topics in what is termed social history. By that historians no longer meant "history with the politics left out" but rather the study of the whole of human society, and of broad social processes. So defined, social history can include the histories of neglected oppositional organisations, and in the 1970s much work was done on the history of such bodies as the African National Congress, the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union, and independent churches. Other scholars turned from

the study of elites and institutions to the more difficult task of understanding the way in which culture and consciousness had changed over time.

In the early and mid-1970s neo-Marxists, under the influence of Poulantzas and post-Althusserian structuralism, tended to present an abstract, highly theoretical view of the past, in which crude generalisations were advanced about the transition to capitalism and about the relationship between sectors of capital, between capital and the state at different periods, and between capital and labour. Much of this literature, and indeed the early radical historiography in general, tended to be Rand-centric and primarily concerned with the gold-mining industry; the first substantive monograph from the new perspective, F.R. Johnstone's *Class, Race and Gold* (1976) was a study of class relations in the gold-mining industry in the early twentieth century. By the late 1970s, in reaction to the work of the structuralists, much of which was both arid and bedevilled by definitional problems, a much more empirically based and nuanced social history came to dominate the new historiography. This social history followed the trend of similar work in Britain and North America and stressed the importance of experience, agency, consciousness, and regional and temporal specificities.

The book which received wide recognition as the single greatest contribution to the new social history, Charles van Onselen's two-volume study of the social and economic history of the Witwatersrand (Van Onselen, 1982), focussed on some of the consequences of people interacting in South Africa's largest urban conglomeration. A few years later important research was published on the early history of Kimberley (Turrell, 1987; Worger, 1987). Much of the work of the early 1980s, however, focussed not on the large towns but instead on social relations in smaller centres and in the countryside, whether obscure pockets of the platteland or remote reserves, where fascinating "hidden struggles" were investigated (Beinart and Bundy, 1987).

If the bulk of this work, appropriately, given their numerical superiority, concerned Africans, other communities were not ignored. Maureen Swan demonstrated how the Indians of Natal had been divided significantly on class lines, and how Gandhi's appeal had been a class one (esp. Swan, 1985). And three books appeared, within a few months of each other, from authors of different ideological persuasions, on the neglected history of Coloured people in the western Cape. They focussed on "Coloured" political organisations and the vexed issue of the creation of a Coloured "identity", which was seen both as having been imposed from above by the politically dominant whites and as something accepted by those who saw advantage in being differentiated from Africans (Van der Ross, 1986; Lewis, 1987; Goldin, 1987).

Some of those social historians who had been radical revisionists in the early 1970s were by the early 1980s proudly proclaiming the value of the particular

and the individual. Structuralist critics accused them of retreating from Marxism and of losing sight of the large-scale transformations that gave history significance (Morris, 1987: 13). Van Onselen's work on the Witwatersrand, which so illuminated the role of such subordinate groups in the new metropolis as Zulu washermen and Afrikaner workers in the brickfields, was criticised for leaving untreated the process of class formation in the gold-mining industry, "the central determining force on the Witwatersrand" (James, 1983). But the social historians did not, as the critics sometimes suggested, altogether ignore conceptual history, nor did most of them fail to relate their accounts of "ordinary people's lives" to the "large social forces that are arguably the real key to understanding the past" (Keegan, 1988: p. 168). The paths followed by the social historians into the past may have been narrow and winding, but they were clearly marked and populated by lived experiences; on the structuralists' road of sweeping, oversimple generalisations, individuals were hardly visible and little could be seen but wastelands of abstraction.

Race, class and gender

From a focus on race as the determinant of wealth, status and power, radical historians swung in the early 1970s to an equally exclusive focus on class as the fundamental category of analysis. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, most historians came to accept that both race and class had played key roles in determining the way South Africa had developed, and that the key question was the changing relationship between race and class over time. In his challenge to the prevailing view that Afrikaner nationalism could be understood in ideological and ethnic terms, Dan O'Meara went to the other extreme and explained it predominantly in economic terms. While he and Hermann Giliomee showed that the "economic movement" had played an important part in mobilising Afrikaner "ethnic power" between the two world wars, O'Meara went too far in suggesting that Afrikaner mobilisation could be understood primarily in relation to that movement. It was the relationship between material and ideological processes that had to be understood, and the relative weight to be attached to each.

By the early 1980s historians had also come to realise that neither ethnic nor class consciousness was primordial; both had been, at least in part, consciously forged and it was necessary to examine historically both the way classes had come into being and how ethnic units had been created under particular circumstances. As they grappled with that formidable agenda, historians began to realise that many of the categories they had long been accustomed to use were inappropriate. Patrick Harries showed that the Tsonga of the Delagoa Bay hinterland had not had a common identity before certain missionary-

anthropologists at the beginning of this century gave them a common language and hence an identity as Tsonga-speakers (Harries, 1988). In speaking of "the Tsonga" as if there was such a united group in say the nineteenth century, historians had been guilty of anachronism. Influenced by apartheid ways of thought, historians had read ethnic categories back into the past quite inappropriately. In future work the challenge would be to avoid this "ethnic trap" and not to impute ethnic consciousness and ethnic identity where none had existed.

Only gradually, too, did historians - most of them male - come to realise that gender was as crucial a variable as race and class, and that it was necessary to trace its relationship to those other categories. Work began on women's history - women and migrant labour, for example, the struggle of white women for the vote, the campaigns by African women against having to carry passes, and the economic contributions of women were among the first topics to be researched (Walker, 1990) and historians learnt to be sensitive to gender in all they wrote. The roles of women had not only to be "added" to history, as those of blacks had been "added" from the 1960s, but broader gender issues had to be addressed. How had gender, say, helped legitimate the social order? What had been the consequences of the different ways in which men and women had been treated as objects of state policy? Despite pleas by feminist historians for answers (cf. Bozzoli, 1983), such questions remained largely unanswered.

The debate about the role of race and class intermeshed with that on the relationship between state policy - segregation, then apartheid - and the economic system. Before the 1960s historians had tended to write as if capitalism in South Africa had either not influenced state policy in any way, or had exercised only a benign influence. Segregation was not linked to capitalist development. But the racial revisionists insisted that capitalism had, on the contrary, served to bolster apartheid; segregation had functioned to promote capitalist interests; the two were intimately connected and the country's political structures could only be understood in terms of its economic development. By the mid 1980s considerable detailed work on the nature of the relationship between capital and the state showed beyond doubt that there had been a close relationship historically - dating back, in the case of the mining industry, to the late 1890s (Harries, 1986). But it was also clear that capital had not acted as one monolithic whole, and that the relationship had varied not only by sector but also over time.

In *Capitalism and Apartheid* (1985), one of the most important works in this field, Merle Lipton argued that capitalists had been forced to accept a racial order which they opposed but were powerless to overturn. Various critics rejected that argument, pointing out that Lipton's discussion rested narrowly on the job colour bar (Greenberg, 1987). Evidence was produced to show that

long after 1948 the manufacturing sector failed to criticise what it regarded as "political" aspects of apartheid (Torchia, 1988). On the other hand, outraged by a racism which they saw as having been closely associated with capitalism, many radical historians assumed the impact of capitalism to have been entirely negative; focussing on exploitation and oppression, they ignored any positive consequences of capitalist economic growth.

No end to the past

The work of the past two decades has made a remarkable contribution to our knowledge of South Africa's past. It has brought much new information to light, reduced uncertainties and identified areas of ignorance. Much of its strength has lain in the way it has, while raising new questions, yet paid close attention to empirical detail. The present heavy emphasis on the relationship between race and class may fade in the future. Gender will certainly receive more attention than it has, but there are also many other areas ripe for historical enquiry: family history in general, ecological history, demographic history and economic history narrowly defined are but a few that spring to mind. We are still without a good history of the rise of secondary industry, say, or one on the interconnections between local and world economies. And while part of the achievement of the recent work has been to show us more clearly than before how much remains to be done, there is to date no adequate synthesis of the work of the past two decades, no satisfactory general history incorporating both the older political analysis and the new concerns of political economy and social history has appeared, though Leonard Thompson's recent short work comes closest (Thompson, 1990). The absence of such a synthesis is itself testimony to how rich and sophisticated the literature on so many aspects of the South African past has become, for only someone with an extraordinary capacity to comprehend that literature in all its facets and an ability to reduce it to brief compass, yet give shape to the essence, could possibly produce such a work. Synthesis apart, however, plenty of challenges remain for South African historians of the future, most of whom will be black. Not least of the tasks for the future will be keeping the discipline alive in an era of fundamental transition, when new appeals to historical myth are likely to arise on every side.

