

## AGENCY IN SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORIOGRAPHY: REFLECTIONS <sup>1</sup>

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People make their own history, runs the famous aphorism, but not in the circumstances of their own choosing. So what is the relationship between the acts of individuals or collectivities in the making of history, and the constraints on those actions? In explaining any particular historical development, how important was conscious human agency, how important structural considerations, whether economic, environmental, demographic or even psychological?<sup>2</sup> Historians rarely address this issue head-on, relying instead on intuition and what they know of their craft to decide what attention to give agency. A major new *Companion to Historiography* published this year, does not have agency in its index, and there is only brief reference to it among the over 900 pages of text.<sup>3</sup> And yet agency has been a key question in the writing of the Annales 'school' (like other such 'schools' it was far from unified);<sup>4</sup> the famous "argument" within English Marxism between Edward Thompson and Perry Anderson in the 1970s turned on agency;<sup>5</sup> and in the words of Gayatri Spivak, one of the central assertions of the Subaltern Studies school is that 'the agency of change is located in the insurgent or the subaltern.'<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Paper presented at a conference on "Problematising History and Agency", Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, October 1997.

<sup>2</sup> On agency in history see P. Abrams, "History, Sociology, Historical Sociology", *Past and Present*, (May 1980); S. James, *The content of social explanation* (1984) and *The structures of History* (1993). Are Hitler's actions to be explained in terms of unconscious intentions and psychopathology, or, if his motives are of marginal importance, should the main focus fall on Nazism as a social movement? Cf. P. Burke, ed., *New perspectives on historical writing* (1992), p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> M. Bentley, ed. *Companion to Historiography* (1997). In the essay on Marxist historiography S. H. Rigby argues that in avoiding the Scylla of reductionism, Marxist historians have inevitably been drawn into 'the Charybdis of pluralism', in which 'Marxism dies the death of a thousand qualifications', (pp. 915, 913).

<sup>4</sup> The late Francois Furet went so far as to deny that it ever constituted a school: P. Harries, "Histories new and old", *South African Historical Journal*, 30 (May 1994). It certainly went through distinct changes: see esp. P. Burke, *The French Historical Revolution*, (1990). Braudel's Mediterranean was 'a world unresponsive to human control' (*ibid.*, p. 40), and he and others argued for the importance of material factors over the long term. More recently there has been a swing back to voluntarism, against materialist and determinist explanations, at least over the short term.

<sup>5</sup> Edward Thompson, *The poverty of theory* (1978); Perry Anderson, *Arguments within English Marxism* (London, 1980), ch. 2. Anderson pointed out that Thompson conflated various kinds of agency, that there are large areas of existence which remain outside any form of agency, and that *The making of the English working class* is all about the making of class, but does not consider 'objective co-ordinates', so that the relationship between agency and conditioning is never tested.

<sup>6</sup> G. Spivak, "Subaltern studies: Deconstructing Historiography" in R. Guha and G. C. Spivak, *Selected Subaltern Studies* (1988), p. 3. The school, she says, claims 'a positive subject-position for the subaltern' and searches for a 'Subaltern consciousness as emergent collective consciousness'.

South African historians have not spent much time applying lessons from the Annales school and until very recently they knew little about Subaltern studies.<sup>7</sup> Isolated from Indian scholarship during the apartheid era, they looked instead to the English-speaking world of Britain and America for models. That the question of agency has rarely been addressed directly in South African historiography is surely in part because other issues and debates have seemed far more pressing, urgent and important. From the late 1970s to the late 1980s, however, agency was an issue in fierce exchanges between structuralists and social historians, after Thompson and Anderson had drawn attention to it. Even before that, agency had emerged as a question central to South African historical writing.

