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THE MAKING OF CLASS

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In this paper I will argue that, although the formulation of new content in history curricula is an essential step in creating a more democratic education system, the importance of ensuring that students are also equipped with analytical skills should not be underestimated.

My argument is, essentially, that, currently, students are cut off from an understanding of how history is made. They are never really in a position to pose questions or to challenge the images which overwhelm them daily. Contemporary ideology shapes both the presentation of history and their reception of it. They are rendered passive and this must undermine their potential for meaningful democratic participation in their society.

My focus, although it does shift now and then, is on white students, since my experience and observations have, thus far, been centred in the 'white' education system. But, there are serious problems in 'white' education which must also be redressed in the interests of a democratic South Africa.

I begin by making some remarks about the academic debate that has grown up about the nature of history as a discipline and the status of historical facts and I ask whether or not the academic views of what constitutes history are useful in the classroom. I go on to look at some samples of standard ten writing, which I believe illustrate how ill equipped students are, in many cases, to analyse events and phenomena in history. I then suggest what some of the ramifications could be on students' ability to make sense of the world and to think and act autonomously. I conclude with a few tentative remarks on the necessity for giving a great deal of thought to planned programmes of study.

I was brought up short by one of my colleagues while working on a textbook in the History Alive series. After a lengthy debate on how to present content, he turned to me and said: 'But, you do believe that there are facts? Of course you do!' His question forced me towards a major reconsideration of my position. Was my caution in dealing with facts mere lip-service to a decade of training in history methodology?

There are probably few academic historians who would consciously identify themselves with the German historian von Ranke's objectives of more than a century ago. In 1830 he wrote: 'The task of the historian is simply to show how it really was.' [1] There are many who would argue that historians do have moral obligations or, at least that they are morally accountable. But, besides that, the nineteenth century scientific optimism behind the idea that arduous fact-gathering would deliver the truth has faded somewhat.

Since the height of nineteenth century complacency historians, when they have felt so inclined since they are not characteristically partial to theorising about their occupation, have debated the nature of history and the status of facts.

In a witty and acute set of lectures delivered in the 1960s, the eminent historian E.H. Carr claimed that the best metaphor for

historical facts was fish swimming about in a vast ocean, which the historian sets out to catch. [8] Carr meant to highlight the difference between all possible facts and the ones that historians select and, with a bit of light-hearted cynicism, he suggested that historians generally catch the facts they want.

Carr was intent on showing that the comfortable distinction that is often made between 'facts' and'interpretation' does not hold. They are inseparable in that, from the outset, the historian's approach is determined by a range of factors which affect not only how he or she sees the facts, but also determines which facts will seem significant.

Carr's argument may appear to put the discipline of history on shaky ground but he would argue, no more than is the case with 'pure' science.

In evaluating the validity of Carr's observations it may help to consider the course of recent historiography on, for example, the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879. In the last few years D.R. Morriss's classic 'The Washing of the Spears' has been challenged by several progressive historians who have shifted the blame for the war from the compulsion of maturing Zulus to 'wash their spears in blood' on to the shoulders of various British officials for whom Zululand was an insuperable obstacle to Confederation and the successful consolidation of capitalism in southern Africa. Lately, these historians have begun to argue about the responsibility of the individual officials and their precise relationship to British Colonial Secretary, Lord Carnarvon and his Confederation Scheme. [9]

What may be observed from this rapidly expanding debate? Some of the historians involved argue with great moral passion, which von Ranke, with his dry prescription, would have found distinctly distasteful Jeff Guy, for example, writes: 'The (Anglo-Zulu) war was ... a calculated attack by the most powerful nation in the world, made to bring about certain changes in the social and political order in southern Africa. The British army (was turned) into Zululand, letting loose on men, women and children thousands of professional soldiers...They caused the death of perhaps ten thousand people and brought chaos and suffering to the lives of hundreds of thousands of others, starting a process of subjugation and oppression which is with us today.'[4]

Guy and his fellow historians are selective, not so much in their deliberate disregard of evidence, as in what they choose to highlight or to see as relevant to the Zulu case. They do write from readily identifiable moral and political viewpoints. But they are able to engage each other and their critics in a debate, which appears to move forward (although it may take the occasional step backwards) casting a greater light on nineteenth century British Imperialism in southern Africa and on the Zulu kingdom, as it does so. [5]

Academic historians understand the processes involved. Perhaps an archaeological parallel is not out of place here. Historians also have to sort the finds from the debris and to try to establish how the artefacts fit into the wider matrix. Sometimes, although the risks are incalculable, they allow for hypothesis, assumptions and educated leaps in the dark.