Chapter 8

The mfecane

In 1983 Julian Cobbing, who lectures in the History Department at Rhodes University, gave a seminar paper at the University of Cape Town entitled "The Case Against the Mfecane". Since then he has extended his argument in another half dozen papers, the majority of which remain unpublished, but his radical critique of the existing historiography on this topic is summed up in his article "The Mfecane as Alibi" which appeared in the *Journal of African History* in 1988. In part because his critique is so radical, it has attracted great interest, not only among specialists on this period but also among those who teach early South African history and even a wider public. Some historians - most notably John Wright of the University of Natal, who has recently completed a doctorate on Natal in the early nineteenth century - have expressed support for Cobbing's "overall critique" (Wright, 1989) while others have expressed doubts about it. Carolyn Hamilton - a historian by training but now a lecturer in the Wits University Anthropology Department - decided the time had come to get the critics to put their thoughts on paper and to bring them and Cobbing together, to debate the issues and see what measure of agreement there would be, and in what new directions the argument would go. The result was a colloquium held at the University of the Witwatersrand from 6-8 September 1991 on "The 'Mfecane' Aftermath: Towards a New Paradigm".[1] In the opening session Cobbing rehearsed his arguments and insisted that we should "get rid of the 'Mfecane'" once and for all. Then over the following two days some twenty-three papers were discussed in six sessions entitled: The Southern African Slave Trade; Historiography, Method and the Production of Knowledge about the "Mfecane"; The Construction of Shaka; Natal; Eastern Cape; the Highveld. In a final session a number of different perspectives on the proceedings were aired. The papers are to be published in 1992 by Wits University Press.[2]

Historiographical aspects

Cobbing's "Mfecane as Alibi" article, surely one of the most polemical pieces ever to have appeared in the normally staid *Journal of African History*, not only rejected the notion of a Zulu-inspired political explosion occuring c. 1820 which devastated and depopulated Natal/Zululand and much of the

highveld.[0] It also proposed an alternative explanation which he has elaborated in more recent papers. While he has shifted his ground somewhat on matters of detail, his general argument stands. This attributes the violence that occurred to slave-trading and raiding from Delagoa Bay, from Port Natal, from the eastern and from the northern Cape, where the Griqua and other raiders are seen as the advance agents of the world economy. His version of events explicitly seeks to reintegrate "black" and "white" history, and in a sense revives the emphasis which historians of an earlier generation placed on the frontier, in the form of a zone in which raiding occurred.

Cobbing also presents the Mfecane as a myth deliberately created to provide an "alibi" for the slaving and raiding going on, and then at a later stage propagated by historians to justify and legitimate the racially unequal division of the land. Inherent in the macro-myth, as Cobbing outlines it, is the idea that the land into which the Voortrekkers advanced in the 1830s was, quite fortuitously, depopulated by "black on black" violence; and that the new African states born in the "time of troubles" formed the basis for the Bantustans created under apartheid. At the colloquium, as in his papers, Cobbing called for the old paradigm to be abandoned, and to be replaced by a new one.

But the way in which Cobbing has presented the work of previous historians must be criticised. A tradition of writing, from Theal in the late nineteenth century to some recent school history textbooks, portrays Theal's "Zulu wars" as a classic example of black barbarism, and suggests, say, that blacks were solely responsible for depopulating Natal and the interior. What Cobbing does in his "Mfecane as Alibi" article is lump together with Theal such later historians as Macmillan, Omer-Cooper and the so-called liberal Africanists of the 1960s and 1970s, calling them all "Mfecane theorists" and dismissing them as myth-makers whose work served an ideological purpose. This stereotypical "Mfecane myth" is the "old paradigm" he wishes to overturn.

Macmillan's *Bantu, Boer, and Briton* (1929), however, was written to challenge both Theal and the segregationism of Macmillan's own day, and in it the then Professor of History at Wits cited evidence - some of it subsequently lost in the fire which destroyed the papers of the missionary John Philip - on the role of slave-trading, the importance of which Macmillan recognised. The liberal Africanists of the 1960s, the first to begin to research the topic in depth, were concerned to present the Mfecane as a positive development to help give Africans back their history, and they had, for example, argued against depopulation. These historians cannot be accused of setting out to legitimate the racially unequal division of the land.

Cobbing was right, then, to draw attention to the disinformation spread in the 1820s, to the fact that some of the accounts published then and subsequently were highly romanticised, to the myth-making in Theal, whose writings were in

turn heavily plagiarised by others, and to the ideological purposes of apartheid apologists such as F.A. van Jaarsveld. But he was wrong to include with such people those professional historians for whom the "Mfecane" seemed a useful historical construct, but was no alibi. Cobbing's central ideas, moreover, are to be found in essence in work done in recent decades by members of the Cape Town-based Unity movement, work which professional historians either ignored or dismissed because it was written by amateurs, was published obscurely, and was often presented in crudely polemical terms (Jaffe, 1952; Taylor, 1952; Jaffe, 1983). While Hosea Jaffe's critique failed to generate any public discussion, Cobbing's aroused great interest when presented at universities round the country, and the holding of the colloquium was itself testimony to that interest. There is no doubt that his work has brought new excitement to the study of early nineteenth century South African history. It has taken the study of that history, and by extension that of the late eighteenth as well, in exciting new directions.

Methodological issues

A number of participants at the colloquium, however, expressed concern about the methodology used by Cobbing and the group of Rhodes or ex-Rhodes students who share his approach and commitment to undermining the Mfecane. They tend to dismiss much contemporary and later work as so tainted and ideologically loaded as to be worthless. They also overstate their case, making allegations they cannot substantiate, and mine sources to find evidence to help their argument, while ignoring counter-evidence.[3] Cobbing had drawn attention to his case by setting it out in stark terms. The time had come, it was suggested at the colloquium, to try to put polemics aside - and they did not all come from the "Cobbingites", for the paper presented in absentia by J.B. Peires was also couched in polemical vein - and to assess the evidence as critically as the tools of the historian's craft make possible. Historians should approach the issues at stake with open minds and scrupulous methodologies.

Little detailed discussion of the nature of the evidence proved possible at the colloquium. Few participants were experts on more than one region, and where the discussion did get into detail, usually only one or two people knew the sources sufficiently well to be able to understand the arguments. Cobbing remained adamant that evidence will be found to support his arguments: give us twenty or thirty years, he said, and we will show you we were right. He seemed not to take account of the fact that the evidence for the early nineteenth century, and especially for what was happening at that time in the far interior, will always be limited. It is unlikely that any significant new evidence, either from archival sources (say the Portuguese records in Lisbon) or newly collected oral tradi-

tions, will come to light concerning what happened at that time and why. Archaeological evidence may possibly provide more evidence about drought or the spread of maize, but will never be able to tell us, say, the extent of slave raiding in a particular locality in the years before 1824.

A number of participants pointed to the need for careful and critical examination of all the available evidence, and especially the documentary sources, whether settler or African. Both Peires and Hamilton criticised Cobbing for dismissing or disregarding African sources, on the grounds that they are distorted and worthless. In his paper to the colloquium Alan Webster seemed to reject the account of the Mfengu by Ayliff and Whiteside as valueless, and in discussion he was criticised for too easily dismissing Henry Somerset as a liar. Somerset's writing, Hamilton reminded us, had to be analysed carefully to see whether it did or did not contain anything of value. As Eldredge pointed out in her paper, Cobbing was ready to reject sources as biased, yet to make use of them when it suited his argument.

Will firm evidence be found for a major slave trade at Delagoa Bay before 1822? To date Cobbing can only provide circumstantial and speculative evidence, which many think still insufficient to outweigh the counter-indications. Can it be shown that aggression from the Cape colony was a major cause of violence in the interior? The British incursions beyond the Cape border in 1828 and 1835, to which both Cobbing and Webster attach so much importance, clearly cannot, on chronological grounds alone, help explain violence before 1828. The extent to which earlier settler and British army activity on that frontier helped produce upheavals far in the interior remains to be shown.

Towards a consensus

A brief report on the colloquium in the *Weekly Mail* (13 September 1991) suggested that it had indeed done what Cobbing had asked it to do: laid the "Mfecane" to rest. But what does that mean? There is general acceptance of the need to get rid of the idea of one large event - call it "time of troubles" if you will - which involved a lot of violence as well as state-formation and had a single origin in the rise of the Zulu state. Not all the violence of the 1820s was inspired by the Zulu, and white-inspired violence was more important than the literature of the 1960s and 1970s suggested. There is little doubt, moreover, that the labour needs of the expanding Cape colony have been underplayed, even if Chris Muller did devote considerable attention to the influx of "Mantatees" and their use as labourers in his neglected *Die Oorsprong van die Groot Trek* (1974). John Wright's recent work confirms Cobbing's view that the Zulu state was considerably weaker and smaller than has been thought.

On the other hand, many of the papers which investigated in detail particular aspects of Cobbing's argument showed him to have been wrong: Guy Hartley argued convincingly that the missionary Robert Moffat was not a slave-raider; as Peires pointed out, the seizure of captives was not the purpose of the British raid into the Transkei in 1828, but a by-product of it; and so on. Cobbing now seems to concede that internal change did play a part in the upheaval of the early nineteenth century, but he has not abandoned the view that the forces representing the world economy were mainly responsible for the greatly heightened violence of the 1820s, and that the African states which emerged in this period, including the Zulu one, were reactive and defensive in purpose, even if, say, the Zulu participated in the slave trade themselves, as he suggests.

While rejecting ecological determinism, some wish to bring back the role of climatic change, and especially the major drought said to have occurred early in the nineteenth century. Others claim that Cobbing has failed to acknowledge the fact that significant state formation began back in the 1760s and 1770s. To those who want to emphasise the longer-term processes of change, Cobbing can reply that he has been concerned to explain something significantly different that happened in the second and third decades of the nineteenth century, the period of greatly increased violence, of major disruption of African societies, of migrations over very long distances. In his paper entitled "Rethinking the Roots of Violence" Cobbing does speak of the "era of 'the Mfecane'... from the 1790s to the 1840s", but his major arguments concern events in a narrower timeframe. Where state formation is concerned, there are clearly longer-term processes at work, and the external influences on which he focuses his attention have to be seen as working on societies which were already undergoing processes of change.

What we are left with is a more complex picture than before, and a new sense of how incomplete it is, because of the difficulties of the evidence. We may have to accept that we will never know anything very definite about what happened in the interior in the "time of troubles", or the causes of those "troubles". It remains at least possible that they were caused by a combination of many different factors: in part an increased slave trade, but also raiding for cattle; in part ecological change; in part various internal developments. Those who want simple truths will have to learn to live with the complexities. That does not mean that no new synthesis is possible. One may be found in the fourth edition of T.R.H. Davenport's *South Africa A Modern History* (1991): taking account of Cobbing's work, though not agreeing with all of it, Davenport presents a brief overview of the topic in the light of the new research (12-18).

