



CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM STATED

An extensive body of literature has been written and is emerging on South African historiography. All have addressed themselves in one way or another to the various schools of South African history writing. When referring to "schools" reference is being made to the theoretical and ideological foundations that underlie the various interpretations of South African history. It is clear that there are several schools discernable, viz., the colonial, the Afrikaner, the liberal, the radical and latterly the Black schools. It is this latter school that is intended to be the major thrust of this dissertation.

The motives for this are various. While the works dealing with South African historiography acknowledge the existence of the first four mentioned, the attention given to the fifth, namely the Black school, is generally limited on the grounds that there is an insufficient body of works to justify defining it as a "school". Secondly, the point can be made, with some justification, that many of the purely historical works are written under the aegis of tutors who subscribe to a specific theoretical and ideological format which makes the student's interpretation that of his promoter. However there is one glaring deficiency in the works referred to in that they generally neglect the works of Blacks which reflect their perception of the South African past. This perception is hardly found in academic works but rather in polemical, creative, popular historical works and renditions of the oral tradition.

Outside of the pioneering works of Prof FA Van Jaarsveld on South African, historiography there were few other contributions to the debate until the emergence of the liberal-radical debate in the 1970s. Even in the case of Van Jaarsveld his early works,¹ showed a preoccupation

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The Awakening of Afrikaner Nationalism 1868-1881 (1961); The Afrikaner's Interpretation of South African History (1964); Geskiedkundige Verkenninge (1974); Probleme by Die Onderrig van Geskiedenis (1976); and Wie en Wat is die Afrikaner? (1981)



(albeit not exclusively) with his own cultural milieu, that of the Afrikaner. In his most recent publications, however, he has broadened the scope of his enquiry to include fairly comprehensive sections on Black historiography.² Unfortunately, he often implies in these sections that the works he has reviewed owe their origins to some form of external influence and that they view the world through White eyes, or are informed by an inimical ideology,³ i.e. inimical to the status quo. However it must also be remembered that Van Jaarsveld frequently speaks out against overt and covert ideological influences of all persuasions detracting from historical objectivity.

Two recent works allude to the problem of Black historiography and both are fairly agreed that there is no such thing as a "Black school", but that there are works that reflect a very definite Black perception of the past. Saunders in the chapter titled "Early Africanist Work" discusses some of the works to be cited in this dissertation and makes the telling comment that in the case of the early creative and non-fictional writers they "offered a view of the past very different from that offered in the textbooks written by whites ... When they wrote of the past ... they were addressing the present as well." A pertinent observation is made when he says that although these viewpoints of the early writers were already in circulation the "[c]ontemporary professional did not take note of what such writers said; their work headed in quite other directions."⁴ A study of Saunders's references for this particular chapter shows that he has consulted these texts in some detail. Therefore it might be assumed that spatial limitations stunted this aspect of his work. Nevertheless he does outline some perspectives that became clearly apparent during the research for this dissertation.

² Omstrede Suid-Afrikaanse Verlede. Geskiedenis-ideologie en die Historiese Skuldvraagstuk, pp.123-169(1984) and "Das Afrikaanertum - Weg und Selbstverständnis", in R Hilf(ed), Südafrika - Krise und Entscheidung - Raum - Geschichte - Kraftfelder, p. 83. (1987)

³ FA van Jaarsveld, Omstrede Suid-Afrikaanse Verlede. Geskiedenis-ideologie en die Historiese Skuldvraagstuk, p. 124.

⁴ C Saunders, The Making of the Past..., pp. 105-111 and p. 110.



The second work referred to in the previous paragraph is Ken Smith's The Changing Past. Trends in South African Historical Writing. For the purposes of this study an earlier article by Smith has been utilized as there is no substantive or qualitative difference between the article and what is scattered throughout his recently published book.⁵ The central thrust of Smith's article is that there is in fact no "Black school" of history writing, and that in effect one can only talk of views. In fact he rejects the concept of a Black school because of the ethnic connotations that this has. But his concept of a Black school is that which places the Black man at the centre of the historical stage. He argues that this has already been done with the work of Eddie Roux, Time Longer Than Rope, and has been continued to be written by historians such as Omer-Cooper, Guy, Beinart, Peires and Shillington.⁶ He expresses the hope that when Blacks come to write on various topics in South African history "although their approaches may differ, this will hopefully not be because they are black, but rather as a result of their own perception of events as historians."⁷

There is no quarrel with this viewpoint but then Smith goes on to cite an essay by Grundlingh that in turn has drawn on a work that deals with Black Consciousness. The aspect that both Grundlingh and Smith refer to is the need to decolonize the past. This perception appears to be based on the work of Franz Fanon, whose philosophy had some influence on the thinking of Steve Biko. Biko was a leading and articulate protagonist of Black Consciousness which made clear statements on the need for

5 K Smith, "The Black Man's View of South African History", in BJ Liebenberg, Leesbundel oor Strominge in die Suid-Afrikaanse Historiografie / Reader on Trends in South African Historiography, pp. 208-222

6 K Smith, "The Black Man's View of South African History", in BJ Liebenberg, Leesbundel oor Strominge in die Suid-Afrikaanse Historiografie / Reader on Trends in South African Historiography, pp. 208-209.

7 K Smith, "The Black Man's View of South African History", in BJ Liebenberg, Leesbundel oor Strominge in die Suid-Afrikaanse Historiografie / Reader on Trends in South African Historiography, p. 209. (Emphasis in text).



