

TRENDS IN SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THE PRESENT STATE OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH

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Introduction

Traditionally, historical writing on the history of South Africa has been divided into broad categories or historiographical schools, namely a British imperialist, a settler or colonialist, an Afrikaner nationalist, a liberal and a revisionist or radical school. The emergence of social history is generally also regarded as a by-product of the revisionist school, while some historians argue that the emergence of a black nationalist historiographical tradition stemmed partly from the radical approach during the years of apartheid.

The British imperialist school

This body of work contained within it the realization that the British colonies in South Africa were dependent on and formed a subordinate part of the colonizing motherland, Britain. The central theme of the British imperialist school was the expansion of the British Empire and the achievements and benefits of empire. These writers were apologists for the British takeover and rule of the Cape of Good Hope. They concentrated on events after the first British occupation of the Cape in 1795, the activities of British governors, the coming to the Cape of British settlers and their activities in the eastern frontier districts, their struggle against the Xhosa on the eastern frontier, the fate of the British settlers in Natal, etc.

They took little notice of developments at the Cape during the Dutch East India Company period. They detected signs among the Afrikaner Voortrekkers who departed on the Great Trek that these Boers in the interior were degenerating as far as their adherence to "civilization" was concerned. Conditions in the interior were compared unfavourably with the level of "progress" and "civilization" in the British Colonies. The British imperialist school shared a firm belief in the superiority of British rule and British values. The basic assumption was that British institutions and ideals were superior to the South African versions and that the British presence in South Africa represented the spread of beneficial influences. They also disapproved of the Boer republics that were established in the interior.¹ Examples of such works are those by **J. Cappon**², **W.C. Holden**³, **A. Wilmot** and **J. Chase**⁴ and **Arthur Conan Doyle**.⁵

¹ K. Smith, *The Changing Past. Trends in South African Historical Writing*, (Johannesburg, 1988), 18-31.

² *Britain's title in South Africa*, (1902).

³ *History of the Colony of Natal, South Africa*, (1855).

⁴ *The History of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope*, (1869). Wilmot also published *The Story of the expansion of Southern Africa* in 1895.

⁵ *The Great Boer War* (1902).

The Settler or Colonial school

No other historian stamped his authority on the study of South African history in this period to the same extent as **George McCall Theal** did. Theal was the most prolific historian of his time. A Canadian by birth, he was employed in the public service of the Cape colony and published numerous histories and series on the history of South Africa. In 1871 he published *South Africa as it is* and in 1874 *A compendium of South African history and geography*. As the first comprehensive history of South Africa the, latter was an immediate success and was widely used in schools. In 1883 followed three volumes of *Basutoland Records*, in 1887 *The History of the Boers in South Africa* and eventually the 11 volumes of *History of South Africa*. Between 1897 and 1905 the 36 volumes of *Records of the Cape Colony* were published, while the nine volumes of Theal's *Records of South Eastern Africa* were published between 1898 and 1903.

Theal was and remains a controversial figure. The controversy has to do with the nature and quality of his work.⁶ He sought to extract from archival documents what he took to be "hard facts" and to reproduce these in his *History of South Africa*, but in doing so showing little imagination and minimal analytical skills. 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.⁷

Theal became the great champion of the Afrikaners. He adopted a conservative pro-white - and in particular pro-Boer - anti-missionary and anti-black standpoint. His account of the Boers in the Cape, on the eastern frontier of the Colony, the Voortrekkers, and the Boer republics is sympathetic and warm. Theal came to identify very strongly with a "colonial nationalist" attitude, and adopted a hostile stance towards the interference of British imperialists. In his writing he extended the idea of the Cape alliance between English and Afrikaner northwards across the Orange and Vaal Rivers, developing the theme of the formation of a new white South African society, ruled by whites of both Anglo-Saxon and Dutch heritage. Theal did not see a role for blacks in his white South Africa, except as a source of labour. To him the coloured races of South Africa were "fickle barbarians, prone to robbery and unscrupulous in shedding blood". The history of South Africa was the history of the whites and their efforts to open up and bring civilization and Christianity to a wild untamed country. Blacks were part of the background, while the British philanthropic missionaries who took up the cause of black peoples were the enemies of the whites.⁸

Next to Theal, the best-known historian of the settler school was the British-born **George Edward Cory**. Between 1910 and 1939 six volumes of *The Rise of South Africa* were published. Cory's work was very much a history of the eastern districts of the Cape, with the British settlers at the centre. Like Theal, he saw the history he described from the point of view of the white colonists and he was critical of missionaries who had "interfered" in South African affairs. He was not particularly sympathetic towards blacks. Cory had great sympathy for the Afrikaners and was full of praise for the Voortrekkers and provided a more detailed picture of the Great Trek than Theal did. Another writer who may be classified as falling broadly into the settler school is **Frank R. Cana**, whose *South Africa from the Great Trek to the Union*

⁶ Smith, *The Changing Past*, 31-36.

⁷ C. Saunders, *Writing History. South Africa's urban past and other essays* (Pretoria, 1992), 106.

⁸ Smith, *The Changing Past*, 36-38.

was published in 1909. As with most settler history, scant attention is given to the indigenous African populations. They are hardly noticed at all in this history, which is the history of how whites resolved their differences to establish a white-dominated Union of South Africa.⁹

The Afrikaner nationalist school

Afrikaner nationalist historiography is characterized by two phases – a pre-academic phase and an Afrikaner-centric academic or professional phase. The **pre-academic phase** emerged with the growth of an Afrikaner historical consciousness in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The authors of Afrikaner national or republican historiography wrote in Dutch or Afrikaans. Their work reflected an anti-British imperialist trend. The 19th century struggle between Boer and Briton became a master narrative. The Afrikaner interpreted his history as a bitter struggle for self-preservation and fulfillment in the face of the hostile forces of nature and the indigenous peoples that he found in the country. The British were seen as oppressors and opponents, as sympathizers with blacks in their struggle against the Boers.

The Great Trek and the Second Anglo-Boer War were the main focal points in the construction of the Afrikaner's historical image. South Africa should not be seen as an extension of Britain and consequently the Boer republics, rather than the British colonies of the Cape and Natal, were prominent in these writings. The Afrikaners' heroes were Voortrekker leaders such as Piet Retief, Hendrik Potgieter and Andries Pretorius. Blacks only featured when they clashed in military conflicts with the Boers or when they were protected or armed by the British, or benefited from their presence. Many of these works portrayed the bitter struggle between the two Afrikaner republics and the British Empire between 1899 and 1902, the consequence of which was the loss of the independence of the former. History was presented in terms of a list of grievances against the British: it was a tale of suffering and struggle towards freedom, towards their own republican form of government. History became at the same time a source of solace and an inspiration – Afrikaners could take comfort from their persecuted past; they could draw strength from it.¹⁰

Examples of the pre-academic phase of Afrikaner nationalist or republican historiography are works by J.H. Hofstede¹¹, S.J. du Toit¹², C.N.J. du Plessis¹³ and J. de V. Roos.¹⁴ W.J. Leyds accused the British of anti-Boer politics and, according to Leyds, old grievances should not be forgotten.¹⁵

Gustav Preller has been widely seen as one of the most important Afrikaner writers of the pre-academic phase of Afrikaans historical writing. Preller, who wrote history as an Afrikaner nationalist, "rediscovered" the Great Trek as the central thread of the Afrikaners' past in the generation after the Trek. His aims were to make Afrikaners

⁹ *Ibid.*, 44-49.

¹⁰ Smith, *The Changing Past*, 57-63; F.A. van Jaarsveld, *Omstrede Suid-Afrikaanse Verlede. Geskiedenisideologie en die historiese skuldvraagstuk* (Johannesburg, 1984), 10-16; J.C. Moll, *et al*, *Tussengroepverhoudinge soos weerspieël in die Suid-Afrikaanse historiografie*, 8.