If the term "Mfecane" is inextricably bound up with the idea of a Zulu-inspired "black on black" explosion, then perhaps we should abandon it, even if

no-one has come up with another term for the "time of troubles" which Cobbing's thesis seeks to explain. The colloquium did not get to grips with the political implications of the "Mfecane Aftermath Debate". That there are contemporary resonances is clear from Cobbing's own work, which is replete with phrases such as "black on black violence" and "destabilisation". Cutting Shaka and the Zulu state down to size has obvious implications for Mangosutho Buthelezi and Inkatha. And as the 1820s were being discussed at Wits, a new wave of violence erupted on the Rand. The old idea of a Zulu-inspired Mfecane has lent support to the idea that the Zulu are somehow inherently militaristic and violent. In some of what is written about the current violence there is the suggestion, which the old view of the Mfecane encouraged, that blacks are inherently violent and that internecine conflict among blacks is somehow part of the natural order of things. On the other hand, Cobbing's interpretation - that the causes of the violence were mainly, if not entirely external - also has resonances in the present, for it has an obvious appeal for ideologues in the nationalist movement. Historians will need to be sensitive to the links between past and present as, spurred on by Cobbing's work, they take up with new enthusiasm the task of reinterpreting the major processes of change which occurred almost two centuries ago.

Notes

1 I thank John Wright for his comments on a draft of this paper, and Hosea Jaffe for confirming that he was "V.E. Satir", an anagram of "veritas".

2 Since this paper was written, John Omer-Cooper has published "The Mfecane Defended" in **Southern African Review of Books**, July/October 1991, and the papers presented to the conference by E. Eldredge and C.Hamilton have appeared in the **Journal of African History**.

3 For example, Gewald's paper on "Untapped Sources: Slave Exports from Southern and Central Namibia up to the Mid-Nineteenth Century" ignored the work of Lau on the same area and period.

Chapter 9

The origins of the South African war

As historians have approached the origins of the South African war with very different ideological positions and methodologies, it is not surprising that they have to come to different conclusions about those origins. But while very diverse explanations have been, and continue to be, advanced, some common ground has been found. It should not be expected that there will ever be general agreement about the causes of the war, but with most of the papers from the time now known to historians new revelations are not likely and instead the continuing debate concerns such matters as the relative importance of political and economic developments and of particular events and longer-term processes.

Historians writing in Afrikaans have had much to say about the war itself, but have not made major contributions to the debate on its origins. G.D. Scholtz published a book on the causes in 1947, but Afrikaner historians have probably left the topic to others because they saw Britain as the aggressor and cause of the war, and accepted that the reasons for British action lay mainly in sources in Britain itself.

To over-simplify, one can say that two basic kinds of explanation have been put forward to explain the outbreak of war in 1899. The first emphasises "British supremacy". J.S. Marais, who taught at English-medium universities and wrote in English, was the first to make a comprehensive study of the British official records in the Public Record Office on the coming of war (1961). He, Ronald Robinson and Jack Gallagher (1961) and Godfrey Le May (1965) all studied the making of British policy, and saw "British supremacy" as the basic cause of the war. Le May did give one of his chapters the title "Milner's war" because Sir Alfred Milner, Governor of the Cape and High Commissioner, had persuaded Joseph Chamberlain that if the Transvaal continued to grow wealthy and more powerful, the South African Republic would become a real threat to British interests. Milner, therefore, in Le May's eyes, had been responsible for the war. These historians all accepted that the exploitation of the gold of the Witwatersrand upset power relations in the region and led the British government to fear a threat to British supremacy, but they emphasised the threat rather than gold. More recently, Iain Smith has revived the idea that the origins of the war lie not with the discovery of gold but back in the 1870s, with the

assertion of the British imperial factor which began then, an assertion which, he claims, culminated in the war of 1899 (Smith, 1988).

Thucydides's famous explanation for the Peloponnesian war - that it was made inevitable by the growth of the Athenian power and the fear this caused in Sparta (quoted Smith, 1988) - does not go far enough. We need to know why Britain became so concerned with the growth of Kruger's power that it took steps that led to war, and why both sides decided that they could achieve more by going to war than by remaining at peace. In analysing this, we cannot ignore the fact that decisions were taken on the basis of inadequate information and with expectations which turned out to be unjustified. The British expected a very quick war; Schalk Burger called it 'a war of miscalculation' on both sides (cf. Blainey, 1973: 46-7 and cf. 159; Howard, 1983: 22).

In the historiographical tradition I am discussing, one can point to major advances in understanding. It became accepted that the Uitlander franchise issue was not itself the cause of war, but a pretext. Marais established that though that issue had been central to the diplomatic wrangles before the war, it had not been, for Milner, the real issue at stake; as President Kruger made concessions, so Milner moved the goalposts until Kruger himself realised that the High Commissioner was determined to oust him. So the war was not "a struggle for justice, a war to protect British subjects who were denied elementary rights by a backward and stubborn, even tyrannous regime" (Caldwell, 1965: ix). Detailed research also revealed that the war was not caused by a conspiracy among mine magnates, as J.A.Hobson (1900) had argued at the time. For example, the biography of the belligerent Percy FitzPatrick by Andrew Duminy and Bill Guest (1987) showed him to have been essentially a maverick. Nor was war the result of jingoistic fervour whipped up in Britain; public opinion, it was demonstrated, trailed after policy, and did not determine it. Nor could the machinations of a kept press be held responsible for the war (Porter, 1980). Le May's view of "Milner's war" did not stand up either; as Milner had not been able to determine policy on his own, he was no more solely responsible for the war than Frere had been for the Anglo-Zulu war two decades earlier (cf Webb, 1979).

Revisionism

A second type of answer was offered in the early 1970s by revisionists who revived, in new guises, an economic explanation - which had its origins before Hobson (1900) in the immediate aftermath of the Jameson Raid (Smith, 1988). These revisionists sought to move the debate away from the role of individuals, and what had motivated them, and to lay stress instead on the structural context in which they operated, a context into which the particular set of events leading

to war had, they said, to be fitted and which gave those events meaning. They pointed out that the liberal historians had focused on the largely official documents, and the explanations for events offered in those documents by the participants themselves. The revisionists shifted the focus from Milner to "Milnerism" and to the development of late nineteenth century capitalism, which they saw, ultimately, as the cause of a war fought to promote the development of a capitalist state in the Transvaal, one which would meet the demands of the mining industry.

Many of the specific arguments advanced by the revisionists have, however, been challenged successfully. Bransky (1974) attempted to revive Hobson's idea that the supply of African labour had lain at the centre of British concern to replace the Kruger government with an administration more in the interests of the mining industry. But Patrick Harries pointed out that the Kruger government had made major changes in the mineowners' favour after the Jameson Raid, so that "mining capitalists had little reason to intrigue with British imperialists in [bringing about?] a destructive war" (Harries, 1986: 45). The idea that Britain was chiefly concerned with its economic interests in South Africa, whether gold specifically or more generally trade and investment, also did not find favour. No convincing evidence was supplied either to show that Britain went to war to protect its commercial interests in southern Africa (cf. Porter, 1990: 48) or that the supply of gold, and concern that that supply should not be disrupted, was the crucial reason why Britain wished to get rid of Kruger. Gold certainly acquired a new international status in the late 1890s, but attempts to link that to the actual decisions taken by the British politicians which led to war were not successful. The relevant archival material did not reveal economic pressures, whether relating to gold or of any other kind, playing a major role in determining the actions of the key politicians, and the confidential records of the Bank of England showed that that institution had not in fact been much concerned about the supply of gold (Van Helten, 1982; Smith, 1988).

Lessons

Certain lessons of a methodological nature emerge from this brief survey of the two main approaches to the origins of the war, and how they have fared in the ongoing debate. Clearly, in studying the causes of this or any other war, historians must bring the broadest possible perspectives to bear, looking, say, at the causes of other wars for insights (cf. Blainey, 1973; Taylor, 1979; Howard, 1983) and taking into account the long series of events leading ultimately to war, as well as the precipitants. The preconditions, which need not have led to war, must be separated from the causes, those events which led directly to war.

It is obvious that the causes of this war must be situated in the history of British policy in South Africa in general, and in the context of the "scramble for southern Africa" in particular, as Robinson and Gallagher tried to do in their classic *Africa and the Victorians* (1961). The war must obviously be related to economic change both in South Africa and in Britain itself. Into this structural context must be woven the specific series of events and individual actions that led to war. Context and cause are not the same thing.

Any convincing explanation must be a comprehensive one. Grundlingh (1986) has rightly called for a "total interpretation of the complex events and circumstances" which led to the conflict. Such an explanation must also be a plural, multi-factor one. As Bernard Brodie has said: "Any theory of the causes of war in general or any war in particular that is not inherently eclectic and comprehensive ... is bound for that very reason to be wrong" (quoted Howard, 1983). De Kiewiet wrote fifty years ago: "The anti-Boer, the anti-imperialist, and the anti-capitalist interpretations of the years before the Boer War all do insufficient justice to the complexity of events ... The picture of the capitalists as men with gold in their hands, brass in their tongues, contempt in their faces, and treachery in their hearts is as untrue as the picture of an Empire robbing a petty State of its independence out of envy for its wealth, or the picture of an ignorant and perverse old man leading his State into destruction rather than yield to a modern age" (De Kiewiet, 1941: 138).

