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Cross, M.

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13 - 15 JULY 1994

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

HISTORY WORKSHOP

CHANGING FRONTIERS OF ACADEMIC DISCOURSE:
KNOWLEDGE, POWER AND THE PRODUCTION OF HISTORY IN SOUTH AFRICA

M. Cross
Department of Education
University of the Witwatersrand

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CHANGING FRONTIERS OF ACADEMIC DISCOURSE: KNOWLEDGE, POWER AND THE PRODUCTION OF HISTORY IN SOUTH AFRICA

M. Cross
Department of Education, University of the Witwatersrand

The purpose of this paper is to draw attention to the conceptual vacuum "caused" by the end of Cold War and the consequent epistemological crisis among South African historians in their endeavour to unravel more revealingly the past. In doing so, it will expose the academic discourses which dominate the production of history in South Africa. It is argued in this paper that African history in South Africa has been approached with a series of preconceptions.

First, the preconception that only the body of ideas produced within the academy[1] through a sophisticated methodological and conceptual ritual is socially acceptable as historical knowledge. At best, this can lead to a hierarchization of historical knowledge: 'high knowledge' produced by the academy and 'low knowledge' or popular knowledge based on common sense of ordinary, non-professional people.[2] It is assumed, in this case, that there are degrees of knowledgeability or intelligibility of historical phenomena depending on the level of intuition and abstraction involved. At worst, it can lead to a dichotomy between historical knowledge generated by the academy and common-sense, very often reduced to the conventional signifier 'sources' of historical knowledge.

Second, there is also the preconception that by virtue of its methodological rigour only the academy can claim a genuine authorship and the right to canonize historical knowledge. In this sense, the products of the academy have necessarily a status of knowledge and the products of

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[1] By academy I do not mean just the institutional setting in which this particular intellectual practice takes place, but the whole academic and professional tradition binding all those involved in the pursuit of knowledge. It includes the library or archive of information commonly and , in some of its aspects, unanimously held. What binds the members of the academy together is a family of ideas, a unifying set of values proven in various ways to be effective, which provide the members with a mentality, a genealogy, an atmosphere, which allow them to deal with and to see historical phenomena in a particular way. It functions as a sort of guild community with its own internal traditions and peculiar ways of behaviour, learning and appropriation of knowledge. This somewhat unproblematic order of things is what this paper is trying to question.

[2] I shall use the term 'popular knowledge' to refer to the forms of knowledge produced among ordinary non-professiuonal people. This differs from the way it is used by some social historians such as Luli Calinicos who have appropriated the term to refer to the history written about and with the participation of ordinary people.

non-professional people have not. Obviously, this is very limiting and retrograde particularly when it is dissected from the perspective of those who have refused to be silenced because their processes of knowing do not fall under the knowledge parameters imposed by the academy. Historians have shown some enthusiasm in re-adjusting and refining timely their theoretical and analytical tools within the parameters set by the academy to address the changing historical circumstances. They have however done very little to redress the constraints imposed by increasing professionalisation of production of knowledge within the academy. They have not come to terms with the silences which this professionalisation seem to legitimise. Neither have they accounted for the fact that the boundaries of formal analysis they proclaim and attempt to universalise remain too rigid and hiearchizing.

The paper contends that the production of historical knowledge takes place in different sites and under different dynamics. Particular 'grammars' in these sites regulate the flow of information and meanings, and impose restrictions about what information is acceptable as knowledge and what knowledge is socially useful. It suggests that what is required is an analytical and interpretative framework with enough flexibility to account for the different frames of reference involved in the different contexts where the past is processed and made intelligible. For this to materialize, attention should be given to the informal processes of production of knowledge by students, workers and non-professional agents, i.e. the practices of knowledge production outside the academy or discarded by it as unscholarly.[3] This is an issue that has been ignored and met with almost complete silence by social scientists, and disregarded by the canonizers of knowledge.

Put another way, the paper is a plea for recognition of the fact that **there are different epistemologies** within and outside the academy and as such **multiple locations of historical knowledge**. These epistemologies lead to different degrees of knowing or different bodies of knowledge. It is not claimed that these bodies of knowledge have the same theoretical status. The important fact is that the recognition of these epistemologies represents a breakthrough or an important departure from the prevailing discourses of knowledge production. If particular attention is given to popular constructs of history, to the specific ways the past is processed and made intelligible by ordinary non-professional subjects, the gap between 'high knowledge and popular knowledge would certainly be reduced.

The academy can no longer claim monopoly of production of all historical knowledge but of a particular kind of knowledge. Culturally specific, shared set of norms or 'grammar' which regulates the 'debatability of the past' need to be extended beyond the boundaries of academic formal analysis to accommodate cases of other overlapping histories; to include those histories which have been ignored by social scientists as not satisfying inner-academic standards of

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[3] Note that the professionalisation of history has been accompanied by greater selectiveness and closure.

criticism of sources.[4] Therefore, there needs to be a radical review of the existing methods and processes of knowledge production as recognized by the academy.

Changing discourses in South African historiography

According to the methodological principles established by the academy, the production of historical knowledge requires a careful and critical examination of historical texts, conventionally known as historical sources. These texts may assume the form of written texts (documents) in predominantly literate societies or oral texts in predominantly non-literate ones as well as the form of objects, symbols and 'social texts' such as songs, arts and performance, which in Nietzsche's terms represent a 'continuous sign-chain'.[5] To attach meaning to these variety of texts, several tasks have to be undertaken. First, it is necessary to define the different settings in which historical texts are produced - location of texts - and to understand the dynamics which determine and regulate their production - the context of texts -. Second, it is necessary to unpack the nature of historical texts, deconstruct and decode their different representational forms. Third, it is also necessary to abstract from their empirical appearance, uncover the relationships between the facts they contain and derivate explanations or theory.

However, underpinning this apparently simple and technical procedure lies an important terrain of contestation, conflicting interests and struggles over control of power represented by knowledge. In South Africa, this contestation included changing the discourses, or more precisely, the approaches, assumptions, concepts and practices, which from time to time dominated the production of history. While shifting the frontiers of academic discourses, efforts were also made to reconceptualise the purpose, define and redefine the object of historical knowledge produced by the academy or, to use Bozzoli's terminology, the 'audiences'.[6] Involved in this process were institutions and organizations which in South Africa control the production and dissemination of historical knowledge. These include universities (History Departments, African Studies Centres or Institutes),[7] schools, newspapers, professional periodicals such as

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[4] For details on this particular approach see Adjun Appadurai, "The past as a scarce resource", *Man*, 16, 1981, pp.201-219.