Social historian Natalie Zemon Davis has compiled a fascinating case study of the French peasant of the sixteenth century, who successfully impersonated the long absent villager, Martin Guerre, for several years before being exposed. [6] She uses the case to explore some of the ways sixteenth century French peasants may have tried to 'refashion' their lives within considerable social and economic constraints. As she recounts the story, she self-consciously reveals her modus operandi. She poses questions, hypothesises on possible answers, surveys the available evidence and selects the most probable scenario. It is a scenario which not only answers to her criteria of probability but it must also conform to her central thesis about how French peasants tried to remake their lives under difficult circumstances.[7] In the epilogue she confides to the reader: 'I think I have uncovered the true face of the past - or has Pansette (nick-name of the redoubtable impostor) done it once again?' [8]

History, like archaeology has tangible artefacts - documents, records, interviews and so on but they are never complete or self-sufficient and they are always perceptions of reality relayed by a witness. There are always gaps which the historian must fill in. One might argue that there are rules about what counts as legitimate evidence but, even so, there is always that air of uncertainty captured by Zemon Davis; that deep subconscious fear that the historian has been duped by the representatives of the past.

This is all very well for academic discussion. But what about teaching students? Do we send them into the intellectual maze, telling them they may never get out, or, at any rate, that all exits may only be illusions? Or do we adopt a different persona as teachers once we have left the seminar room behind us and simply hand out the latest version of 'the truth' for student consumption?

A few months ago, historian Colin Bundy was quoted by The Star newspaper as saying: 'History as taught in South African schools ... not only distorts the past, but maims it. In content it is exclusive, elitist and shallow, it is silent or misleading on the historical experience of the majority of South Africans.'[9] I think Bundy is entirely right to highlight the 'silences' in South African school history - the fish that have got away, mostly through the deliberate negligence of the fishermen, to continue in the E.H. Carr vein. But the notion of 'the past' suggested by Bundy in this particular instance has von Ranke overtones of a solid and tangible 'past,' which simply awaits discovery and revelation by a more conscientious set of historians.

I want to argue that the iniquities in our school history amount to more than the 'silences' and distortions in South African history brought about by omissions or inaccuracies in content. It is the way students are taught to regard the past and the discipline of history which ensures that they are usually fundamentally passive recipients of so-called historical knowledge and that, even when they sense that something is wrong they do not know how to raise an effective challenge.

For three years I have tried to give my own second year college students an overview of Anglo-Zulu historiography, culminating in a decisive refutation of 'The Washing of the Spears.' Students have become incensed with the 'wicked' British imperialists and, although

most of them are white, I believe this represents quite genuine indignation. I have sensed a fairly close identification with Guy's passage quoted above. (p.3)

Then, I have shown the by now rather worn copy of the film Zulu made in 1963. Ironically, in this film, it is the British soldiers whose manhood is forged in battle. Its viewpoint is from within the tiny camp at Rorke's Drift faced with wave after wave of 'savage' Zulu warriors. This last year (1986) the students were given a pre-film tutorial exercise which warned them of the film's bias. The students quickly became intensely involved in the film and there was general cheering every time a Zulu warrior was slain. At the end of the film one student remarked ingenuously: 'That's the kind of movie I like - with lots of action.'

Afterwards, at the next lecture, I asked them: 'Who did you side with in the film yesterday?' There was a general chorus of: 'The British!' and then a deep, shamed silence. One student then called out: 'But they made us, they made us side with the British!' (her emphasis.)

I was alarmed by the mass transfer of allegiance effected by a third rate movie which had lasted a couple of hours after my carefully structured course of several weeks on the Anglo-Zulu War. The students had been confronted with two versions of 'the past' and they had accepted each one with vigorous emotional identification although they were diametrically opposed to each other. They explained this by claiming that they had been co erced.

At the end of one college year, an evaluation form from one of the second year students asserted that: 'Ms Kros indoctrinated us (about the Anglo-Zulu War) with facts and slides.' There were indications both from this remark and that quoted above that the students felt themselves to have been manipulated either by the film or by my lectures. They were able to express some of their feelings of passivity and helplessness but they could not identify the mechanisms of manipulation, without substantial guidance and they were unable to make a real choice between the two versions of 'the past' with which they had been presented.

In the case of the SABC's Shaka Zulu and the earlier epic on the 1922 mineworkers' strike, academic historians waxed eloquent about distortions but many non-academic viewers enjoyed the series and thought of them as 'true.' Critic Willie Currie talks about the positioning of the viewer' on the side of the profligate Henry Fynn in Shaka Zulu, but the question of viewpoint does not occur to most of the viewers.[10] Historian Julian Cobbing questions the evidence Shaka Zulu was based on, calling the Fynn diaries 'a series of fantasy articles' written some time after Shaka's death, which were subsequently moulded for specific political purposes. Cobbing throws the whole question of Shaka's existence into doubt by asking the cardinal question: what evidence is there beyond the Fynn diaries?