From the 1920s until the 1970s, historians of the liberal school confronted issues of structure and agency as little as did Afrikaner nationalist historians.<sup>8</sup> Both liberal and Afrikaner nationalist traditions were anti-theoretical, and most professional historians of the liberal school believed that any historian worth his or her salt learned the craft by immersion in the archives, and that from the documents themselves one learnt, almost by osmosis, what weight to give human agency and what to the context within which that agency played itself out. For most historians in both these schools, that context was primarily a political one; broader issues relating to socio-economic structure passed them by. The giants of early professional historical writing, W. M. Macmillan and his student C. W. de Kiewiet, addressed economic issues in some of their writing, but gave major attention to individual actors, and were far from economic determinists.<sup>9</sup> Some economic historians adopted a more determinist position in the 1960s, but their influence was marginal, for they did not relate the economic to other forces in society, and they were ghettoised professionally.<sup>10</sup> The work of Afrikaner nationalist historians, almost all of it entirely ignorant of economics, was polemical as well as being highly empirical and descriptive. In their limited studies of the development of white Afrikaner consciousness and identity, these historians accorded major place to agency, but without conscious thought to its relation to structure.

The impetus for the new stress on agency which began to emerge in South African historical writing in the late 1960s came from two different directions. Many of the new revisionist historians who became prominent from about 1970 were to be influenced by

<sup>7</sup> UCT library does not even have a complete set of *Subaltern Studies*; it is without volumes 4 and 7.

<sup>8</sup> For a survey of the liberal school see my *The making of the South African past* (1988). For Afrikaner nationalist history see K. Smith, *The changing past* (1988) and L. M. Thompson, *The political mythology of Apartheid* (1985).

<sup>9</sup> In writing about British colonial policy, for example, Macmillan stressed John Philip's role, while De Kiewiet devoted much attention to that of Lord Carnarvon. Both historians were keenly aware of the economic forces shaping society, as evidenced in Macmillan's study of agrarian change and De Kiewiet's classic social and economic history, but neither systematically addressed structural issues. On the interwar economic historians see H. M. Robertson, unpublished paper.

<sup>10</sup> Perhaps most deterministic was Michael O'Dowd, author of what was dubbed the 'Oppenheimer thesis', that apartheid must collapse because contrary to economic realities. Cf. his chapter in A. Leftwich, (ed.), *South Africa* (1974).

both. The one source was Africanist, the other English/American Marxist. Let us take them in turn.

As with tropical African historiography, the Africanist<sup>11</sup> stress on agency in South African historical writing was a response to a historiography which had denied Africans any significant place in history. Early radical writers, if they had not also denied Africans such a place, had tended to see them as helpless victims of a system of racial domination. The Ibadan school, the first in which African historians themselves played an active role, was the first to challenge the view that Africans had played no major part in shaping African history. And it was a South African historian who taught at the University of Ibadan who was the first to publish a monograph on South Africa's past from an Africanist perspective. In *The Zulu aftermath* John Omer-Cooper argued that what had happened in African society in the early nineteenth century was not a merely negative series of upheavals involving large-scale loss of life - which was the Theal view - but should rather be seen as a process in which Africans had acted positively to create new states and re-shape their world on the eve of the advent of colonialism.<sup>12</sup>

Terence Ranger and the Africanist school of historians which emerged at Dar es Salaam in the late 1960s explicitly stressed African initiative and African agency in the colonial period.<sup>13</sup> Much of the early work of this school, including some of Ranger's own writing, concerned African resistance and was designed to show that Africans had not been passive victims of colonialism, but had resisted the initial imposition of colonialism, rebelled against colonial rule and acted in other ways to shape the colonial environment in which they had lived. Mass nationalist movements were the key agents in bringing an end to colonialism.<sup>14</sup>

As young South African historians studying abroad became aware of this work, they sought to emulate it for their own country. Shula Marks took an early lead in this, in her University of London doctoral thesis, published as *Reluctant rebellion* (1970).<sup>15</sup> Others followed, writing of popular struggles, whether organised and open or those which had

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<sup>11</sup> I use 'Africanist' throughout this paper to refer to those historians who stressed African initiative, not to the philosophy associated with a stress on identification with an African heritage.

<sup>12</sup> J. Omer-Cooper, *The Zulu aftermath* (1966). Much of his argument was to be challenged by Julian Cobbing and others. See esp. C. Hamilton, (ed.), *The Mfecane aftermath* (1995).

<sup>13</sup> Esp. T. Ranger, ed. *Emerging themes in African History* (1968) and *The recovery of African initiative in Tanzanian History* (1969). Cf. I. Kimambo, *Three decades of production of Historical knowledge at Dar es Salaam* (1993), p. 5; A. Temu and B. Swai, *Historians and Africanist History: A critique* (1981).