[5] Quoted by G C Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), p.198.

[6] B Bozzoli, "Intellectuals, audiences and histories: South African experiences", *Radical History Review*, 46 (7), 1990, pp.237-263.

[7] In this paper I shall closely scrutinize major trends in the intellectual history of the universities in their role in the pursuit of historical knowledge. As Lipset has noted:

(continued...)

Social Dynamics, *Transformation*, magazines, archives and museums, the book trade and cultural institutions involved in film, theatre, research, maintenance of cultural heritage and teaching.[8] Within these institutions and organisations progressive history production has been dominated by the white Left since the early 1970s. I shall refer to this particular tradition by the term "Radical Historiography".[9]

I shall briefly review the role played by Radical Historiography in this process. I shall explore the following main themes: (1) the advent of neo-Marxist historiography in the early 1970s and its increasing influence on social studies; (2) the emergence of a radical/neo-Marxist school of thought in educational studies in the early 1980s; (3) theoretical metamorphoses within this school; and (4) the crisis of revisionism in the 1990s and the advent of what Laclau would call 'post-Marxism'. The aim is not however to re-write this historiography. This has been done elsewhere.[10] The aim is to textualise and dissect the main tenets of radical/neo-Marxist

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[7](...continued)
Universities are... the primary centers of intellectual life in modern society. They are, therefore, a key center of criticism - criticism of the society, of the dominant trends in it, especially its politics, by sections of both the faculty and the student bodies (S M Lipset, in H W van der Merwe and D Welsh (eds.), *Student Perspectives on South Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1972), p.3).

[8] Clarke et al argue that the study of the culture of the Academy which keeps the intellectual world in movement seems important for understanding how historical knowledge is integrated in society (Clarke et al, 'Sub-cultures, cultures and class', in Bennet et al, op cit, p.54.)

[9] The paper shares the meaning attached to the term radical historiography by Windsor Leroke. This is how Leroke defines it:

> In one sense, "Radical Historiography" is used definitionally to refer to the emergence of a new theoretical paradigm in the South African social sciences. [This paradigm is marxist, in that it seeks to further the arguments of historical materialism]. In another sense, the term refers to the heterogeneous character of this "new theoretical paradigm", and its social research methods, which is comprised of labour historians, labour studies, Marxist Structuralists, socialist humanists, social historians, etc (W S Leroke, "Social research and knowledge-construction in South African radical historiography", Sociology Department, University of the Witwatersrand, 1994, p.38.

[10] Bozzoli, op cit; Frederick Johnstone, " 'Most painful to our hearts': South Africa through the eyes of the new school", *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 16 (1), 1982, pp.2-26; (continued...)

discourses and explore possible implications for history production.

The crisis of the apartheid system between 1976 and 1980 appears to have had the effect of radicalizing an important sector of the liberal establishment, which began to contest the liberal view that apartheid must be explained in terms of an irrational racial logic.[11] As a result of this

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[10](...continued)
Christopher Saunders, "Reflections on the state of South African History at the beginning of the 1980s", in D I Ray, P Shinnie and D Williams (eds.), *Into the Seventies: Proceedings of the Eleventh Annual Conference of the Canadian Association of African Studies* (Vancouver, 1981), pp.233-240; C Saunders, "Towards understanding South Africa's past", *South Africa International*, 19 (2), October 1988; Harrison M Wright, *The Burden of the Present: Liberal-Radical Controversy over South African History* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1977); K R Hughes, "Challenges from the past: Reflections on Liberalism and Radicalism in the writing of Southern African History", *Social Dynamics* 3 (1), 1977, p.47; Basil A Le Cordeur, "The reconstruction of South African history", Presidential address delivered to the tenth biennial conference of the South African Historical Society at the University of Cape Town, 15 January 1985; Shula Marks, "Towards a people's history of South Africa? Recent developments in the historiography of South Africa", in R Sanuel (ed.), *People's History and Socialist Theory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp.297-308; Shula Marks, "Review article: African and Afrikaner history", *Journal of African History*, 3(1) 1962; Shula Marks, "Review article: Liberalism, social realities and South African history", *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies*, (8) 1972; F Johnstone, "'Most painful to our hearts'..., op cit; Frederick Johnstone, *Class, Race and Gold: A Study of Class Relations and Racial Discrimination in South Africa* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976); Anthony Atmore and Nancy Westlake, "A liberal dillemma: A critique of the Oxford History of South Africa", *Race 14* (1972), pp.107-136; and John W Cell, *The Highest Stage of White Supremacy - The Origins of Segregation in South Africa and the American South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); P Kallaway, "What happened to South African history", *Concept* (6), 1975; J Lonsdale, "From colony to industrial state: South African historiography as seen from England", *Social Dynamics*, (9), 1983; C Bundy, "An image of its own past? Towards a comparison of American and South African historiography", *Radical Review*, 46/47, 1990; J Bergh, "The Afrikaans historian and his work", *South Africa International*, 19 (2), October 1988; L M Thompson, "Afrikaner nationalist historiography and the policy of apartheid", *Journal of African history* 3 (1), 1962.

[11] Liberals argued that this irrational logic would fall apart as a result of progressive modernization of the economy. See for example Thompson L, *The Political Mythology of Apartheid* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985) and Cell J, *Segregation. The Highest Stage of White Supremacy. The Origins of Segregation in South Africa and the American South* (Cambridge, 1982).

modernisation, whites would choose to be rich and mixed rather than poor and separate.[12] However, the inability of the liberal school to deliver a satisfactory solution to the crisis faced by South Africa since the 1970s - increasing oppositional struggles waged by the African National Congress (ANC), the growth of black trade union movements, the 1976 uprising, the explosion of youth and student movements - resulted in deep crisis of identity among liberal academics, which culminated in the emergence of radical neo-Marxist theorists.[13]

For neo-Marxist theorists, the nature and the dynamics of South African social formation could only be understood within the framework of a Marxist political economy. They drew on Marx's method of historical and dialectical materialism and on theories of social change produced by Marxist political economists.[14] They concentrated on the functional linkages between capitalism and racial domination in terms of class analysis based on a conception of capitalism as a class-divided, exploitative and conflictual system.[15] They regarded economic relations and structures as having an overwhelmingly determining effect on the social structures of society.[16] The themes included issues such as periodisation, the state, class fractions and alliances, class hegemony,

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[12] An idea borrowed from Norval, "Letter to Ernesto", op cit, p.138.