How to relate structure and process, how to rank them and establish a hierarchy of causes? When Grundlingh speaks of the need to place "events on the surface" within the context of the underlying structural capitalist system (Grundlingh, 1986: 199) he seems to suggest that those events are less important than the context, yet he himself devotes most attention to those events in his chapter on this topic. It is not enough merely to say that we need to take into account different types of explanations; those explanations must be ranked in order of importance, through close attention to all the available evidence and through historians bringing to bear all the skill and imagination they can muster in the exercise of their craft. While significant progress has, as we have seen, been made in the task of establishing a hierarchy of causes, that task will never be complete, for in the nature of things there can never be a totally definitive explanation of the causes of any war.[1]

Note

1 Since this essay was first written, two key articles have been published: Smith, 1990, and Porter, 1990

Chapter 10

The capitalism/apartheid debate

In the 1970s and 1980s two major debates invigorated South African historiography. One concerned the relative importance of race and class (cf. e.g. Posel, 1983; Saunders, 1988), the other the relationship between white supremacy - especially in its segregation and apartheid phases - and economic growth or capitalist development. Many liberals assumed that segregationist and apartheid policies were economically irrational, and that there was a fundamental incompatability between them, for racial segregation necessarily interfered with the operation of free market principles. But radical historians, who denied that relationship, were not always right in what they claimed liberal historians believed. A survey of what historians have said about the relationship over time will reveal a diversity of views, and will point to an increasing awareness that the relationship was not a simple one.

For South Africa's early historians - and at least until the 1920s South African historical writing was dominated by the giant figure of the amateur historian George McCall Theal, whose *History of South Africa* appeared in eleven volumes between 1887 and 1919, the year of his death - the establishment of white supremacy was natural and did not require explanation. In the 1920s, however, a number of professional historians emerged who began to ask why South African history had taken the course it had. William Miller Macmillan, Professor of History at the University of the Witwatersrand from 1917 to 1932, rejected Theal's pro-colonist standpoint, and his unquestioning attitude towards the establishment of white supremacy. Macmillan instead asserted the importance of economics in the country's history; for him the main theme in the country's history of the past century had been the growth of a single economy. The segregationist measures which Hertzog proposed in the 1920s could not possibly be just, for economic growth had promoted, and continued to promote, integration. Territorial separation might have been possible a century earlier, Macmillan allowed, but economic integration had gone so far that what Hertzog proposed must mean *baasskap,* crude, repressive white domination.

Macmillan was the first to point to an apparent contradiction between the integration being promoted by the development of one economy, and the segregationist measures of the government; economic integration, he argued,

was incompatible with policies designed to keep people apart. Yet the theme of economic integration was not one which he investigated at any length, nor did he explain how increasing economic integration had accompanied the development of racial policies which aimed to prevent such integration. He only considered the roots of racism in passing in his *Agrarian Problem* (1919), *Cape Colour Question* (1927) and *Complex South Africa* (1930), suggesting that in the tradition, character and culture of the trekboer, the semi-nomadic frontiersman of the eighteenth century, was to be found the essential explanation for the racist policies being implemented in his own day.

It was Eric Walker, Professor of History at the University of Cape Town in the 1920s and early 1930s, who took up Macmillan's idea and elaborated the theme. He knew that Frederick Jackson Turner had in his famous lecture explained the course of American development in terms of the influence of the American frontier. In a lecture he delivered at Oxford in 1930, Walker elaborated on Macmillan's idea that the origins of twentieth century racism, which he assumed explained the segregationist policies then being implemented, were to be found in the character of the early Afrikaner on the eighteenth century Cape frontier. By Walker's account, it was on the frontier that the trekboers had come to identify themselves as whites, superior to a black enemy. The strong racial identity and prejudice then forged had been carried into the interior by the Voortrekkers in the 1830s and then been enshrined in the constitutions of the Orange Free State and the South African Republic, which proclaimed no equality in church or state between white and black. That the British in Natal were as racist as the trekkers was something most English-speaking liberals tended to ignore; there was anti-Afrikanerism in their explanation of why things had gone wrong. By the twentieth century, Walker suggested, the racist ideas and prejudices forged in the eighteenth century had come to dominate the Union founded in 1910. He saw them as challenging the Cape's non-racial tradition as he wrote in 1930. Walker and his fellow liberals believed that the frontier ideas which lay behind the segregationist policies buttressing white supremacy were out of place in the modern world. There was, they implied, a contradiction between the old racism and the new forces of change, including the new economic growth. Segregationist policies, designed to preserve white supremacy in all fields of life, were hangovers from a past age, and were to be explained, at the level of ideas, as the product of irrational white fears originating on a distant frontier, though now reproduced in the towns to which the new trekkers - the poor Afrikaners - had moved in recent decades. In Walker's view these essentially old fears were leading the new trekkers to erect boundaries against black advancement.

The idea of a contradiction between an old racism and new forces of change was taken over and carried further by C.W. de Kiewiet, Macmillan's most

brilliant student. Segregation, wrote De Kiewiet in his *History of South Africa: Social and Economic* (1941), had been tried since the days of van Riebeeck, founder of white settlement in the 1650s, and had never worked, for the forces bringing people together had always been stronger than the attempts to keep them apart. De Kiewiet followed Macmillan in believing that the history of South Africa had been one of growing interaction between people, and incorporation into one economic system. De Kiewiet was probably influenced by the argument advanced by his friend Herbert Frankel in the *South African Journal of Economics* in 1927, an argument much used by those who challenged slavery in the early nineteenth century: cheap labour was inefficient labour. For this reason, Frankel argued, segregationist devices to keep African labour cheap did not in fact promote economic growth. By the time De Kiewiet wrote his *History* there was another reason why, in his view, segregation could not work: the growth of secondary industry.

Before the 1930s, the economy was almost entirely based on agriculture and, from the late nineteenth century, mining - the manufacturing sector was minute. But after 1933, having left the gold standard and, in effect, devalued its currency, South Africa quickly pulled itself out of depression, and manufacturing industry for the first time began to grow rapidly. Liberals took heart from this: politically there seemed, after the implementation of Hertzog's segregationist measures in 1936, little hope of their achieving their goals, but it now seemed the economy could gradually achieve those goals for them. The growth of manufacturing industry would require more and more skilled labour. Given the small size of the white community, more and more blacks would have to be trained for such jobs. Migrancy would not be possible if skills had to be learned, and so blacks would have to be allowed to settle in the towns. So industrialisation and permanent African urbanisation seemed to go together, and permanent urban residents would, it was assumed, have to be given educational opportunities and welfare benefits, possibly even political rights. Colour bars, customary and statutory, would necessarily disappear, higher wages would have to be paid, and not only to those blacks who got skilled jobs, for the new manufacturing would need an ever-expanding domestic market, and, to make it possible for the mass of blacks to consume as well as be producers, they would have to be paid a decent wage. So it seemed that racial discrimination affecting jobs, education and access to the cities would disappear, and that South Africa would eventually, as a result of the operation of economic forces, be freed from racism.

This was far from being - as some later critics were to imply - a major argument in De Kiewiet's *History*, and it was essentially an *a priori* one, for secondary industry was new, and the evidence was not yet available on what the relationship between it and the state's racial policies would be. When De

Kiewiet suggested the two were in conflict, he was not making an historical point relating to what had happened in the past, but a political one, against the segregationism then being introduced, and a predictive one. Because of his opposition to segregation in his own day, he did not stress that in the early decades of the century the implementation of segregationist measures had in fact accompanied early industrial growth, though he himself provided evidence that that had been the case in his *History*. Such evidence was also to be found in Frankel's book on capital investment in Africa, published in 1938, and in a book published soon after De Kiewiet's *History* by another economist, Sheila van der Horst. Both Frankel and van der Horst assumed, along with other liberals, that, whatever had been the case in the past - and they recognised that policies to provide and control a regimented labour-force had been at the centre of the development of the mines and the commercialisation of agriculture - in the future there would be a growing incompatibility between industrial growth and the racial policies that underpinned white supremacy.

In the early 1940s, in the interests of economic growth during a time of war, various aspects of segregation were relaxed: the job colour bar, the pass laws and restrictions on industrial action by Africans. Liberals could hope that their predictions were beginning to come true. But by the end of the war the old measures had been re-imposed, along with new ones, and then in the decades after the election of the National Party government in 1948 apartheid unfolded, extending racial discrimination into almost every area of life. Apartheid was in part a response to increased black urbanisation during the war, a device to control the effects of industrialisation and to prevent the breaking down of racial barriers. But economic growth did not decline: there was a major crisis of confidence following the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, but then South Africa entered a new period of boom in the middle and late 1960s, when the growth rate was said to be second only to that of Japan, and manufacturing grew apace.

Yet liberals did not change their view that in the long run economic growth would destroy apartheid. As it became clear in the 1950s that there was no hope of removing the Nationalists at the polls, that view became, if anything, stronger. The very boom of the 1960s encouraged some liberals to elaborate the old argument about the incompatibility of economic growth and segregation/apartheid, and to predict far-reaching changes as a result of the development of the economy. In 1964 Michael O'Dowd of the Anglo American Corporation advanced what some dubbed the Oppenheimer thesis: that the new economic growth would lead by the 1980s to the full dismantling of apartheid, which would usher in an era of mass consumption and a democratic welfare state on the British model. What had happened in England in the nineteenth century - the gradual extension of the franchise following industrialisation - would occur in South Africa (O'Dowd, 1974). Liberal economists mostly accepted that the

colour-blind market place would undermine apartheid. Ralph Horwitz, for example, predicted that conflict would grow between the polity - the state and its racial policies - and the economy, leading eventually to an explosion (Horwitz, 1967).