Cobbing provocatively suggests that Shaka was really a weak, ineffectual king, caught up in a process of change and re orientation, at about the furthest remove from 'the vengeful, brutal and ambitious despot' Currie describes being shown on SABC T.V.[11] But, this is a debate conducted on the review pages of The Weekly Mail, whose own

survey suggests a somewhat elite readership. [12]

Janine Walker, reviewer for The Star, cannot understand the objections that have been made by some academics to Shaka Zulu and, in this respect, her perception is probably representative of a large segment of white T.V. viewers. Furthermore, to prove her point that Shaka Zulu does not project 'a predictably racist view,' to use Currie's phrase, Walker insists that black children 'play Shaka' in the street.[13]

Most viewers are not in a position to detect bias, standpoint or ideological subtleties. For them historical veracity is elaboration of costume or scenic detail. A domestic servant says, for example, : 'I don't believe Shaka because he was a Zulu and on T.V. he speaks English.' The Star's reviewer for T.V. 2, on which Shaka did speak Zulu, concentrates his criticism on the inaccuracies in 'tribal' dress and marriage customs.

Willie Currie tries to demonstrate how reform ideology is expressed through Shaka Zulu, by presenting a case for Zulu co option. Counterposed to the' advantages' of 'reform,' Currie argues, are the images of savagery and devastation, which are the familiar T.V. images of present day Africa. [14] (This interplay of imagined past and present images is one I take up later see p.11)

Even if Currie's analysis is a little too cosily conspiratorial and the intentions behind the creation of Shaka Zulu amounted to no more than the ambition to create a 'Black Dallas,' as one wit has put it, the effect (just as it is with the 'white' Dallas) is to project a certain mythologised world, tailored to entertain the fantasies of people who believe that they are witnessing the real world on a more exalted level than they experience it, and who accept the fundamental moral framework of the world they are being shown.

Why are people so easily seduced by visual images, even when they are as cliche ridden or simply as 'hammy' as Shaka Zulu or Zulu? This is probably an important question to pose, since it is in its visual form that most adults encounter 'history.'

Albert Speer, in his chilling and cathartic account of The Slave State, claims that Hitler himself would have failed if the 'politically lukewarm intellectuals' (included in this term are the scientists, engineers and planners who participated in Hitler's economic programmes) had not made themselves available to him.[15] In trying to explain how it became possible for ordinary individuals to witness and even to enact great atrocities, Speer writes that 'the moral sensitivity of the individual had gradually atrophied.'[16] Perhaps we need to ask: How is 'moral sensitivity' acquired and safeguarded against the kinds of ideological depredations alluded to above? Is it the responsibility of educators?

Italian marxist, Antonio Gramsci, in his reflections on education for democracy wrote that: 'Democracy, by definition... must mean that every citizen can govern and that society places him, even if only abstractly in a general condition to achieve this.'[17] I would like to pose this question: how can the teaching of history help to prepare students for genuine democratic participation?

In this next section I digress to a discussion of student treatment of the 'world history' component of the present (1986) standard ten syllabus. Here, the content is less obviously objectionable than it is in the South African component. But, I argue that inadequate analyses and a lack of historical understanding have debilitating effects on the way students think about the world and on their ability to participate in a truly democratic society, on the level suggested by Gramsci.

My observations in this section are gleaned from a group of student writings (about 200 essays).[18] The pupils in question are mostly, although far from exclusively white and they generally come from fairly well off middle class backgrounds. I would like to stress that, in my criticisms, I nowhere hold pupils, teachers or schools responsible for defects in understanding and analysis. In many ways, given the considerable constraints they are working under, what the students have written, represents a remarkable achievement.[19]

The essays I discuss cover the following topics:

Hitler's Rise to Power
The Origins of The Second World War
The Cold War in Europe

Immediately apparent in the students' writings are the inroads that current government terminology has made. Beyond the terms lies a vast ideological hinterland. For example, various commentators have observed that the term 'unrest' is used in South Africa to neutralise descriptions of violence, to obfuscate the nature of events and, above all, to conceal the identity of the agency responsible for the 'unrest.' Students use the term 'unrest' to describe Nazi fifth column activities in the Sudetenland immediately prior to Hitler's dismemberment of Czechoslovakia. The effect is the same as in the South African case. The sense of extensive violence, intimidation and corruption is glossed over. Students give no clear indication that they know what happened or who was really responsible. The same applies to discussions of pre revolutionary Russia - Lenin comes to power on a wave of 'Unrest.'

Probably the greatest casualty in the students' writings under review is 'democracy,' which is hardly surprising in a country where the concept of democracy has been so badly tampered with that many people (witness recent letters and phone-calls to The Star) are willing to accept the absurdity of an argument that severe repression of the press must be instituted to preserve press freedom.