[13] See for example Harold Wolpe, 'Capitalism and cheap labour-power in South Africa: from segregation to apartheid', *Economy and Society*, 1(4), November 1972, pp.424-456; F A Johnstone, 'Class conflict and colour bars in the South African gold mining industry, 1910-1926', in *Collected Seminar Papers* (University of London, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, October 1969-April 1970); F A Johnstone, " White prosperity and white supremacy in South Africa today", *African Affairs*, LXIX (1970), pp.125-140; Frederick Johnstone, *Class, Race and Gold: A Study of Class Relations and Racial Discrimination in South Africa* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976); Stanley Trapido, "South Africa in a comparative study of industrialization", *Journal of Development Studies*, 7 (1970); M Legassick, 'South African capital accumulation and violence', *Economy and Society*, 3(3), 1974, pp.253-91; M Legassick, 'The making of South African "native policy", 1903-1923: The origins of segregation', in *Collected Papers* (University of London, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, 1974).

[14] Johnstone, 1982, op cit., p.6.

[15] F Johnstone, "'Most painful to our hearts'..., op cit, pp.8-9. For further details see for example Martin Legassick, "South Africa: Capital accumulation and violence", *Economy and Society* 3 (1974), pp.253-91; S Trapido, "South Africa in a comparative study of industrialisation", *Journal of Development Studies*, 7 (1971); Harold Wolpe, "Capitalism and cheap labour power in South Africa: From segregation to apartheid", *Economy and Society*, 1 (1972), pp. 425-456.

[16] S Hall, 'Race, articulation and societies structured in dominance', in UNESCO, *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism* (Poole: Sydenham Printers, 1980), pp.306-7.

imperialism and national capital, white workers, the role of gold, and the importance of economic and political factors in capital accumulation process.[17]

Among the group of neo-Marxists was a new generation of historians with a viewpoint startlingly opposed to the 'liberal' and Afrikaner nationalist traditions.[18] These historians set themselves the task of challenging liberal and nationalist discourses by reviewing their approaches, and redirecting their modes of thinking about history, processes of construction and modes of representation of historical knowledge. To promote emancipatory ideals, radical/neo-Marxist discourses emphasised the centrality of Marxist categories of 'class' and 'class struggle' and the role of the working class, as analytical categories. Embedded in these discourses were popular signifiers such as 'people's history', 'history from below', 'bottom up history', 'popular history, and so forth. However, neo-Marxist theorists replaced the reductionist racial logic with a class logic, which also led to another form of reductionism, class reductionism. The emphasis on class analysis in history production did not solve the problems posed by the complexity of South African society. Neither did the emphasis on and attention given to 'privileged subjects' such as the working class and the trade unions.[19]

A major weakness remained thus the inability to grapple with non-economic factors in history and society such as subjectivity, identity and culture.[20] The neo-Marxist school thus faced the challenge of combining its strengths with sensitivity to the cultural and subjective dimensions of social life, human agency and actors's choices in real and complex historical situations.[21] As

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[17] F Johnstone, "'Most painful to our hearts'..., op cit, p.22.

[18] These are well characterised by Bozzoli. See Bozzoli, op cit, pp.240-242.

[19] As Laclau and Mouffe have pointed out, the era of 'privileged subjects' - in the ontological not practical sense - of the anti-capitalist struggle has been superseded. No class or social movement can be taken *a priori* as progressive by virtue of its class nature. Its progressiveness depends upon its hegemonic articulation with other struggles or demands. It is a question that requires further elaboration within the declining world socialist movement. In this sense the assumption that in modern societies 'the most fundamental groups are the social classes, and the major cultural configurations are class cultures' should be taken with some qualification.

[20] Johnstone argued for example that "the historical and sociological significance of Afrikaner nationalism cannot be entirely grasped merely in these new and important terms of its class instrumentality "the historical and sociological significance of Afrikaner nationalism cannot be entirely grasped merely in these new and important terms of its class instrumentality" (Johnstone, op citd., p.24).

[21] Ibid., p.25.

Le Cordeur pointed out "the absence of the human dimension in this 'history without passion' invests it with an air of unreal lifelessness".[22] What was required was a synthesis which combined structuralist and interactionist perspectives, material determination and human agency.[23] This was achieved during the second half of the 1970s.

A new approach emerged representing a shift from the 'economic' to social relations, relations between different racial, ethnic and cultural groups. Its general feature was the fact that it stressed the autonomy, the non-reductiveness, of race and ethnicity as social factors - the relative autonomy of ideology, politics, race, culture. This is what has been described as "writing history 'from the bottom up' or history from below".[24] This was followed by a remarkable proliferation of Marxist-sounding 'social history' works in the main liberal institutions (University of the Witwatersrand and University of Cape Town), supported by progressive publishers such as Ravan Press and David Philip.[25] In the 1980s, neo-Marxism, particularly as applied to social history, became almost a standard paradigm in the main Centres for African Studies and the History and Sociology departments of the English-speaking universities.[26] Charney quotes

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[22] Basil A Le Cordeur, "The reconstruction of South African history...", op cit, p.2.

[23] For a review of this trend see Saunders, 1981, op cit.

[24] K R Hughes, "Challenges from the past..., op cit, p.45.