<sup>14</sup> Ranajit Guha, guru of the Subaltern Studies school, stressed the importance of the contribution of subaltern classes acting on their own, independently of the elite, in the making of nationalism. Ranger, say, did not deny that importance, but Guha seems to have been unaware of relevant African literature when he wrote "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India", published in R. Guha, (ed.), *Subaltern Studies*, I (1982). Cf. esp. p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Shula Marks, *Reluctant rebellion* (1970).

remained "hidden" until given prominence by historians.<sup>16</sup> African initiative was stressed, from pre-colonial times to the present, in everything from independent churches to peasants producing for the market.<sup>17</sup>

The radical pessimists who by the late 1960s were challenging the nationalist historians, urging the importance of underdevelopment, stressed dependence on foreign influences as the reason why Africa remained poor and "underdeveloped". Their arguments were taken up by some South African historians in the early 1970s, the years of political quiescence.<sup>18</sup> If peasants "rose" because they seized new opportunities, they "fell" because of forces far beyond their control.<sup>19</sup> But it was soon realised that an explanation which turned on dependence on outside forces denied autonomy and agency, and other influences encouraged a revival of the Africanist stress on agency in the 1970s.

In the early 1970s workers in Durban ended the years of quiescence and the proponents of black consciousness demanded a new history. More than any other single event, the Soweto revolt brought agency to the fore in the agenda of progressive white historians in South Africa. Some of these now looked to the urban townships as prime sites of struggle, others wrote about rural revolts, to show that Africans had made their own history, implying that if they could do so in the past, they could do so again in the present, acting as active agents to challenge, and perhaps even overthrow, apartheid. Thus *A taste of freedom*, about rural struggles in the 1920s, was also implicitly about the township revolt of the mid 1980s when it was written: if freedom had been tasted in the 1920s, perhaps it could be won in the 1980s.<sup>20</sup>

Agency was also championed in reaction to Marxist structuralism. The most influential structuralist article relating to South African history was that by Harold Wolpe, Communist Party intellectual and sociologist at Essex University. In "Capitalism and cheap labour power: From segregation to apartheid" (1972),<sup>21</sup> he argued that segregation ensured the cheapness of black labour by transferring the responsibility for its reproduction to the reserves; apartheid was then a response to the collapse of the capacity of the reserves to continue reproducing cheap labour. A number of other scholars applied to the pre-colonial history of South Africa the insights of the French structuralism of the social anthropologist Claude Meillassoux.<sup>22</sup> And the first full-length

<sup>16</sup> Esp. W. Beinart and C. Bundy, *Hidden struggles* (1987).

<sup>17</sup> To cite just two examples: my own article on "Tile and the Thembu church", *Journal of African History* (1970); C. Bundy, *The rise and fall of the South African peasantry* (1979).

<sup>18</sup> Esp. N. Parsons and R. Palmer, (eds.), *The roots of rural poverty* (1977).

<sup>19</sup> Above all, state intervention in support of white agriculture, most notably in the 1913 Natives Land Act: Bundy, *Rise and fall*. One way of writing about this stressed the active agency of whites, in white interests; another emphasised, rather, the constraints imposed by structural forces.

<sup>20</sup> H. Bradford, *A taste of freedom* (1987).

<sup>21</sup> Published in *Economy and Society*, 1 (1972).

<sup>22</sup> Esp. C. Meillassoux, "From reproduction to production: a Marxist approach to economic

monograph on any topic in South African history from a Marxist perspective, also by one who became a sociologist, *Class, race and gold* (1976), had also been largely structuralist, being concerned primarily with the conditions in which capital accumulation and impoverishment had taken place on the Witwatersrand early this century. "Ultra-exploitation" was one of Rick Johnstone's key concepts, and he presented a picture of a rightless and powerless black labour "ultimately, indistinguishable from the faceless victims of earlier generations of historians".<sup>23</sup>

