

Writing Histories and Creating Myths: Perspectives on Trends in the Discipline of History and its Representations in Some South African Historical Journals 1985-1995¹

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"Such is history. A play of life and death is sought in the calm telling of a tale, in the resurgence and denial of the origin, the unfolding of a dead past and result of a present practice. It reiterates, under another rule, the myths built upon a murder of an originary death and fashions out of language the forever - remnant trace of a beginning that is as impossible to recover as to forget."

*Michel de Certeau*²

INTRODUCTION: THE PRODUCTION OF HISTORIES AND THEIR CIRCUMSTANCES

The study and writing of history rely on very specific circumstances to flourish. Such circumstances prevailed, in ancient Greece when a hyper-critical Athenian, Thucydides (c.460-400B.C.), after the Peloponnesian war in 420BC, produced his history.³ It was also

¹ Extended report on a lecture presented on 3 April 1996 to undergraduate and postgraduate students in Military History at the Faculty of Military Science of the University of Stellenbosch, Saldanha. The author is grateful to colleagues Prof. Pieter de Klerk and Ms. Retha van Niekerk for their valuable comments and criticism on an earlier draft of the report.

² M. DE CERTEAU, *The writing of history* (Translated by T. Conley, Columbia University Press, New York, 1988), p. 47.

³ A. MOMIGLIANO, *The classical foundations of modern historiography* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1990), p. 41; H.A.L. FISHER, *A history of Europe Vol. I: From the earliest times to 1713* (Eighth impression of the 1935 edition, Collins, London, 1968), pp. 47-48, suggests the war is overrated in its significance, as a result of the attention bestowed upon it by Thucydides; W.J. VAN DER DUSSEN, *Filosofie van de geschiedenis* (Dick Coutinho, Muiderberg, 1986), p. 31.

a Europe which had been exposed to a belligerent Napoleonic France and the emergent awareness of Prussian sense of destiny, which inspired a youthful Leopold von Ranke, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, to produce an anti-Enlightenment discourse in his hermeneutics.⁴ In more recent times a standard history of the Mediterranean and the Mediterranean world, by Fernand Braudel (1902-1985),⁵ made its appearance in a post-World War II era when the ambitions of global political domination had been transferred from a Western European nucleus to the United States of America (USA) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The totalitarian approach of the *Annales* historians opened up new vistas on historical studies that were incomprehensible at the beginning of the twentieth century.

But what are these circumstances that auger in changes that are so comprehensive that they adjust the way in which we as historians think? Perhaps it has a lot to do with De Certeau's observation that:

“Stable societies allow history to favor continuities and tend to confer the value of a human essence upon a solidly established order. In periods of movement or revolution, ruptures of individual or collective action become the principle of historical intelligibility.”⁶

Or it might otherwise be the result of a creative spirit which requires of the historian to give account, within a specific situation - usually a crisis of sorts - of the time and space in which a society finds itself. More important is the fact that there must exist a specific need to account for existential changes that have taken place.

It also perhaps has much to do with the need for humankind to create myths. In recent times historians have given attention once again to the similarities between history and myth.

HISTORY AND MYTH

Both myth and history are attempts at knowing and understanding the past. They rely on memory. They are transmitted culturally over generations by means of a particular group's historical memory. But there has traditionally been one major distinction between myth and history. History lays claim to greater “scientific” accuracy.⁷

This claim can also be an albatross around the neck of the historian. In the past two

⁴ P. BURKE, “Ranke the reactionary”, in G.G. IGGERS and J.M. POWELL, *Leopold von Ranke and the shaping of the historical discipline* (Syracuse University Press, New York, 1990), pp. 43-44.

⁵ P. VRIES, “De zegetocht van de Annales” in H. BELIËN and G.J. VAN SETTEN (Eds.), *Geschiedschrijving in de twintigste eeuw: Discussie zonder eind* (Uitgeversmaatschappij Agon, Amsterdam, 1991), pp. 189-191.

⁶ M. DE CERTEAU, *The writing of history*, p. 48.

⁷ B. MAZLISH, *The fourth discontinuity: The co-evolution of humans and machines* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1993), p. 210.

decades, as a result of comprehensive technological and scientific developments, historians have started questioning the conventional wisdom of the scientific base of history. In the 1970's Mandelbaum stated:

“(W)e impose upon historical studies a truth condition that is not only different from any applied to art or myth, but one that may be more severe than the truth condition placed on the theoretical structures of the natural sciences by some philosophers of science.”⁸

This realisation, together with an awareness that we might be super-imposing a new “truth” upon one which might never have existed in the first place, by the 1980's gave cause for grave concern. In the early phase of the post-modernist era it was a question of asking with whom lay the authority of vouching for truth and on what terms? The acceptance for “myth” as a viable conceptual discourse in the process of producing histories, became a realistic alternative.

Is it then strange at all that the macro-historian W.H. McNeill, described his specific approach as *mythistory*? It implies that the historian, in order to make any significant contribution towards making history more understandable, makes ‘intuitive leaps’ into generalisation.⁹ In this context historians are then “...mythistorians who provide ideational grounding through generalization for a climate of opinion...”¹⁰

The link between history and myth, in this context, is close to the surface when we accept that:

“Myth exists because, through history, language is confronted with its origins.”¹¹

In accepting that history needs to account for our origins and where we are at any given point in time, explains why history is our myth. It then “...combines what can be thought, the ‘thinkable’, and the origin, in conformity with the way in which a society can understand its own working”.¹²

Methodologically, Ginzburg tries to fathom the interpretative process of historical understanding, when he states:

“There is a...distance between passively living a myth and the attempt to interpret it critically in the broadest and most comprehensive manner possible.... (W)e still find ourselves confronting something that our interpretations succeed only in approaching, but not exhausting.”¹³

⁸ M. MANDELBAUM, *The anatomy of historical knowledge* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1977), p.9.

⁹ P. COSTELLO, *World historians and their goals: Twentieth-century answers to modernism* (Northern Illinois University Press, DeKalb, 1993), p. 185.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

¹¹ M. DE CERTEAU, *The writing of history*, p. 47.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹³ C. GINZBURG, *Clues, myths, and the historical method* (Translated from the Italian *Miti emblematici: morfologia e storia* by J. and A.C. Tedeschi, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1989), p. 155.

In accenting the solipsistic image he works from the premise that “myths think us up” on account of “the perpetual inadequacies of our analytical categories”.¹⁴

For some historians this approach to history falls in the category of post-modernism. What is however important is to accept the fact that within the current tensions prevalent in the discipline there are schools of thought who argue that history - because of a distinct credibility crisis in terms of representations of reality - is little more than the creation of myths. These myths are constantly subject to redefinition. They may also be provided with a new content. They may also have different connotations to different people. Bearing this in mind, it is then possible to question many of our fixed assumptions as to reality, truthfulness and credibility. For the historian, like a Homer of old, is also subjected to passing on as lucidly as possible the fantasies (in the form of myths) to future generations, who might be able to understand it in context.

THE PROBLEM OF POST-MODERNISM

The word ‘post-modernism’ hints at a crucial problem in contemporary society. According to Rüsen, it is the effort to overcome modernity and modernization as a specific use of rationality in running all affairs in human life, and to develop alternative ideas which should guide human life beyond the horror of unrestrained domination by technological rationality. It is this crisis of orientation, this change of basic cultural values, he points out, which has motivated the already mentioned critique of advanced modernity in historical studies and which has bred new questions on the past, new ideas of history, new strategies of research and new forms of writing history.¹⁵

Others historians contend that we have currently progressed way beyond post-modernism. For them it is merely a revival of the classical conception of history within the hermeneutic tradition. If this is so, then it is important to remember that the hermeneutics of the late twentieth century is substantially different in character to that of almost two centuries ago.¹⁶ The “new hermeneutics” is the product of an apparent global communications environment in which nationalism has been relegated to a second or third order of importance in the wake of the approaching waves of technology and new economic realism. One example of the new approach is research conducted in Germany. From 1986 to 1987 about 40 academics in the disciplines of history, anthropology, literature, law, political science, sociology, psychology, art history and economics participated in a project at the *Zentrum für Interdisziplinäre Forschung (ZiF)* of the University of Bielefeld. Their objective was to get a new and more comprehensive understanding of the evolution of European society since the eighteenth century. As a team of researchers they acknowl-

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

¹⁵ J. RÜSEN, *Studies in metahistory* (Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria, 1993), p. 208.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

edged the fact that the writing of social history had become international in character. They were also aware that national differences still persisted. However it was not a serious obstacle.¹⁷ What was evident from the new research environment was that the realities of human society blurred strong nationalist sympathies, which in former times made out the “lifeblood” of histories. More important is the fact, where the “old hermeneutics” acted as an extension of reactionary power bases, it has now become a theoretical network, aimed at the realisation of a greater sense of individual liberty.