The Weimar Republic, which preceded Hitler's regime, is frequently characterised as a 'fragile democracy.' 'Democracy' in this context, comes to assume an existence independently of people. Democracy is a machine which the people are required to master. The oft cited phrase 'Democracy did not work' reinforces this mechanistic impression and the implication is nearly always that it could not work. Its failure was somehow pre determined.'The German people were not used to democracy' nearly every student goes on to say. The German people could not 'work' democracy. The machine proved too complex for them and they harked back

to their old ways. This perception proceeds in some cases, directly from the textbooks in use at schools.

The textbook most commonly used in private schools makes the point that it was parliamentary experience which was lacking and suggests that it was the system of proportional representation which led to unwieldly party coalitions which were not conducive to democratic practice. But, Breitenbach's is a dense analysis and it would be easy for the reader to carry away only the impression left by the sub-heading which is 'Political Inexperience.'(South Africa In The Modern World 1910 -1970 edited J.J. Breitenbach, Shuter and Shooter, Pietermaritzburg, 1974.pp. 78-9)

A textbook written for English schools, although it subsequently goes on to qualify its statement, asserts under the subheading: 'Weaknesses of the Republic' - 'The Germans had no experience of living in a democracy.' (Europe In The Twentieth Century Peter Lane, Batsford, London 1978. p.32.)

Perhaps, surprisingly, Boyce, commonly used in English speaking state schools, gives quite a clear and comprehensible account of how the economic depression affected each class in Germany, making them susceptible to the promises of National Socialism. But, Boyce does talk of the 'contagious ideas' of communism and manages to convey the impression that they were threatening enough to make National Socialism a preferable alternative, without saying how popular the communist party in Germany was. Later on Boyce writes a little carelessly of Weimar: 'democracy was discredited.' (Europe And South Africa Part Two: A History for Standard 10. A.N. Boyce, Juta, Johannesburg, 1974 p.46.)

Nowhere are students asked to consider how ' used 'other people in Europe were to democracy (universal male suffrage was only granted in 1918 in England, for example) or whether or not it is reasonable to suppose that it was the German people's unfamiliarity with democracy which accounted for the Weimar government's fragility. They are not directly confronted with the notion that parliamentary or representative democracy might not be the highest form of democracy and that it may have constitutive flaws or limitations.

The arguments about Weimar are complex,'desperately' so, according to the German historian, Golo Mann.[20] If we are to follow Mann's own analysis, we might say that the matric students have caught at part of the truth in their depiction of Weimar 'democracy' as a concrete apparatus which existed independently of the people. Mann often uses the word 'democracy' as a synonym for the doomed Weimar Republic but he is quite insistent, in his final analysis, that it was never a real democracy. Its government merely entrenched the power and privileges of landowners and employers, whereas the majority of Germans were workers. For Mann, Weimar's failure was bound up with the fact that it was not a democracy at all, but a feeble fascimile of the old monarchy, without even the advantage of a real king. There was no way, he argues, that, constructed as it was, the Republic could withstand the economic and political crises of the late 1920's and early 1930's.

Mann's tendency to poetic allusion and stern moral judgements on the conditions of people's souls (Hitler's is unequivocally' black') is

sometimes misleading. But, it is important not to lose sight of the pervasive and profound analysis which snakes its way through his colourful text. In fact, much of his moral outrage proceeds directly from a careful and reasoned consideration of the people and the events who allowed Hitler to come to power.

In his moral vein, Mann talks of certain instincts such as 'pan-German nationalism' and 'anti-semitism,' which may lie dormant at the bottom of a kind of national soul pool. But, he is quite emphatic that it was not 'the German soul' which brought Hitler to power as an embodiment of its longings, but a complex interplay of social, economic and individual circumstances. The richness of Mann's writing derives from his ability to generalise, to be sweepingly universal and yet to be able to pin point the 'forces of history' capable of activating dormant impulses or of twisting them into new shapes.

Students (and teachers) are served with the dregs of this kind of analysis so that their heads are filled with dangerous ideas of 'impulses,' and 'national habits.' Mann's point is that in Weimar Germany the people suffered because there was no real democracy, not because they found democracy too difficult to understand. But, the students hear only the insinuation that certain people (nations) are better suited to democracy than others.

Observable here is also the tendency to see countries and peoples as homgeneous units, but this I discuss later on below.(see p.11)

Even more frightening, perhaps, but the obvious corollary to this way of thinking about Weimar, is the way Hitler is frequently depicted, rising up out of the ruins of Weimar as 'the strong man to save his country.' One can detect what I call the 'Rambo factor', because I think it may partly be inspired by film and TV dramas of the superhuman individual who takes on, not only the physical onslaught of his enemies but also the arsenal of the enemy's ideas and values, which may be masquerading as the norm or the establishment. This is the theme of the conservative revolt in Reagan's America.