¹¹ *Geschiedenis van den Oranje-Vrystaat*, (1876).

¹² *Di geskiedenis van ons land in di taal van ons volk* (1877).

¹³ *Uit de Geschiedenis van de Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek en van de Afrikaanders* (Amsterdam, 1898).

¹⁴ *Een Eeuw van Onrecht* (Cape Town, 1899).

¹⁵ See W.J. Leyds, *De Eerste Annexatie van de Transvaal* (Amsterdam, 1906).

conscious of their own national past in order to inspire them after their defeat and spiritual demoralization in the Second Anglo-Boer War. According to Preller, all events after the second British occupation of the Cape in 1806 led to the Great Trek and the Anglo-Boer War was the Trek's ultimate sequel. The history of South Africa was the story of conflict between Afrikaner nationalism, on the one hand, and British imperialism and black barbarism, on the other. The Afrikaner trekboer pioneers were depicted as the conveyors of Christian civilization into Southern Africa, whereas the blacks were seen as heathens and barbarians.

The conflict between black and white was interpreted as black-on-white aggression. Therefore the whites' military actions were justified as a defence of Christian civilization against the forces of paganism. The Voortrekkers were seen as legendary heroes, almost as holy aristocrats. White superiority over black submissiveness formed a central theme in Preller's works.¹⁶

In 1905-06 Preller, a journalist, wrote a feature series on the Voortrekker leader Piet Retief for an Afrikaans newspaper, and in 1906 these articles were published in book form entitled *Piet Retief, Lewensgeskiedenis van die grote Voortrekker*. This work was the first full-length biography of an Afrikaner leader. In 1917 *Piet Retief* was followed by *Dagboek van Louis Tregardt, 1836-1838*. Between 1918 and 1938 six volumes of *Voortrekkermense* appeared and in 1938, with the centenary commemoration of the Great Trek, *Andries Pretorius, 'n lewensbeskrywing van die Voortrekker-kommandantgeneraal* was published. Preller also made a notable contribution to the history of the Second Anglo-Boer War. Among his books on the subject were *Scheepers se dagboek en die stryd in Kaapland* (1938) and *Talana: Die drie Generaals-slag by Dundee* (1942).¹⁷

The foundations for scientific Afrikaner historiography in the **academic phase** were laid at the University of Stellenbosch by two Dutch historians, E.C. Godeé-Molsbergen and W. Blommaert. Their successors included men like Professors S.F.N. Gie, J.A. Wiid, H.B. Thom and P.J. van der Merwe. D.W. Krüger of the Potchefstroom University of Christian Higher Education and I.D. Bosman of the University of Pretoria were two of many Afrikaner historians who received at least part of their training overseas at German, Dutch or French universities, acquiring a continental flavour in their historical approach. They inculcated into their students the principles of scientific historical writing as established by the German historian, Leopold von Ranke. In line with this tradition, historical thematology invariably centred on "national" history-politics, the state and inter-state relations, military history and the deeds of past great men.¹⁸

An outstanding feature in most of the works written by these historians is their Eurocentric approach and the prominent and central role played by the Afrikaners and white communities in the history of South Africa. The rise of Afrikaners and their role in South Africa until the 20th century is the main focus of these publications. Political history was dominant and the history writing is descriptive rather than analytical.¹⁹

¹⁶ Smith, *The Changing Past*, 65; Van Jaarsveld, *Omstrede Suid-Afrikaanse Verlede*, 22; Moll, *Tussengroepverhoudinge*, 8-9.

¹⁷ Smith, *The Changing Past*, 66-68.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁹ Moll, *Tussengroepverhoudinge*, 10-11. See also e.g. S.F.N. Gie, *Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika*, 2 Vols (1924-1928); A.J.H. van der Walt, et al (reds.), *Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika*, 2 Vols (1955); G.D. Scholtz, *Die Ontwikkeling van die Politieke Denke van die Afrikaner*, 8 Vols (1967-1984); D.W. Krüger,

P.J. van der Merwe's studies cannot be classified among those who wrote history from a specifically republican or nationalist standpoint. He focused on the pioneering history of the Afrikaner prior to the Great Trek, i.e. on the so-called trekboers [migrant farmers]. His trekboer trilogy²⁰ is regarded as one of the most significant Afrikaner contributions to South African historiography before the end of 1945. Moving away from political and national preoccupations, he concentrated on the emigration of the surplus population of the Cape colony and on the phenomena of *bywoners*, Boers without land, the desire for space, the trek [nomadic] spirit, economic adaptation and the process of expansion. Van der Merwe's approach had more in common with social and economic history as studied in the 1970s than it did with the work of the majority of his contemporaries.²¹

Although **G.D. Scholtz's** work is strongly nationalist, he tried to place events in their broadest possible international perspective.²² Scholtz also wrote a number of works that deal with South Africa as part of the larger world political scene. He emphasized that the world had changed and that South Africa was inextricably linked with what was happening in the rest of the world.²³

Among the Afrikaner academic historians **F.A. van Jaarsveld** was by far the most prolific writer on South African history. In 1957 *Die ontwaking van die Afrikaanse nasionale bewussyn, 1868-1881* was published. In this study Van Jaarsveld distinguished a number of phases in the development of Afrikaner nationalism. In the 1960s and early 1970s he increasingly identified himself with the struggles and fears of the Afrikaners as they contemplated the future. He not only concentrated on political history, but also on economic and social factors. Although the focus is on Afrikaners in his *Van Van Riebeeck to P.W. Botha*, this is the first Afrikaans history to give considerable space to the history of black peoples in South Africa. The work has, however, been criticized as positing too much of a black-white divide – the “white Christian, pioneer, civilizing” forces opposed to the “wild, untamed, barbaric”, indigenous peoples.

Van Jaarsveld's work has been characterized by his changing view of the Afrikaner and the situation in South Africa. In his later work he adopted a more critical approach towards the Afrikaners' vision of the past and went so far as to demythologize their history. Van Jaarsveld's major contribution to the study of South African history is arguably his work on South African historiography. His division of South African historical writing into Afrikaner republican, settler, imperialist and liberal schools, found wide acceptance.²⁴

Towards the end of the 20th century a revision of Afrikaner history writing began to appear in a liberal approach. The old accepted image of black and white relations became to be questioned and revised. **Hermann Giliomee** and **André du Toit**, for

The Making of a Nation, (1978); C.F.J. Müller (red.), *Vyfhonderd Jaar Suid-Afrikaanse Geskiedenis* (1980) and F.A. van Jaarsveld, *Van Van Riebeeck tot P.W. Botha* (1984).

²⁰ *Die Noordwaartse beweging van die Boere voor die Groot Trek, 1770-1842* (1937); *Die Trekboer in die geskiedenis van die Kaapkolonie (1657-1842)* (1940) and *Trek: Studies oor die mobiliteit van die pioniersbevolking aan die Kaap* (1945).

²¹ Smith, *The Changing Past*, 76-78.

²² See e.g. *Europa en die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog* (1941).

²³ See *Hoe die wêreldpolitiek gevoer word* (1952); *Suid-Afrika en die wêreldpolitiek 1652-1954* and *Die stryd om die wêreld*.