Liberal historians of the 1940s, 1950s and early 1960s wrote almost exclusively on political-constitutional matters, and gave no attention to the historical relationship between economic growth and the development of the racial order. They left any consideration of economics and economic history to those economists who taught those subjects at the South African universities, many of whom had little or no historical training. Macmillan, who might have tackled economic history, had left the country for good in 1932 and he wrote nothing original about its history thereafter. De Kiewiet was by 1932 settled in Iowa, and wrote his *History* there. When liberal history revived, after a long decline, in the 1960s, it was a revival that had as its central concern the recovery of the history of African societies, along the lines of what was being done in tropical Africa. Most of those who contributed to *The Oxford History of South Africa*, written in the mid to late 1960s, still assumed that apartheid was an ideology at war with economics, and was chiefly the product of irrational, archaic ideological and political factors - race prejudice, Calvinism, Afrikaner nationalism were all part of the explanation - not economic interests.

The hints of another kind of explanation to be found in the work of Frankel and van der Horst were ignored, as was the argument of the sociologist Blumer in the mid 1960s that industrialisation - and the argument was not made specifically for South Africa - accommodated itself to the racial system it found. Economic development, in Blumer's view, was neutral, neither undermining nor shoring up any particular racial system. This argument suggested that any diminution of white control in South Africa was likely to come about for non-economic reasons, and also that capitalists, who had found themselves operating in a racial order, and had adapted to it, would happily work within some other system; their main concern was stability. But historians of the 1960s did not begin to ask whether Blumer's argument was correct historically in the South African case.

The revisionists

In the late 1960s not only did South Africa enjoy massive economic growth but segregationist policies were implemented more rigidly and thoroughly than ever in every aspect, from petty apartheid through to the grand apartheid of the Bantustans and the mass forced removals. In their classic of radical scholarship, *Class and Colour in South Africa* (1969), Jack and Ray Simons suggested a connection between the new economic growth and the intensifica-

tion of apartheid, but they did not develop the point. That was left to a new generation of scholars, mostly young emigrés from South Africa, exposed to new ideas in Europe and America, including a revived Marxism. In the 1960s, posts opened up for historians of South Africa in other countries and the new work was in part a product of the new internationalisation of South African history; the main forum at which it was discussed was the University of London.

It was a Canadian, Frederick Johnstone - who had been led to do post-graduate work on South Africa by the South African emigré liberal historian Arthur Keppel-Jones - who, on his return to Britain from a research visit to South Africa in 1969, first elaborated an explanation for the compatibility of white supremacy and economic growth. He spoke of "the relations between capitalist development, apartheid policies and the core structures of white supremacy" as being "essentially collaborative" and of white supremacy "continually being reinforced by economic development". For him apartheid was a set of policies rationally conceived to restrict black advancement by preventing blacks from acquiring education, accumulating capital or using their industrial bargaining power. Its purpose was to provide employers with the cheapest possible labour, and to arrange the reproduction and regulation of that labour. South Africa's industrial prosperity of the 1960s was, then, the result of ultra-cheap, ultra-exploited labour. Not only was there no antagonism between the system of racial domination and economic growth; on the contrary, the exact opposite was true; they were functional to, and they benefited from each other. They were not only inseparable, they were mutually reinforcing. The more prosperity the whites enjoyed, the more secure was white supremacy. Racial oppression helped economic growth, and economic growth boosted white supremacy. What Johnstone called "the conventional wisdom" - which was in fact a certain liberal position - was turned on its head (Johnstone, 1970).

This revisionist argument was developed by other scholars, and various implications for the present were drawn from it. If indeed segregation and economic growth were incompatible, then foreign investment, stimulating that growth, might be thought likely to heighten the contradictions and promote the demise of the capitalist system itself. But the argument advanced by Legassick, Innes and other revisionists in the 1970s was that foreign investment would, in furthering economic growth, bolster white supremacy. Therefore, because white supremacy was morally objectionable, foreign investment in South Africa should cease. As capitalism was firmly tied to apartheid, it was also argued, both would and should be overturned together - one would not survive without the other. The liberal view of conflict between segregation and economic growth suggested that in the interests of the latter there might be a gradual, evolutionary dismantling of apartheid, and the possibility that capitalism might better function in a non-racial South Africa. The revisionist argument implied,

on the other hand, that apartheid would have to be got rid of by revolutionary action, which the revisionists hoped would overturn apartheid and capitalism together.

Johnstone's argument in the 1970 paper almost entirely concerned white supremacy and economic growth in contemporary South Africa, but he and other social scientists - like Martin Legassick the other key figure in developing the revisionist critique, he was trained as an historian but became a lecturer in sociology - were quick to apply it to the past. In doing so they focused especially on the gold-mining industry, which for Johnstone was "the play within the play", the key which explained everything else. The revisionists tended to attack an over-simple, stereotypical liberal view of that relationship, and it is easy to fall into the same trap when discussing them. In confining myself to the initial form in which their views were presented, I hope not to fall too far.

Segregation, the revisionists claimed, had always functioned for, and always benefited, industrial growth. Industrial growth had not occurred despite white racism, but instead capital had used the state and racial policies and practices for its own ends. Though Legassick admitted that the roots of racism lay in pre-industrial South Africa - though in the slavery of the western Cape, rather than on the outlying frontier - he argued in other papers that the racist policies that began to emerge at Kimberley and on the Rand in the latter part of the nineteenth century were quite different in scale and purpose to what had gone before. They were designed to obtain and control a black labour force and to keep it distinct from the relatively small, privileged white working class. Segregation - the name given to the new set of policies - had not always existed, but was deliberately created, mainly in the first decade of this century, to secure cheap labour for the mines and the farms. Industrial capital had not merely adjusted to an already existing racial order - as Blumer had suggested - but had shaped the new racial order of segregation. Stanley Trapido pointed out in 1971 that South Africa had not industrialised as Britain had; rather, like other *late* industrialising countries, it had used massive state intervention and coercion. Industrial development had taken a special form in South Africa because it was based so crucially on deep-level gold-mining, which needed vast amounts of labour. As the grade of ore was low, and the price of the metal fixed, labour costs were critical, and a massive ultra-cheap labour force essential (Trapido, 1971). Explaining how this had been obtained, Harold Wolpe, a radical lawyer turned sociologist, suggested that the migrant labour system, created in capitalist interests, had allowed the mines and, later, secondary industry, to assume that the workers had homes and rural bases in the reserves; therefore they did not have to provide housing for the families of migrants, or welfare benefits. In this way the mineowners and other capitalists had derived profits from exploiting the pre-capitalist economies of the periphery, the reserves. Post-1948

apartheid was specifically a response to the disintegration of the reserve economies, and a way of propping them up to provide migrant labour for secondary industry (Wolpe, 1972).

This crude summary of the initial ideas of the revisionists - ideas which soon became nuanced, varied and complex - shows that their position on the relationship between white supremacy and economic growth was totally opposed to that which had suggested that economic growth was, and always had been, in conflict with the country's racial policies, and would ultimately undermine them. In the early 1970s some assumed there could be no meeting ground between such starkly opposed positions, and spoke of two quite different, irreconcilable paradigms. But at the beginning of the 1970s very little historical research had been done on the relationship between white supremacy and economic growth. Liberal historians had, as already noted, tended to ignore the detailed study of anything related to the economy, while many of the new school, who were the first to consider the relationship in detail, were sociologists, economists or other social scientists who tended to argue from theory, or from scraps of historical evidence, and did no original historical research. When such research was done, it concerned aspects of the conundrum: the history of the reserves, of migrant labour, of relations between the state and the gold-mining industry, or, say, the reasons for the passage of particular segregationist laws; it was not focused centrally on the debate itself. Merle Lipton's *Capitalism and Apartheid* (1985) comes closest to the debate, and ranges over a wider field than her title might suggest, for her use of the term "apartheid" embraces segregationist policies from the early twentieth century. She has many important points to make about the relationship between particular capitalist interests and particular apartheid policies, but she too is reluctant to address the broad relationship between white supremacy and economic growth, and for good reason, for that relationship is extremely difficult to pin down. Growth obviously occurred for many different reasons, some of them those which explained growth elsewhere in the world. But South Africa's growth was also the product of a peculiar set of circumstances, the main one being its immense mineral resources. Whether there might have been more or less growth had the country been governed differently was impossible to say; the world of counterfactuals makes ordinary historians uncomfortable. It was very hard indeed to imagine South Africa industrialising without white supremacy. For more than half a century the system of white supremacy, imposed on conquered people, helped produce a measure of stability, with state coercion and divide and rule policies combining with psychological dependence to prevent any major challenge to the system. Such "stability" was conducive to economic growth, but beyond that the question seemed to boil down to the relationship between economic growth and South Africa's peculiar

racial policies, which still left a lot of imponderables. And the problem was confounded by the large gaps in our knowledge of much of the economic history of the country.

Complexities

What has the work of the past decade and more revealed about the historical relationship between white supremacy and economic growth? The single most important lesson to be learned is an obvious one: that the relationship between white supremacy and economic growth was never as simple and straightforward as either of the views of 1970 suggested. And if the relationship was not simple, neither was it static - it changed over time. The view, then, that economic growth was *always* hampered by segregationist policies has long been discarded. Both mineowners and commercial farmers benefited from a racial system which helped provide them with the large, unskilled and docile labour force they wanted, and in limiting the mobility of workers helped to keep down wages or other rewards for service. It is now generally accepted that in the early phases of industrialisation, when a coerced labour force was extensively used, segregationist policies aided economic growth.