There also parallelles with contemporary politicians and notably with Ronald Reagan himself who is Rambo - not only because he has his own personal cowboy legacy but because he is still engaged in shoot outs and Star Wars programmes. Hitler's and Reagan's economic policies are sometimes compared and then with approbation. This disturbing admiration is also the product of looking at political and economic policies in separate categories as suggested by the syllabus. There is no understanding of how 'the political' and 'the economic' might interact and influence each other and students are taught to judge economic policies, not by their morality, but by their 'success' within very narrow terms of reference. For example, rearmament which was an important aspect of Hitler's programme of industrial expansion, is often completely omitted in discussions of Hitler's 'economic' policy, in favour of the splendid construction of autobahns and the miraculous contraction of 'the unemployment problem.' Almost universally missing from the students' analyses are suggestions that Nazi policies against women and Jews may have played their part in reducing the unemployment statistics.

In considerations of the Nazi state, students can give fairly

comprehensive details which include the extension of rigid state control over education and press censorship. There is rarely a flash of recognition, although to be fair, under the circumstances the students may have felt that it was inappropriate to express overt 'political' opinions.[21]

There is no sense, except in a very few cases, that students really grasp the concept of totalitarianism, its material roots or its various manifestations. One may ask here if it is reasonable to expect a std 10 student to understand totalitarianism in this kind of comprehensive way. Some teachers think not. But, it is worrying that students show themselves so absolutely unable to identify it.

There are signs that some students believe that a Nazi Germany minus the concentration camps would not have been morally objectionable. When I once stressed to my own matric students that any analysis of Nazi Germany ought to probe beyond a morbid fascination with the Death Camps to an understanding of the kind of society that tolerated them, it was I who was accused of being 'fascist' and an 'anti-semite.'

No assertion is made here that twentieth century German history has deliberately been re written to legitimate aspects of the South African state. The authors of some textbooks do not appear to have wrestled with the issues in the historiography. Boyce makes many references to standard works on the subjects he covers and sometimes poses questions that academic historians have asked. But these questions are almost always placed outside the text as supplementary material. The effect is to perpetuate the complacent distintinction between 'facts' and 'interpretation,' which means that the 'interpretations' are probably discarded and the 'facts' hungrily consumed. The contributors to the book edited by Breitenbach are by and large historians of high calibre themselves but the text is often difficult and its presentation sometimes very bland. Perhaps unwittingly the authors of textbooks have created a situation in which questions are closed off and comparative analysis is not encouraged. Teachers may themselves lack adequate historical training and then there is the general cultural milieu which glorifies Rambo-Reagan and insists upon a fragmented political/economic approach.

In essays on the Second World War a strong anti-appeasement line is taken by almost all the students, with active hostility displayed towards British prime minister Neville Chamberlain. At best, he is excused as a namby pamby, powerless in the face of evil genius, at worst, Chamberlain is portrayed as the real activator of Hitler's imperialist ambitions because of his insistence on 'just doing nothing.' Very few students cited the material limitations on Chamberlain - his electorate's war-weariness or the state of Britain's military resources, or even the distractions from Nazi Germany posed by Bolshevism. All of these points, except the last, are covered in Boyce's textbook and he uses the words of historian Martin Gilbert to suggest that our 'hindsight' has made us judge Chamberlain too harshly. Yet, the student analyses here concentrate, almost universally, on the individual, and it is the individual severed from his economic, political and ideological environment.

It is Chamberlain, not Hitler who is the real villain and on whose

shoulders responsibility for the outbreak of the Second World War is heaped. Chamberlain, the 'playground paff' is ultimately more reprehensible than the bully boy. Does one read off this the insidious effects of militarism on white South African society? Are these students really thinking, not of World War Two at all, but of taking up arms against 'communists' or 'terrorists,' whom the students have come to understand must be checked by force before South Africa is swallowed up in the maws of Soviet imperialism?

It does not stop here. The cowardly Chamberlain is represented as an individual bereft of societal context, but paradoxically he is simultaneously represented as the personification of 'Britain.' Countries are homogenised and personalised (cf above p.6) So that students frequently substitute 'Germany' for 'Hitler' and 'Britain' for 'Chamberlain.' Since, students usually refer to these countries as 'she' this kind of substitution can result in amusing gender confusion. 'She(Germany/Hitler) is aggressive' or 'She (Britain/Chamberlain) is selfish.'