It is this underlying theme we shall consider in the discussion that follows.

OUTLINE: SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORY AND THE REPRODUCTION OF HISTORIES

South African society has been subjected to more tumultuous change between 1989 and 1995, than at any other time over the past three hundred years. The most important manifestation of change was the formal transfer in 1994 of political power from a white minority government to an African controlled government, elected on the basis of a basic majoritarian democracy. This process has been the order of the day in all spheres of South African society.

The fraternity of academic historians in South Africa and their research production reflected these changes. For more than a decade, since 1985, there were clear signs that they were sensitive to the processes taking shape. In their work, reflections on the past offered a better understanding of the present and the potential future lying ahead. One might even say that they had helped, through their academic pursuits, towards the creation of a new myth for a new understanding of South African society. In the discussion that follows an attempt will be made at outlining certain trends of development in the history of historical writing - historiography - in South Africa between 1985 and 1995.

For the purposes of this paper the basis of analysis was texts published in *The South African Historical Journal*, *Historia* and *Contree*. The first two journals are mouthpieces respectively of the South African Historical Society and the South African Historical Association whereas *Contree* was, until the early 1990's, a government sponsored journal aimed at promoting development studies and policy planning within the discipline of history and related disciplines.

In the discussion, certain trends in history will be identified, such as for example the writing of gender, military, environmental and cultural history. Furthermore consideration will be given to narrative, as opposed to analytic/structural history and the production of histories of the stable past, as opposed to histories of the present.

¹⁷ J. KOCKA and A. MITCHELL (Eds.) *Bourgeois society in nineteenth-century Europe* (Translated and edited in English, by G. Fagan, A. Tooze and K. Koerner, from *Bürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert* (1988), Berg Publishers, Oxford, 1993), pp. 9-11.

SCHOOLS OF HISTORICAL STUDY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Traditionally South African historiography has been classified in four schools, i.e. the settler, liberal, Afrikaner and radical school. This classification was initially made by F.A. van Jaarsveld¹⁸ in his pioneering historiographical studies and refined by K. Smith¹⁹ and C. Saunders²⁰ in their respective works. For the purposes of this study it is only necessary to briefly take note of the main trends that developed in these schools.

The "settler school" was representative of the values of colonial society which was subordinate to the greater order of things in the context of a European imperial power centre, with nuclear centres of influence in the colonies. The work of George McCall Theal, George Cory and Frank Cana are considered as being representative of the settler school.²¹

The "liberal school" which emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century was one of questioning the common sense of prevailing racial discrimination and preoccupations in a socio-political and a partial economic context. Outstanding figures in the liberal school were W.M. Macmillan, E.A. Walker, C.W. de Kiewiet and L. Fouché.²² A major liberal historian of more recent times is T.R.H. Davenport.

The "Afrikaans school" of historians evolved in the early part of the twentieth century after members of the Afrikaans cultural community were exposed to predominantly post-graduate training at continental universities. The historians in this category included A.J.H. Van der Walt, P.J. van der Merwe, G.D. Scholtz, C.F.J. Muller, A.N. Pelzer and F.A. van Jaarsveld, to mention only a few.²³

The "radical school" emerged at the beginning of the 1970's as a result of the need to rephrase the discourse on South African history. This followed in the wake of the open debate which had been sparked off once the synthesis of the liberal inspired *Oxford History of South Africa* filtered through to the historical and social science fraternity of the country.²⁴ The leading historians in this category were P. Delius, S. Trapido, S. Marks,

¹⁸ F.A. VAN JAARSVELD, *Geskiedkundige verkenninge* (J.L. van Schaik, Pretoria, 1974), Chapter 3.

¹⁹ K. SMITH, *The changing past: Trends in South African historical writing* (Southern Publishers, Johannesburg, 1988).

²⁰ C. SAUNDERS, *The making of the South African past: Major historians on race and class* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1988).

²¹ For more on them see K. SMITH, *The changing past: Trends in South African historical writing* pp. 18-56.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 103-154; C. SAUNDERS, *The making of the South African past: Major historians on race and class*, pp. 47-104; F.A. VAN JAARSVELD, *Geskiedkundige verkenninge*, pp. 74-80.

²³ K. SMITH, *The changing past: Trends in South African historical writing*, pp. 57-102; F.A. VAN JAARSVELD, *Geskiedkundige verkenninge*, pp. 65-74; F.A. VAN JAARSVELD, *Afrikanergeskiedskrywing: Verlede hede en toekoms* (Lex Patria, Johannesburg, 1992), pp. 193-210.

²⁴ For one of the first historiographical studies in this field, see H.M. WRIGHT, *The burden of the present: Liberal-radical controversy over South African history* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1977). This study, despite certain shortcomings, is an important guideline for later developments in radical historiography.

C. van Onselen, B. Bozzoli, W. Beinart and others.²⁵

The different schools of historians did not come into existence in isolation. The settler and liberal schools were the products of British universities. Afrikaans historians, although they were inspired by local nationalist sentiments, had strong ties with Germany, the Netherlands and to a lesser extent with Belgium, Britain and France. The radical historians were the product of American and British universities. Especially in the case of the latter, neo-marxist thought of the 1960's had a significant impact on the way in which history was being written. In the American historical tradition radicalism was closely associated with gay history, gender studies, minorities and environmental concerns. The structural analysis of marxist thought, as in the style of Eugene Genovese, only had a peripheral status on radical historical thought. South African historians in many respects merely started applying the methodologies of their overseas counterparts to local empirical studies.

In order to understand prevailing trends, it is necessary to take a look at what happened in Europe and the United States.

TWENTIETH CENTURY TRENDS IN ANGLO-AMERICAN AND EUROPEAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

Up to the end of World War I, narrative history, in the tradition of the discipline as outlined by Leopold von Ranke a century before, was the order of the day. In the United States of America and Britain there were some voices of dissent. In the wake of progress made in the young disciplines of sociology, psychology, political science and economics, later to be grouped together as social sciences, a deterministic approach gave substance to what was called "New History" in the USA.²⁶

After World War II the new trend in historical writing manifested itself in no uncertain way on the European continent. The *Annales* School of historians in France, led the Western European onslaught against the hermeneutic method which had its origins in the defeated Germany. Furthermore the ideas of popular social democracy had become integrated with democratic trends in historical writing. Marxist socialism became one of the cornerstones of European historical writing.

In the United States of America, by the early 1960's the study of economic history gave rise to quantitative analysis. Soon historians who were writing "history by the numbers" were called *cliometrists*. They were operating on the principles outlined earlier by Carl Hempel and Rudolf Carnap. An outstanding feature of their work was an overt commitment to the autonomy of 'factual' evidence and methodological individualism, which

²⁵ F.A. VAN JAARSVELD, *Omstrede Suid-Afrikaanse verlede: Geskiedenisideologie en die historiese skuldvraagstuk* (Lex Patria, Johannesburg, 1984), pp. 72-122.

²⁶ H. BELIËN, "De moderne Amerikaanse historiografie" in H. BELIËN and G.J. VAN STETTEN, *Geschiedschrijving in de twintigste eeuw: Discussie zonder eind*, p. 263.

reflected a tacit commitment to psychological behaviorism, based on empiricism.²⁷ These historians had a marked effect on the introduction of the computing revolution in history as discipline.

By the early 1970's the *Annales* had become the most respected group of historians. Their methods were emulated, not only in Europe, but also in the United States of America. Their objective was to write "total histories". A decade later a new shift was once again the order of the day in European and American historiography. The *Annales* approach, also known as structuralist history, and a continuation of the "Enlightenment project", imploded in the wake of changing cultural needs. In other disciplines, the prevailing approach was termed "post-modernism". In history, perhaps as a result of the inherent conservative character of the discipline, it was described as a return to "narrative" history.

According to Olábarri, it was initiated by J.H. Hexter as early as 1968, and carried further with greater impact by Laurence Stone in 1979.²⁸ In itself this was the transformation of a form of hermeneutical historical writing, which Von Ranke favoured at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

It is the emergence of this trend that we shall try to identify in South African historiography over the past decade.

SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORIOGRAPHY IN THE 1980's

The historical fraternity in South Africa, outside the circle of radical historians, predominantly resident at the English speaking universities, such as Cape Town and the University of the Witwatersrand, were slow to adjust to the new socio-economic methods propagated in the 1970's as representing *Annales*-type historiography. This was as a result of the political and intellectual isolation in which South Africa found itself.

Socio-politically South Africa was adjusting to a new system by the mid-1980's. On the political front there was an apparent failure in locating opportunities for constitutional compromise. It marked the acceleration of intense protest on the side of African nationalists. Their objective was to undermine authority by making the system ungovernable. This had a direct influence on the environment in which professional historians were operating.

In his presidential address in 1985, at the tenth biennial conference of the South African Historical Society, Prof. Basil Le Cordeur referred to the dynamic developments that had taken place within the space of two decades in the historiography of South Africa. It was the result of the dynamic political climate that was the order of the day in the country. He was however critical of the apparent inability on the side of the Afrikaner, English

²⁷ C. LLOYD, *The structures of history* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1993), pp. 73, 75.

²⁸ I. OLÁBARRI, "'New' new history: A *longue durée* structure" in *History and Theory*, 34(1), 1995, p. 21; P. BURKE, "History of events and the revival of narrative" in P. BURKE (Ed.), *New perspectives on historical writing* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1993), p. 234.

liberal and radical, as well as the African historian, to find a middle ground in their respective versions of South African history. He sensed a feeling of scepticism on the side of readers of historical works. Their lack of interest in the new directions in historical writing was as a result of its apparent lack of commonsense relevance.²⁹

Le Cordeur pointed out that there was a need for more general studies, also it was necessary for sufficient African historians to be trained.³⁰ By implication he wanted an eclectic approach to start emerging, more so than had been the case up to that point in time. More interdisciplinary perspectives were important. His was a call to put the history of South Africa together again in such a fashion that it was comprehensible. He felt: "It would offer South Africa an essential enhanced understanding of itself and of the significant social trends that are shaping the lives of its people as it enters the last decade (of the twentieth century)."³¹

To what extent this objective was realised in the space of ten years, is uncertain. Since 1985 a number of new monographic texts on South African history were published, such as that of Maylam,³² Beinart,³³ Van Aswegen³⁴ and Worden.³⁵ However of an "enhanced understanding of itself" there was at least in the historical fraternity no indication.

The forces that were afoot tended to generate new energies and more diversity in respect of ideological shifts. What inspired the change was a new attitude towards marxist theory. This was evident, less overtly amongst South African historians, than their counterparts in Britain, France and Germany.

In France the critical questions Michel Foucault posed in respect of the fashionable and highly respected *Annales* approach, only really had an impact after the philosopher's death in 1984. He surged to the top of the French academic world as an apparent Romantic intellectual with fresh minted metaphors, which were more representative of Shelley and Blake, than of the structuralist logic of Braudel and his associates.³⁶ This state of tension emerged despite the fact that Foucault was earlier praised as the leading exponent of *mentalité* history by the *Annales* historians themselves. But then, his works were by then also considered to be amongst the best intellectual history written in the twentieth century.³⁷

²⁹ B.A. LE CORDEUR, "The reconstruction of South African history" in *South African Historical Journal*, 17, 1985, p. 5.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 1985, p. 5.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

³² P. MAYLAM, *A history of the African people of South Africa since the early iron age to the 1970's* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1987).

³³ W. BEINART, *Twentieth century South Africa* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994).

³⁴ H.J. VAN ASWEGEN, *Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika tot 1854* (Academica, Pretoria, 1989).

³⁵ N. WORDEN, *The making of modern South Africa: Conquest, segregation and apartheid*. Blackwell, Oxford 1994.

³⁶ C. NORRIS, *The truth about postmodernism*, (Blackwell, Oxford, 1993), p. 40.

³⁷ F.R. ANKERSMIT, *Denken over geschiedenis: Een overzicht van moderne geschiedfilosofische opvattingen* (Second impression, Wolters-Noordhoff, Groningen, 1986), p. 258.

In the former Western Germany intellectual disillusionment had started setting in with the critical approach of the Frankfurter School in philosophy and sociology, and historians of the Bielefeld school, shifted away from the “Geschichte als historische Sozialwissenschaft” approach of H-U Wehler, to start concentrating once again more extensively on narrative history.³⁸ The impact of the narrativist approach was observable already by the early 1980’s in the sociology of Niklas Luhmann.³⁹

In South Africa itself the transition to social history of a structural kind was slow and difficult. Grundlingh criticised Afrikaans historians, in the mid-1980’s, for apparently being disinterested in the social history approach.⁴⁰ His was clearly a proposal that they adjust to the trend that was set in Britain by the inveterate E.P. Thompson, who was until his death recently one of the major British socialist historians of the twentieth century. Thompson’s local disciples included *inter alia* Charles van Onselen,⁴¹ who in the absence of sufficient Afrikaans historians taking on the field, concentrated on elements of Afrikaner social history in Johannesburg after 1886. One response to the apparent challenge of Grundlingh was Van Jaarsveld’s research report on the evolution of people’s history in Germany during the 1980’s.⁴² The message that was conveyed, was that there was a social history from a marxist perspective, beyond that of the British Isles.

Other Afrikaans speaking historians responded in due course. Their approach was in the main from a non-Marxist perspective. This was evident in the editorial contents of *Contree*, a journal for local and regional history, which was published as from 1977 by the Institute for Historical Studies at the Human Sciences Research Council. This journal which had no specific alignment with any of the major schools of historical writing in South Africa, did much to make the *Annales* approach more accessible to South African scholars. It also promoted interdisciplinary history. An outstanding example of this type of research was an article by J.B. de Vaal on the earliest trade routes in the Northern Transvaal. The historian in this text relied on diverse methodologies such as economics, anthropology and archaeology in order to give a more comprehensive perspective of the indigenous and early colonial history in a regional context.⁴³

The work of a younger generation of scholars by the 1980’s gave evidence of the new trend in analytical work. A. Appel in his study on Bethelsdorp pointed out what difficulties were encountered with the introduction of individual land tenure in a community which

³⁸ I. OLÁBARRI, “‘New’ new history: A *longue durée* structure” in *History and Theory*, 34(1), 1995, p. 11.

³⁹ See N. LUHMANN, *Love as passion: The codification of intimacy* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1986).

⁴⁰ A. GRUNDLINGH, “Sosiale geskiedenis en Afrikanergeskiedskrywing” in *South African Historical Journal* 18, 1987, p. 47.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁴² F.A. VAN JAARSVELD, “Demokratisering in die geskiedeniswetenskap” in *Historia*, 32(1), 1987, pp. 30-44.

⁴³ J.B. DE VAAL, “Handel langs die vroegste roetes” in *Contree* 17, 1985, pp. 5-14.

had been accustomed to a communal reference framework.⁴⁴ He was to move increasingly in the direction of structural history, with a heavy accent on economic theory. Ultimately it was to be a strong blend between socio-economic history that would rule the roost in *Contree*, as was evident in P.H.R. Snyman's local history of Kuruman⁴⁵ and an article by Minnaar on Graaff-Reinet, in which the significance of water as a scarce commodity in the Karoo, showed how local history could contribute to policy formulation and the solving of contemporary problems.⁴⁶

Mainstream historians, with the exception of a few hardline structuralists, still tended to write narrativist history. This was especially evident in biographical studies - a field which had traditionally been opposed to determinist social science approaches.⁴⁷ D. Prinsloo's narrative on Dr. Piet Meyer,⁴⁸ O.J.O. Ferreira's biographical study of T.I. Ferreira,⁴⁹ and a number of historiographical researches by F.A. van Jaarsveld, proved that the hermeneutic trend was still the order of the day, particularly in the pages of *Historia*.⁵⁰

QUESTIONING CERTAIN MYTHS: JOHANNESBURG'S CENTENARY AND THE GREAT TREK

In many respects the altered perspectives on history tended to transform the way historians made contributions towards the construction of certain myths of the past. This was evident in two commemorative events in the second half of the 1980's. In 1986 the centenary of Johannesburg, the city of gold, was celebrated. This was followed in 1988 by the 150th celebration of the Great Trek. The historical journals at the time, did feature the usual festive contributions of the authorities. The works of lesser known authors made out a macro-peripheral text which was very important. These contributions on the periphery reflected the underlying trends emerging in the discipline.