²⁴ Smith, *The Changing Past*, 83-85.

instance, challenged the traditional image Afrikaners had of themselves and their relations with other racial groups in South Africa. Their point of departure was that Afrikaner political thought was neither uniform nor consistent, but rather diverse in character and orientation. Afrikaners did not all think unilaterally in terms of slavery, law and order, racial equality or conflict. In certain aspects Afrikaner reflects a pragmatism that was not always determined by ideology but rather by a variety of traditions of thought.²⁵

Albert Grundlingh, in *Die 'Hensoppers' en 'Joiners': Die rasionaal en verskynsel van verraad* (Cape Town, 1979), subjected aspects of the Second Anglo-Boer War to rigorous scrutiny. He broached the question of Boer traitors, a topic of some sensitivity to Afrikaner nationalists, who liked to portray Afrikaner attitudes as monolithic and who were reluctant to admit that there were a significant number of Afrikaners who had been less than enthusiastic about the war.²⁶

The Liberal school

In South Africa the impetus to take a fresh look at the role of blacks in history was provided by rapid industrialization and the social and economic problems that attended it in the early twentieth century. The gradual political awakening of blacks and the new situation of black poverty alongside and in competition with white poverty in the economically integrated urban communities, to which both white and black people had been drawn from the rural districts, became a major focus of attention among certain liberals concerned about black welfare. This gave rise to another strain in South African historiography, which emerged in the 1920s and which became known as the liberal school. The liberal historians were part of the wider community of liberal economists, anthropologists, sociologists and political scientists who came into prominence between the two world wars, whose intellectual foundations were those of classical liberalism.

Foremost among the liberal historians were **W.M. Macmillan** and his pupil, C.W. de Kiewiet. They wrote at a time when many thinking people were concerned about the effects of urbanization and industrialization in South Africa. Macmillan wrote in the 1920s, in an age of depression, focusing attention on the emergence of the poor whites and the resurgence of Afrikaner nationalism after the Second Anglo-Boer war. While Macmillan's work was aimed at a South African audience, and white policy-makers in particular, De Kiewiet in his principal work was looking at South Africa in the context of the British Empire at a time when the threat of Hitler to that empire loomed large. Their work dealt with social and economic issues and gave greater prominence to the role of blacks in South African history. What was new in their vision was their rejection of a "segregated" history and the placing of people of colour in the past as a factor of equal importance with whites. These liberal historians rejected racial discrimination and evinced a great concern for black welfare, but they did not actually study black societies themselves.²⁷

²⁵ See e.g. H. Adam and H.B. Giliomee, *The rise and crisis of Afrikaner power* (Cape Town, 1979); R. Elphick and H.B. Giliomee, *The Shaping of South African Society 1652-1820* (London, 1979); A. du Toit and H.B. Giliomee, *Afrikaner political thought: Analysis and documents, Volume I, 1780-1850* (London, 1979) and H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners. Biography of a People* (Cape Town and Charlottesville, 2003).

²⁶ Smith, *The Changing Past*, 86.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 103-104.

Macmillan believed that the historian's task was not primarily to establish "how things had really been", but he or she should analyze why the past had been as it was and how it had led to the present. He did not shy away from linking what he wrote about the past very directly with present concerns.²⁸ In *The South African agrarian problem and its historical development* (Johannesburg, 1919), and also in *Complex South Africa: An economic footnote to history* (London, 1930), Macmillan traced the significance of the issue of poverty in South African history. He became convinced that it was not possible to separate the study of poor whites from that of poor blacks, and asserted the importance of economics in the country's history. For him the main theme of the previous century had been the growth of a single economy.

Macmillan rejected Theal's pro-colonist standpoint and his unquestioning attitude towards the establishment of white supremacy. The history of South Africa was the history of its total population, he asserted. He was the first historian working on South African history to see this and also the first historian to move away from the political history that dominated historical studies. *The Cape Colour Question* (London, 1927) was a study of the political and legal status of the indigenous Khoikhoi people. In this work Macmillan also defended philanthropist missionaries, such as Dr John Philip, against the charges that had been levelled against them by the likes of Theal and Cory. His work *Bantu, Boer and Briton: The making of the South African Native problem* (London, 1929) was based on the voluminous Philip papers. Macmillan examined white conquest of the black peoples; the way they were dispossessed, their resistance on the shifting frontier to white penetration, the way they lost their lands and were transformed into farm labourers or poor peasants living in reserves that were unviable, and their consequent migrations as wage earners to the cities, where they came into competition with poverty-stricken rural whites. Macmillan saw in the application of the principles of freedom and equality that had guided Philip the solution to the problems of South Africa.²⁹

De Kiewiet, Macmillan's successor in the liberal school, represented the high point of liberal history writing before the Second World War. In his *British Colonial Policy and the South African Republics* (London, 1929) and *The Imperial Factor in South Africa* (Cambridge, 1937), he broadened the parochial approach towards the past by portraying South Africa as part of the British Empire, with the Boer republics as peripheral states. His approach brought a broader understanding and perspective to the historical events inside South Africa.³⁰ De Kiewiet was at pains to show that Theal had been unfair in his judgement about the ignorant meddling of Britain in South African affairs. He stressed the difficulties facing British officials. Although British policy had revealed many shortcomings and the British had many failures as colonisers, they had acted with "high motives and worthy ends".³¹

De Kiewiet wrote in his *History of South Africa: Social and Economic* (1941) that segregation had been tried since the days of Van Riebeeck, who established a white settlement at the Cape in 1652, 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

²⁸ Saunders, *Writing History*, 107.

²⁹ Smith, *The Changing Past*, 107-111; Saunders, *Writing History*, 91, 107; Van Jaarsveld, *Omstrede Suid-Afrikaanse Verlede*, 39-46.

³⁰ Van Jaarsveld, *Omstrede Suid-Afrikaanse Verlede*, 48.

³¹ Smith, *The Changing Past*, 114.

growing interaction between peoples and their incorporation into one economic system.³²

Eric Walker elaborated on the theme of the frontier tradition in South Africa in *A History of South Africa* (London, 1928) and *The Great Trek* (1934). In Walker's account, it was on the frontier that the trekboers had come to identify themselves as whites who were 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 that there should be no equality in church or state between black and white. By the 20th century, Walker suggested, the racist ideas and prejudices forged in the 18th century had come to dominate the Union of South Africa founded in 1910. 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.³³

An Afrikaans-speaking historian who was strongly influenced by Macmillan was **J.S. Marais**. Like Macmillan, Marais came to the conclusion that the history of South Africa was the tale of race relations, contact between race groups of different civilizations and their gradual coming together into a single, although heterogenous, community. In *The Cape Coloured People 1652-1937*, published in 1939, he saw race as the real problem in South African affairs. This book is a social history in the same mould as the work of Macmillan, and specifically analyses the origins, development and fate of South Africans of mixed descent. It is as much concerned with policy towards the Coloureds as it is with the history of the Coloureds themselves.

In *Maynier and the first Boer republic*, published in 1944, Marais undertook a minute examination of the frontier in the period 1778-1802. He demonstrated quite clearly that Theal's work could not stand up to cold scrutiny of the facts and showed that Theal was heavily prejudiced in favour of the white settlers on the frontier. Marais was also a liberal in the wider sense that he attempted to see all sides of the question, to do equal justice to all points of view. In his last major work, *The fall of Kruger's republic* (Oxford, 1961), he traces the events leading up to the Second Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902.³⁴

Against the background of the process of decolonization in Africa in the 1960s, the two-volume ***Oxford History of South Africa***, edited by Leonard Thompson and Monica Wilson, appeared in 1969 and 1971. The *Oxford History*, which represented the summation of liberal thinking about South Africa at the end of the 1960s, was a major landmark in South African historiography. This work dispelled for all time the myth that South African history began when the Portuguese seafarers rounded the Cape in 1487 – it demonstrated that Africans had indeed had a history before the coming of the white man. It thus pushed back the frontiers of South African history by going beyond the founding dates of more traditional histories.