In England Edward Thompson led the reaction against Althusserian Marxism, in which, he claimed, history became "a process without a subject", and agency was denied.<sup>24</sup> In *The making of the English working class*, he argued, against those who had presented "working people... as passive victims of laissez faire, with the exception of a handful of far sighted organizers" that the English working-class had in effect made itself in the early nineteenth century. Those who saw members of the working class as merely "a labour force... or ... the data for statistical series" obscured 'the agency of working people, the degree to which they contributed by conscious efforts, to the making of history'.<sup>25</sup>

Thompson and Eugene Genovese, who wrote brilliantly about American slavery and the world the slave owners made, were extremely important influences on many of the new generation of radical, revisionist historians who emerged to prominence in historical writing on South Africa in the 1970s, but a section of the new Marxist school, training to be sociologists rather than historians, especially at Sussex university, adopted instead the structural Marxism of Poulantzas and Althusser. Writing at a time when it seemed that any popular challenge to apartheid must fail, they inclined towards economic determinism and allowed relatively little if any weight to agency, intention, or human will. Africans "were as much dominated in the structuralist texts", wrote Shula Marks, "as their authors saw them [to be] in reality".<sup>26</sup> Dan O'Meara's *Volkskapitalisme*, one of the most important books to emerge from this sub-school, presented Afrikaner nationalism as essentially shaped by economic forces.<sup>27</sup>

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anthropology", *Economy and Society*, 1 (1972). Jeff Guy and John Wright were among those influenced by Meillassoux's work. Cf. P. Harries, "Modes of production and modes of analysis: The South African case", *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 19, 1 (1985).

<sup>23</sup> P. Harries, *Work, culture and identity* (1994), p. xix. F. A. Johnstone explicitly described *Class, race and gold* (1976) as structuralist: pp. 2, 218. He called his book a 'work of sociology and history': p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Thompson, *Poverty of theory*, p. 103. Ironically, as Anderson pointed out, Althusser was far from being an economic reductionist: he redefined mode of production to include political and ideological levels or practices, and wrote of the relative autonomy of those practices.

<sup>25</sup> E. Thompson, *The making of the English working class* (1968), pp. 12-13.

<sup>26</sup> S. Marks, *The ambiguities of dependence* (1986), p. quoted Tatham, 85.

<sup>27</sup> D. O'Meara, *Volkskapitalisme. Class, capital and ideology in the development of Afrikaner nationalism 1934-1948* (1983), based on a thesis completed some years before. In his *Forty lost years* (1996), he is critical of 'overtly structuralist analyses of the state and state politics [which] have tended to reduce it [Afrikaner nationalism] all somehow to the logic of capital' (p. 14). One of the key works by the Sussex 'school' is R. Davies, et al, "Class struggle and the periodisation of the South African state", *Review of African Political Economy*, 7 (1976).

It was in part in reaction to such work that social historians,<sup>28</sup> most of them no longer based abroad but in South Africa itself, and therefore able to do intensive archival work and to draw upon oral interviews, argued the case for agency. Against the top-down work of the structuralists, concerned mainly with the abstractions of capitalist development or the depersonalised evolution of a system of racial domination, or the structural constraints on the mining houses, the social historians turned to the detailed investigation of particular groups and individuals. Strongly populist and overtly anti-elitist, they stressed the agency of the marginal and the dispossessed, whether individuals or classes, such as the peasantry, which had been marginalised in the literature and needed to the “rescued” for history.

The triennial History Workshops held at the University of the Witwatersrand from 1978, modelled on the History Workshop movement which had originated at Ruskin College, Oxford, with its links to Edward Thompson,<sup>29</sup> were the main fora at which this social history was presented, and Belinda Bozzoli, the main organiser of the Workshops, then edited and introduced published collections of Workshop papers.<sup>30</sup> Charles van Onselen, working alongside the Workshop,<sup>31</sup> wrote the most heralded books. In early writing he tended to romanticise worker consciousness, presenting as resistance actions which need have been resistance at all.<sup>32</sup> In what he called “an exercise in historical materialism”, he then analysed how those who ruled early Johannesburg asserted their control over the dominated classes, but he did this not in an abstract way, but by showing ‘the warm, vibrant and intensely human struggle of people seeking to find a place of dignity and security within a capitalist world that encroached on them all too quickly’.<sup>33</sup> Criminals and gang-leaders were seen as agents of the new society,<sup>34</sup> while in more recent work Kas Maine is presented as an outstanding example of a man who was constrained by wider forces, yet who acted to make a difference in shaping his life.<sup>35</sup>

n such work an Africanist stress on agency meshed with a concern to show that the

<sup>28</sup> There were, of course, divisions and differences among the social historians; it is difficult to avoid over-generalisation.