Johannesburg centenary: As far as the Johannesburg centenary is concerned, in *Historia* the tendency was to celebrate the event with articles primarily of local content. An unusual, but important contribution was an article written by L. Heydenrych. She shed some light on the relations between President Paul Kruger and the Jewish community in

⁴⁴ A. APPEL, "Grondbesetting en grondbesit op Bethelsdorp, 1828-1945" in *Contree*, 23, 1988, pp. 23-28.

⁴⁵ P.H.R. SNYMAN, "Die rol van sendelinge, die owerheid en ekonomiese faktore in die ontstaan van Kuruman, 1886-1913" in *Contree*, 22, 1987, pp. 5-14.

⁴⁶ A. DE V. MINAAR, "Graaff-Reinet's water problems" in *Contree* 22, 1987, pp. 23-30.

⁴⁷ C. LLOYD, *The structures of history* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1993), p. 73.

⁴⁸ D. PRINSLOO, "Dr. Piet Meyer in Johannesburg, 1936-1984" in *Historia*, 32(1), May 1987, pp. 44-54.

⁴⁹ O.J.O. FERREIRA, "Thomas Ignatius Ferreira (c. 1743- c. 1814), Oosgrenspionier en 'Britse' bevelvoerder van Fort Frederick" in *Historia* 35(2), November 1990, pp. 20-38.

⁵⁰ See for example F.A. VAN JAARSVELD, "J.S. du Plessis (1919-1990): Potchefstroomse historikus" and "Gustaf Preller: sy historiese bewussyn en geskiedbeskouing" in *Historia*, 35(2), November 1990, pp. 1-19.

Johannesburg.⁵¹ The theme projected a field of study - minorities history - that had, up to that time, hardly received satisfactory coverage. From the periphery the message was transmitted that in Afrikaans historiography notice was taken of the Jewish minority which played a decisive role in the history of the Transvaal. In itself the article was also aimed at “demythologising” some elements of the heroic discourse on nineteenth century Transvaal society. It was an attempt at recasting the image of President Paul Kruger in yet another context.

In *The South African Historical Journal* neo-marxist interpretations of mining and related histories received prominence. This mouthpiece of the South African Historical Society, which had been up to that point in time, far too much part of the “establishment” as far as the radicals were concerned, now became a vehicle to convey modernist analyses of marxist historical theory. Patrick Harries⁵² and Allen Jeeves,⁵³ respectively delivered strong discourses on capital, the state and labour in the development of the Witwatersrand, while Gammack presented a well-rounded narrative with certain micropolitical undertones on the re-shaping of society on the Witwatersrand.⁵⁴

Contree, being a local history journal, gave moderate prominence to the Johannesburg centenary, perhaps as a result of the fact that even prior to 1986, many publications had seen the light which dealt with the history of Johannesburg. What was clear overall, was the fact that especially in the historical fraternity, there was a somewhat cynical approach towards a supposedly “heroic” centenary. Instead, the dominant thematics covered fields of social inquiry and economic development, which were represented in a starkly realist style of historical representation.

The Great Trek: In 1988 the 150th birthday of the Great Trek was commemorated. On this occasion, historians - Afrikaans and English speaking - were critical of the event which had shaped the way in which the history of the nineteenth century had been seen for more than three quarters of a century. The analysis of J. Benyon⁵⁵ and Van Jaarsveld⁵⁶ called for new perspectives and greater relevance. In effect they were questioning, to a very considerable extent, the logic of a myth which had come to an end in the 1970's.

⁵¹ L. HEYDENRYCH, “Paul Kruger en die Joodse gemeenskap van Johannesburg: Fabels en feite” in *Historia*, 31(2), pp. 26-38.

⁵² P. HARRIES, “Capital, state and labour on the 19th century Witwatersrand: A reassessment” in *South African Journal of History*, 18, 1986, pp. 25-46.

⁵³ A. JEEVES, “Migrant labour and South African expansion, 1920-1950” in *South African Historical Journal*, 18, 1986, pp. 73-92.

⁵⁴ D. GAMMACK, “‘The Johannesburg Republic’: The re-shaping of Rand society” in *South African Historical Journal*, 18, 1986, pp. 47-72.

⁵⁵ J. BENYON, “The necessity for new perspectives in South African historiography with particular reference to the Great Trek” in *Historia*, 33(2), 1988, pp. 1-10.

⁵⁶ F.A. VAN JAARSVELD, “‘n Afrikanerperspektief op die Groot Trek: Simbool en ritueel” in *Historia*, 33(2), 1988, pp. 11-26.

The comprehensive discourse by professional historians on the historical significance of the Great Trek which had been conducted in the 1970's and culminated in the tarring and feathering of Prof. F.A. van Jaarsveld in 1979, by the 1980's, tended to have a subdued effect on approaches to this event which traditionally made out a pivotal part of white historical awareness. Microstudies on the Trek were still conducted by *inter alia* Visagie,⁵⁷ but they were more of a cultural historical inclination. This, together with a growing ideological estrangement between different political grouping in Afrikaans cultural circles, undermined the continued appreciation of the Great Trek as a pivotal event in the history of South Africa.

Disillusionment with prevailing political trends and the enforcement of traditionalist principles of mythologising the historical awareness of the past, was evident amongst Afrikaans historians. The central question posed by especially Afrikaans speaking historians, was the need to redefine their position in the disciplinary spectrum.

By 1987, Prof. J.S. Bergh maintained that Afrikaans historians had the responsibility of looking at the past, in very much the same way as German historians did after 1945. They had to realise it was essential to take note of the plural society in which they found themselves in South Africa.⁵⁸ This was the extension of an awareness that grew out of the criticism levelled on Afrikanerdom as a whole by F.A. van Jaarsveld. In 1985, shortly before his retirement, he came to the conclusion that the Afrikaners were an "historically retarded" community. Van Jaarsveld bluntly blamed the prevailing state of affairs on the isolation and racial prejudices which had become part of South African society.⁵⁹

Also amongst Afrikaans speaking economic historians, there was a growing awareness that in the history of South Africa, economics and politics could no longer be kept apart in the study of capitalism in apartheid society.⁶⁰ What had earlier been termed as the "conspiracy between maize and gold" by radical historians, now increasingly became a practical device for accounting for the inadequacies of the apartheid myth. Historiographically, social history thus acquired a very strong economic history character.

In radical quarters, the History Workshop Movement gained momentum at the University of the Witwatersrand. Increasingly, after 1980, peoples' history gained prominence. This was an approach to history which looked at the ordinary person, instead of the outstanding figures who were traditionally the subjects of historical researches. The new trend emerged at a time when the first edition, in 1979, of R. Elphick and H.B. Giliomee's important work, *The shaping of South African society*,⁶¹ appeared. This was a period of

⁵⁷ See J.C. VISAGIE, "Minder bekende Voortrekkerleiers" in *Historia*, 35(1), May 1990, pp. 38-56.

⁵⁸ J.S. BERGH, "Uitdagings vir die Afrikaanse historikus" in *Historia* 32(2), 1987, p. 26.

⁵⁹ F.A. VAN JAARSVELD, "Die Afrikanerdom: 'n Historiese vertraagde volk - weg en selfbegrip" in *Historia*, 30(2), 1985, pp. 6-32.

⁶⁰ F.C. van N Fourie, and P. BEUKES, "Ekonomie en politiek in die Suid-Afrikaanse ontwikkelingsgeskiedenis: 'n Historiografiese verkenning" in *Historia* 32(1), 1987, pp. 96-117.

⁶¹ Longman, Cape Town, 1979.

new trends in social history and the discipline as a whole gained significant momentum. The neo-marxists within the History Workshop Movement supported this trend. In their own writings which were published in *The Journal for Southern African Studies*, they went a step further by promoting ideologically motivated historical analysis. Theirs was however a support for intellectual marxism, not on the basis of ideological subservience, but more as a means of accounting for the past within a well-defined theoretical context. This approach enjoyed significant support, especially from a growing population of urban Africans who could, as a result of their workers' backgrounds, closely identify with the new approach. The proletarian sentiment, almost immediately had strong ties with the rapidly growing trade union movement which had been legalised a little earlier. Besides, especially amongst urban Africans, there had been substantial frustration with the conventional interpretations of South African history since the 1970's.

The general socio-political environment led to the publication of the *Reader's Digest history of South Africa*, popularly labelled "The true history". The first edition appeared in 1988 and became an overnight success. It was a blend of peoples' history and popular social history. Its major appeal lay in the fact that the ordinary reading public of historical works was now provided with a satisfactory source for the understanding of the history of the new South Africa that was emerging.