The *Oxford History* reflected the shift in thinking that had accompanied the era of decolonization in the rest of Africa. Whites no longer held the centre of the stage of history. About a third of the first volume that deals with events up to 1870 is devoted

³² Saunders, *Writing History*, 93.

³³ Saunders, *Writing History*, 92.

³⁴ Smith, *The Changing Past*, 119-120.

to the pre-colonial era, and about half to the movement of black peoples between 1778 and 1870. The whites became known as “settlers” against whose depredations and penetration the blacks fought. There are no separate sections on the two main axes of Afrikaner historiography, the Great Trek and the Anglo-Boer War. They are interwoven into the story and given no special prominence. Black reaction to white domination is more important.³⁵ The *Oxford History* used an interdisciplinary approach and, apart from the historians’ accounts, there were also various chapters by sociologists, archaeologists, anthropologists, economists, journalists and Africanists. According to Van Jaarsveld, this study represented a high point in the ideology of the liberal school.³⁶

Thus the *Oxford History* heralded a new era in South African liberal historiography that was also represented by works such as **John Omer-Cooper’s** *The Zulu aftermath: A nineteenth-century revolution in Bantu Africa* (London, 1966). The latter dealt with the rise of the Zulu kingdom and the widespread repercussions that followed its expansion. The attention given by Omer-Cooper to the *Mfecane* focused the attention of historians anew on the disruptions among black peoples in the South African interior.³⁷ In the wake of the *Oxford History* followed **T.R.H. Davenport’s** *South Africa, A Modern History* (Johannesburg and London, 1977). Davenport’s work reflected a liberal Africanist interpretation of the past.³⁸ Contemporary studies in liberal historiography followed the Africanist trend of the *Oxford History* by approaching South African history from a black perspective. For **Nigel Worden** the “conquest” of the land of the indigenous peoples by white colonists provides the essential background to the history of modern South Africa,³⁹ while **Leonard Thompson** accuses the “white invaders” for “encroaching” upon the lands of the Khoisan and black peoples that would eventually lead to their “conquest” and “subjugation” to white rule.⁴⁰

Some historians, such as Smith, Moll and Van Aswegen, also regard the liberal school as having inspired the beginnings of a **black (nationalist) historiographical tradition**. This liberal trend is mission-inspired” but the number of works is, however, small. Few of these black writers had received much or indeed any formal training in history as a discipline. The missionary tradition of black historiography is a Christian liberal-humanistic approach to the past. The early writers of these histories were the products of missionary schools. Their writings are politically moderate, exhibit racial tolerance and are very much in line with Cape liberal thought. They favoured the qualified franchise and equal rights for all “civilized” men. The histories they wrote were black-centred, but they accepted the world as it was, viewing it with “white liberal eyes”.

They adopted a far more positive attitude towards the role of Britain in South Africa, seeing this influence as beneficial to blacks, protecting them against the racism of the Afrikaner. They wrote largely for their fellow blacks to give them a sense of identity, so that they would know who they were and where they came from, in the hope that

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 139.

³⁶ Van Jaarsveld, *Omstrede Suid-Afrikaanse Verlede*, 62,65.

³⁷ Smith, *The Changing Past*, 145.

³⁸ Van Jaarsveld, *Omstrede Suid-Afrikaanse Verlede*, 65.

³⁹ See *The Making of Modern South Africa: Conquest, Segregation and Apartheid* (Oxford, 1994).

⁴⁰ See *A History of South Africa* (New Haven, 1995).

they would be inspired to “collect and record the history of their people”.⁴¹ Examples of such writers are **S.T. Plaatje**⁴², **S.M. Molema**⁴³, **J.H. Soga**⁴⁴ and **D.D.T. Jabavu**.⁴⁵

The Revisionist school

Although the revisionist or radical academic historical tradition that emerged in the 1970s owed much of its immediate impetus to the shortcomings of the *Oxford History*, it also owed something to a non-academic radical historical phase that formulated new questions about the past in the 1940s and 1950s. The roots of this tradition lay in the growing black resistance to the South African government. With the coming to power of the Nationalist Party in 1948 black resistance increased and signs of Marxist influences were more in evidence.⁴⁶ This tendency was preceded by the emergence of white English-speaking members of the Communist Party of South Africa who began to write anti-capitalist histories about black suppression and racial discrimination; they included writers such as **Bill Andrews**⁴⁷, **R.K. Cope**⁴⁸ and **Eddie Roux**.⁴⁹ Roux's work was followed by **H.J. and R.E. Simons's** study, *Class and Colour in South Africa 1850-1950*, first published in 1969 which told the story of the past from a point of view of black resistance to white power and policy, and analysed in class terms the reasons for the unsuccessful attempts to overthrow capitalist domination.⁵⁰

The revisionist school represented a radical reinterpretation of the South African past and was initiated by white English-speaking émigrés from South Africa at British universities who began to take a stand against the liberal school. They became frustrated with the Afrikaner political hegemony in South Africa and the consequent non-achievement of any form of decolonization such as was happening in the rest of Africa. They therefore took to historical research in order to explain this phenomenon on the basis of Marxist historic-materialism. South African history had to be traced back to its roots and re-presented as a class struggle in a class-ridden society created by international and South African capitalism. Capitalism was closely linked to imperialism with its strategy of colonialism or black subjugation. In its turn colonialism was responsible for transforming a politically and economically independent pre-capitalist black populations into wage labourers in a proletarianised urban community.

Most radical historians saw black South Africans as the only true inhabitants and inheritors of the land. Whites, who are associated with capitalism, fill only a small space on the stage of history: they were the colonisers, exploiters and oppressors. For the radical revisionists South African history should thus be rewritten *de novo*, from the point of view of those “colonised” (by capitalism), the black working class.

⁴¹ Smith, *The Changing Past*, 131-133; Moll, *Tussengroepverhoudinge*, 22-23; H.J. van Aswegen, *History of South Africa to 1854* (Pretoria, 1990), 300.

⁴² *Native Life in South Africa*, (London, 1916).

⁴³ *Chief Moroka: His Life, His Times, His Country and His People* (Cape Town, 1951).

⁴⁴ *The South Eastern Bantu* (Johannesburg, 1930).

⁴⁵ *The Life of John Tengo Jabavu, Editor of Imvo Zabantsundu* (Lovedale, 1922) and *The Segregation Fallacy. A Native view of some South African inter-racial problems* (Lovedale, 1928).

⁴⁶ Smith, *The Changing Past*, 155.

⁴⁷ *Class Struggles in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1940).

⁴⁸ *Comrade Bill, the Life and Times of W.H. Andrews, Workers' Leader* (Cape Town, 1943).

⁴⁹ *S.P. Bunting. A Political Biography* (Cape Town, 1944) and *Time Longer than Rope. A History of the Black Man's Struggle for freedom in South Africa* (London, 1948).

⁵⁰ Van Jaarsveld, *Omstrede Suid-Afrikaanse Verlede*, 76; Smith, *The Changing Past*, 172.