[25] S Marks and S Trapido, 'Lord Milner and the South State', *History Workshop Journal*, 8, 1979; B Bozzoli (ed.), *Town and Countryside in the Transvaal* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983); B Bozzoli (ed.), *Class, Community and Conflict* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987); Burman & Reynolds (eds.), *Growing up in a Divided Society*, op cit; Alex Callinicos & John Rogers, *Southern Africa after Soweto* (London: Pluto Press, 1978), 2nd edition; M Swilling & T Lodge, 'The year of the Amabutho', *Africa Report*, January-February 1986; M Swilling, ' "Because your yard is too big": Squatter struggles, the local state and dual power in Uitenhage, 1985-1986', (unpublished paper, University of the Witwatersrand, 1988); M Swilling, 'Stayaways, urban protest and the state', *South African Review*, (3), 1986, pp.20-50; J Seekings, 'Why was Soweto different? Urban development, township politics, and the political economy of Soweto, 1977-1984', (African Studies Seminar Paper, University of the Witwatersrand, 1988).

[26] B Bozzoli (ed.), *Town and Countryside in the Transvaal* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983); B Bozzoli (ed.), *Class, Community and Conflict* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987); Burman & Reynolds (eds.), *Growing up in a Divided Society*, op cit; Alex Callinicos & John Rogers, *Southern Africa after Soweto* (London: Pluto Press, 1978), 2nd edition; M Swilling & T Lodge, 'The year of the Amabutho', *Africa Report*, January-February 1986; M Swilling, ' "Because your yard is too big": Squatter struggles, the local state and dual power in Uitenhage,

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Charles van Onselen, director of the Wits African Studies Institute, as expressing his satisfaction with the victory of Radical Historiography in this way: 'We've largely won our battle against the liberals. In the social sciences, we dictate the terms'.[27]

The most outstanding feature of this approach was the development of 'peoples' history', which had an increasing impact in the main fields of social inquiry, particularly history, sociology, political science and educational studies. 'People's history' is one of the several signifiers appropriated by popular movements in Britain and South Africa and then given a theoretical meaning as a framework for production of a particular kind of history. This was followed by a call for 'people's history' in 1987.

People's history is essentially anti-apartheid history, i.e. history written explicitly as a counter to the racist and elitist stereotypes and perversions that have characterised the history propagated, especially in government schools. It is 'popular' history in that 'it deliberately seeks to bring the black underclasses into South African history, and at the same time is written primarily for a readership drawn from those classes'.[28] People's history is thus an alternative to the perspective of the 'Great Man' approach to history. It is the history of the 'ordinary

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[26](...continued)
1985-1986', (unpublished paper, University of the Witwatersrand, 1988); M Swilling, 'Stayaways, urban protest and the state', *South African Review*, (3), 1986, pp.20-50; J Seekings, and 'Why was Soweto different? Urban development, township politics, and the political economy of Soweto, 1977-1984', (African Studies Seminar Paper, University of the Witwatersrand, 1988).

[27] Craig Charney, 'Thinking of revolution: The new South African intelligentsia', *Monthly Review*, 38, December 1986, p.16.

[28] John Wright, 'Popularising the pre-colonial past: Politics and problems', *Perspectives in Education*, 10 (2), 1989/90, p.47. For more details see: L Callinicos, *Gold and Workers* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1980); New Nation, 'People's History series', issue of 23 October-5 November 1986, onwards; C Hamilton & H Webster, 'The struggle for control over the voices of the past and the socialising role of pre-colonial history: Perspectives on the production of pre-colonial education materials', *Perspectives in Education*, 10 (2), 1988/9, pp.53-60; The History Commission, *'What is History?' A New Approach to History for Students, Workers and Communities*, (Johannesburg: Skotaville Educational Division, 1987); L Callinicos, 'The People's History Workshop', University of the Witwatersrand, February 1987, Report, *Perspectives in Education*, 10 (1), 1988, pp.84-86; Cynthia Kros, 'The making of class: Beyond model curricula - A preliminary critique of the presentation of history in South African schools', *Perspectives in Education*, 10 (1), 1988, pp.87-100; and Leslie Witz, 'Write your own history' (Johannesburg: SACHED Trust/Ravan Press, 1988).

people', the oppressed and exploited masses, viewed not as simple objects of a particular intellectual activity but as active subjects of the very same activity. The main thrust of people's history is that it recognizes, though sometimes it tends to overemphasize and reify, the 'lived experience' of ordinary people.

However, what has become increasingly limiting in the neo-Marxist discourse is its almost complete inability to locate cultural phenomena in domains which do not follow strictly on the logic of class relationships and the social stratification determined by the changing South African political economy. This cannot account for the complex developments that have dominated history in the post Cold War period, namely (1) the emergence of new subjects, the location of which, is not within the boundaries of class - women, racial and ethnic minorities, ecological, gay and anti-institutional movements; and (2) the nature of struggles carried out by these subjects, which do not respond to the logic of class struggle. These are also part of a wider project of radical democracy. The discourses of Radical Historiography can no longer be restricted to the working community. Radical Historiography also needs to move beyond a defensive intellectual culture of criticism, towards a creative, risk-taking intellectual culture, which is dynamic, open and energized. The risks are obviously greater as to bring in new identities means that the project will entail many struggles, and perhaps a few celebrations, with the possibility of antagonism, contradiction and complexity.[29] Attempts to grapple with the phenomena related to above developments culminated in the advent of a Post-Marxist discourse in South Africa, which has been seen by some critics as the emergence of "romantic populism".[30]

Post-Marxism did not emerge as a case against neo-Marxism and class analysis,[31] but as a warning against the limitations of class reductionism in analyses of social activities and discursive formations which are not necessarily determined by the logic of class or class struggle. In 1985, at the moment when the antagonism dividing nationalist, liberal and Marxist identities was at its climax, asked to make a choice between liberal and Marxist approaches, I replied with the following comment:

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[29] Similar argument is articulated by Rosalind Brunt in "The politics of identity", in Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques (eds.), *New Times - The Changing Face of Politics in the 1990s* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1989), p.158.

[30] Bozzoli, "Intellectuals..., op cit, p.261.

[31] For this purpose see the debate on Post-Marxism: Ernesto Laclau & Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony & Socialist Strategy - Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: The Thetford Press, 1985); Norman Geras, "Post-Marxism?", *New Left Review* , May/June 1987; Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Moufee, "Post-Marxism without apologies", Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections...*, op cit.