What emerges very strongly in the students' writings is the total failure to understand where power in society is located, to distinguish between those who have power and those who do not,(never mind about understanding the limitations on power and the niceties of class struggle). It is the kind of thinking that gives credence to the 'anti-South African' rebuke delivered by government sources against the 'rest of the world' or any of the government's critics. A letter writer to The Star (Dec 13, 1986) responding favourably to increased censorship of the press stated that she would be 'patriotic' whatever the government. While it is hard to believe that she would remain so steadfastly patriotic if the government in power were the ANC, her letter illustrates the common conflation of government-country-people that exists unchallenged in the minds of so many whites.

The Cold War is a vast and complex subject which has vexed the minds of some of the world's most competent intellectuals. The US and the USSR are such multi-faceted entities that it is extraordinarily difficult to locate the source of power and decision making, once one tries to penetrate the 'military industrial complex' rhetoric. And yet 'communism' is such an old bogey in South Africa (it was used to discredit Bishop Colenso's championing of the Zulu cause in the 1880s) that it seems essential to provide students with some means of assessing the reality of' evil' communism.**

In the student answers, the Cold War is frequently defined as 'a clash of ideologies' (meaning' ideas'). These are elaborated as 'capitalism' vs 'communism.' 'Democracy' is sometimes used interchangably with 'capitalism' but never with 'communism.' In most cases, the students may as well have written 'good' vs. 'evil' or even 'Luke Skywalker' vs. 'Darth Vadar.' Boyce could very well be made to bear the brunt of this 'good vs evil' moralising since this is what he has to say about the origins of the Cold War: 'There was basically a conflict of irreconcilable ideologies. In the USA a liberal democracy, private capitalism and the pursuit of business profit flourish. The USSR is a totalitarian state, a one party state which forcibly suppresses all critics of its socialist policies.' (Boyce, 1974, p.99.) But perhaps Boyce may plead in mitigation that he too has been a victim of the

anti-communist paranoia that has enjoyed such a long reign in South Africa.

Many students did attempt to ascribe some motives to Stalin's post second World War expansion into Eastern Europe, but overall there was the sense that communism insiduously crept over the face of beleaguered Europe. Interestingly enough, when it comes to the real evil of communism, it is not personalised. Stalin is not so much Darth Vadar as the embodiment of the dark force.

Common is the fatalistic phrase 'an iron curtain fell (my emphasis) across Eastern Europe,' which is, of course, culled from Winston Churchill's famous visionary speech of 1946.[43] Churchill, the anti-appeasement leader, is 'democracy's' guru and guardian angel. His motives are never considered. He is not a politician but transcends the bonds of time and place.

In the discussion thus far, I hope I have stressed that, in the student writings under discussion, there is a lack of analysis beyond simplistic racial/national typifications or descriptions of personality. The basic tools for historical understanding are absent - historical individuals are not contextualised within their specific periods and societies, which is why they so often slip their historical shackles and make their way into the present. Students are unable to identify political viewpoints, either of the historical actors themselves or of those who are telling their story. They do not know how to weigh up and evaluate reasons and causes or to determine the validity of evidence, or even to sense that evidence is necessary. Is it surprising that few people listen to Julian Cobbing's admonitions about taking the Fynn diaries too seriously? Or that even fewer will understand Willie Currie's points about how Shaka Zulu is played through the reform strategy filter?

Antonio Gramsci criticised the distinction between 'sterile instruction' and 'creative education' that was made by the architects of the educational reforms introduced in Italy in the early 1920s.[44] Gramsci's objective was to expose the rhetoric about creativity and freedom as dangerously misleading and likely to reproduce class distinctions with a mass of skilled and unskilled workers on the one hand and the 'lukewarm intellectuals', who would serve Fascism so well, on the other. Gramsci was criticising an educational system that took shape under Mussolini, but some of his caveats are well worth noting, as is the fact that he was ultimately concerned with the question of how intellectuals were to be provided from the working class. Gramsci wrote: 'The new curriculum presupposes that formal logic is something you already possess when you think, but does not explain how it is to be acquired...'[45]

While Gramsci thought that many logical skills could be acquired through the painstaking study of Latin grammar, I would prefer to think that they can be taught in history courses. They are skills which I would argue can contribute to the students' ability to understand their society and to rise above their passive acceptance of the status quo. These remarks may appear to contradict those I have made above where I have cavilled at the students' haphazard mixtures of past and present.

When I, in the company of much more illustrious historians and social

theorists, argue for the 'relevance' of history or make ambitious claims for the power of history to enlighten people about how their society works, I do not mean that we should rudely knock down the barriers between past and present. On the contrary, it helps our understanding of the present if we try to come to terms with the past as the past and to follow and critically examine the processes of both change and continuity. I have noted that in the student writings I scrutinised, there are often curious chronological displacements. The students seem to have very little conception, to put it quite crudely, of what life was like in the 1930s in Germany, for example and I do not know if pasting a time-chart on the ceilings of South Africa's classrooms, as one inspector suggested, will really remedy this deficiency. I turn now to consider this aspect in more detail.