The revisionists were influenced by the works of British leftist historians such as E.P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm, and by the theoretical interpretations of anti-colonial Marxists and structuralists such as Eugene Genovese, Louis Althusser, Gramsci and Nicos Poulantzas. The revisionists opted for an activist approach towards history that was aimed at revolutionary change in South Africa. Blacks were to be “liberated” and eventually brought to power.⁵¹

The leading figures of the new historiographical trend were initially perhaps **Martin Legassick, Stanley Trapido** and **Frederick Johnstone**. The main forum for this new work was the **Institute of Commonwealth Studies (ICS)** 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. The radical revisionists believed theory to be essential in the formulation of historical questions. According to Saunders, their materialist approach helped to make the decade of the 1970s a “golden age” for the production of historical knowledge of South Africa.⁵²

The new approach was carried on at university centres in South Africa, the most important being the **History Workshop** at the **University of the Witwatersrand** in Johannesburg under the guidance of **Belinda Bozzoli** of the Sociology Department at the university. The first was held in 1978 and then at three-yearly intervals, and they had as their concern not the history of “great men” and elites nor the old-style political history. In the aftermath of, and in response to, the Soweto uprising of 1976 revisionist historians began to work on the history of particular African townships and on earlier urban struggles, while the growth of massive squatter settlements in the major metropolitan areas spurred some to research the long history of African migration to towns and the relationship between that history and political action. The first of the University of the Witwatersrand History Workshop volumes, *Labour, Townships and Protest. Studies in the social history of the Witwatersrand*, was edited by Bozzoli and published in 1979. The emphasis of the book fell strongly on class.⁵³

The revisionists tried to write history “from the bottom up” or “from below”, focusing on the history of “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. They sought to recover the experiences of those who had, until then, slipped through the cracks of historical narratives, and in particular the marginalized and dispossessed, from sharecroppers and peasants to gangsters and childminders. The late 1970s are intimately connected with the rise of the new **social history**, which sought to capture the everyday experiences and consciousness of “ordinary” residents of towns. In this “social history” enterprise the collection and use of oral evidence was of central importance.⁵⁴

In the 1980s the social history approach was by far the dominant one in the work of English-speaking historians⁵⁵ and there can be little doubt that the revisionists had displaced the liberals as the authors of the dominant tradition in South African historiography, both in sheer volume and diversity of publication. For instance, participants in the ICS seminar series were interested in historicizing the material base of Southern African societies. The starting point was to establish the nature of

⁵¹ Van Jaarsveld, *Omstrede Suid-Afrikaanse Verlede*, 72-74.

⁵² Saunders, *Writing History*, 72.

⁵³ Van Jaarsveld, *Omstrede Suid-Afrikaanse Verlede*, 90; Saunders, *Writing History*, 14, 72-73.

⁵⁴ Saunders, *Writing History*, 14, 73.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

the political economy, whether of pre-colonial African society, or that of the merchant/settler or, later, industrial capital. Participants were influenced by the French *Annales* school and the ecological debate and by the rethinking of African history and work on development and underdevelopment. Shula Marks at the ICS, in particular, produced a stream of doctoral candidates who went on to become highly productive purveyors of the new approaches to history during the 1980s.⁵⁶

Some of these revisionists contributed pieces to a series of three major collections that Marks co-edited in the 1980s.⁵⁷ These edited collections in particular served a critical purpose because they not only demarcated the sets of themes around which the revisionist discourse had coalesced; they also mapped out the terrain for future research and writing.⁵⁸ In their wake followed scholars such as **Colin Bundy**⁵⁹, **William Beinart**⁶⁰, **Peter Delius**⁶¹, **Philip Bonner**⁶², **Jeff Guy**⁶³ and **Ken Shillington**.⁶⁴

In the 1980s the situation in South Africa was characterized by repeated waves of widespread popular protests and by state attempts to suppress them. At the same time the economy moved into a real crisis. This situation affected the choice of subject matter researched by progressive historians, so that new themes were brought into focus.⁶⁵ For example, the process of proletarianisation, the social effects of industrialization, the organizing and culture of the black working class, the strengths and flaws of the popular movements, the development of political consciousness among blacks, the forgotten struggles in rural areas and other local forms of freedom struggle became popular fields of research.⁶⁶ **F.R. Johnstone's** *Class, Race and Gold: A Study in Class Relations and Racial Discrimination in South Africa* (London, 1976) was a study of class relations in the gold-mining industry in the early twentieth century, while in *Migrant Labour in South Africa's Gold Mining Economy* (Johannesburg, 1985) **Alan Jeeves** tells of how it took almost thirty years for the mine owners to create a recruiting monopsony.⁶⁷

⁵⁶ A. Copley, 'Does Social History have a Future? The Ending of Apartheid and Recent Trends in South African Historiography', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 27,3 (2001),615.

⁵⁷ See S. Marks and A. Atmore (eds), *Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa* (London, 1980); S. Marks and R. Rathbone (eds), *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa. African Class Formation, Culture and Consciousness 1870-1930* (London, 1982) and S. Marks and S. Trapido (eds), *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalisation in Twentieth Century South Africa* (London, 1987).

⁵⁸ Copley, 'Does Social History have a Future?', 615.

⁵⁹ *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry* (London, 1979).

⁶⁰ *The Political Economy of Pondoland, 1860 to 1930* (Johannesburg, 1983).

⁶¹ *The Land belongs to Us: the Pedi polity, the Boers and the British in the nineteenth century Transvaal* (Johannesburg, 1983).

⁶² *Kings, Commoners and Concessionaries, the Evolution of the 19th century Swazi State* (Johannesburg, 1983).

⁶³ *The Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom: the civil war in Zululand, 1879-1884* (Johannesburg, 1982).

⁶⁴ *The Colonisation of the Southern Tswana, 1870-1900* (Johannesburg, 1985).

⁶⁵ H.E.J. Stolten, *History making and present day politics: the making of collective memory in South Africa* (forthcoming),2.

⁶⁶ See e.g. E. Webster (ed), *Essays in Southern African Labour History*, (Johannesburg, 1978); B. Bozzoli (ed), *Town and Countryside in the Transvaal. Capitalist Penetration and Popular Response* (Johannesburg, 1983); B. Bozzoli (ed), *Class, Community and Conflict* (Johannesburg, 1987) and P.L. Bonner, 'Family, crime and political consciousness on the East Rand, 1939-1955', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 14,3 (1988).

⁶⁷ Saunders, *Writing History*, 76,100.

Studies of popular movements improved the understanding of mass mobilization around important conflicts. Tom Lodge's overview of black resistance, *Black politics in South Africa since 1945* (London, 1983) and Helen Bradford's comprehensive examination of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union, *A taste of freedom: the ICU in rural South Africa, 1924-30* (New Haven, 1987), represent this tendency.⁶⁸ Some studies looked into popular culture such as music and dance, sport and literature, which broadened the understanding of everyday life for township residents and migrant workers.⁶⁹

Charles van Onselen had turned his attention to the early history of the Witwatersrand even before the Soweto uprising in 1976 and eventually published a two-volume work on topics in the early social and economic history of the Rand: *Studies in the social and economic history of the Witwatersrand 1886-1914 I, New Babylon* and *II, New Nineveh* (Johannesburg, 1982). He was especially interested in what happened to groups who were marginalized in the metropolis and focused on some of the consequences of people interacting in South Africa's largest urban conglomeration. Van Onselen's work illuminated the work of such subordinate groups in the new metropolis such as Zulu washermen and Afrikaner workers in the brickfields. Similarly **Rob Turrell** in *Capital and labour on the Kimberley diamond fields* (Cambridge, 1987) and **William Worger** in *South Africa's city of diamonds* (Johannesburg, 1987) published important research on the early history of Kimberley.⁷⁰

Some scholars writing within the framework of the History Workshop at the University of the Witwatersrand also explored and published so-called "counter-histories" as part of the "history from below" approach. **Luli Callinicos** published two books in this regard. The first volume, *A People's History of South Africa, Volume One, Gold and Workers, 1886-1924* (Johannesburg, 1980) is an undisguised, class-based counter-history of black workers' experiences of the urban environment of the Witwatersrand. The second volume, *Working Life, Volume Two, Factories, Townships and Popular Culture on the Rand, 1886-1940* (Johannesburg, 1987), analyses social structures by means of a deeper, experience-based methodology without forgetting the class view.⁷¹ 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.⁷² In *Capitalism and Apartheid: South Africa, 1910-84* (Aldershot, 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.⁷³

Dan O'Meara examined class structure and class struggle inside the National Party in *Volkskapitalisme: Class, Capital and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1934-1948* (Johannesburg, 1983). In concentrating on economic development in the period 1934-1948 he undertook the first serious examination of

⁶⁸ Stolten, *History making and present day politics*, 2.