> It is not clear that there is any advantage in labelling different social scientists, whatever the labels (conservative, liberal, radical, Marxist, neo-Marxist, right-wing liberal, left-wing liberal, extreme-right-wing liberal or radical, or conservative, etc., etc.,). Like many other labels, they probably conceal as much as they reveal. They tend to obscure the fundamental differences between those who think dialectically, and those whose thinking is criterion-based or categorical [refers to analytical philosophy of education]. Rather, it seems that **what is important for a social scientist is his/her ability to critically discern, select, and develop or use the theoretical tools provided by the different schools of thought which, can more easily and safely, lead to the intelligibility of social reality, without being arrested by unnecessary scholarly apartheid.**[32]

The interpretation of this passage in the context of the objectives of this paper is, in Laclau and Mouffe's words, that "there is not one discourse and one system of categories through which the 'real' might speak without mediations".[33] To be or not to be Marxist in terms of identity construction or participation in a particular discourse represents a continuous process of making and re-making ourselves, and ourselves in relation to others. Nobody is born 'Marxist' or 'Socialist'. This is a product of life-choices and contingencies. If current rethinking of traditional social theory is to be helpful in actually changing anything, it must do more than regurgitating Marx in different ways. It has to set a whole new transformatory project which takes seriously the question of de-canonization of knowledge or at least the shifting of the frontiers of the canon. This is not to suggest that Radical Historiography should start again on a clean sheet or more precisely that class analysis and class struggle must be finally buried. Certainly the project must include elements of continuity and elements of discontinuity. In this regard, I would like to reiterate Laclau's observations about paradigmatic changes and epistemological breaks:

> The surpassing of a great intellectual tradition never takes place in the sudden form of a collapse, but in the way that river waters, having originated at common source, spread in various directions and mingle with

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[32] M Cross, "A response to Penny...", op cit, pp.163-164. To avoid misunderstanding the article I added the following comment:

> However, there are some labels which are conventionally accepted as terms of reference of the different schools of thought. In this sense, the terms 'liberal' 'radical or 'conservative' and others have a place. But before we stick on the labels why not open the parcels and check what sort of commodities are inside? (Ibid.)

[33] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*..., op cit, p.3.

> currents flowing down from other sources. This is how the discourses that constituted the field of classical Marxism may help to form the thinking of a new left: by bequeathing some of their concepts, transforming or abandoning others, and diluting themselves in that infinite intertextuality of emancipatory discourses in which the plurality of the social takes shape.[34]

In addition, the need to recognize difference and plurality of possibilities in a transformatory project in which class and class struggle may be one of them or mere contingency.

> In intellectual history, the important epistemological breaks have not occurred when new solutions have been given to old problems, but when a radical change in the ground of the debate strips the old problems of their sense. This is what seems central to me today if one wishes to push forward the political debate of the left: it is necessary to construct a new language - and a new language means, as you know, new objects, new problems, new values, and the possibility of discursively constructing new antagonisms and forms of struggle.[35]

What the review illustrates is that Radical Historiography has been very effective in constantly re-thinking its conceptual practices and exploring new conceptual possibilities to account for the rapidly changing South African scenario. Most importantly, it has been able to draw on popular discourses of South African history and conceptualise the various and complex ways ordinary people process and make sense of their past, in the dance, art, songs and so forth. In this regard, it has played an outstanding role in popularizing or 'democratising' historical knowledge and making it accessible to wider audiences. This is illustrated by the work done by the History Workshop project. This project could certainly widen the frontiers of the domain of history and cultural production, diminish the silences which have prevailed in this activity and mobilize new constituencies.

It must be stressed however that little has been done to contest the 'rules of the game' which have turned the academy into an exclusivist institution, claiming monopoly over the production of socially acceptable historical knowledge. I would contend that this is because its exercise is still based on a eurocentric discourse which reduces the process of generation of historical knowledge to the narrow and restrictive concept of **historiography**. Although it is recognised that a major breakthrough has taken place with

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[34] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony...*, op cit, p.5.

[35] Laclau, *New Reflections...*, op cit, p.162.

the introduction of the concept of **production of history**,[36] borrowed from social anthropology, I shall argue that the complexity of the processes whereby historical knowledge is generated are best captured by the dynamic concept of **construction of historical knowledge**. The last two concepts are based on a radically different assumption: that there is a plurality of possibilities, sites and epistemologies in the process of construction of historical knowledge. This is extremely important particularly when "the guild tradition... [as seems to be the case with Radical Historiography] takes over the scholar who is not vigilant, whose individual consciousness as a scholar is not on the guard against *idées reçues* all too easily handed down in the profession".[37]

The Combing of History

In **The Combing of History**,[38] which, to my view, represents a radical shift in contemporary historiography, Cohen writes:

> I did not feel inclined to enter a anew the literatures on historiography: the

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[36] "Production of history" is a key concept in Cohen's work, which he defines as follows: The production of history - a frame of reference that is intended here to augment the conventional senses of meaning of history and historiography - refers to the processing of the past in societies and historical settings all over the world and the struggles for control of voices and texts in innumerable settings which animate this processing of the past. This field of practice - **the production of history** - encompasses conventions and paradigms in the formation of historical knowledge and historical texts, the organizing sociologies of historicizing projects and events including commemorations, the structuring of frames of record-keeping, the culturally-specific glossing of texts, the deployment of powerfully nuanced vocabularies, the confronting of patterns and forces underlying interpretation, the workings of audience in managing and responding to presentations of historical knowledge, and the contentions and struggles which evoke and produce texts and which also produce historical literature. David W Cohen, The Combing of History (The Chicago University Press: Forthcoming), Manuscript, op cit, pp.425-26.

The concept of production of history has a double meaning: "how understandings of history are created and shaped, and how history itself is made".

[37] Edward W Said, *Orientalism* (New york: Pantheon Books, 1978), p.326.

[38] The title is a metaphor in which the 'comb' represents simultaneously 'the power to cover and usurp knowledge from inspection, but also the power to restore it in practice' (Cohen, op cit, p.427).