But the racial system both imposed costs and provided benefits, and different sectors of the economy benefited differentially. In *Working for Boroko* (1981), Marion Lacey stressed how commercial agriculture and mining capital, competing for labour in the decades after Union, differed in their attitudes to the reserves - mining capital wanted them maintained, to supply migrants: agricultural capital preferred them broken up, to provide labour that would live and work on the farms. Mining capital won much of that battle but, conversely, the racial system imposed costs of a different kind on the mineowners in the form of the job colour bar. In his major monograph, *Class, Race and Gold* (1976), Johnstone tried to downplay the importance of the job colour bar: for him it was marginal compared to the provision of a large, cheap, controlled labour force. Mining capitalists had, after all, opposed the job colour bar, and he wished to argue that the racial system had been devised in capitalist interests. But if the job colour bar was so relatively unimportant, how then could it have lain, as it did, at the centre of the white workers' Rand Revolt of 1922? Despite what he said, the evidence in fact seems clear that the mineowners did not merely want to adjust the job colour bar, as he suggested, but to get rid of it altogether, though after it was enshrined in legislation in 1926 they accepted that they could not do so. The early revisionists were wrong to suggest that capital had created the kind of racial system which it desired. That system had in fact evolved for complex reasons, having in part, but only in part, to do with

considerations of economic growth - which revisionists assumed to be the same as the interests of capital.

That capitalists did not invent the racial system in their own interests may also be illustrated with reference to the migrant labour system. For Lacey, "segregation was not only compatible with economic growth but was designed as a coercive labour system geared to ensure capitalist production" (Lacey, 1981: xi), and Wolpe, concerned to stress how the reserves functioned in capitalist interests, suggested that the capitalists created them, and began the migrant-labour system (Wolpe, 1972). In fact, later work showed that migrancy started well before the opening up of the Kimberley diamonmd mines, let alone the Witwatersrand gold fields. It was, to some extent, a deliberate form of African resistance to full proletarianisation. Conquest helped to shape the territories which were left as reserves, and forced men out to work, though why they went out as migrants from particular societies and not from others had much to do with local conditions and their particular social relations. Moreover, some mineowners were from the beginning opposed to migrancy, preferring a settled (stabilised) labour force, which would be more reliable than a migrant one, which needed constant training, and was thought potentially more likely to desert.

One of the unresolved questions raised by the debate about the relationship of white supremacy and economic growth is that of the importance of the mineral revolutions. Did the industrial system adapt to existing patterns, or should one follow the revisionists and stress discontinuity? In a book published in 1982 John Cell accepted Legassick's view that segregation was something quite new in the early twentieth century, but more recent work has tended to confirm the arguments of George Fredrickson and others, who have rather stressed continuities between segregation and earlier forms of domination such as the slave and indentured labour systems of the old Cape, and also continuity at the level of racial ideas and attitudes.

The relative weakness of mining capital is confirmed by Alan Jeeves. His *Migrant Labour in South Africa's Gold Mining Economy* (1985) tells of how it took almost thirty years for the mineowners to create a recruiting monopsony. In characterising the relationship that came to exist between mining capital and the state as symbiotic, almost a marriage of equal partners, David Yudelman probably exaggerates the extent to which the mineowners were in fact able to get their way (Yudelman, 1983). It was clearly in the interests of the mineowners to employ blacks in skilled jobs rather than whites at higher rates of pay. But the mineowners were not able to do this because of the resistance of the white workers who, after the Rand Revolt was crushed, helped to elect a new government which re-established the colour bar, in a stronger form than before. If mining capital was not as powerful and influential as early revisionist writing

suggested, neither was agricultural capital, as the work of Tim Keegan has shown. No sector, in fact, could dictate to the state.

If the reasons why particular racial policies were adopted be considered, it is clear that the economic interests of white workers who were concerned with job security, rather than those of capitalists, lay behind the job colour bar. Liberals had exaggerated the importance of racial prejudice and racial fear but that prejudice and fear could not be dismissed altogether, as revisionists tended to do. Segregation and apartheid were not adopted exclusively for political and ideological reasons; but the early revisionists had been wrong to exclude such reasons, or to regard them as insignificant. Saul Dubow's work on the making of racial segregationist policies in the 1920s has again stressed the importance of political-ideological considerations, in particular the white fear that increased black urbanisation would create a dangerous proletariat in the cities, which would pose a threat to white security (Dubow, 1989). Segregationist policies, which from 1948 went under the name apartheid, were in part devices to prevent that threat materialising, even at the cost of some economic growth. Hence the refusal to allow a stabilised labour force in the towns, which manufacturing industry wanted; hence the insistence on migrancy, and the measures to make life for those blacks who did live in the cities as difficult and insecure as possible; hence the increasingly rigid influx controls and, from 1970, the legislation which progressively stripped Africans of their South African citizenship and made them citizens of one or other Bantustan.

Segregationist policies might be economically functional where the labour force was unskilled and wages low, but the liberal argument was that it was manufacturing industry, in particular, with its concern for skilled labour and a domestic market, that would force changes in segregation policies. Certainly manufacturing and commerce were more vocal critics of such aspects of racial policy as the job colour bar and migrant labour than mining or farming before the 1970s, but, as the revisionists did not fail to notice, manufacturing did extremely well in the 1960s, despite having to rely upon migrant labour or having to use higher-priced white or Coloured labour. To what extent such extra costs were offset by the benefit of cheap, controlled labour remains unclear: we still lack anything like an adequate history of manufacturing industry. But let me notice here the recent restatement of the liberal argument by Merle Lipton. Segregation and apartheid, she has suggested, were incompatible with advanced capitalism, with economic growth dependent on advanced technology. Before the 1970s, the argument runs, only manufacturing was hampered by skill shortages, but from the early 1970s mining and commercial farming increasingly needed skilled labour, and so were led to criticise apartheid labour policies which prevented the stabilisation of labour. With increased mechanisation, farmers wanted more settled labour; with a rise in

the gold price in 1970 the mineowners could begin to move away from a cheap labour policy - seen to be inefficient - and to think of finally buying off white labour, and eliminating the job colour bar. This at a time when there was an increasing concentration of capital in conglomerates which linked the various sectors of the economy, and in which Afrikaner businessmen played increasingly important roles. Afrikaner businessmen came to share the view of their English-speaking counterparts that certain key apartheid policies in the social and economic fields should disappear. This line of argument accepts that big business was not only worried by the direct costs of apartheid, but also by other costs, such as the huge, bloated bureaucracy spawned by the racial system, and perhaps too by the intangible costs of the long denial of rights and the refusal to respect the dignity of those constituting the bulk of the labour force, as well as by growing internal instability, increasing international hostility to the apartheid regime, the threat of sanctions, and the withdrawal of foreign investment. Essentially, however, the argument is that it was changes in the economy, and pressure from economic interests, that led the state to move away from rigid, all-embracing apartheid. It repealed some apartheid laws, accorded formal recognition to African trades unions in 1979, accepted the permanence of Africans resident in towns, removed the pass laws for those not living in the "independent" Bantustans in 1986 and restored to some Africans the South African citizenship earlier taken away from them. And from early 1990 change has been rapid, involving the abolition of most apartheid legislation. At the same time, with the collapse of communism first in Eastern Europe and then in the Soviet Union itself, critics of capitalism increasingly found themselves on the defensive. But all this did not mean that the liberals had won the debate. It could be argued that it was the failure of economic growth in the 1980s, rather than the growth of the economy, which lay behind the government's decisions to dismantle white supremacy.

We cannot know precisely why the government acted - the records of cabinet and state security council meetings are not available. There is no doubt that pressure from big business, via, e.g. the Urban Foundation, played an important role in the changes affecting the status of urban Africans. But quite clearly too there were other important reasons for the changes in policy: internal black resistance; changes in the regional balance of power, and especially the coming to power of black governments in the neighbouring states; growing international pressure, and a new concern by the government for international legitimation after the failure of the Bantustans to win any support abroad. All these have to be weighed and it is certainly not possible categorically to say that economic pressures were more important than other considerations in the making of "reform". There is little doubt, moreover, that the lack of economic growth, the financial crisis that followed P.W. Botha's "Rubicon"

speech in August 1985, and the threat of further sanctions were prime motors for change in government policy. If change could be shown to have come about primarily for non-economic reasons, Blumer would have been vindicated, but any such analysis would be much too simple.

Historians remain interested in the relationship between the state and its racial policies on the one hand and the development of the economy on the other. How closely capitalism was associated with apartheid in the past has obvious relevance for the debate about the nature of a post-apartheid economy. But there has been relatively little new work of significance in recent years on the relationship over time between white supremacy and economic growth. (Lipton's book was the product of work mainly done in the 1970s). This in part at least reflects changes in the present. When the state appeared all-powerful and what it did all-important, the nature of the state and its relations with capital seemed a central issue for historical analysis. After the Soweto uprising of 1976 and more especially after the popular resistance which began in late 1984, historians tended to turn away from the state and its relationship with the economy, and from the role of white workers, and to look instead at the impact of industrialisation on those caught up in that process, at the making of the working classes, at their culture, their consciousness and local struggles - at the many different forms of black resistance in the past. Segregationism began to be seen not simply as something imposed from above, the product of what white capital, white labour or a white government wanted, but as shaped significantly by the struggles of ordinary people, in Zululand or elsewhere. Even the advent of apartheid itself was shown to have been more ambiguous than previously suggested (Posel, 1991). It was realised, too, that before the debate could advance further, much more work needed to be done on the development of the economy, for even the history of the growth of secondary industry had not been recorded at all adequately. When detailed studies are available both on the history of different segregationist policies and on the history of the economy, historians will be able to return to the capitalism/apartheid debate and explore the complexities in that relationship with a surer touch.