⁶⁹ See D. Coplan, *In Township Tonight! South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre* (London, 1979).

⁷⁰ Saunders, *Writing History*, 14, 76-77.

⁷¹ Stolten, *History making and present day politics*, 3.

⁷² Saunders, *Writing History*, 78. See also P. Harries, 'Capital, state and labour on the 19th century Witwatersrand: A reassessment', *South African Historical Journal*, 18 (1986) and D. Yudelman, *The Emergence of Modern South Africa. State, Capital, and the Incorporation of Organized Labour on the South African Gold Fields, 1902-1939* (Westport, 1983).

⁷³ Saunders, *Writing History*, 78.

the material upliftment of the Afrikaner in these years and of the growth of a well-to-do class of Afrikaner. O'Meara tried to show how Afrikaners underwent a fundamental change as a result of the economic progress of the 1940s. **T. Dunbar Moodie's** *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, apartheid and the Afrikaner civil religion* (London, 1975), analysed how Afrikaner nationalism interpreted the world for itself, and unlike O'Meara, concentrated very much on also analyzing Afrikaner nationalism in terms of its internal political development.⁷⁴

The latter half of the 1980s saw a growing diversity of themes in revisionist scholarship, which had moved beyond issues of political economy to address, in addition, social and cultural questions such as the environment, gender relations, health, religion, ethnicity and identity.⁷⁵ In his chapter, 'Competition and cooperation in Middelburg, 1900-1930', which appeared in W. Beinart *et al.* (eds), *Putting a plough to the ground: Accumulation and dispossession in rural South Africa, 1850-1930* (Johannesburg, 1986), **Rob Morrell** pointed to sharp differentiation among the Middelburg farming community between the 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.⁷⁶ The examination of change in the rural areas was the principal theme in **Tim Keegan's** *Rural transformations in industrializing South Africa: The Southern Highveld to 1914*.⁷⁷

Lastly, historians such as Smith, Van Jaarsveld, Moll and Van Aswegen concur that the emergence of a **black nationalist historiography** was **partly stimulated** by the **radical revisionist historiography**. In the works of the black historians the main emphasis is on the black experience. As in the case of Afrikaner nationalist histories, it is "committed" historiography with a clear reflection of black peoples' conceptions of the course of history, as well as their ideals regarding their position in South Africa. In general, whites are typified as rulers, oppressors, colonialists and imperialists who subjugated the blacks – the original inhabitants of the land – purposefully and systematically. They deprived the black peoples of their land, broke up the black societies and transformed them into a landless proletariat. Greater attention is given to aspects such as slavery, wage labour, the black reserves and apartheid. Black resistance to white supremacy forms a central theme in most works: black resistance movements are dealt with; the role of black leaders is stressed, and in the more recent works the freedom struggle is typified as a class struggle.

Many of these works are propagandistic in nature and were written with a view to promoting the freedom struggle.⁷⁸ For instance, in *The All-African Convention: The Awakening of a People* (Johannesburg, 1950), **I.B. Tabata** opposed General Hertzog's removal of blacks from the Cape Province's common voters' role in 1935.⁷⁹ In protest against the 1952 Van Riebeeck celebrations of 300 years of white settlement in South Africa, **Hosea Jaffe** published *Three hundred years: A history of South Africa* (Lansdowne, 1952) under the pseudonym "Mnguni". In this book the history of South Africa is seen as the history "of 300 years of struggle between oppressors and oppressed". In the same year **Dora Taylor**, who wrote under the

⁷⁴ Smith, *The Changing Past*, 182, 185.

⁷⁵ Cobley, 'Does Social History have a Future?', 616.

⁷⁶ Saunders, *Writing History*, 73.

⁷⁷ Smith, *The Changing Past*, 198.

⁷⁸ H.J. van Aswegen, *History of South Africa to 1854* (Pretoria, 1990), 300; Van Jaarsveld, *Omstrede Suid-Afrikaanse Verlede*, 131-150.

⁷⁹ Van Jaarsveld, *Omstrede Suid-Afrikaanse Verlede*, 140.

pseudonym “Nosipho Majeke”, published *The role of the missionaries in conquest*, which was aimed at furthering the liberation struggle.⁸⁰ In similar mould followed **J.K. Ngubane’s** *An African Explains Apartheid* (London, 1963)⁸¹ and **Govan Mbeki’s** *South Africa: the Peasant’s Revolt*.⁸²

From **David Dube’s** *The Rise of Azania, the fall of South Africa* (Lusaka, 1983), it appears that black student organizations had relinquished the idea of South Africa as a multiracial country. For Dube it is a black country for blacks alone. Black peoples will write their own histories alone and only they could decide who will be the new heroes of the South African past for whom monuments would be built in the future.⁸³ Other black protest works against white oppression and racial discrimination which see the liberation struggle as the alternative to the “historical injustices of the past” are those by **T. Mbeki**⁸⁴, **B.M. Magubane**⁸⁵, **No Sizwe**⁸⁶ and **M.W. Tsotsi**.⁸⁷

Historiographical and research trends and tendencies beyond the 1990s

Historians hold diverse views on research trends and the general direction of academic history in post-apartheid South Africa. For Albert Grundlingh the academic history profession reached its high point during the 1980s. It was a period when the History Department at the University of South Africa, for instance, could boast a staff of 35 historians; today (2004) is it half this figure. Other South African universities remained stayed stagnant in the 1990s. According to Grundlingh, the growth during the 1980s can be seen as quite artificial, as so much depended on apartheid: structurally, in terms of a lack of open-ended career opportunities for black people, and ideologically, as an issue that by force of circumstance informed much of academic debate and historical writing. In the new context it will perhaps be possible to discern a less spectacular but steadier growth based on more realistic premises than the unsound fundamentals which buttressed the spectacular growth in the 1980s.⁸⁸

The rapid legal and political demise of the apartheid regime had a remarkable effect on the discourses of South African history in general, and on revisionist historians in particular. Jeff Peires commented on “unmistakable signs of crisis and collapse” in the radical historiography on South Africa. For many practitioners of South African history it seemed inescapable by the mid-1990s that there must be a “new history” to complement the “new South Africa”; the question was, what sort of new history?⁸⁹ Stolten correctly observes that the transfer of power that took place in 1994 has not yet been matched by any significant new historiographical development and that the study of history has lost much of its excitement and appeal in South Africa in the years since 1996.⁹⁰

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 142-143; Smith, *The Changing Past*, 157-158.

⁸¹ Van Jaarsveld, *Omstrede Suid-Afrikaanse Verlede*, 133-134.

⁸² Moll, *Tussengroepverhoudinge*, 69.

⁸³ Smith, *The Changing Past*, 161.

⁸⁴ *South Africa: The historical injustice* (1978).

⁸⁵ *The Political Economy of Race and Class* (New York, 1979).

⁸⁶ *One Azania, one Nation, the National Question in South Africa* (London, 1979).

⁸⁷ *From Chattel to Wage Slavery: a new approach to South African history* (Maseru, 1979).

⁸⁸ A. Grundlingh, ‘Some trends in South African academic history: changing contexts and challenges’, in S. Jeppie (ed), *Toward New Histories for South Africa* (Lansdowne, 2004), 197,200.

⁸⁹ Cobley, ‘Does Social History have a Future?’, 617-618.