Blacks to write their own history because only a Black could understand what it was and is like to be black. References to those writers who wrote according to the dictates of Black Consciousness in this and later chapters will underscore this observation. It is interesting to note that the reference provided in the article and the book differ although they refer to the same work of Fanon's and both owe their origins to Grundlingh.⁸ Grundlingh cites an American doctoral dissertation as source.⁹ It is interesting to note that Fatton also credits this viewpoint to Biko in his footnote cited on the relevant page.¹⁰ Nor does Fatton in any way indicate the provenance of this quotation. The only reference that he has to Fanon's Wretched of the Earth is in an entirely different context and to a different page.¹¹ In a personal communication Grundlingh says that he resorted to this method to avoid a direct reference to a banned publication, that of Biko. Smith would have done well to directly consider the works of both Black Consciousness and African humanism as represented by Biko and Mphahlele respectively. It is hoped that this dissertation will overcome these shortcomings in Smith's work and also indicate that, as objectionable as the concept of a Black school is, there are theoretical foundations for it, and that these cannot be easily ignored.

8 K Smith, "The Black Man's View of South African History", in BJ Liebenberg, Leesbundel oor Strominge in die Suid-Afrikaanse Historiografie / Reader on Trends in South African Historiography, p. 211 footnote 9. and K Smith, The Changing Past..., p. 4 footnote 15. The original text is in F Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, p. 169.

9 R Fatton, "Class and Nationalism in South Africa: a study in the radicalization of black politics, 1952-1976", p. 223, as cited in AM Grundlingh, "George Orwell's Nineteen Eighteen-Four: some reflections on its relevance to the study of history in South Africa", in Kleio, Vol XVI, 1984, p. 23

10 R Fatton, "Class and Nationalism in South Africa: a study in the radicalization of black politics, 1952-1976", p. 223.

11 R Fatton, "Class and Nationalism in South Africa: a study in the radicalization of black politics, 1952-1976", p. 163. He refers to F Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, p. 33.



Echoes of the arguments that are followed in this dissertation and the premises on which they are based are to be found in an article by H J Van Aswegen entitled "Geskietskrywing Deur Swartes Oor Suid-Afrika."¹² In his exposition of themes Van Aswegen neglects an important aspect, that of cultural transformations as a result of colonization and dispossession.¹³ In general though the thematic categorization that he applies corresponds with those used in this work, even though they are used in a chronological context here. In addition there is a concurrence with the views on the nature of scientific history amongst Blacks.¹⁴ The term that Van Aswegen applies to classify some of the works he has analysed is also useful. He uses the term "resistance history".¹⁵

It appears that Saunders is the only one who considered fictional sources as a means of understanding Black perceptions of the past. But neither Saunders, Smith nor Van Aswegen appear to have considered the insight that can be gained into Black perceptions of the South African past from political documents. It is not intended to address this aspect any further as this will be discussed in the later exposition of the type of documents consulted and the reasons for their inclusion.

The publication of M Wilson's and L M Thompson's two-volume work, The Oxford History of South Africa, in 1969 and 1971, can be said to have

12 Published in BJ Liebenberg (compiler), Leesbundel oor Strominge in die Suid-Afrikaanse Historiografie / Reader on Trends in South African Historiography, pp. 194-207.

13 HJ van Aswegen, "Geskietskrywing Deur Swartes Oor Suid-Afrika", in BJ Liebenberg (compiler), Leesbundel oor Strominge in die Suid-Afrikaanse Historiografie / Reader on Trends in South African Historiography, pp. 196-206.

14 HJ van Aswegen, "Geskietskrywing Deur Swartes Oor Suid-Afrika", in BJ Liebenberg (compiler), Leesbundel oor Strominge in die Suid-Afrikaanse Historiografie / Reader on Trends in South African Historiography, p. 198.

15 HJ van Aswegen, "Geskietskrywing Deur Swartes Oor Suid-Afrika", in BJ Liebenberg (compiler), Leesbundel oor die Strominge in Suid-Afrikaanse Historiografie / Readers on Trends in South African Historiography, p. 200. (My translation)



triggered an (at times) acrimonious debate on the nature of South African historiography. Wilson and Thompson in their preface make it clear that South African history writing has laboured under the influence of an ideologically based subjectivity.¹⁶ The clearly-stated intention to deploy auxiliary sciences such as anthropology, archaeology, phonetics and sociology to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the South African past and to destroy the myth that African history only commenced with the arrival of Europeans on the continent,¹⁷ did not arouse too much dissension. But the suggestion that for too long South African historiography had been preoccupied with group interests, and then more particularly the White groups, would prompt various reactions.

The central thesis of Wilson and Thompson's work is that through a variety of forces South Africa is moving towards an integrated society, and its people are committed to a common destiny that is explicit in a shared history. By their own admission "there are insufficient studies of the experiences of specific African communities since they came into contact with white people".¹⁸ It is not clear whether these lacunae should be filled by studies of African origin. Given Wilson and Thompson's rejection of a group orientation it can be assumed that they would not advocate such a course. Nevertheless the comment does suggest that they chose to ignore the works that were already available at that time. Perhaps it is because they did not consider the works as studies, since they were often written by people who did not have the schooling required to reflect the insights that Wilson and Thompson considered necessary for their own work. Instead they were very often the personal reminiscences of individuals who wished to express the experiences to which Wilson and Thompson referred. Some acknowledgment of this type of writing is, however, made under the heading "Additional

16 M Wilson and L M Thompson (eds), The Oxford History of South Africa, Volume I, South Africa to 1870, p. vi.

17 M Wilson and L M Thompson (eds), The Oxford History of South Africa, Volume I, South Africa to 1870, pp. vii-viii.

18 M Wilson and L M Thompson (eds), The Oxford History of South Africa, Volume I, South Africa to 1870, p. xii.



Bibliography".¹⁹ Despite these flaws Wilson and Thompson came far closer than any of their predecessors, to satisfying the call made by E A Walker in an article written in 1935, that because Africans had a separate history, a history of Africans should be written.²⁰ Saunders refers to this article by Walker, but fails to mention that Walker also looked into the future and suggested that as a common identity emerged so the need for a "segregated" history would decline.²¹ It is this aspect that Wilson and Thompson's work largely satisfied, despite contemporary radical criticism of their effort.