A more moderate approach towards the new interpretations and analyses of the South African past, was T. Cameron and S.B. Spies' *Illustrated history of South Africa* which already appeared in 1986.⁶² The historical spectrum of the South African past was broadened to incorporate the latest findings in paleontological research and newer trends in the analysis of the history of the indigenous peoples of South Africa.

The English liberal approach was gradually in the process of being absorbed by the radical historians. They did however protest against being classified, merely as "radicals". Instead they started calling themselves "revisionists", suggesting that in the spirit of the original liberal experiment in rewriting the history, in the spirit of the *Oxford history of South Africa*, at the end of the sixties, they were now deconstructing old myths and reconstructing new truths.

1989 AND THE CHANGE IN ACCENT

In August 1989, Mr. F.W. de Klerk assumed the presidency of South Africa after the resignation of Mr. P.W. Botha, and on 6 September of that year won the election. The new president and his cabinet were intent on changing, and what followed was an era of unsurpassed social, economic and political transition which was augured in on 2 February 1990 with the release of Mr. Nelson Mandela from lifelong imprisonment, as well as the

⁶² Human en Rousseau, Jonathan Ball, 1986.

unbanning of *inter alia* the African Nationalist Congress (ANC), the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP).

The new approach of government was one of aspiring to an internally negotiated political settlement.

More important was that the new-style of government in South Africa coincided with the collapse of the USSR. The East-West conflict came to an abrupt end. The strategic necessity for South Africa to be firmly under control of the Western capitalist powers, no longer seemed to make sense. In itself this was one of the major factors which gave rise to the winds of change on the subcontinent. By 1991 Namibia became independent and former comrades in the struggle against the white-dominated government of South Africa, together with the white politicians, were embroiled in talks at Codesa I and II.

The impact of these developments are still too much part of the popular consciousness, to crystallise out in all its historical significance. Historiographically, it was as if historians in all categories of South African academia halted their isolated activities in local ivory towers and started talking to one another on issues of national concern.

At the 1991 biennial conference of the South African Historical Society, mainstream historians listened to the marxist historian, L. Callinicos, convey the message and success that had been achieved with peoples' history at the University of the Witwatersrand. At the same time Afrikaans-speaking historians were debating the exigencies of the aftermath of war in Namibia.

On the occasion, Prof. B.J. Liebenberg, an Afrikaner historian who had studied under the Dutch marxist, Jan Romein, in the 1950's, fired the first salvo in the direction that South African history was going to move. In a seminal presidential address, he pointed out that analytical history was clearly something of the past. The human past was the major focus, because: "*Met verskynsels soos droogte, aardbewings en plantsiektes het hy (the historian) niks te make nie - dit is die studieveld van natuurwetenskappe.*"⁶³

He was also specific in standpoint as to whether historians should be autonomists (individualising history) or assimilationists (generalising history). The historian should try to give substance to both perspectives. However when a historian interpreted he/she could do nothing other than generalise. Secondly, Liebenberg argued, the historian needed to test generalisations against the individual factual information. Finally, the historian had to use the generalist approach in order to understand the particular information better.⁶⁴

Liebenberg's views on political history, a field which had been disregarded for a long time, were also important. More than any other field of history, he explained, political history concentrated on the role played by power because power was a factor that created

⁶³ B.J. LIEBENBERG, "Die terrein van die geskiedenis" (Presidential address to the 13th biennial conference of the South African Historical Society 22 January 1992) in *South African Historical Journal*, 26, 1992, p. 64.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

history.⁶⁵ Personally he was very pleased to see the move from social history to political history predominating and considered it as a move in the right direction.⁶⁶

Mainstream Afrikaans speaking historians, despite shifts in focus amongst a younger generation, were still firmly entrenched in the field of political history by the 1980's. The strong focus on political history by the *Institute for Contemporary History* at the University of the Orange Free State, was evident of the trend. The transition back to political historical writing was thus not difficult to make for some practitioners. The fundamental focus of political history had, however, changed from a history of power politics and the heroics of formal governance, to histories of political resistance to the system.

But why was this change taking place in historiography? Prof. F.A. van Jaarsveld, in his exposition of the return to narrative history, ascribed it to discontent with the repetitive nature of structural history in which certain themes were constantly subjected to analysis. The reading public also lost interest in reading this type of history, he maintained.⁶⁷ "The British cultural historian, Peter Burke, felt that the return to narrative history was the result of an intense distrust of the structural approach."⁶⁸

Another motivation for the return to narrative history was to be found in the motivation by Francis Fukuyama, who completed his important study *The end of history and the Last man* in 1989. In this post-deconstructionist study, Fukuyama, a Japanese scholar operating in France at the time, stated that liberal democracy had scored a victory. Capitalism had won its conflict against communism, and in itself implied the end of history.⁶⁹ The warning was, however, that now capitalism was on its own and would have to contend with its potential demise. It could not survive in the face of a lack of an antithesis. What was required was a rejuvenation of ideological fields of force.

Historians increasingly in terms of the philosophical and intellectual history discourses of the French historian Michel Foucault started seeking, answers to a new type of history.

THE SOUTH AFRICAN RESPONSE TO THE RETURN OF NARRATIVE

It appears as if Afrikaans historians were well aware of the new trends that were emerging in historical writing, after the course had been set for a new political dispensation in South Africa. It was as if the outside world had opened up for South African academics. Already in 1988 the first of a two part history of French involvement in the South African War

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁶⁷ F.A. VAN JAARSVELD, "'n Terugkeer na die verhalende geskiedskrywing" in *Historia*, 36(1), 1991, p. 3.

⁶⁸ P. BURKE, "History of events and the revival of narrative" in P. BURKE (Ed.), *New perspectives on historical writing*, p. 236.

⁶⁹ F. FUKUYAMA, "Reflections on *The end of history*, five years later", in *History and Theory*, 34(2), 1995, p. 30.

1899-1902, by a French historian, J-G. Pelletier, was published in *Historia*.⁷⁰ This sensitive and masterful narrative cleared the way for other studies.

In the field of political history, the analysis of power and politics took on a very special character in Paul Forsyth's interpretation of Chief A.N.M.G. Buthelezi's approach to history. In a semi-biographical narrative he tried to interpret the acquisition and expansion of personal influence and power, in the actions of a living politician.⁷¹

By 1992 narrative history once again was dominant in *Historia*.⁷² Of the nine articles published in *Contree* in 1991 six were narrativist whilst three were analytical.⁷³ A similar trend prevailed in 1992.⁷⁴ In 1993 only two out of eight articles were narrativist.⁷⁵ However by the following year, four of the seven articles, were once again narrativist.⁷⁶ In *The South African Historical Journal* narrativist historical writing tended to remain consistent in the 1980's.⁷⁷ In 1990 there was a bias in favour of analysis, but by 1991 all articles in no 24, were narrativist.⁷⁸

By 1995 narrative history - the essential telling of the story - had come into its own. There were still a number of historians working within an analysis context, but it was no longer hard and fast history by the numbers. More important was that theories based on hardline ideology were being marginalised.

MICROHISTORY

The changed circumstances saw the emergence of new approaches to historical understanding. One was that of microhistory.⁷⁹ In this approach "...the fragmentation of the object of study is seen not as an obstacle to(,) but as a goal of history".⁸⁰ It was a type of study which had its origins in Italy with the researches of Carlo Ginzburg on the history of religious practices in the era shortly before the Renaissance. This approach was influenced in a significant way by Gramscian marxism. One major feature was the concentra-

⁷⁰ J-G. PELLETIER, "France and the Boer War I: The beginning of the war to the death of Villebois-Mareuil" in *Historia*, 33(1), 1988, pp. 19-30; and "France and the Boer War II: The death of Villebois-Mareuil to the end of the war" in *Historia*, 34(1), 1989, pp. 52-63.

⁷¹ P. FORSYTH, "The past in the service of the Present: The Political use of history by Chief A.N.M.G. Buthelezi 1951-1991" in *South African Historical Journal*, 26, 1992, pp. 74-92.

⁷² See for example *Historia* 37(1) May 1992, in which six of the seven articles were written in a strong narrativist tradition.

⁷³ *Contree*, 29 and 30, 1990.

⁷⁴ Six out of eight articles were narrativist, *Contree*, 31 and 32, 1992.

⁷⁵ *Contree*, 33 and 34, 1993.

⁷⁶ *Contree*, 35 and 36, 1994.

⁷⁷ See for example *The South African Historical Journal* 22, 1990 in which two out of the three contributions were narrativist.