If we return to a consideration of the dominant presentation of South African history, let us ask once again if it is the content that is so misleading and distorting? Of course it is, to a certain extent, but the real harm is done by the repression of questions, debate and opportunities for analysis.

The Kimberley Mine Museum, might serve to illuminate this aspect of my argument. Here we might observe that it is not simply the absence of black representation in that city's history which is problematic. The old compound has not yet been resurrected alongside the quaint old curiosity shops and 'the oldest house in Kimberley,' but clay models have appeared as part of one of the exhibits, which suggest that blacks did much of the digging and other back-breaking manual work while the whites sorted the diamonds and supervised black workers. But how did blacks reach this point? Nowhere is that question posed or even suggested.

It is further displaced by chronological confusion. The clay models are of small production units, probably representative of the situation in the 1860s and 70s. They are surrounded by beautifully reproduced photographs on the walls from the 1890s. There is not a date to be seen anywhere or any suggestion of chronological development. Perhaps this is because such intrusions might diffuse the aesthetic impact. But, the effect is to deny the processes of development, change and social differentiation. The denial is so complete, precisely because questions of process and development do not occur to most of the museum's visitors.

It may be noted that working class whites are more or less denied a place in Kimberley's history too and even Barney Barnato's Company which was swallowed up by De Beers is hardly mentioned in the museum, even in the hall devoted to Barnato. He is represented, rather fondly and idiosyncratically as the 'Cockney' Jew who somehow made good and then fell over the side of a boat.[24]

The message is clear - in the beginning was De Beers. All questions of evolution are anathema. The Divine Order must be accepted in good faith and, just as with other fundamentalist religions, success in this case is guarenteed by the total ban on questions, especially those which relate to origins or social inequalities.

Denis Hirson's recent autobiography The House Next Door To Africa has a wonderful satirical account of how South African school history leaves a confused trail of voortrekkers fecklessly 'turning lions into shoes' and warring with tribes in 'an empty interior' in the minds of most students.

In one sentence the 'tribes' are metamorphosed into mine-workers. 'The marauding tribes, who are the cause of the Kaffir Wars and later become Natives and Bantu, line up for health inspection and go down to work in the mines.' [27] Hirson puts his finger on what is wrong with South African school history. This is precisely the point. How did the tribesmen become workers?- or to go one step further: what are some of the explanations historians provide for the processes of proletarianisation? How and why were they accomplished?

Some individuals and representatives of organisations have called recently for histories of the ANC or of the PAC or of Sharpeville or June 1976. This call is completely understandable as a response to the stubborn silence that the South African school syllabuses have maintained on these subjects, although in the last few years some of the state examiners have relented to the extent of posing one or two one word answer questions on the history of resistance in South Africa e.g. 'The most important champion of rights for Indians in South Africa was ...' (National Senior Certificate, History Higher Grade, November 1985 p.7.)

But the ANC and the PAC and the long history of resistance in South Africa cannot be extracted from the processes of capitalist consolidation and the development of the state. It is not possible to understand how an organisation such as the ANC evolved or to evaluate its changing strategies without knowing about its historical antecedents as well as its social and political context. It is just as valuable to understand what the nature of the impact of resistance has been on the establishment of capitalism in South Africa and on the particular form that the state has come to assume. The 'history from below' approach has begun to indicate how long, difficult and uneven the road to white supremacy in South Africa has been. (see the works of Beinart, Delius and Trapido and van Onselen and others.)
But school history tends to be concertinad so viciously that it produces as monotonous and meaningless a melody as the undiscerning ear detects from the squash box playing 'sakkie sakkie.' The questions are omitted, there is no analysis; for many students there is no significance. Strains from the dominant culture waft through their minds. How do they challenge them? How are the melodies reworked, if indeed it is melody we are after?

History is elusive. It comes to us via a complex process of sifting, sorting and selective presentation. It is probably unwise to plunge students into all of its complexities at once, but they must begin to understand how history is made; that its conclusions are fluid and open to debate and that it is not the closed book represented by the ponderous textbook of any political persuasion or the false glamour and sensation of Shaka Zulu. They ought not, like my second year college

students, still to be asking me by this stage: 'Can I write what I think happened or will you penalise me?' 'How much will facts count in the exam?' 'But, what's the right answer? This is not to say that they should not be asking the first and last questions, or even the middle one if they are sceptical about my 'open minded' approach, but they should not be in a position where they have to defer to me as the ultimate authority on these matters. '