Attention must be given to the sources consulted for this dissertation. It is hoped that through the discussion that follows the reason for their inclusion will become apparent.

It is realized that the use of the term "Black" creates a number of problems. It can be applied inclusively or exclusively. When applied inclusively "Black" would mean all those who, due to the laws of the country, consider themselves to be the oppressed, and who have taken a conscious decision to act to free themselves from this situation.²² For the purposes of this work, however, the more exclusive connotation of Black namely "African" has been adopted. The reason for this is that there is a far greater body of literature available relevant to this work. In addition it is contended that the position of the African in society has been complicated by discriminatory measures for a far longer period than that of any other group in South Africa, therefore

19 M Wilson and L M Thompson (eds), The Oxford History of South Africa, Volume II, South Africa 1870 to 1966, pp. 553-554.

20 EA Walker, "A Zulu Account of the Retief Massacre", in The Critic, Vol III, #2, January 1935, pp. 68-69, quoted in C Saunders, "Liberal Historiography Before 1945", in J Butler, R Elphick and D Welsh (eds), Democratic Liberalism in South Africa. Its History and Prospect, p. 146.

21 EA Walker, "A Zulu Account of the Retief Massacre", in The Critic, Vol III, #2, January 1935, pp. 68-69.

22 S Biko, "The Definition of Black Consciousness", in A Stubbs (ed), Steve Biko..., p. 48.



the aspects that are pertinent are far more readily discernible and over a far longer period of time. The inclusion of other non-African Blacks would also have made the scope of this work even more far-ranging than it already is. It is hoped that some of the ideas generated in this dissertation might prompt further research to include a comparison of the evolution of Coloured and Indian perceptions of South African history with those of the Africans.

As far as possible the bibliography has been restricted to products of South African Blacks. Once again the urge to express themselves on their situation was to be found far earlier than amongst the other Black groups, the "Coloureds" and the Indians. The notable exceptions to this criterion are the works of Bessie Head and Peter Abrahams. Their works are included because of their frequently stated standpoint that they identified with the cause of Africans.

A somewhat more complex problem is that of works based on secondary sources. Frequently the authors of these works have based their comments and attitudes on the works of White historians and other researchers. It could be argued that the views so incorporated in their works are not theirs but those of their sources. While this argument has a certain amount of validity, it should also be remembered that unless the writers concerned concurred with the viewpoint expressed in their sources, they would not have included them in their own work. This argument may appear to contradict the comments made earlier in connection with historical theses, but this is not so. In the case of the student working under a tutor, he is guided intentionally and unintentionally by his promoter and seeks to satisfy the conscious and unconscious criteria of his tutor. Thus in many respects the product of his work involuntarily becomes a reflection of the values of the tutor. Whereas in the case of the works produced under the writer's own volition the absorption of perspectives of others is voluntary and therefore can be considered to be his own. This is not to say that those authors do not have extraneous influences working on them. After all more often than not they have been written to meet certain criteria, the chief of which is to indict a system that has created the conditions that the Blacks find themselves in, and to suggest solutions to the predicament of



Blacks.

Firstly some attention must be given to the concept of perception. For the purposes of this discussion the following definitions have been employed:-

In early modern philosophy, perception was used in a much wider sense ... Thus, for Bacon, perception designated the mind's subjection to external influence and its adaptive reaction to such influence. (De Augmentis, IV, 3) Descartes and Spinoza designated by perception intellectual rather than sensuous apprehension."²³

In the same vein but with a somewhat more extended vision:-

Perception. The selection, organization, and interpretation by an individual of specific stimuli in a situation, according to prior learning, activities, interests, experience etc. Perception is a process and a pattern of response to stimuli. It is a function of the situational field, that is, of the total configuration of stimuli, as well as of previous social and cultural conditioning.

Selective perception. The tendency of individuals to perceive those elements of a situation which support previous expectations. All perception is selective, in the sense that all individuals learn to select relevant stimuli and organize them in standard ways, both for understanding and for communication with others.²⁴

A further dimension is added to the above definition by the following:-

Perspective. The values, beliefs, attitudes, and meanings that provide the framework and point of view from which an individual views a situation. A perspective consists of assumptions that are usually not consciously defined, but which influence what the individual

²³ D D Runes, Dictionary of Philosophy, p. 228.

²⁴ GA and GA Theodorson, A Modern Dictionary of Sociology, p. 295.



perceives and how he interprets his perceptions.²⁵

The salient point in these definitions is that perception in its various guises is a reflection of the situation of the observer. In the South African context the situation of the South African Black is unique in terms of his position in society and the place that is accorded him by legislation and custom. This in itself is a product of attitudes of the ruling group. The uniqueness of the situation is further emphasized in that, particularly since 1936, the legislation that has been enacted which has a direct bearing on the lives, economy and culture of Blacks has been passed by parliament without the consent of those directly affected by it- the Blacks. This comment is made with awareness of the fact that at various times since 1936 to the present attempts have been made to create organs that appear to involve Blacks in the decision-making process but which at the same time have been careful to deny them access to the central and dominant structure of power - parliament.

It is for this reason that the polemical works have been included, because in many cases the justification of present and future policies is based on a reaction to and vision of the past. Similarly the inclusion of creative works of a didactic nature can be justified on the grounds that much of the prescription contained in these works is based on a perception of the past. This is particularly so in the case where this genre of works is directed at supplying a political blueprint for the future, which aims to eradicate the errors of the past.

Some Black views on perception also provide some further insight into the interpretation of the term. A significant point is raised by Magubane when he argues that although "beliefs and inherited ideas" are consistent over generations "the social environment within which individuals and groups function is in a continual process of change and affects the implementation of such inherited outlooks."²⁶ This aspect of the

25 GA and GA Theodorson, A Modern Dictionary of Sociology, p. 298.

26 BM Magubane, The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa, p. 229.



influence of the changing social environment is important to this study because it is hoped to show the evolution of perceptions relative to the era in which they were formulated.