Chapter 11

Style in the writing of South African history

I can read poetry and plays, and things of that sort, and do not dislike travels. But history, real solemn history, I cannot be interested in. Can you? (Catherine Morland in Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*).

Students of English regularly examine the language and style of poetry or prose fiction but rarely subject non-fictional prose to criticism. The language and style of that group of non-fiction writers concerned with the history of society over time has attracted little attention. One of the few to have considered style in the writing of history, Yale historian Peter Gay - who investigated the language and "angle of vision" of four master historians, Gibbon, Ranke, Macaulay and Burckardt - argued that "style shapes and in turn is shaped by substance". The language of the historian, says Gay, is part of his message; literary style is not unimportant or an after-thought, but an integral part of any historian's skill, reflecting his ideas of past and present, and the world in which he operates. In his hands, literary devices are "not separate from historical truth, but the precise means of conveying it" (Gay, 1975: 3, 5, 195, 216). Gay suggests that Gibbon's "measured tread" and his irony were appropriate to, and helped illuminate, his theme of the decline of the Roman Empire, and that Macaulay's rhetorical and expansive style fitted admirably the early Victorian age of progress in which, and about which, he wrote (Gay, 1975: 22, 97).

South Africa has produced no Gibbon or Macaulay, but we should nevertheless investigate our historians, analyse the influences that helped shape their work, and consider their conceptions of the world and their literary style. In recent years the historical consciousness of some of our leading novelists has been subjected to scholarly evaluation (Clingman, 1981, 1986; Watson, 1986), but the language and style of the works of our major historians, works which are contributions to our literature as well as to our knowledge of the past, have not been examined. What follows here is necessarily a preliminary and in part subjective assessment, which focuses on a few major figures in our historiographical tradition, all of whom wrote in English. Their work will be placed in its historical context and some differences in style analysed.

Let us first note that the historian is limited in a way the writer of fiction is not: the historian must use his imagination, yet cannot allow it free rein. Clio is a muse, and history a branch of literature - closer to poetry than to geometry, thought the British historian Herbert Butterfield (1945: 138) - but history is also a science, with the historian seeking - though he may not find it - objective truth. In the work of the historian imagination has to be used to recreate the past as it was, and language must be predominantly referential, imparting information about the past, and not emotive or directive (for these terms cf. Leech and Short, 1981: 30). But even a purely narrative history possesses its own style. Style may depend on the kind of history written, but is at least in part determined by the individual writer's talents, the time in which he writes, his purposes, and the audience he perceives for his work.

Theal to Marais

Our first great historian, George McCall Theal, wrote a multi-volumed *History of South Africa* which made its first appearance in the 1880s, and was concluded by two volumes which were published in 1919, the year of his death. Born in New Brunswick, Canada, in 1837, and educated there, Theal did not have the opportunity to go to university. He was a man of enormous application, and passionate enthusiasm for the history of his adopted country, but not a man of wide literary interests. In his youth he read the works of the great romantic historians, such as Francis Parkman, but his own style was dry and matter-of-fact, as befitted a chronicler whose approach was often closer to that of the antiquarian than that of the professional historian. He called his first work a *Compendium* of South Africa's history and geography. When, a few years later, he gained access to the archives, he set great store by original documents, and sought to extract from them what he took to be the "hard facts" and to reproduce these in his *History,* employing in doing so little imagination and a minimum of analytical skill. Though he had read Edward Gibbon in his youth, he did not try to emulate him, and constructed no great dramatic theme for his *History.* He admitted that he spent little time polishing his prose, and that he did not strive to produce great literature. The result was flatness of expression. If his approach, rather than his style, is compared with that of the great nineteenth century masters, it was nearest to that of Leopold von Ranke, who was concerned to recreate the past "as it had really been - *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*", and furthest, perhaps, from that of the argumentative Macaulay. Theal's *History* was completed in no systematic way, but in haphazard order, as and when he had time to work on it. Enormously prolific, his chief aim was to write so complete a history that it would remain a fundamental text, one acceptable to both English and Afrikaans-speaking white South Africans. It would serve to help unify those groups; Theal was a colonial (white) nationalist historian.

Thus his matter-of-fact style was influenced by the circumstances under which he wrote his *History,* his limited educational background and his vision of his purpose.

It was not until the early years of this century that departments of history began to be established in our universities, and the first chairs of History were established at Cape Town and at Stellenbosch. Peter Gay has pointed out how the professionalisation of history bore a literary price. Historians became detached from society and from the general reading public, and began writing for their peers, whom they sought to impress with their objectivity. The exact standards of proof and presentation necessary in professional history writing, and their new prime audience, meant that their writing often became narrow and difficult for the non-specialist to follow (Gay, 1975: 209). Before the 1960s there were in South Africa no more than a handful of English-speaking professional historians at any time, so their audience necessarily remained a fairly general one. But the same consequences of professionalisation seen elsewhere were in time to come to South African history as well.

Eric Walker, Professor at Cape Town from 1911, and William Miller Macmillan, who took up a post in History and Economics at Rhodes University College in the same year, were both products of Merton College, Oxford. Both read widely and sought to advance South African history beyond Theal's dry narrative by looking analytically at major problems in our history. But they had contrasting personalities, and they wrote differently. Walker, a rowing blue at Oxford, did not let his concern with politics dominate his life, and for him writing came relatively easily. Even when addressing his peers - as in his famous lecture on "The Frontier Tradition in South Africa", delivered at Oxford in 1930 - he was always stylish and elegant. His general *History of South Africa,* which first appeared in 1928, was too packed with detail and too allusive to be easy reading, but the works he completed before and after - major biographies of Lord de Villiers and W.P. Schreiner and a study of the Great Trek for the "Pioneer Histories" series, the aim of which was to give the results of original research "in narratives which should appeal to the general reader" (Walker, 1934: vii) - are distinguished by their literary quality as well as by their merit as works of history.

Macmillan, who in the 1920s was Professor of History at Wits University, was intense and serious, with a strong social conscience. Deeply concerned with the contemporary political situation in the country, he was appalled by the course of South African development. He believed that the historian's task was not primarily to establish "how things had really been". More importantly, the historian should analyse why the past had been as it was, and how it had led to the present. Macmillan did not shy away from linking what he wrote about the past very directly with present concerns. For him, history had a social purpose,

and the historian's duty was to rethink the past and make it relevant to the present. He was therefore contemptuous of the study of the past for its own sake. To a much greater extent than Walker, believed passionately in the contemporary relevance and usefulness of history. Thus he hoped that his work on the role of John Philip of the London Missionary Society in the early nineteenth century would influence government policy in the South Africa of his own day, and his books were directed at the policy-makers as much as to fellow historians.[1]

Macmillan wrote with much greater difficulty than Walker, and his style was rarely either elegant or fluent. His sentences and his paragraphs were often overlong and rambling, and consequently difficult to read. His professionalism would seem to have led him to a certain disdain for literary pretensions. He believed that what was important was what was said rather than how it was said. He may have been influenced in that direction by his belief that history had much to learn from the social sciences, and especially from economics. The third volume of his South African trilogy, *Complex South Africa* (1930), was more a work of sociology than of history. In not laying much stress on style, Macmillan was not untypical of a post-First World War generation of writers who were distrustful of high-flown rhetoric and romantic prose. Leading British historians of the day argued that history was a science, and not an art. Science was concerned with facts; how things were put down on paper seemed not to matter too much.

Literary style - the way sentences are ordered, the use of rhetorical devices, the rhythm of the narration - is necessarily shaped in part by the historian's intentions and the potential audience. Most of the liberal historians who, following Macmillan, sought to get away from a purely Eurocentric view of our past set out both to challenge the dominant historiographical tradition, based very largely on Theal, and also to "tell a story".

Before the Second World War there were too few English-speaking historians in this country for them to write merely for the small circle of fellow researchers and professional colleagues. They had to write for a wider audience: Macmillan wrote with a particular eye to white policy-makers and those who elected them; Walker and J.S. Marais - who taught at Cape Town in the 1930s before becoming Professor of History at Wits in 1944 - both had in mind the wider world of historical scholarship but also the broader South African reading public interested in the country's past. J.S. Marais, like Macmillan, did not write easily and in stylistic terms his books are very uneven. His *Maynier and the First Boer Republic* (1944) was especially dense and difficult to read, perhaps in part because it was written during the war. Elsewhere he showed himself able to write lucid prose, as in his last and most important work, the classic *The Fall of Kruger's Republic* (1961).

De Kiewiet, master stylist

Macmillan's most brilliant student, C.W. de Kiewiet, completed honours and master's degrees under his supervision in the early 1920s. He then went to London to work on a doctorate, and there came to set great store by what he called "the mystery of style". It was a mystery because it could not be explained with precision, nor was it possible to say where it came from.[2] He came to believe, however, that the way one said something affected what was said, and that all great history was great literature at the same time. He set out deliberately to write well, believing in what C.V. Wedgwood was to call "the close relationship between clear thinking and good writing" (Wedgwood, 1960: 75).

De Kiewiet both spoke and wrote with great lucidity and clarity. He composed in his head, so that he rarely needed to revise anything he wrote.[3] Nevertheless, his mellifluous style was in part acquired and learned. Peter Gay has pointed out that style, besides springing from talent, is also "an act of will and an exercise of intelligence ... the tribute that expressiveness pays to discipline" (Gay, 1975 : 12). De Kiewiet's mother-tongue was Dutch - he was born to Dutch parents in Rotterdam in 1902 - and he later believed that the fact that he only gradually acquired English at school in Johannesburg helped him develop a good prose style.[4] When he was at the University of London in 1926 and 1927, the person who did most to influence his writing was a fellow student, John Cawte Beaglehole, who became one of New Zealand's leading historians. Beaglehole did much of the proof-reading of de Kiewiet's first book, based on the doctorate. "He had a brave mind", recalled de Kiewiet, "and loved Bach and could turn delightful phrases, some of which became my model."[5] De Kiewiet learned to read great works of prose - especially the Bible - with an appreciation for the way they were written and their power of language. He came to believe strongly that history should not merely provide information, duly analysed, about the past, but should also, because of its literary qualities, give pleasure to the reader.