⁷⁸ *The South African Historical Journal*, 24, 1991.

⁷⁹ J. RÜSEN, *Studies in metahistory*, p. 210.

⁸⁰ I. OLÁBARRI, "'New' new history: A *longue durée* structure" in *History and Theory*, 34(1), 1995, p. 17.

tion on minute details for the understanding and comprehension of complex historical texts. The master text was then one of immense detail and the minimum generalisation. The exemplary work in the new trend was Ginzburg's *I formaggio e I vermi* (*The cheese and the worm*) which appeared in 1977. This narrative told the story of an Italian Jewish miller who had been subjected to the Catholic Inquisition of the Counter Reformation. The diverse interpretations of reality and popular understanding showed the irony of potential misunderstanding in human discourse. The miller was totally misunderstood and also himself did not understand his Catholic peers.⁸¹ In France Immanuel le Roy Ladurie's *Montaillou* was a regional history in a microhistorical context, which took note of interesting social trends in rural France.

In South Africa the trend took on quickly. In 1991 the editor of *Contree* defined microhistory as an integral part of local history by accentuating the fact that "place" made out the decor of history and that it should be seen as an extension of "history from the bottom up".⁸² Methodologically however the approach was only to reach a point of refinement in the journal as from 1992. The journal was ideally suited for microhistorical studies. One of the most sensitive studies of the time was that of T.F. Trulick and G. Cook who explored the preservation of the Bokaap in Cape Town.⁸³ The eternal ring to a statement of a Malay woman in 1938 declaring: "We could get places at Goodwood and Parow, but we cannot get there or take our things out there. Tomorrow I'll pack up and get out. I suppose I shall have to go to District Six"⁸⁴ told the story of removals of people in twentieth century South Africa in a special way which went beyond base political argumentation and instead explored new avenues of cultural and ethnic expression which were only possible in the sphere of cultural history.

The interrelated way of microhistory was evident in the study of Beavon and Elder, who explained how the economics of milk production in Johannesburg gave rise to the introduction of municipal by-laws which eventually inhibited white milk producers much more than it did their African counterparts.⁸⁵ The narrativist tradition is marked in this study which in fact lends itself to analytic history. However the story trend is dominant and lets the reader become part of a past that belonged to an era when South African urban society was in the process of defining itself.

J.E.H. Grobler's contribution to microhistory looked at the minute political history of the local environment, in a narrative of the Marabastad riots of 1942. In this article he

⁸¹ A. LÜDTKE (Ed.), *Alltagsgeschichte: Zur Rekonstruktion historischer Erfahrungen und Lebensweisen* (Campus Verlag, Frankfurt, 1989), pp. 29-30.

⁸² EDITOR, " 'Microhistory' - A different look at the past" in *Contree* 29, 1991, p. 4.

⁸³ T.F. TRULICK and G. COOK, "Preservation of the Bokaap, Cape Town: Changes in attitudes and actions" in *Contree* 29, 1991, pp. 18-23.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁸⁵ K.S.O. BEAVON and G. ELDER, "Formalising milk production in Johannesburg: The dissolution of white petty milk-producers, 1908-1920" in *Contree*, 30, 1991, pp. 10-15.

pointed out how “group anxiety”, a factor which previously would not have been considered as being important in political historical quarters, generated hostility in a racial and class differentiated society.⁸⁶ A similar research project undertaken at the University of the Orange Free State, gave an exposition of how sorghum beer in 1925 was a crucial factor in sparking of a riot in Bloemfontein. C.J.P. le Roux pointed out how restrictions on freemarket practices, prevailing unemployment and low salaries influenced a community to resort to violence.⁸⁷

Micro-political narrative also featured in *The South African Historical Journal*. Van Tonder’s perspective of the Newclare squatter’s movement of 1952 was interesting.⁸⁸ It gave a fresh interpretation of the protest movement which was similar to emerging trends in other African townships in South Africa, such as Sophiatown, Sharpeville and Alexandra, between 1948 and 1960.

Increasingly the history of land tenure started enjoying substantial attention. An interesting microstudy, was that of Van den Bergh on Machaviestat in Potchefstroom in the nineteenth century. The study shed valuable light on the issue of African townships in the nineteenth century South African Republic. The roots of urban separation in the former Transvaal clearly had a long history. What was even more interesting was Van den Bergh’s skillful way of pointing out how an inter-dependence between African settlers and their white counterparts evolved in an urban environment.⁸⁹

MILITARY HISTORY

In military history it could be said by the 1990’s that South Africa was by no means an academic backwater. The new trends being applied in the discipline worldwide, were also the order of the day locally. Especially the work of Fransjohan Pretorius on the South African War, presented an up to date state of the art report on the leading trends. His research reports in journals⁹⁰ satisfied the appetite of many military historians.

It was, however, what was happening in other areas of the field earlier that was interesting. Louis Grundlingh’s study on discharged and demobilised Africans soldiers after World War II,⁹¹ tended to show the direction in which the newer type of historiography

⁸⁶ J.E.H. GROBLER, “The Marabastad riot, 1942” in *Contree*, 32, 1992, pp. 24-32.

⁸⁷ C.J.P. LE ROUX, “Die Bloemfonteinse oproer van 1925” in *Contree*, 29, 1991, pp. 24-29.

⁸⁸ D. VAN TONDER, “Gangs, Councillors and the apartheid state: The Newclare squatters’ movement of 1952, in *South African Journal of History*, 22, 1990, pp. 82-107.

⁸⁹ G. N. VAN DEN BERGH, “Machaviestat 1839-1889: Potchefstroom se eerste swart woonbuurt” in *Contree*, 34, 1993, pp. 11-20.

⁹⁰ See for example F. PRETORIUS, “Die voorsiening van lewensmiddele aan die Boerekommando’s in die Anglo-Boere-oorlog, 1899-1902” in *Historia*, 35(2), 1990, pp. 98-114; and F. PRETORIUS, “Waarom het die ‘Bittereinders’ gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog van 1899-1902 op kommando gebly” in *Historia*, 35(1), May 1990, pp. 57-71.

⁹¹ L. GRUNDLINGH, “Prejudices, promises and poverty: The experience of discharged and demobilized black South African soldiers after the Second World War” in *South African Historical Journal*, 26, 1992, 116-135.

was heading.⁹² Of particular importance is the study of Jeremy Krikler in 1993, discussing the psychological impact of fear amongst Republicans for an African uprising at the time of the South African War.⁹³ New insights were presented with his interpretation of the reaction on the side of the Afrikaner soldiers when they noted that Africans were recruited by the British.⁹⁴

The impact of military actions has been identified on numerous terrains in the history of South Africa. Snyman's study on the way in which the Langeberg rebellion of 1896-97 influenced the founding of the village of Olifantshoek suggests that there is a need to take note of cause and effect in the study of military history.⁹⁵

I.R. Smith's consideration of the origins of the South African War (1899-1902) in 1990 once again opened up the way for constructive debate for the centenary celebrations of a military event which finally brought to an end the innocence of the British colonial experience in Africa.⁹⁶

To what extent military history should merely be interpreted as the history of warfare and military campaigns and the political decisions which makes people go to war, is an open question which can spark off a comprehensive debate. The history of World War I and its impact on South Africa, would hardly be complete without taking note of Hummel's identification of four themes in the history of Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape Province in 1914-1918. He vividly pointed out how anti-German sentiment, white poverty, black deprivation and protest as well as the Spanish influenza epidemic coloured the way in which the residents of Grahamstown experienced their city in an era of trans-continental conflict.⁹⁷

It appears as if military history might have a lot to offer micro-historians and *vice versa* in the final decade of the twentieth century. Military historians are skilled in the craft of recording detail and also interpreting different discourses. More important they are capable of identifying, perhaps more than other historians, what was propaganda and what was factual truth.

It could be of great value to history as a whole, especially in view of the approaching

⁹² See for example G.J. ANDREPOULOS and H.E. SELESKY (Eds.), *The aftermath of defeat: Societies, armed forces, and the challenge of recovery* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1994). Of particular interest to South African military historians is the chapter of J. Gooch, "Britain and the Boer War" (pp. 40-58).

⁹³ J. KRIKLER, "Social neurosis and hysterical pre-cognition in South Africa: A case study and reflections" in *The South African Historical Journal*, 28, 1993, pp. 63-97.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 90-97.

⁹⁵ P.H.R. SNYMAN, "Die Langeberg-rebellie en die totstandkoming van Olifantshoek" in *Contree*, 20, 1986, pp. 16-26.