That the concept of perception is loaded with ideological implications is clear from Ngubane's comment:-

The ideological conflict assumes interesting forms at the racial level. If the African insists on the validity of his perceptions of reality or his perspectives, he often runs the risk of being laughed out of circulation in the literary world of the whites or of having his bona fides denied. Creating in new forms or in those rooted in his culture, his patterns of expression and the understructure of his very cultural self may all be misunderstood or even be found "incomprehensible". African understandings of the truth are rejected for stylistic or other so-called aesthetic reasons while black observations are dismissed as propaganda, exaggerations or worse.²⁷

Ngubane's comment shows that even though he is aware of criticism and rejection of "African understandings of the truth" they are no less valid for the perceiver of this truth. Despite this external criticism he will abide by his "understandings" and determine his actions and attitudes on the basis of these "understandings".

A rather arbitrary definition has been given to South Africa. For the purposes of this dissertation the present geo-political confines of South Africa have been adhered to, without allowing for the present internally created divisions. Occasionally the territorial confines have to be exceeded, but then only to look at works that have been written to comment on the situation in South Africa or to give an opinion on relations between the country where the writer is based and South Africa. Nevertheless as far as possible an attempt has been made to restrict this input to those writers who have their origins in South Africa, but

²⁷ JK Ngubane, Ushaba: The Hurtle to Blood River, p. 2.



who, for a variety of reasons, have taken up residence outside the country. The most notable inclusions in this regard are once again Bessie Head, Peter Abrahams and Lewis Nkosi. Some of the writers produced some of their work while in exile, which lent a particular complexion to their productions. Subsequently, however, they have repatriated themselves and produced works whose tone has changed according to their changed environment.

Had the research been restricted exclusively to written scientific history then the number of works available for this study would have been severely limited and subject to the constraints mentioned in the introduction. Therefore the term "history" is used in a wider sense. The meaning adopted is that of an awareness of the past, irrespective of whether it is a conscious interpretation of this past, or whether it is merely a rendition of the past without any attempt to place it into context or relate it to the present. Even in this case there is a deliberate portrayal of the past to justify an action(s) or, in some cases, to evoke a sense of political awareness and activism based on a sense of grievance.

As part of this section of the discussion it is important to reflect Black views on history with regard to its nature, aims, functions and their criticisms of the discipline - with reference to the current state of the subject in South Africa.

History is a record of the past that is essential to the understanding of the present.²⁸ History also lays an onus on the oppressed to take up the struggle against their oppression, which makes it "a struggle, not an orgy."²⁹ The past is also like part of the "national dress" of a people,³⁰ thus it forms part of their culture and the process of enculturation. For a people trying to redefine their culture after the ad-

28 M Tlali, Amandla. A novel, pp. 244-245.

29 BA Khoape, "The New Black", in S Biko(ed), Black Viewpoint, pp. 64-65.

30 ZK Matthews, Freedom for My People..., pp. 58-59.



vent of colonization this facet would have serious implications on how they viewed their past. If the representatives of a historical tradition were to recover their dignity as a people they would have to restore the status of their history so that they could reflect on it with pride, instead of as a source of humiliation and denigration. Biko confirms this viewpoint with the comment that a "people without a positive history is like a vehicle without an engine."³¹ People must realize through their experienced lives that "history is a culture of resistance."³²

An important link in the creation of an historical awareness was the patronymic legend which served as the repository of the "history or achievements of the greatest ancestors of each group" which "preserved the chain of cultural continuity by reminding the individual that he was the extension into the future of a cluster of ancestors and that his destiny was defined in the patronymic legend."³³

History is conceived of as having a "particular logical direction" that will inevitably take Blacks to liberation.³⁴ A far earlier concept of the nature of history also, articulated by Molema, attributes an element of progression to history, but without attaching the idea of political inevitability to it. The same author continues that while history is a reflection of cultural growth it is not a justification of cultural superiority.³⁵

Of the writers consulted only one, Modisane, ascribes a motive force to

31 S Biko, "We Blacks", in A Stubbs(ed), Steve Biko..., p. 29.

32 M W Serote, "time has run out", in M Mutloatse (Comp and Ed), Reconstruction..., pp. 225-226.

33 JK Ngubane, "Shaka's Social, Political and Military Ideas", in D Burness, Shaka King of the Zulus in African Literature, pp. 134-135.

34 S Biko, "The Righteousness of Our Strength", in A Stubbs (ed), Steve Biko..., pp. 133-134.

35 S M Molema, The Bantu Past and Present, p. 335.



history itself, when he blames racial subjugation "on the commitment of history; blame the bigotry on history; blame black nationalism on history."³⁶ In this extract from Modisane on the nature of history he indicates that it is not a means to explaining the past or understanding the present in terms of the past. Instead he sees it as the cause of the present.

From the above it is clear that the overriding concept in the nature of history is that of culture. Because culture encompasses the totality of human activity and man's interaction with his environs, whether they be animate or inanimate, the scope of historical concerns of Black writers encompasses all aspects of life.

While a clear concept of the nature of history is not always apparent, when it comes to the aims of history then there are far more definite ideas evident. Irrespective of the view on the final aims of history, most have one underlying principle - that history has no justification in itself, but in an ulterior motive. This motive in one way or another is found in the political situation of Blacks. The articulation of the response to this situation varies. Among the earliest writers one finds a strongly atavistic note, which frequently looks back at the African past with a sense of nostalgia, and seeks to provide some form of explanation for the current condition, that prevails at the time of writing. Generally the tenor of this group of writers is to accept the situation as a fait accompli and to encourage their audience to adapt to their changed circumstances by emulating the values and beliefs of those that have brought about these changes in their society.