⁹⁰ H.E.J. Stolten, ‘History writing and history education in post-apartheid South Africa’, Paper for NETREED Conference, 8-10 December 2003, 1-2.

One reason for this sense of crisis, according to Tim Nuttall and John Wright, was the sudden evaporation, in the course of the dramatic political changes of the early 1990s, of the moral and epistemological certainties of the apartheid era. South African historians were in one way or another, to a greater or lesser degree, caught up in the deep and narrow groove of “struggle history”. The degree to which they became involved in fighting political battles on the terrain of their discipline meant that when the political climate suddenly began to change, as happened from 1990 onwards, many of them, on the right and the left alike, were left without clear academic agendas.⁹¹

To explain the absence of a new direction in South African historiography in the 1990s, Martin Legassick and Gary Minkley point to the nature of the negotiated political revolution. The transfer of power in South Africa was different from the decolonization of tropical Africa thirty years before in that it was the result of a set of negotiations within the country between the ruling white minority and the ANC, which accepted a liberal democratic constitution and at least in the middle-long term agreed to work within a capitalist framework. Radical liberatory history became less relevant due to the actual demobilization of social struggle. According to Saunders, the historiographical equivalent to the dramatic political change of 1994 had already taken place decades earlier and he suggests that South African history was decolonized long before the political decolonization of 1994.⁹²

One of the most serious weaknesses in the present state of South African historiography is that even well into a decade of epoch-making changes since 1994, a generally authoritative history of South Africa with a distinctly Africanist point of view has yet to appear. Apart from some outstanding examples, dealt with above, in general the historiographical tradition in South Africa is marked by the almost total absence of black history writers. Specialist literature written by black historians does not take up much space on the shelves of the university libraries. An important reason for this situation is that few black historians have been able to obtain, and retain, academic positions. Some of the best black historians are lost to the government and the private sectors.⁹³ Thus, up to now the construction of the master narrative of the history of South Africa has been dominated by white English-speaking males.⁹⁴

Grundlingh argues that what may turn out to be more challenging than grappling with a nationalist “African voice” in the future is the issue of dealing with South Africa’s history in the context of Africa. The question of South Africa’s “exceptionalism” on the continent has the potential to draw historians into a wider frame and therefore the question of the South African past in relation to the rest of Africa remains.⁹⁵

The first post-1994 histories on the liberation struggle have begun to appear. Ben Magubane is director of the South African Democracy Education Trust (**SADET**), a presidential project researching the struggle for democracy between 1960 and 1994. The SADET project was initially conceived merely as the history of the ANC. It was

⁹¹ Quoted by Cobley, ‘Does Social History have a Future?’, 617-618.

⁹² Quoted by Stolten, ‘History writing and history education’, 1-2.

⁹³ Grundlingh, ‘Some trends in South African academic history’, 210-211; Stolten, ‘History writing and history education’, 3.

⁹⁴ Stolten, ‘History writing and history education’, 4.

⁹⁵ Grundlingh, ‘Some trends in South African academic history’, 213-214.

later broadened to become the story of *The Road to Democracy in South Africa Volume I: 1960-1970*.⁹⁶

Stolten correctly observed that the radical revisionist school never presented a complete alternative synthesis of South African history. It is still too early to think of a comprehensive national alternative synthesis as there are still too many unresearched lacunae in historical research.⁹⁷ At the present, therefore, South African historiography appears to be a rather eclectic enterprise. However, a few particular research foci have manifested themselves since the 1990s.

An outstanding research focus, which seems to be growing stronger and becoming more popular, is **gender studies**. Quite a few studies have appeared on the role and place of women in colonial society⁹⁸ and on gender discrimination under apartheid.⁹⁹ A lot of attention is also being devoted to gender and sexuality, family and missionary work.¹⁰⁰ In conjunction with gender studies articles on **masculinity**¹⁰¹ and **homosexuality** have also appeared.¹⁰² Louis Grundlingh has explored public attitudes and responses to **HIV/AIDS**.¹⁰³

A new, highly ceremonial form of political history has begun to emerge in South Africa and concentrates on the promotion of the redemptive value of **memory** and of personal testimony, on the one hand, and on the identification and dedication of new, inclusive, national monuments, on the other.¹⁰⁴ Thus **heritage** forms part of a "socially responsible past".¹⁰⁵ In this regard, the **Truth and Reconciliation Commission**, established in 1996, was investigated by historians such as Nico Combrink¹⁰⁶ and D. Thelen as an example of the first aspect of the new public history.¹⁰⁷ As examples of the second, studies on **Robben Island**, the **Khoisan heritage** and **Afrikaner monuments** have appeared. The role of **national monuments, museums and cultural festivals** and their public image were re-

⁹⁶ Stolten, 'History writing and history education', 16. See also M. Morris, *Every Step of the Way: The Journey to freedom in South Africa* (Cape Town, 2004); F. Buntman, *Robben Island & Prisoner Resistance to Apartheid* (Cape Town, 2004) and B. Bozzoli, *Theatres of Struggle and the End of Apartheid* (Johannesburg, 2004).

⁹⁷ Stolten, *History making and present day politics*, 4.

⁹⁸ K. Schoeman, 'Vroeë Geskrifte deur Suid-Afrikaanse Vroue, 1749-1865', *South African Historical Journal*, 36 (1997), 24-47; N. Erlank, "'Thinking it wrong to remain unemployed in the pressing times". The Experiences of two English settler wives', *South African Historical Journal*, 33 (1995), 62-82; A. Appel, "'Trying to make them visible". Women in Port Elizabeth in the late nineteenth-early twentieth century', *Historia*, 43, 1 (1998), 9-28; H. Bradford, 'Makeovers of Two Women. Illustrated History and Gender Bias', *Kronos*, November 2004.

⁹⁹ K. Watson, 'Gender Bias? The struggle to establish a permanent women police presence in South Africa during the Union period: 1915-1960', *Journal for Contemporary History*, 24, 1 (1999), 1-14.

¹⁰⁰ See N. Tisani, 'The Shaping of Gender Relations in Mission Stations', *Kronos*, 19 (1992), 61-79 and *Kronos*, 23 (1996).

¹⁰¹ R. Morrell, 'Masculinity in South African History: Towards a Gendered Approach to the Past', *South African Historical Journal*, 37 (1997), 167-177.

¹⁰² N. Southey, 'Uncovering Homosexuality in Colonial South Africa: The Case of Bishop Twells', *South African Historical Journal*, 36, (1997), 48-67; A. du Plessis, 'Searching in an "Empty Closet". A History of Homosexuality in South Africa', *Historia*, 42, 1 (1997), 116-129.

¹⁰³ L. Grundlingh, 'Early attitudes and responses to HIV/AIDS in South Africa as reflected in newspapers, 1983-1988', *Journal for Contemporary History*, 26, 1 (2001), 86-103.

¹⁰⁴ Cobley, 'Does Social History have a Future?', 618.

¹⁰⁵ Grundlingh, 'Some trends in South African academic history', 206.

¹⁰⁶ 'History and the Commission on Truth and Reconciliation: the problem of collective guilt', *Journal for Contemporary History*, 23, 2 (1998), 101-112.