Gramsci outlined a course for all students so that they could reach 'scholastic maturity.'[28] Gramsci meant much more than an abstract academic standard - he hoped to see students reach a position from which they could understand how their lives were governed and to be able to challenge the mechanisms of power. Gramsci's proposed programme was rigorous and may well have been influenced by personal suffering and the immense struggle he had for an education,as his translator suggests.[29] But several of his points are worth noting, including his observation that scholastic discipline is not innate, even the habit of sitting at a desk reading for hours at a stretch is learned and does not proceed from natural inclination. This vision is not that far removed from NECC chairman Vusi Khanyile's, who seemed to stress that the call for People's Education was not for 'academically inferior education' and who said: 'People's education demands ultimate discipline, dedication and hard work.'[30]

How do we ensure that students develop 'a capacity for moral and intellectual creativity, autonomy and initiative,' which is Gramsci's ideal for the 'mature scholar'? He went so far as to argue that it is the student's 'mastery of method' which finally enables him to make his own personal discovery of 'truths' that others have come upon as well as 'new truths.' [31] This presupposes a course of intellectual development; some sort of planned learning process. If we accept this then the teacher has to play an interventionist role, which does not mean that it is necessarily an authoritarian one. To argue for direction and active teaching does not, I think, automatically undermine democratic ideals. There are certainly many issues to thrash out in this arena but there are precedents in education literature.

I was struck by what a black Wits student said to me recently: 'Bantu Education arrested our **development.** It deprived us of the **techniques.**' (My emphases.) That set me thinking. Perhaps it is not that Bantu Education tried to teach people to despise their own history that is so terrible, but that it prevented them from knowing how to go about exposing the myths and fallacies which they knew to be there.

FOOTNOTES

1. Von Ranke quoted in E.H. Carr, <u>What Is History</u> (London, 1961.)
2. <u>Ibid</u>., p.23.
3. e.g. Cope's criticisms of Etherington's thesis that Shepstone converted Carnarvon to his way of thinking, see 'Local Imperatives and Imperial Policy: the sources of Lord Carnarvon's South African Confederation Policy' (Paper presented to <u>African Studies Seminar</u>, 20 October 1986.)
4. J. Guy, 'The Invasion of Zululand'
5. The 'occasional step backwards' might refer to Cope's argument in which he accepted some part of older theories and disputed

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Etherington's ideas cf. above, notably on the grounds that Etherington had made a hypothetical leap and did not have evidence to support his view.

6. Natalie Zemon Davis, The Return of Martin Guerre (USA, 1985.)
7. Ibid., - this point is somewhat crudely expressed. Davis's question was, in some sense, also suggested by her reading of the evidence.
8. Ibid., p.125.
9. The Star (Johannesburg) 8 December 1986.
10. The Weekly Mail (Johannesburg) 9 October - 16 October and 21 November to 27 November 1986.
11. Julian Cobbing in a letter published in The Weekly Mail 7 November to 13 November 1986.
12. See The Weekly Mail survey published in 9 October to 16 October 1986 edition. It was noted that 'two thirds of The Mail's readers have a university degree and half of these have a post-graduate degree as well.
13. I do not know how true Walker's assertion is in this regard, I would be interested to know what kind of impact Shaka Zulu had on black viewers.
14. The Weekly Mail 21 November to 27 November 1986.
15. A. Speer, The Slave State: Heinrich Himmler's Masterplan for SS Supremacy.(London, 1981,) p.5.
16. Ibid., p.7.
17. A. Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks (London, 1976) p.40
18. The students were writing under exam conditions.
19. By 'constraints' I mean to refer to the present examination system, the 'syllabus and textbook fixation' that it breeds, the system of inspection and the hierarchical structures both beyond and within schools, all of which need detailed analyses of their own.
20. Golo Mann, The History of Germany Since 1789. (Suffolk, 1968)
21. see footnote 19. Students are taught that it is inappropriate in history to express one's own personal 'political' views, which might inhibit some observations about certain similarities between the German and South African states. It might be noted here that when comparisons between the Nazi state and the South African one have been made they are shallow and might easily be overturned by critics who simply assert that in South Africa there is no policy of genocide. This is a difficult point and needs much discussion.
22. The Times of Natal called Colenso 'an agent of a socialistic society.'
23. Churchill's famous 'iron curtain' speech was delivered at a university in Missouri in 1946. He talked about the curtain 'descending.'
24. A. Gramsci, Selections From The Prison Notebooks,(London 1976.)
25. Ibid.,p.42.
26. I owe these insights to Alan Mabin.
27. D. Hirson, The House Next Door To Africa, (Cape Town and Johannesburg 1986.) pp 46 -49.
28. A. Gramsci, Selections From The Prison Notebooks, (London 1976.) p.33.
29. See translator's notes for edition cited above.
30. The Star 8 December 1986.
31. A. Gramsci, Selections From The Prison Notebooks p.33.