Later and contemporary writers frequently start their discussions on the same premise, although they do not have the same preoccupation with their ancestral roots. Instead they are more concerned with explaining how the changes came about in their society, rather than in describing the nature of these changes. The object of this approach is to castigate the economic and social systems and ideologies that brought about

³⁶ B Modisane, Blame Me on History, pp. 217-218.



these changes. At the same time as the scapegoat has been defined, alternative economic, social and ideological paradigms are offered to replace those that these writers have sought to discredit. Thus there is a far more overt and vehement political thrust to these writings.

Although it is hoped that the points raised in the preceding two paragraphs will be illustrated in the discussion of individual themes during the various phases of writing, attention should be paid to the views on the aims of history of some of the writers whose contributions will come under discussion in succeeding chapters.

History has to be a search for what went wrong for the Black that has created his present malaise. History should have "the open pen of truth" that will restore to the Black his rightful place in society and refurbish his dignity.³⁷ There is also, as Champion noted, an awareness that the writing of history can lead to racial antagonism and feelings of insurrection, but this particular author does not seek to do this. Rather he just wishes to correct the misrepresentations that have occurred in South African histories right from those dealing with "the Kings Tshaka, Dingaan and Chief Bambata".³⁸ It has to be established whether "our position is a deliberate creation of God or an artificial fabrication of the truth by power-hungry people whose motive is authority, security, wealth and comfort."³⁹

Kekana makes a distinction between the "naïve" historian who, with the best of intentions, sought to write histories of South Africa that neglected or distorted the history of Africans. He condones their naïveté on the grounds of a lack of information. But he notices an important

37 P ka I Seme, "The Regeneration of Africa", in The African Abroad, April 5 1906, quoted in T Karis and GM Carter (eds), From Protest to Challenge. Vol 1, p. 70.

38 A W G Champion, "Blood and Tears", extract from pamphlet, quoted in T Karis and GM Carter (eds), From Protest to Challenge. Vol 1, p. 335.

39 S Biko, "Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity", in A Stubbs (ed), Steve Biko..., p. 87.



transition at the end of the nineteenth century. At this time the "naïve" historians' conjecture became established "fact". The transition became particularly marked in the time of Theal, who not only sought to add credibility to this conjectural history, but also sought to deliberately negate Black history and so "disrobe the African of his history, cultural heritage and humanity." Even for this development Kekana is prepared to make some allowance for the "Zeitgeist" in which Theal operated. But like Champion he adds that the perpetuation of the myths created by Theal, in the face of contradictory evidence, has ideological origins.⁴⁰

The creation of history should seek to define Blacks on their own terms instead of those laid down by Whites.⁴¹ An important component of the motives for a Black perception of South African history is evident from this viewpoint.

It evinces the idea of a search for an identity on their own terms. In turn this implies that there is no longer a willingness to accept externally imposed norms, with their implied devaluation of indigenous values. If a pride in indigenous values and norms can be instilled then the tendency to depend on external guidance in their struggle for their rights will diminish. Not surprisingly Dube subscribes to the Black Consciousness ideology, which in its early phases stressed the need for cultural liberation as a prerequisite to political emancipation.

There is some correlation between the aims and functions of history from the point of view of Blacks, in as much that the goals set frequently become the functions.

A recurrent comment on the function of history is that the current state of the art in South Africa has left a legacy of division and bitterness, chiefly because it has so frequently been used to justify the

40 NS Kekana, "A History of the Black People in South Africa to 1795...", p. 110.

41 D Dube, The Rise of Azania..., pp. 12-13.



position that has been assigned to Blacks in South African society. Although it would not be unreasonable to assume that as a result of this perception there would be a tendency to be dismissive of the role of history in a future society, there is not always an outright rejection of it and its functions. For history to be of use to any future society it will have to be purged of the "dehumanising heroism of the past in favour of a new heroism."⁴² Manganyi's prescription contains not only a recipe for reconciliation in the future but also a criticism of present history. There is no doubt that the "dehumanising heroism" that he refers to is that history which relegates the heroes of Black history to the status of bloodthirsty tyrants, whose sole function in history is to justify discriminatory policies, by providing the "bogeymen" who will drive the electorate into continued support of the National Party or any other party that advocates policies that will protect it from the "Black Peril" that has been so effectively portrayed in the history books and syllabi of the classroom and elsewhere. Although Kekana is critical of a Euro-centricity in South African history he is also quick to warn that the swing of the pendulum should not be such as to create a Afro-centric vision that will be as limited as that which it is seeking to counter.⁴³

History must destroy the myth of the "Dark Continent" which denies any suggestion of historical endeavour.⁴⁴ An early writer like Molema was content to ascribe the "hazy mists" that shrouded African history to the lack of written records which has left it "devoid of all historical certainty."⁴⁵ It did not occur to Molema that the absence of historical certainty and therefore of a history that showed that Blacks "had also loved, fought wars bravely, painted and sculpted, sung songs and cultivated poetry," might be a deliberate attempt by the colonizer to deny

42 NC Manganyi, "The Making of a Rebel", in NC Manganyi, Looking Through the Keyhole..., p. 176.

43 NS Kekana, "A History of the Black People in South Africa to 1795...", pp. 112-113.

44 L Nkosi, Mating Birds, pp. 104-106.

45 SM Molema, The Bantu Past and Present, p. 192.



the African his humanity and therefore his claims to fair treatment from his new ruler.⁴⁶

Despite the concern with history and its contribution to future society there is also some involvement with history and the present, particularly with reference to current political trends. Several writers are concerned with the fact that the young Black political activists of today lack an awareness of the struggle of their predecessors in the past. If these activists have any awareness of past struggles then it is just to be dismissive of them and their participants. This criticism is not only aimed at the young, but also at their elders for not informing their successors of what preceding generations had tried to achieve.⁴⁷ A proper historical awareness is a part of politicization. Unless Blacks want to remain ignorant of the legislative processes that have dispossessed them of their land and segregated them in all spheres of life from their fellow South Africans,⁴⁸ they will have to develop a political awareness through a proper historical awareness.