> theory of history, the philosophy of history, the varieties of history, historical imagination, the history of historical writing... these were and are thematic fields that I think of when I hear the word "historiography"... to me at the time, and still today, the realm of historiography so construed is reserved for an arena of scholarly practice on the reconstruction of the past. As a field of scholarly activity, "historiography" privileges the written document and the learned and scholarly literatures on the past developing over centuries. **It omits... the practices of history outside the academy.**[39] [My emphasis]

He goes on to appeal for recognition of the "immense power created as people popularly process the past outside the work of the guild" [academy]. The recognition of this, he argues, will have dramatic consequences: (1) it will free "the student of other societies and other pasts from narrow understandings about the nature of history, historical evidence, historical writing, and what should constitute history";[40] (2) it will disclose "a far more spacious, (clearly broad, yet sometimes unmapped)", and "challenging view of history - of the telling of the past - in which it is recognized that there are **multiple locations of historical knowledge**";[41] and (3) it will open clear horizons about the forms and directions of historical knowledge. From this point of view, questions about history production become broader questions about "the shifting composition of 'audiences', about who is listening to whom, and about the struggles for control of vocabularies, grammars, and symbolic materials in the telling and writing of history".[42] As he puts it, "Actual, and imagined, audiences work upon the productions of history in powerful ways, introducing critiques, rereadings, corrections, value, and meaning".[43] The new paradigm will also free historical inquiry from the limitations and constraints imposed by overemphasis of expert knowledge on written texts. Indeed,

> Historians and others interested in contact between literary and non-literary traditions can hardly live with the simplifications and reifications involved in the simplistic dichotomy of written and oral.[44]

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[39] Cohen, op cit, p.34.

[40] Ibid., pp.37-38.

[41] Ibid., p.38.

[42] Ibid., p.376.

[43] Ibid., p.425.

[44] Cohen, op cit, p.403.

Or as Chartier puts it,

> ...what readers make of their readings in an intellectual sense is a decisive question that cannot be answered either by thematic analyses of printed production, or by analysis of the social diffusion of different categories or works. Indeed, the ways in which an individual or a group appropriates an intellectual theme or a cultural form are more important than the statistical distribution of that theme or form.[45]

The model suggested by Cohen has dramatic implications for understanding the nature of academic discourses in the area of social sciences, particularly history. Firstly, it can liberate South African historiography from the limited analytical scope offered by its prevailing paradigms, e.g. social history or history from below.[46] It sanctions and adds a more operational framework to the mode of analysis suggested by the 'people's history' and 'people's education' movement.[47]

Secondly, by bringing attention to silences and by liberating silenced voices, Cohen's model makes it possible to map out the interplay of academic discourses and non-professional discourses and to determine the nature of the struggles and dialogue between dominant and subordinate voices in the production, selection and presentation of historical

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[45] Roger Chartier, "Intellectual history or sociocultural history? The French trajectories", in D LaCarpa and L Kapkan, (eds.), *Modern European Intellectual History: Reappraisals and New Perspectives* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1982), p.30.

[46] Introduced in the early 1980s by radical historians and sociologists of education as a response to technocratic and technicist views of the education crisis in South Africa, it has become almost institutional in the main liberal and progressive schools of education. For a detailed review see M Cross, A historical review of education in South Africa: Towards an assessment", *Comparative Education*, 22 (3), 1986, M Cross, "Education in South African historiography", in M Cross, *Resistance and Transformation - Education, Culture and Reconstruction in South Africa (Jo*hannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1992); Peter Kallaway (ed.), *Apartheid and Education* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1984), Intro; and Peter Randall, "The role of history of education in teacher education" (Ph.D. Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1989).

[47] For details see M Cross, "Youth culture and resistance in South Africa: A theoretical review", *Perspectives in Education*, 12 (2) 1991.

knowledge.[48] South African educational historiography has privileged and celebrated the authority of 'the written document'[49] in history production to almost mythical proportions.[50] Most importantly, the authority which regulates the selection and the uses of the written text is neglected. No attention has been paid to the complex ways in which, in Cohen's words, popular and institutional constructions of the past and political suppressions of knowledge, shape, distort and deform the processes of knowledge production.[51]

Thirdly, Cohen's model provides a more holistic basis than the existing historiographical paradigms for an understanding of the workings of the various forces and audiences in society in the process of formation and presentation of school knowledge as well as responses to this knowledge. It widens the scope of production of historical knowledge to include all kinds of settings beyond the formal and institutional structure of the academy. Indeed, the production of history and culture is not just a privilege of the academy, it takes place in different kinds of settings: formal institutions of the 'guild' - forums, seminars, exhibitions, festivals, parades, workshops, symposia, conferences, lecture series and publication projects - in several public institutions such as the library, the schools and curriculum, dinner dances, forms of radio broadcasting, labour unions and their organizers, film, television and newspapers, photography, and in memorials and commemorations, re-enactments, museum exhibitions, popular biographies, and advertising, i.e in all institutional and popular processes with some bearing on the covering/uncovering, revealing or suppressing of historical and cultural knowledge.[52]

Academics have an incredible capacity either to consider texts as having attributes which may not appear as evident to outsiders, or to ignore attributes which would have appeared to those same outsiders as being inextricably part of those texts. This is not only because

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[48] One would certainly agree with Cohen that: "To take up the question of silence is at the same time to take up in a very specific way the general problem of how people handle and deploy knowledge. This is a complex moral and ethical ground". (Cohen, op cit, p.430)

[49] This is associated with crude empiricism, 'white-centredness' in focus and silence concerning African voices in their written or oral expression.

[50] Given its ideological nature, historical debate is obviously dominated by struggles over control of voices and texts in the processing of the past. For example, the two competing views of Zulu history which led to a vociferous exchange of words between Chief Buthelezi and Shula Marks are part of these struggles.

[51] Cohen, op cit, p.424.

[52] Cohen, op cit, p.377 and p.421.

to some extent they are a human mirror which reflects a particular configuration of social relations in society but mainly because they have some bearing on the constitution of the same social relations. It is important to account for the complex relationships through which texts are constituted as sources of knowledge. Texts are not mere things, they represent dynamic relationships between people.