<sup>29</sup> One of this writer’s most vivid memories of an Oxford lecture was hearing Thompson speak at Ruskin in the late 1960s.

<sup>30</sup> G. K. Tatham, “The University of the Witwatersrand History Workshop and Radical South African Historical scholarship in the 1970s and 1980s”, M. A. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1992; B. Bozzoli and P. Delius, “Radical History and South African society” in *Radical History Review*, 46/7 (Winter 1990); P. Bonner, “The Wits History Workshop”, *Journal of American History* (December 1994).

<sup>31</sup> Perhaps because Belinda Bozzoli was his wife.

<sup>32</sup> Esp. M. Goldberg, “Formulating worker consciousness”, *Social Dynamics*, 7 (1981).

<sup>33</sup> C. van Onselen, *New Nineveh, New Babylon. Studies in the social and economic History of the Witwatersrand*, 2 vols. (1982), vol. 1, p. xvi. Bozzoli and Delius, however, believe that ‘if anything van Onselen exaggerates rather than underplays the power of capital accumulation, profitability and the forces and relations of production...’: “Radical History”, p. 41, n. 63.

<sup>34</sup> “The Regiment of the Hills” in *Studies*, 2 and C. Van Onselen, *The small matter of a horse: the life of ‘Nongolozá’ Mathebula 1867-1948* (1984).

<sup>35</sup> C. van Onselen, *The seed is mine. The life of Kas Maine, a South African sharecropper 1894-1984* (1996).

structuralists were wrong in playing down, or even denying altogether, the role of conscious human will as a major factor in the making of history. In writing the history of dispossessed or peripheral individuals or groups, these historians implicitly argued for their importance. Accounts of the development of segregation and apartheid were criticised for suggesting that state policies were formulated by an elite in a vacuum and merely imposed from above. Instead, it was argued, policy evolved in a context in which subordinate classes or individuals, such as the Zulu royal family in the 1920s, played a role in shaping it.<sup>36</sup> Even under the brutalities of apartheid, Africans were not merely helpless victims. And there was a move away from general categories such as "state" and "capital" to investigate relations within the state and the roles of individual capitalists.

Whereas Rob Turrell and Bill Worger had seemed to suggest that the whites of Kimberley took the decisions which shaped the lives of workers there,<sup>37</sup> Patrick Harries drew upon the oral testimony of retired miners and documentary sources to argue that miners had had a rich cultural life of their own, much of it derived from the rural areas. While he accepted that "human action was constrained by climate and environment, prices, demography, kinship and politics, the state, and mental structures", and that the workers were exploited, he sought to bring out 'the pride of the miners in their work, their experience and courage, and their dignity as their wages allowed them to overcome the autocracy of nature'. He wanted, in other words, to show that they helped shape their lives, though like all good historians he recognised that people act within a constraining context. Others added to his attempt to show how the miners shaped their own worlds.<sup>38</sup>

Social history was always far more readable than structuralist history, and, in recovering the lives and experience of those who had previously been left out of history, it caught the imagination of a wider readership than the work of those who wrote only of modes of production. In the late 1980s Tim Keegan, who had himself been much concerned with "structural" questions in the transition to capitalism in South Africa, took the lead in challenging the structuralists head-on. Rejecting the charge that he believed in "history from below" as opposed to "history from above, or had privileged agency over structure, Keegan argued against the rigid schemes of the structuralists, and was able to draw upon empirical work to argue for a much more complex reality than they allowed for.<sup>39</sup> With their arguments shown to have been overly-theoretical, the structuralists, in

<sup>36</sup> E.g. criticism of Saul Dubow, *Racial segregation and the origins of apartheid* (1989).