It may appear ironic that the last part of this section of this chapter, viz., that dealing with a criticism of the various parts of the practice of history, contains most of the expectations that Blacks have of history. Therefore there will be a tendency for the following criticisms to overlap with the views expressed on the aims and functions of history.

The criticism takes on various guises which range from complaints about methodological limitations, to ideological and racial bias and prejudice, to insufficient ideological commitment and a lack of a comprehensive enough vision amongst others. It should be pointed out that the criticisms levelled at the interpretations were made at specific junc-

⁴⁶ L Nkosi, "Black Power or Souls of Black Writers", in L Nkosi, Home and Exile and Other Selections, p. 111.

⁴⁷ M Tlali, Amandla. A Novel, pp. 244-245.

⁴⁸ AWG Champion, "The Great Announcement. April Fool", in M W Swanson (ed), The Views of Mahlathi...., p. 98.



tures in time, when either new directions in South African historiography were still to be taken, or where a specific set of circumstances prevailed that prompted the criticism. These circumstances may have changed subsequently, but this does not alter the validity of the views in the specific era in which they were made. Ironically some authors suggest a "correct" ideological application of history, while at the same time complaining of historical distortions to satisfy external ideological demands.

Irrespective of what the actual nature of the criticism is, there is no doubt that Black criticisms of South African history originate from the situation in which Blacks find themselves. The general explanations offered for their condition do not correlate with their understanding of the forces and ideas that created their situation. To extend the analogy of ZK Matthews where he referred to history being part of the national dress of a people, it is clear that the main objection is to the fact that the fabric of the national dress has been woven by people who have no empathy for the fibre that makes up the warp and woof of Black history. And if this were not enough then the unsatisfactory cloth was cut according to patterns that had no relationship to the people who were supposed to wear it. The worst aspect of this ill-fitting suit was that the pupil had to wear it if he was to enjoy the accoutrements of White science and literature.⁴⁹

A pervasive sentiment is that history is in the dock of a court of law and is not telling "the whole truth and nothing but the truth". History as it is taught at school in South Africa seeks to glorify Western civilization, but omits to mention that it is the same civilization which left "tyranny ... among the legacies of the civilisation that was Rome."⁵⁰

The heroes that history has created have caused divisions rather than unity. Heroes such as Cecil John Rhodes of the English, Piet Retief of

49 ZK Matthews, Freedom for My People..., pp. 58-59.

50 B Modisane, Blame Me on History, p. 40.



the Afrikaners and Shaka and Langalibalele and the history of Black-White conflict that they represent,⁵¹ will never act as the inspiration for a common destiny. The heroes that often form the centre of South African public holidays revive the humiliation of defeat and satisfy White yearnings for a hero.⁵² Too often history is used to act as the "echo of hate and vengeance" that makes the Afrikaner succumb to an arcane influence to grope "back through the corridors of history to pick up some of the broken threads that linked his life with a terrible past", to bolster his "violent desire to remain part of a brutal historic past, lest he should be crushed by the brutal necessities of the present, lest he should be forced to lose his identity." The "layers of crocodile skin" so created prevent him from revealing and experiencing his humanity, with its emotions and feelings.⁵³

Because the primary area of concern is that of the situation that Blacks find themselves in today, much of the criticism is aimed at what is perceived to be the mainspring of that condition - colonialism and the establishment of White settlements. It is not the intention to discuss Black perceptions of colonialism per se at this stage. What is of importance at this time is to look at the criticisms that are directed at the historiography that concerns itself with the question of colonialism. Equally important is to understand the comments on the perceived bias and the motives for it in this history.

Through the impact of colonialism, Black history was abruptly truncated and the colonized were suddenly reduced to being "pagan and savage", members of "an inferior race, destined by the Christian God to slave to Europeans."⁵⁴ The bland assumption that the colonists had come to

51 NC Manganyi, "Culture and Identity: The Tyranny of the Symbolic", in NC Manganyi, Looking Through the Keyhole..., p. 67.

52 S Biko, "We Blacks", in A Stubbs (ed), Steve Biko..., p. 30.

53 E Mphahlele, "The Living and the Dead", in Africa South, Vol 2, #2, January-March 1958, pp. 109-110.

54 BM Magubane, The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa, pp. 68-69.



lift the "hazy mists" that shrouded the "Dark Continent", to refer back to Molema, are rejected outright in this statement. Magubane brings a further facet to the fore in that he brings into question the role of Christianity in colonialism. The argument that colonialism was acceptable because it had a Christian foundation is rejected. What emerges from this standpoint is that history written from this perspective is also unacceptable because it seeks to justify the unjustifiable. The crux of the matter is that in order to accept Christianity, Blacks had to accept those who had brought it - the missionaries and the colonists. There could be no rejection of the subjugation and dispossession that went with colonialism without rejecting Christianity, and the historical apologists of colonialism were careful to create the impression that the only means out of the "benighted" state that the African found himself in was to accept all tenets of Christianity. More specifically he had to accept the dictum of "rendering unto Caesar what was Caesar's", and not harbour any feelings of revolt or overt resentment towards his colonial ruler.

In order to encourage the sense of obligation towards obedience and compliance with colonial rule, the history of Blacks had to be voided of any content that might create a sense of longing for an inspiring but lost past. In order

to destroy completely the structures that had been built up in the African society and to impose their imperialism with an unnerving totality the colonialists were not satisfied with merely holding a people in their grip and emptying the Native's brain of all form and content, they turned to the past of the oppressed people and distorted, disfigured and destroyed it. No longer was reference made to African culture, it became barbarism. Africa was the "dark continent". Religious practices and customs were referred to as superstition. The history of African Society was reduced to tribal battles and internecine wars. There was no conscious migration by the people from one place to another. No, it was always flight from one tyrant who wanted to defeat the tribe not for any positive reason but merely to wipe them out off the face of this earth.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ S Biko, "We Blacks", in A Stubbs (ed), Steve Biko..., p. 29.