⁹⁶ I.R. SMITH, "The origins of the South African War (1899-1902): A re-appraisal" in *South African Historical Journal*, 22, 1990, pp. 24-60.

⁹⁷ H.C. HUMMEL, "Grahamstown, 1914-1918: Four wartime themes" in *Contree*, 28, 1990, pp. 21-30.

centenary celebrations of the South African War in 1999, for military historians to start researching social and economic trends in a lively narrative fashion.

GENDER HISTORY

Feminist history, which developed towards the end of the 1960's in Europe and the United States, was at first an extension of the radical approach to history. It was however closely related to another sociologically inclined direction which focused in on family histories. Interesting results were obtained, but the most important spin-off was a growing awareness amongst historians, of all sexes, that it was necessary to perceive the past in terms of gender studies as a whole. This movement which was inaugurated by N. Zemon Davis in the early 1980's, had a substantial impact. It opened up diverse areas for research. In intellectual history Locke's concept of "The Social Contract" was questioned against the backdrop of "The Sexual Contract". Questions were raised about what was precisely meant in the Revolutionary era of French when the call was for liberty, equality and fraternity. To provide answers, it was consequently necessary to return to John Locke's thoughts and take note of how they were presented by J.J. Rousseau to a French audience which after all also included about fifty per cent women.⁹⁸

The historical fraternity's prevailing conservatism, was evident in this field deep into the 1980's when special initiatives were launched to give women the opportunity of presenting works to *The South African Historical Journal*. Although their contributions over the years were substantial, by 1988, only one article dealing with women in history, had been published in the 20 years' history of the journal.⁹⁹ In the years to come numerous reports were published. The nineteenth century appeared to be one of the favourite eras. Edna Bradlow turned to education and the position of the woman in middle class English speaking society.¹⁰⁰

Gillian Vernon made a sturdy contribution with a study of four women in the nineteenth century on the Cape Eastern frontier and their attitudes towards race and class. The Victorian tradition, with its strong class and religious prejudices, asserted a most definite influence on the way in which Harriet Ward, Amelia Gropp, Jane Waterson and Helen Pritchard, defined themselves and their fellow human beings in society.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ U. Jansz, "Vrouwengeschiedenis: Een voorbeeld van emancipatoriese historiografie" in H. BELIËN and G.J. VAN SETTEN (Eds.), *Geschiedschrijving in de twintigste eeu: Discussie zonder eind*, pp. 288-297.

⁹⁹ B.A. LE CORDEUR, "The South African Historical Journal and the periodical literature on South African history" in *South African Historical Journal*, 20, 1988, p. 16.

¹⁰⁰ E. BRADLOW, "Women and education in nineteenth-century South Africa: The attitudes and experiences of middle class English speaking females at the Cape" in *The South African Historical Journal*, 28, 1993, pp. 119-150.

¹⁰¹ G. VERNON, "'A vague vision of a legion of Mephistoles': The attitude of four women to class and race on the Eastern Cape frontier, 1843-1878" in *Contree*, 32, 1992, pp. 16-23.

An interesting feminist historical debate was sparked off when the Afrikaans author, Tom Gouws, perceived nineteenth century Voortrekker women as suppressed and dependent. The reaction by the Afrikaans historian, dr. Maria Hugo (a former student of Jan Romein) and K.W. Pauw, tore into Gouws's arguments by questioning his ability to hermeneutically interpret the past properly.¹⁰² From this article it was clear that Afrikaans female historians had progressed beyond mere modernistic and deconstructionist thought.

In a study related to military history, Keith Tankard identified the role of women in community service, during the South African War (1899-1902) in East London. This was an important work in the sense that it opened up certain perspectives on themes that would otherwise merely have resorted under military history.¹⁰³

CULTURAL HISTORY

In the 1990's there appeared to be a renewed interest in cultural history. What was interesting is that a former radical historian, such as William Beinart, now appeared to come over as a "cultural historian".¹⁰⁴ This was to a large extent the result of greater impetus given to anthropology in the study of history in the Anglo-Saxon society. However it also tended to go to the roots of classical cultural history which developed in Germany in the nineteenth century, and of which the objectives were firstly to study the daily life of society and all its component groups, and secondly identify the different epochs in history and account for the developments that took place within them.¹⁰⁵

Tankard's history on Victorian bathing habits in East London¹⁰⁶ was creative and a valuable contribution towards a field of study which, by the beginning of the 1990's had made substantial progress in Europe and the United States of America. Furthermore it gave a clear impression of the potential that the combination of social history and cultural history had for the opening up of new ways for looking at the past.

An interesting article in this specific edition of *Contree* is that of James Walton dealing with the history of Mostert's Mill.¹⁰⁷ This article by a renowned cultural historian is important in the sense that it represents a statement that the strict discipline of local/regional history, is beginning to take note of cultural history. Much can be done in this area to enrich the ethnic focus on local and regional historical studies.

¹⁰² M. HUGO and K.W. DE PAUW, "Feite of fiksie - Freudiaanse fantasie en 'n feministiese beeld van Susana Smit" in *Historia*, 36(1), May, 1991, pp. 8-13.

¹⁰³ K. TANKARD, "The role played by women in the Uitlander refugee crisis, 1899-1902: A case study of the East London humanitarian effort" in *Contree*, 36, 1994, pp. 1-9.

¹⁰⁴ See the introduction of W. BEINART, *Twentieth century South Africa* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994).

¹⁰⁵ F. GILBERT, *History: Politics or Culture? Reflections on Ranke and Burckhardt* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1990), pp. 47-48.

¹⁰⁶ K. TANKARD, "Bathing habits in Victorian East London" in *Contree*, 32, 1992, pp. 1-8.

¹⁰⁷ J. WALTON, "Mostert's mill - An eighteenth century Cape Windmill", *Contree*, 37, 1995, pp. 29-31.

Mainstream historians were however still wary of moving into the direction of cultural history. The reason for this was perhaps a still persistent inherent preference for a social science orientation towards history. It was also for long accepted that cultural history was the domain of the museumologist. Furthermore the strong structuralism of cultural history, especially at the University of Pretoria, along the lines of the German and Dutch approach, tended to keep many historians away from the discipline. Consequently *The South African Cultural History Journal*, which was accredited as a Sapse publication in March 1987, featured few contributions from English-speaking historians.

By 1993 the observational appreciation of museums as part of the academic pursuits of historians, suggested there was a growing interest in cultural history, albeit it of a very contemporary and somewhat ethnic orientation. *The South African Historical Journal* featured a section under the heading of "Focus: Myths, monuments, museums" in which a number of authors gave their impressions. According to the editor, this awareness was necessary because: "Historians should not only write history. They should also study the way history is introduced to and received by wider audiences: how it is represented, distorted and manipulated in the media, in museums, galleries and monuments."¹⁰⁸

Contributions were made on diverse cultural institutions ranging from Gold Reef City¹⁰⁹ to the Voortrekker Monument¹¹⁰. A similar type of report, only this time comparative in structure, was published in *Contree*. In the contribution Mabin "read" the museums of Pilgrim's Rest and Kimberley and had some interesting insights to share with fellow historians.¹¹¹ In July 1995 at the South African Historical Society's biennial conference in Grahamstown one session was devoted to the appraisal of museums in Cape Town. It appeared to be a growing trend in historical studies.

Although this type of "history of the present" approach has merits, it is an open question to what extent it would have value and an impact over the long term. The museum, as representation of culture, is a constantly changing phenomenon. Still, the studies presented local and regional historians as well as historians of culture with substantial insights which could hardly be overlooked.

IN CONCLUSION: NEW DIRECTIONS?

It is difficult to predict new trends in an era of immense change. However one might constitute that new directions are becoming apparent. In a recent review article two histo-

¹⁰⁸ ANON., "Editorial" in *South African Historical Journal*, 29, 1993, p. 1.

¹⁰⁹ C. KROS, "Experiencing a century in a day? Making more of Gold Reef City" in *The South African Historical Journal*, 29, 1993, pp. 28-43.

¹¹⁰ E. DELMONT, "The Voortrekker Monument: Monument to myth" in *The South African Historical Journal*, 29, 1993, pp. 76-101.