All de Kiewiet's major historical writings contain brilliant passages. There is space here only to give a few examples. In an essay on "The Frontier and the Constitution" he spoke of "white civilisation" having deliberately sought to create a black proletariat: "Its legislation sought to restrict and to bind, not to relieve or to liberate ... Economically, it drew the natives deeply into white society. Socially and politically it cast them forth" (De Kiewiet, 1938: 336). Elsewhere he paid tribute to the value of historical writing in these striking words:

A vigorous and independent historiography is more than an ornament of culture. It is the indispensable agent to wise and successful action in all human problems ... Without historians a society cannot be mature or make its decisions

wisely. Between democracy and a free inspired historiography there is a real equation. Amongst disciplines it is the greatest emancipator, releasing men from thraldom to the past, setting free their minds and their hearts for the tasks of each new generation ... in its fulness history is the meeting place of all knowledge (De Kiewiet, 1956: 3).

His two greatest works were *The Imperial Factor in South Africa* (1937) and the more influential *History of South Africa Social and Economic* (on the writing of which cf. Saunders, 1986). In both he showed an ability to include rich detail without over-burdening his text, and to hold the reader's interest by the sheer power and eloquence of his prose. Macmillan's sentences tended to be long and complex. De Kiewiet was economical in his use of language, and he knew how to vary the length of his sentences, to carry the reader and the argument forward. He used short and pithy sentences to particularly good effect in his *History,* which was designed as an introductory text for a general audience. Though published over fifty years ago, it remains the greatest single work of historical synthesis to have appeared on this country, and is at the same time a work of history which deserves the encomium "literary masterpiece".

Just because he was, of all our historians, the greatest stylist, de Kiewiet's work should be given the closest critical attention. To date only Phyllis Lewsen, eminent historian of the liberal tradition in South Africa, has begun that task and then only briefly, in a few paragraphs in a little-known article. While acknowledging de Kiewiet's greatness as a historian, Lewsen is critical of him for what Gay calls "fine writing" (Gay, 1975: 216). As "a perceptive and original thinker", she writes, de Kiewiet did not need to use such "spurious aids to reader-interest" as flashy metaphors and personifications. In his more polemical work, notably *The Anatomy of South African Misery,* a set of lectures published in 1956, he frequently allowed himself to overwrite, as when he spoke of how "the splendid stepping ox, the pride of every farmer who had a well-trained team, became a lumbering beast that impeded progress" (Lewsen, 1970: 356). One must agree with Lewsen that here de Kiewiet is writing for effect; the reader's historical knowledge or imagination is not advanced, and the words lack that referential quality that should be found in all historical writing. While in his writing, style is often an aid to the uncovering of historical truth, there is sometimes a tension between the elegance of his prose and the imparting of historical understanding. His overdecoration, his use of words not instrumental to the presentation of knowledge about the past, was sometimes so distracting as to obscure the meaning of his message. Good writing could be bad history. Perhaps the most cited of all his aphorisms is his remark that South Africa had advanced economically by windfalls and politically by disasters (De Kiewiet, 1941: 89). His reference to windfalls is helpful, for the discoveries of diamonds and gold, and the revaluation of gold in the early 1930s when South Africa left

the gold standard, were indeed windfalls. But had the country "advanced" by political disasters? Macmillan had indeed spoken of the Great Trek as a "disaster" because it allowed the north to triumph over the whole of the country, but though de Kiewiet's words read well, "advancing by disasters" was a phrase devoid of real meaning or validity.

The 1960s and the radical challenge

In 1960 Leonard Thompson of the University of Cape Town emerged as one of the leading stylists among our historians with the publication of his magisterial *Unification of South Africa.* There and in his chapters in the *Oxford History of South Africa* (1969, 1971), which he edited with Monica Wilson, chapters written after he had moved to the University of California, Los Angeles, he showed an admirable ability to synthesise a mass of material in flowing, readable prose. His biography of Moshoeshoe of Lesotho - *Survival in Two Worlds* - which followed in 1975, was a work of striking clarity, deliberately written "to make the achievements of a remarkable human being intelligible to non-specialists without sacrificing scholarly integrity" (Thompson, 1975: ix).

By the early 1970s many more historians were at work on South African topics, both here and overseas. As the number grew, so more and more of their writing was aimed exclusively at professional colleagues and appeared in journals of relatively small circulation, in which the language used was of a sort comprehensible only to the initiated. It was in the early 1970s that a group of radical scholars began to employ a Marxist approach to history to challenge the liberal tradition in South African historiography. They emphasised the importance of class rather than race, and sought to relate the political phenomena to the economic base, which they, as materialists, regarded as fundamental to an understanding of history. Most of these radical academics were young, with little, if any, experience of writing, and many were not historians by training at all, but sociologists, economists and political scientists. Even those trained in history were much influenced by sociological writing. To begin with, the new historians wrote entirely and exclusively for their colleagues, sometimes in seminar papers that circulated widely but which were never published. The message was obviously much more important than the literary medium expressed.

The "new history" of the mid 1970s was much more concerned than the old with theoretical concepts, such as "state", "capital" and "ideology", which were often discussed in abstract and also in reified terms. Concepts such as "proletarianisation", "peasantisation" and even sometimes "migrantisation" began to be used. "Mode of production" became so frequent a phrase that in some articles it was used in abbreviated form, so that the "capitalist mode of produc-

tion" became CMP (e.g. Morris, 1976). Full of jargon, the prose of the "new school" was often so turgid as to be virtually unreadable. One could quote numerous passages from, for example, F.R. Johnstone's *Class, Race and Gold* (1976) to make the point.

By the late 1970s the use of sociological and other jargon in the literature on South African history was on the decline. Johnstone's own articles after *Class, Race and Gold,* for example, especially those which sought to present surveys of the "new history" for non-specialists, were admirably clear and free of jargon. In part the move to greater clarity came about because those who now sought to write the history of the underclasses - history from below - came to realise that it was important not only to listen to what people themselves had to say about the past, but also to write in a language that the "person in the street" could understand. If history was to be relevant, it had to be accessible to more than a handful of academics. Once again, historians began to take more trouble over their writing and to pay more attention to the demands of style. Some of the books in the New History of Southern Africa Series published by Ravan Press, though revised versions of doctoral theses, were extremely well-written (e.g Peires, 1981, 1989; Delius, 1983).

Perhaps the most striking stylist among the new historians was Charles van Onselen, the Director of the African Studies Institute at the University of Witwatersrand. There was much entertaining and lively writing in his two volume *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand 1886-1914* (1982). One of his stories told of how the young Jan Note, who found his employers "kept rather strange hours", took "very little time to realise that he was in fact being employed by a gang of European criminals". Van Onselen adds that Note "would have been equally quick to appreciate the virtue of silence" (Van Onselen, 1982: vol. 2: 174). Of the criminal "army" which Note formed, van Onselen comments that "Unlike some of its modern counterparts Jan Note's "army" was not all dressed up with nowhere to go and very little to do" (ibid: 185). A number of his phrases suggest the very nature of the gold-bearing rock above which his characters lived, and the explosions necessary to remove it: for example, Note worked "his way along the particular ethnic cleavages of black society", while his community "started to experience a series of organisational and ideological tremors in their mountain stronghold" (ibid: 174-75). Both irony and understatement are used to good effect. That the Zulu washermen were indeed "not alone in possessing an eye for the economic chance on the Witwatersrand" (Ibid: 101) is made abundantly clear throughout the work. Black South Africans were kept "on the bureaucratic leash of the pass laws", implying that they were treated like dogs (ibid: 171).

But like de Kiewiet, van Onselen sometimes overwrote, obscuring rather than clarifying through his use of metaphor. To give just one example:

"Fathered by gold and mothered by money, Johannesburg's impatient and demanding parents scarcely allowed their charge time to pause in infancy or linger in adolescence before pushing it out onto the streets of the economic world ... Given the company that the parents kept, it is scarcely surprising that the child lost its innocence at an early age" (Van Onselen, vol.I: 2).

In conclusion

The relationship between style and historical analysis is not straight-forward, and it is possible to place too much weight on the importance of style in historical writing. It is self-evident that the most difficult and inelegant prose may contain significant insights and information, whereas the most mellifluous prose may say nothing new about the past. A measure of clarity is essential to the conveying of historical truth, but good style is not indispensible. Yet style may enhance meaning, and the extent to which it has done so in South African historical writing remains to be considered in depth. All this brief essay has tried to show is that the role of style in our mainstream historical writing, from Theal through the liberal and then the radical professional historians - let alone in more popular historical writing - has been unduly neglected, and that its study may indeed prove rewarding.

Notes

1 I am indebted to Mrs Mona Macmillan of Dorchester on Thames, England, for information on her late husband.

2 Author's interview with C.W. de Kiewiet, Washington D.C., 1983.

3 This can be seen by perusing the original manuscript of his **History of South Africa Social and Economic**, which is now in the Jagger Library, University of Cape Town, and comparing it with the printed text.

4 Author's interview with de Kiewiet.

5 De Kiewiet to Jay Naidoo, 17 September 1980. I am indebted to Jay Naidoo for giving me permission to quote this letter.

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