Reification or fetishization of texts[53] tends to mask the actual power and social relations which determine the process of production and presentation of historical and cultural knowledge. Therefore students need for example to understand the dynamics of 'story telling' to know what they can make of the story as it is told. They have to come to grips with fundamental questions such as: Who is presenting the text? What is presented in the text? What is not presented in the text? Why is it presented in that particular way? What is expected from the text and so forth. They must recognize that the subject of historical knowledge - the producer of knowledge - cannot be entirely separated from the object or the product and vice-versa. Miller's concept of 'objectification' is important to explain this aspect. He uses the term objectification :

> ...to describe the dual process by means of which a subject externalises itself in a creative act of differentiation, and in turn reappropriates this externalization through an act which Hegel terms sublation... This act eliminates the separation of the subject from its creation but does not eliminate this creation itself; instead, the creation is used to enrich and develop the subject, which then transcends its earlier state.[54]

This means that there is no historical knowledge prior to the process through which it is created, though the process must take place in history and through the material and intellectual media given by history. [55] For example, in a study of uses of the past in Gola discourse, D'Azevedo does a fine job in illustrating the complex process whereby councils of elderly people arrive at socially knowledgeable constructs of the past or reconstitute past histories, which are then accepted as historical knowledge:

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[53] This refers to the process whereby social groups are held to be unable to understand that texts (commodities) which they see as alien are actually of their own production.

[54] Daniel Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1992), p.28. To some extent, Miller draws on Marx's concept of **alienation** and **objectification** as opposed to self-affirmation: "The object that labour produces, its product, stands opposed to it as something alien, as a power independent of the producer. The product of labour is labour embodied and made material in an object, it is an objectification of labour" (K Marx, *Early Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975, p.324).

[55] Ibid., p.28.

> These histories, as we may call them, are constructed from the collective efforts of aged persons whose special skills are directed to arriving at a public consensus regarding the validity of past events and their meanings... In litigation proceedings, for example, an interesting transformation takes place in the uses of historical data. Here, it is necessary to justify one's actions by an appeal to precise locations in time and space. In a matter involving land ownership each of the contestants is armed with a version of events in the past which are meant to validate his claim, and justification requires that a third party can be convinced of the reliability of one among a number of rival versions.[56]

Beyond "The Combing of History"

As any other conceptual innovation, the project suggested in "The Coming of History" raises however several problems. First, the production of history is conflated with 'the making of history'.[57] Every aspect of human activity becomes part of "production of history". No distinction is made between the constitution of historical knowledge and the making of history. Where does one draw the line between the 'processing of the past' - constitution of historical knowledge in its wider sense - and the process whereby the participants make their own history? In a more specific sense, 'production of history' could refer to consciously articulated activities whereby people process the past to constitute historical knowledge in its different forms - common-sense or abstracted knowledge. In this process, people make use of different kinds of texts, oral, written, aesthetics, to make sense of the past.

Second, **production** as a concept refers to the first step of a complex process, which

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[56] See Warren L D'Azevedo, "Uses of the past in Gola discourse", Journal of African History, III, 1(1962), p.31. For further details on this issues see for example I M Lewis, "Historical aspects of geneologies in Northern Somali social structure", *Journal of African History*, III, 1(1962, pp.35-48; William P Murphy, "Oral literature", *Ann. Rev. Anthpopol.*, 1978, 7, pp.113-136; William P Murphy, "Creating the appearance of consensus in Mende political discourse", *American Anthropologist*, 92 (1), 1990; and Igor Kopytoff (ed), *The African Frontier - The Reproduction of Traditional African Societies*, (Boomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), ch. "The importance of being first".

[57] Ironically, Cohen himself states that the concept 'production of history' has a double meaning: "how understandings of history are created and shaped, and how history itself is made" (Cohen, op cit, p.426).

includes **distribution** [58] and **consumption**. With the professionalization of history production, the distribution of knowledge has radically changed. A great deal of knowledge produced by the academy is for self-consumption or for the middle class. Particular kinds of knowledge and texts are selected to feed the masses. For those groups whose forms of production of history have not been recognized by the canonizers, history is made under conditions of estrangement. This means that the external is created under conditions which ensure that the producer is unable to fully utilize historical knowledge as an instrument for self-realization. On the other hand, there is also a problem of inaccessibility of the immense body of knowledge produced by the academy.

Third, some remarks should be made about the validity of the concept **production** as an analytical category. Miller points out that a series of academic trends have led to an overwhelming concentration on the area of production as the key generative arena for the emergence of the dominant social relations in contemporary societies. This, argues Miller, has been accompanied by "a comparative neglect of consumption, together with a concomitant failure to observe the actual changes which have taken place over the last century in the balance of influence between these two forms of interactions with goods".[59]

Production demands consumption. Consumption demands production. These processes are mediated through distribution. In the case of production of knowledge, there seems to be a close relationship between the creation of knowledge and the diversity of uses, functions and connotations of this knowledge in society and vice-versa. Individuals are increasingly coming into relationship with objects - books, films, written documents, statues, emblems, furniture or cars- "not as producers who fail to recognize their products, but as **consumers** who have to determine their own development". [60] Production and consumption are all parts of a **totality**, in which the three elements cannot be separated. To understand the parts one has to confront them with the **totality** and vice-versa. This is an analytical puzzle that Marx was confronted with to understand the nature of capitalism. He solved the puzzle by identifying the main feature that characterized the **totality**, which he conceptualized as **commodity**.

Similarly, the key question about the construction of historical knowledge has something to do with the formulation of concepts that capture more effectively the dynamics of the processes of knowing. 'Production' maybe just one aspect of it/them. These concepts

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[58] The term distribution refers to the exchange relations which mediate the process of objectification, i.e the expression of the relationships between goods and desires or human needs.

[59] Daniel Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1992), p.3.

[60] Miller, op cit, p.76.

must take cognizance of the fact that within the academy or even in other epistemological stites, the production of historical knowledge is increasingly becoming production of commodities. These dominate processes of social self-creation in which they are directly constitutive of our understanding of ourselves and others. It is the 'commodification' of knowledge and culture which underpins constructions of the past, suppressions of knowledge and which shape, distort and deform the processes of knowledge production.[61]

Finally, in contemporary world, consumption of knowledge is developing to such proportions that it can no longer be reduced to mere reproduction or completion of the process of production. With the reduction of the time spent in labour or actual production, the time spent in leisure and consumption has enormously increased. We confront ourselves more as consumers of knowledge than as producers, as such unable to connect the artifacts of knowledge - books, films, museum etc - to the world of production. Consumption of knowledge has become an extremely important part of human activity and social engineering. It generates possibilities of socialibilty and cognitive order while engendering ideas of morality, ideal worlds, images and other abstractions and principles, which shape societies in different ways. Consumption of knowledge is used to create the context for social networks and leisure activities such as academic associations, film clubs, readings and debating forums, which have some bearing on the constitution of knowledge.