(Here Biko is drawing directly on the ideas of Franz Fanon as he also does subsequently.⁵⁶)

Similarly "by some strange logic" colonialism must turn on the past of the colonized and so transform it into "most disappointing reading", where the Xhosa went to war for plunder and the Boers were obliged to go on "punitive expeditions" against the thieves. Shaka was not a nation-builder but a cruel tyrant. Against this background it would be "naive to expect our conquerors to write unbiased histories but we have to destroy the myth that our history starts in 1652."⁵⁷ Until this myth is destroyed history will not satisfy the criterion of being a "record of humanity's strivings for complete self-realisation."⁵⁸

History contains too many a "deliberate distortion" that seeks to relegate the Khoi-Khoi to nonentities, that made early Black-White conflict insignificant. The aim of this distortion was to deny any claims that the Khoi-Khoi may have had on the land of which they were dispossessed. And so deny a precedent for anyone else making claims to land of which he had been dispossessed. The dispossession of the Khoi-Khoi was to be the overture to the alienation of the Xhosa land, which would be met by much more forceful resistance.⁵⁹ Even the historian allegedly sympathetic to Blacks - the liberal historian - attempted to explain the evolution of South African history in terms of the law of the jungle. In

56 S Biko, "White Racism and Black Consciousness", in A Stubbs (ed), Steve Biko..., p. 69 and F Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, p. 169.

57 S Biko, "Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity", in A Stubbs (ed), Steve Biko..., p. 95.

58 AM Lembede, 'Some Basic Principles of African Nationalism', in Inyaniso, February 1945, quoted in T Karis and GM Carter (eds), From Protest to Challenge. Vol 2, p. 315.

59 WM Tsotsi, From Chattel to Wage Slavery..., p. 19.



so doing he failed to appreciate that the creation of the status quo was not accidental nor an act of God but the "necessary result of imperialist expansion, colonial conquest, white domination and capitalist exploitation."⁶⁰ To add to this deficiency Black attitudes are conditioned by a history which they had no part in making, and which teaches them that any attempt at asserting their demands will be met with the full force of the state.⁶¹ Thus history stands indicted for firstly applying a misleading paradigm of explanation, and then for contributing to the emasculation of Black resistance.

An answer is still being sought, but it appears that a double standard of morality applies in history, in that the White uses history "to argue his cause and state his case, to represent the truth as he saw it;" and to invoke Divine intervention in subjugating the Blacks and taking their land. In so doing history was made incomprehensible, and showed a truth that was unacceptable.⁶² So forcefully "did subjective compulsions impose themselves on the objective imperatives of history" that they led "to a deformation of the historical process."⁶³ In reaction to this deformation Blacks were forced "to plunder the painful facts of history" in an act of public self-flagellation, either as a demonstration of humiliation or power, or to garner votes and esteem. Blacks appear to take pleasure in being part of a history that reflects three centuries of conflict. Thus for whatever reasons, "anger becomes a compulsive way of asserting our ethnic or racial or political identity."⁶⁴

The ventilation of the anger that is felt can perhaps be attributed to the bemusement that the Black child feels when confronted with the his-

60 WM Tsotsi, From Chattel to Wage Slavery..., p. 6

61 N Mandela, "Black Man in a White Court", in N Mandela, No Easy Walk to Freedom..., p. 155.

62 B Modisane, Blame Me on History, p. 41.

63 WM Tsotsi, From Chattel to Wage Slavery..., p. 48.

64 E Mphahlele, Afrika My Music..., p. 156.



tory lesson in the classroom, which showed the Boers in conflict with the "savage and barbaric hordes" that were led by psychopathic leaders like Shaka. Unfortunately when the teacher was confronted with the distortion of the past, as the children had learned it at the knees of their elders, his answer was that pupils would have to learn the truth for themselves.⁶⁵

History has failed to produce entertaining stories about African civilizations and heroes. Nor are children encouraged to provide their own accounts of local history as passed down to them by tradition. The syllabi have failed to comply to the national philosophies of education as formulated by Blacks, rather than those designed for them by Whites.⁶⁶ In this way the tendency of Whites to reduce Blacks to the source of a "problem" and portray them "as sub-humans, anthropological specimens whose existence and activities have contributed little or nothing to the historical process in South Africa" is enhanced.⁶⁷ It is as if even the terminology employed in historical writing is meant to demean Blacks.⁶⁸ The application of the subtleties of language allows Blacks to emerge as murderers and thieves while Whites were merely defending their position from the aggressive Blacks.⁶⁹ Many of the distortions can be attributed to the viewpoint that South African history "can legitimately be described as the story of how Europeans defeated, robbed and ruled the blacks for the enrichment of the whites."⁷⁰ History is too often used to vindicate ideological premises at the expense of a broader perspective.⁷¹ To compound the problem, pupils are expected to regurgitate this bias in their

65 B Modisane, Blame Me on History, p. 41.

66 E Mphahlele, The African Image, p. 21 and p. 31.

67 WM Tsotsi, From Chattel to Wage Slavery..., p. 5.

68 D Dube, The Rise of Azania..., p. 32.

69 ZK Matthews, Freedom for My People..., p. 23.

70 WM Tsotsi, From Chattel to Wage Slavery..., p. 6.

71 E Mphahlele, Afrika My Music..., p. 105.



examinations and leave them innocent of any personal insight.⁷² History has failed to reconcile the "compulsive images" of the Whites' nostalgia for Europe and the Blacks' memories of "vanished nationhood; cattle."⁷³

South African history has, according to Magubane, failed to take cognisance of "the role of ideas or illusions" and will only be able to do this by following "Marx and Engels and separate the ideas of those ruling for empirical reasons, as empirical individuals, from the ideas of the actual rulers."⁷⁴ There is a great deal of condemnation of the various schools of South African history, until the arrival the neo-Marxist or radical historians.