¹⁰⁷ 'How the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Challenges the Ways We Use History', *South African Historical Journal*, 47 (2002), 162-190.

examined by historians in order to deconstruct the myths surrounding them and to recontextualize them against the background of rapid social and political change in South Africa.¹⁰⁸ Even the **environmental heritage** constitutes a part of the post-colonial debate and approach towards heritage.¹⁰⁹

Other new approaches include studies on **minority identities** such as the Khoisan, the Coloured people and Afrikaner ex-patriots,¹¹⁰ and on **sports and politics**.¹¹¹ Historians have also focused on historical analyses of emerging “soft” industries such as **leisure and tourism**. Vivian Bickford-Smith explored leisure and social identities as pastime in colonial society.¹¹² Jim Davidson explains how tourism was used to economically revitalize a rural South African town that was marginalized as a result of changing economic and demographic determinants¹¹³, while Albert Grundlingh analyses Afrikaner working-class gambling habits and the cultural politics that influenced the dog-racing industry in the 1930s and 1940s.¹¹⁴

A growing number of historians have begun to focus attention on **environmental and ecological history** and have contributed to the increasing corpus of studies in this field of historical research. Studies were published on environmental politics¹¹⁵ and on water-scarcity, dewatering and sinkholes, and the commodification of water.¹¹⁶ Other studies published on environmental and ecological history include a broad variety of topics such as Western Cape rock paintings, horses in colonial society, the

¹⁰⁸ See e.g. V. Riouful, ‘Behind Telling: Post-Apartheid *Representations* of Robben Island’s Past’, *Kronos*, 26 (2000), 2-41; *South African Historical Journal*, 29 (1993), 3-131; Russel Viljoen, ‘Khoisan Heritage and Identity’, *South African Historical Journal*, 35 (1999), 140-145; J. Tempelhoff, ‘Omvormings van ‘n Afrikaanse kernsimbool: ‘n hede-geskiedenis van Kerkplein 1989-1997’, *Journal for Contemporary History*, 23, 2 (1998), 120-147; C. Rassool, ‘The Rise of Heritage and Reconstruction of History in South Africa’, *Kronos*, 26 (2000), 1-21; C. Kros, ‘Heritage vs. History: The end of noble tradition?’, *Historia*, 48, 1 (2003), 326-336.

¹⁰⁹ L. van Sittert, ‘From “mere weeds” and “bosjes” to a Cape floral kingdom: the re-imagining of indigenous flora at the Cape, c.1890-1939’, *Kronos*, 28 (2002), 102-126.

¹¹⁰ See e.g. R.H. du Pré, ‘One nation, many Afrikaners: The identity crisis of “brown” Afrikaners in the new South Africa’, *Journal for Contemporary History*, 22, 1 (1997), 81-97; S.E. Donaldson, ‘Social Space and Racial Identity in colonial Pietersburg (1886-1910)’, *Historia*, 43, 1 (1998), 29-40; S. Robins, ‘Land Struggles and the Politics and Ethics of repressing “Bushmen” History and Identity’, *Kronos*, 26 (2000), 56-75; B. du Toit, ‘Afrikaners and Diasporas’, *Historia*, 48, 1 (2003), 15-54.

¹¹¹ C. Rademeyer, ‘“No normal sport in an abnormal society”. Sports isolation in the struggle against apartheid in South African sport, 1980-1992’, *Journal for Contemporary History*, 25, 1 (2000), 17-41; B.K. Murray, ‘The Sports Boycott and Cricket: The cancellation of the 1971/72 South African tour of Australia’, *South African Historical Journal*, 49, 1 (2003), 162-171.

¹¹² ‘Leisure and Social Identity in Cape Town, British Cape Colony, 1883-1910’, *Kronos*, 25 (1998/99), 103-128.

¹¹³ ‘Coping with Marginality: Tourism and the Projection of Grahamstown, 1870-1955’, *South African Historical Journal*, 42 (2000), 176-190.

¹¹⁴ ‘“Gone to the Dogs”: The Cultural Politics of Gambling – The Rise and Fall of British Greyhound Racing on the Witwatersrand, 1932-1949’, *South African Historical Journal*, 48 (2003), 174-189.

¹¹⁵ See J.F. Kirsten en A. van der Veer, ‘Omgewingsvraagstukke en internasionale verhoudinge: ‘n Historiese perspektief’, 79-95 and P. Steyn and A. Wessels, ‘Environmental non-governmental contributions to the global environmental movement, 1962-1992’, *Journal for Contemporary History*, 24, 2 (1999), 96-113; P. Steyn, ‘Environmental management in South Africa: Twenty years of governmental response to the global challenge, 1972-1992’, *Historia*, 46, 1 (2001), 25-53; P. Steyn, ‘Popular environmental struggles in South Africa, 1972-1992’, *Historia*, 47, 1 (2002), 125-158.

¹¹⁶ J. Tempelhoff, ‘On Laburn’s “mystery query”. A prehistory of the Vaal River as water source of the Witwatersrand’, *Historia*, 45, 1 (2000), 88-117; J. Tempelhoff, ‘Time and the River. Observations on the Vaal River as source of water to the Witwatersrand 1903-24’, *Historia*, 46, 1 (2001), 247-270; A. Pelser and P. Steyn, ‘An age of thirsty people: Exploratory notes on future water-scarcity and water conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa’, *Journal for Contemporary History*, 27, 1 (2002), 81-100; E.S. van Eeden, et al, ‘Effects of dewatering and sinkholes on people and environment – an analysis of the Carletonville area in Gauteng, South Africa’, *Historia*, 48, 1 (2003), 95-125.

history of hunting, agriculture and conservation, veterinary diseases, the prickly pear industry of the Eastern Cape, ornithology, dogs and wildlife conservation.¹¹⁷

Lastly, Gary Baines has opened an important new trend in South African historiography by exploring the cultural memory of white male military conscripts who served during the South African border war from the 1960s to the 1990s.¹¹⁸ Hopefully this will stimulate more research into this aspect of South African history that has hitherto largely been neglected.

As far as ongoing research projects are concerned, it seems if studies on cultural politics, masculine identities, heritage and memory, medical history, oral history, environmental history and post-colonial and post-nationalist historiographies are still popular among historians.¹¹⁹

Conclusion

The ideological liberation of the 1990s unleashed a tremendous variety of thought and approaches to South African historiography, but there is still no clearly defined direction. Stolten suggests that perhaps the immediate future for South African historical research lies in a symbiotic hegemony consisting of all progressive streams from liberal Africanism and radical, social history to ANC-informed strategic thinking.¹²⁰ Although the pursuit of research into “traditional” political, economic and social themes still continues the increasing attention to topics such as heritage identities, tourism and leisure and environmental issues represents a marked shift away from the foci of the revisionist phase. As such it is a welcome development and is clear proof that South African historians are no longer subconsciously harnessed to respond academically to the political challenges of the apartheid era. Indeed, Grundlingh argues that, while South Africa moves further into a post-apartheid future and the current present becomes the past, contemporary South African history may incrementally acquire a semblance of normality as it edges towards a more inclusive narrative of events which, despite possible different emphases, will at least pertain to all groups as fully-fledged South African citizens.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ See e.g. *Kronos*, 29 (2003); *South African Historical Journal*, 48 (2003) and J. Carruthers, “Our Beautiful and Useful Allies”. Aspects of Ornithology in Twentieth Century South Africa’, *Historia*, 49, 1 (2004), 89-109; K. Brown, ‘Cultural Constructions of the Wild: The Rhetoric and Practice of Wildlife Conservation in the Cape Colony at the turn of the twentieth century’, *South African Historical Journal*, 47 (2002), 75-95.

¹¹⁸ “South Africa’s Vietnam?” Literary History and Cultural Memory of the Border War’, *South African Historical Journal*, 49 (2003), 172-192.

¹¹⁹ See conference brochure of the Biennial Conference of the Historical Association of South Africa, University of Stellenbosch, 5-7 April 2004 and Call for Papers of the South African Historical Society, University of Cape Town, 26-29 June 2005.

¹²⁰ Stolten, *History making and present day politics*, 5.

¹²¹ Grundlingh, ‘Some trends in South African academic history’, 200.