So far, the paper has highlighted the constraints imposed by existing paradigms in history production (**historiography school** and **production-of-history school**) to the process of contestation of prevailing practices within the academy. It has shown that the success achieved conceptually and theoretically by radical historians in highlighting the question of the structuring and reproduction of apartheid social relations has been clouded by the failure to combine this theoretical and political concern with the contestation of the academic foundations on which the project of Radical Historiography has been built.[62] Particularly within the academy, intellectual processes - of whatever kind - are part of

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[61] **Commodification** is defined as the process whereby people are effectively reduced to objects, and objects in turn interpose themselves in relationships between people. The concept of commodification is used by Auslander, Hamilton, Michael Donovan, and Breckenridge, though without the necessary qualifications. See M Auslander, op cit; C Hamilton, op cit, Keith Breckenridge, "Migrants, minelords and gold: The cultural politics of metallic money before the South African gold standard crisi, 1920-1933", Department of History, Northwestern University, 27 February 1993; and Michael Donovan, "Capturing the land: Kipsigis narratives of progress", Department of Anthropology, New York University, 10 March 1993.

[62] Leroke has persuasively highlighted the implications of the methodological and espistemological approach which underpins the processes of knowledge production and construction within the project of Radical Histotiography (See Leroke, 1994, op cit).

a complex and unique history that is shaped by particular cultural and political traditions, and such traditions exert a powerful influence upon educational and scientific pursuit and vice-versa. The restrictive political and cultural traditions of the academy have been left uncontested by radical historians.

On the one hand, the notion of **historiography** implies that historical knowledge is only possible within the framework of literary practice. Drawing on Said one can argue that the problem with the notion of **historiography** is that it tends to divide the subject of history into two elements. One which writes about and another which is written about. The former has the power and authority to observe, study and conceptualise. For the latter passivity is the presumed role. The former is a source of knowledge and a writer and the latter is the source of information and a subject matter in need of investigation. As Said has noted no dialectic is either desired or allowed between the two parts.[63]

On the other hand, the **concept of production** assumes that knowledge is a product.[64] As such knowledge is seen as a definite, finished and timeless body of ideas ready to be consumed as any other goods. This leads to a static, petrified and reified conception of knowledge. Knowledge is thus constructed as an object or commodity subject to same market forces which regulate the distribution or circulation of commodities. Leroke makes an important remark in this regard: "The danger of objectifying knowledge, that is of constituting knowledge as an object that participates in social relations, like other objects, such as money and cultural artifacts... is that it leads to the inability of conceptualizing knowledge as process.[65]

I would rather argue that knowledge is a process,[66] characterised by its dynamism and constant incompleteness. In this sense, the processes whereby knowledge is generated are

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[63] Said, op cit, p.308.

[64] The meanings attached to the metaphors Historiography, Knowledge-production and Knowledge construction are central for an understanding of the argument pursued in this paper.

[65] Leroke, 1994, op cit, pp.13-14.

[66] Leroke pursues a similar argument to demonstrate the "textuality of power relations" or the presence of power relations in the proces of knowledge construction:

> The tenets of my argument is that (1) knowledge is not an object, a commodity, but rather that knowledge is a process; (2) specifically, knowledge is not just a social process, but a textual process; (3) knowledge, when located at this level of its textuality reveals the process of its construction as a power relations process. That is, knowledge/power relations take on a textual form (Ibid., p15).

essentially processes of **construction** of knowledge, which include constant search for the truth, permanent covering and uncovering of reality, as meanings are created and recreated. Therefore, no discipline or academy can claim absolute knowledge of any phenomena. There can only be degrees of approximation to the truth or degrees of knowledgeability. These depend not only on the intellectual and material instruments used in the process but also on the dynamics of power and social relations within the particular context where knowledge is constructed. Each context presents particular cultural and epistemological boundaries and principles of internal coherence which impact differently in the construction of knowledge. It is this dimension of power and social relations that the concepts of **historiography** and the anthropological concept of **production of history** fail to fully address. To recognise this limitation is to question the terms of accreditation of knowledge within and outside the academy, an issue which does not fall within the scope of this paper. Yet often the sense in which some scholars feel to be members of the academy lies on a very unrigorous and problematic idea of what is "out there", beyond the frontiers of academic discourse. To use Said's words: "All kinds of suppositions, associations, and fictions appear to crowd the unfamiliar space outside one's own".[67]

There is a strong rationale for a reconceptualization of the projects of **historiography/history production** along the lines suggested in this paper. First, it would certainly have major implications for the ways we think about, construct, disseminate, teach and transmit historical knowledge. First, it would certainly have major implications for the ways we think about, construct, disseminate, teach and transmit historical knowledge. Second, as has been pointed out, it would certainly disclose the relations of power, the relations of inclusion and exclusion, and the silences and 'secrets', entailed in the struggles over control of historical knowledge. As Leroke has noted, this is not to envisage a situation where knowledge will be free from the corrupting nature of power; for knowledge and power are two sides of the same coin, i.e mutually-interdependent processes.[68] Third, it would re-insert the academy into the community, not as the sole proprietor of knowledge but as a fundamental resource through which society accesses more rational ways to process and make sense of the past for its self-realisation. Fourth, it would widen its constituencies as in its enterprise of generating socially useful

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[67] Said, op cit. p.54.

[68] For details see Leroke, op cit, p.12. Drawing extensively on Focault Leroke argues that:

> Power produces knowledge. Power is not the antithesis of knowledge. The relationship between knowledge and power relations is one of symbiosis. The two interdependent variables produce each other. Knowledge is not possible without the practice of power relations, neither are power relations possible without the production of knowledge (Ibid).

knowledge, it would be able to join efforts with a variety of agents beyond the boundaries of the profession.