It appears that the condemnation arises from the fact that the rationale of the other schools, while providing an explanation for the situation that Blacks found themselves in, did not provide a solution by correctly identifying the source of the Black malaise.

To an extent the Marxist paradigm appeared to offer the answer to this criticism. By analysing the South African condition in material terms and seeing the motive force in the evolution of South African history as lying in the struggle for control of the means of production, a significant contribution was also being made to the liberation struggle. There was little point in focusing on racism as the driving force in South African history, and then seeking to redress the injustice of White supremacy by establishing Black primacy. This left those fighting for the rights of Blacks open to the accusation of inverse racism. A far more amenable focus for opposition would be the fairly inanimate capitalism. It also provided a target that transcended racial barriers and thus created a non-racial foundation to political activity. For

72 ZK Matthews, Freedom for My People..., pp. 58-59.

73 N Jabavu, The Ochre People, p. 41.

74 BM Magubane, The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa, p. 118.



this reason one finds a far greater enthusiasm for the Marxist paradigm amongst the modern writers than amongst the earlier ones such as Ngubane. The modern writers seem to opt for this framework of interpretation for ideological reasons as well. Similarly Ngubane would not countenance this method of explanation because of the ideological implications inherent in its unquestioned application. To suggest that there is a carte blanche acceptance amongst modern writers of alien philosophical foundations for understanding their past is incorrect. Nkosi warns that the Black:-

has to be certain that the anguish he experiences is properly his and not imbibed through the process of osmosis by rubbing shoulders with Heidegger and Satre; and this means, generally, being on guard even about methods one uses to analyse or rediscover Africa, for false answers and false questions are likely to arise out of false methodological concerns and vice versa.⁷⁵

South African historiography has also, until recently, tended to be a reflection of the record of the ruling classes, and neglected the significance of oral history. Oral history also fills in those "particular historical moments devoid of descriptive and personal material that take sufficient account of the human dimension."⁷⁶ Frequently the impression is gained that much of the criticism of South African history writing is the omission of the "human dimension", and that where it is included it is merely to portray Blacks as non-human "savages". Attempts to overcome this shortcoming will become apparent in subsequent chapters.

A review of the sources so far cited may elicit some comment as to their validity. Therefore attention should be given to the motives for

⁷⁵ L Nkosi, "A Question of Identity", in L Nkosi, Home and Exile and Other Selections, p. 33.

⁷⁶ T Matsetela, "The Life Story of Nkgono Mma-Pooe: Aspects of Sharecropping in the Northern Orange Free State, 1890-1930", in S Marks and R Rathbone(eds), Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa..., p. 212.



their inclusion, particularly as they form the foundation of this work.

Generally it is accepted that an historical thesis should be based on primary sources. In a work of this nature there would appear to be little justification for satisfying this criterion. What is under scrutiny here is not the factuality of history, but how history is experienced. The expression of this experience is far more readily discernible in the sources to be employed in this work.

A number of the sources consulted are autobiographies. Their significance to this study is that they reflect the views of the author on particular historical situations and developments. In some instances these are merely the views of the individual. In other cases they also mirror the views of a broader group, whose views the author, by virtue of his position in society as a community or organisational leader, hopes to present. It is accepted that these views are political opinions made with covert or overt political objectives. Frequently, however, these opinions are offered in response to and informed by the specific historical perceptions of the author, which are rendered in the work to justify the political statements of the author.

It is also for the above reasons that primarily political documents are included. An important additional dimension to the political documents is that, to underline the need for political actions and policy, the errors and abuses of the past are highlighted. Thus even in this type of source there is frequently an expression of an historical perception, albeit to serve a political end.

Unfortunately there are no works that specifically try to define how Blacks view history and the reasons for this. Instead reliance has to be made on commentators on Black culture. All the works of this genre make a direct or oblique reference to history, because they see history as an essential component in the past and future development of Black culture. The works of Biko, Mphahlele and Nkosi are of particular relevance in this regard.

It is a bit more problematical to justify the inclusion of works of fic-



tion. In particular those works that superficially do not appear to have a particular historical content, as opposed to the historical novels, dramas and epics such as those of HIE Dhlomo, Head, Mofolo and Plaatje. In the case of creative writing in an historical context their inclusion requires no further explanation at this stage.

In the case of those works of a fictional nature that do not have an overtly historical context the following justification is given. Frequently the author places his characters in known historical situations, particularly in the case of the so-called "protest" or "committed" literature, and has them respond to these situations, either verbally or through their actions. In this way the author is reflecting either his own perception of the known historical situation, or that of the character that he has created. The latter qualification is important, because it cannot be said that the fictional character is always representative of the views of the author. In this event the apparently contradictory viewpoints of the author are a literary device employed by the writer to underline his particular viewpoint. A clear example of this style is to be found in Ngubane's Ushaba: The Hurtle to Blood River and HIE Dhlomo's historical plays. In the context of this study this viewpoint echoes the historical perception of the author.

Irrespective of the nature of the sources consulted, what is immediately apparent is that they are closely related to the era in which they were conceived. This in turn brings to the fore the question of how this study is to be structured. In an attempt to give the entire work a comprehensible coherence a chronological-thematic approach has been followed. Within this broad structure a further subdivision will be made, to allow further chronological divisions. The latter divisions differ from the first, as they will seek to categorize authors according to the times in which they created their works. In this way it is hoped to show the reciprocal relationship between historical perceptions and current developments in the socio-political sphere.