¹¹¹ A. MABIN, "Visiting ou(r) urban past: The Kimberley and Pilgrims Rest museums" in *Contree*, 36, 1994, pp. 31-41.

rians remarked: "The eighties have...seen the routing of crude white supremacist history and the development of a popular taste, indeed a hunger, for alternative versions of the past".¹¹²

Along what lines it should take place is difficult to determine. A well-known Afrikaans historian, turned political analyst, Herman Giliomee, is of the opinion that we need to look beyond the superficialities of the apartheid past. It is only one dimension of South Africa's history. As President of the South African Institute of Race Relations he feels, we must look back at our history of slavery and colonialism.¹¹³

His is indeed a theme on which more and more historians are concentrating. In fact one of the important features of South African historiography by the early 1990's was the re-emergence of an interest in pre-colonial history. Carolyn Hamilton and John Wright were amongst the pioneers of the new generation of historians with an interest in anthropology and the inclination to start deciphering the codes which had been laid down by traditions for a long time.¹¹⁴ What is even more interesting is the way in which the political institutions of the Zulu state underwent change and altered to external circumstances. The *amalala*-phenomenon in Zulu society which emerged in the 1820's, would have been invisible to historians, had they not had access to some of the sophisticated analytical and narrative tools of anthropology.

The *Mfecane/Difaqane* debate, sparked off by J. Cobbing in the 1980's culminated in a colloquium at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1991.¹¹⁵ This unique era of African history, is currently no longer seen as merely an extension of an all-African story. Instead clues are sought to identify the influences of colonialism in an era which changed the course of South African society.

The effects of colonialism on pre-colonial society opened up many vistas. An interesting history was Broodryk's focus on a pre-colonial people, the San and Kora in a crucial phase of colonialising history in the nineteenth century Boesmanland.¹¹⁶ Without this type of research it would be difficult in future to come to a better understanding of pre-colonial South African society.

By 1995 a new process had rounded itself off in the sense that new perspectives were

¹¹² L. WITZ and C. HAMILTON, "Reaping the whirlwind: *The Reader's Digest Illustrated History of South Africa* and changing popular perceptions of history" in *South African Historical Journal*, 24, 1991, p. 194.

¹¹³ H. GILIOME, "Die las van die verlede: 'ons moet verby apartheid kyk'" in *Beeld*, 1996.03.26, p. 9.

¹¹⁴ C. HAMILTON and J. WRIGHT, "The making of the AmaLala: Ethnicity, ideology and relations of subordination in a precolonial context" in *South African Historical Journal*, 22, 1990, pp. 3-23.

¹¹⁵ For a comprehensive survey of the colloquium see N. ETHERINGTON, "The aftermath of the aftermath"; P. MAYLAM, "The death of the Mfecane?"; J. DU BRUYN, "Ousting both the Mfecane and the anti-Mfecane"; A. WEBSTER, "The Mfecane paradigm overthrown"; S. MEINTJES, "The Mfecane colloquium: Impressions" in *The South African Historical Journal*, 25, 1991, pp. 154-176.

¹¹⁶ M. BROODRYK, "Die ontwikkeling van Boesmanland gedurende die negentiende eeu" in *Contree*, 30, 1991, pp. 29-35.

filtering through in which a new philosophical depth had been reached in which some areas of historical method, such as for example the comparative approach, was used afresh with good effect.¹¹⁷

The identification of the different voices in the production of history, based on the narrative tradition in anthropological methodology, brought to life new discourses on the history of resistance in South Africa.¹¹⁸

It now became possible to identify that identity, was the great nemesis of South African studies in the early 1970's, when the radical school of historians started producing histories. In the first place in the production of their histories, "...the historians presented grand narratives of class, nation and political emancipation in which the identities of social actors are considered fully valid....Second, the identities of the producers of these narratives are considered irrelevant".¹¹⁹ It was evident that the conflict between the liberals and the radicals was not confined to the intellectual milieu in which they found themselves. Neither was it with an acute awareness of the racial, linguistic and cultural backgrounds from which they came.¹²⁰

Traditionalist political historical writing also tended to open up by the beginning of the 1990's. J.P. Brits published a comparative study on research on voters' behaviour in South Africa and the United States of America.¹²¹ In this field he showed how methodologically advanced approaches to the study of the political past could open up new vistas. Furthermore he showed how South African political historical writing was way behind in its analysis of electoral processes.

In the field of economic history labour themes still featured strongly, as was evident in the 1993 work of Julius and Lumby on the history of job reservation in the Eastern Cape motor industry in the 1960's.¹²² Mabin's study on the Northwestern Cape village of Indwe also showed to what extent economic history approaches, especially within the paradigm of the history of capitalism in South Africa, offered a wide range of research opportunities in local history.¹²³

Van Aswegen's study on miners' phthisis on the Witwatersrand Golfdields saw an inter-

¹¹⁷ R. GREENSTEIN, "Rethinking the colonial process: The role of indigenous capacities in comparative historical inquiry" in *South African Historical Journal*, 32, 1995, pp. 114-137.

¹¹⁸ L. SWITZER, and E. CEIROG JONES, "Other voices: The ambiguities of resistance in South Africa's resistance press" in *South African Historical Journal*, 32, 1995, pp. 66-113.

¹¹⁹ R. GREENSTEIN, Review article: "History, historiography and the production of knowledge" in *South African Historical Journal*, 32, 1995, p. 229.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

¹²¹ J.P. BRITS, "Die studie van stemgedrag in die VSA en Suid-Afrika" in *South African Historical Journal*, 22, 1990, pp. 108-130.

¹²² A.B. JULIUS and A.B. LUMBY, "Labour and industry: Job reservation in the Eastern Cape motor industry in the 1960's" in *Contree*, 33, 1993, pp. 12-18.

¹²³ A. MABIN, "Capital, coal and conflict: The genesis and planning of a company town at Indwe" in *Contree*, 34, 1993, pp. 21-31.

esting field opening up in the medical history of South Africa.¹²⁴ More important is the fact that the history of technological and industrial development were interrelated in order to get to a better understanding of a disease which claimed many thousands of lives in the early years of the Witwatersrand goldfields.

What was apparent was that the radical discourse of the seventies and eighties had started losing its sharp edge. In a special section of the *South African Historical Journal* in 1990 attention was given to the History Workshop of the University of the Witwatersrand which featured in the Winter edition of the *Radical History Review* 46(7). A number of persons were approached and asked for their perspectives on radical history. Worger, who was particularly critical of the use of terms such as “radical” and “left-wing”, pointed out that what was radical had become orthodoxy after hegemony and dominance had been attained.¹²⁵ In trying to find the roots of “realism” amid radical theory of history he pertinently pointed out that at the helm of radical historical writing were whites. Although they were themselves critical of their ability to write the history of South Africa, they appeared to be “pretty well” prepared to take up the task of writing the history.¹²⁶

Bill Freund described the power shift from liberal to radical historiography as follows: “The radicals, despite their borrowings of Marxist categories, similarly are the heirs of that liberal discourse. They are effectively taking over the history departments of the English language universities associated with a liberal heritage but it is an inheritance that has marginal relation to power: Afrikaners have ousted and marginalised the English speakers from state control long ago. The radicals operate within a category that relates very little to Afrikaner historiography...and it is possible to see them still as concerned whites who problematize the situation of the black majority population from a distance.”¹²⁷

He also pointed out that the History Workshop “radicalism” tended to have stronger roots with Britain and the United States of America (than with South Africa itself).¹²⁸

Also Saunders found that “...too little has been done to attract young black scholars” in the radical history movement that has emerged from the History Workshop at the University of the Witwatersrand.¹²⁹

In what direction the radical approach would move in future is an interesting question. It might be one of greater neutrality, or even neo-conservatism. But that is a history of the

¹²⁴ H.J. VAN ASWEGEN, “Tegnologie en gesondheid: Myntering op die Witwatersrandse goudmyne, 1886-1920” in *Contree*, 30, 1991, pp. 16-22.

¹²⁵ W.H. WORGER, “White radical history” in *South African Historical Journal*, 24, 1991, p. 146.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

¹²⁷ B. FREUND, “Radical history writing and the South African context” in *South African Journal of History*, 24, 1991, p. 55.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

¹²⁹ C. SAUNDERS, “Radical history - The Wits Workshop version - Reviewed” in *South African Historical Journal*, 24, 1991, p. 162.

future itself. As historians we need for that time to pass first, before subjecting it to interpretation. More important, if the process of history production, as outlined above, is perceived as an extension of the myth making process in society, it can be accepted old myths will always be replaced by new ones, only to be revived under different circumstances and in different shapes. The appearance of South African history is clearly in a phase of transition. It is an era of dynamic change which offers the historian exciting prospects for methodological and interpretative creativity.