<sup>37</sup> R. Turrell, *Capital and labour on the Kimberley diamond fields* (1987) ; B. Worger, *South Africa's City of Diamonds* (1987).

<sup>38</sup> Harries, *Work, culture and identity*, p. xix; e.g. C. Badenborst and C. Mather, 'tribal recreation and recreating tribalism', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 23, 3 (1997).

<sup>39</sup> For the debate see esp. M. Morris, "Social History and the transition to capitalism in the South African countryside", *Africa Perspective*, 5/6 (1987); M. Murray, "The triumph of Marxist approaches in South African social and labour history", *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 23 (1988); T. Keegan, "Mike Morris and the Social Historians: A response and a critique", *Africa Perspective*, 7/8 (1989); T. Keegan, "The origins of agrarian capitalism in South Africa: A reply", *Journal of Southern African Studies* 15, 4 (1989). For an earlier, general critique of a structuralist position see F. Cooper, "Peasants, capitalists and historians", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 7, 2 (1981). Helen Bradford takes a more nuanced position than Keegan in "Highways, byways and culs-de-sacs: The transition to agrarian capitalism in revisionist South African

retreat, moved on to non-historical agendas, and by the end of the 1980s had largely left the field to the social historians, who remained dominant into the mid 1990s, even if challenged from other directions, by adherents of a political economy approach who accuse them of failing to distinguish the trivial from the important, and by post-modernists and others who criticise them for failing to be more self-conscious of what they are doing.<sup>40</sup>

One of the earlier structuralists has, however, recently returned to the agency debate. In a follow-up to *Volkskapitalisme*, Dan O'Meara conceded that his earlier work had been over-structural. Much of the new book concerned individuals and how they shaped history: the various National Party Prime Ministers and the intrigues of the men who surrounded them at the Nationalist "court". In a theoretical appendix he argued that while the structural limits of state power define the "limits of what is possible", they do not account for the choices of the actors involved. State power cannot be reduced to the interests of the dominant classes; "agency is central to the workings of politics". But he is insistent that there are structural limits to the efficacy of agency. While he concedes that a Dönges instead of a Verwoerd would have produced a very different kind of apartheid, he asserts that "an entire Cabinet filled with determined Verwoerds could not have saved political apartheid in 1990". "Political suicide" was, he seems to say, not an option for the National Party.<sup>41</sup>

On the one hand, there is little new here: no reputable historian would deny that there are limits to agency. On the other, however, O'Meara is still too inclined to deny that individual actions make a difference, too inclined to suggest that the end of apartheid in the early 1990s was inevitable. Had P. W. Botha not had a heart attack in early 1989, he might have remained State President for another five or more years. There is no evidence that he, or other possible successors such as Magnus Malan, would have been able to take the bold steps which De Klerk took.<sup>42</sup> Botha's failure to act might well have produced the civil-war so many had predicted for so long. While O'Meara fails to give De Klerk's role sufficient weight, he also, by his focus on the National Party government, does not concede sufficient agency to the urban masses. The township revolt of the mid 1980s played a key part in helping to push the two sides towards negotiations.

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history", *Radical History Review*, 46/7 (Winter 1990).

<sup>40</sup> Cf. A. Grundlingh, *Transcending transitions? The social history tradition of historical writing in South Africa in the 1990s* (1997). Books written from a structural perspective continue to appear, of course; a recent example is J. Robinson, *The power of Apartheid* (1996), which emphasises the dictates of spatiality and state power.

<sup>41</sup> D. O'Meara, *Forty lost years* (1996), esp. pp. 482, 485. Cf. my review in *Social Dynamics*, 1997.

<sup>42</sup> Here I agree with, say, H. Adam, K. Moodley and F. van Zyl Slabbert, *Comrades in business* (1997), p. 52.



There are dangers, of course that the stress on agency may be taken too far. Already in the writing of some Africanists, 'the initiatives taken by Africans are magnified by the passivity of Europeans'.<sup>43</sup> Many would now disagree with the social historians that "it was in the nitty gritty of everyday conflict - on the level of the small conflicts between classes and groups - that the precise and uniquely South African patterns of class, culture and ideology were and are determined".<sup>44</sup> Surely attention should rather be directed away from the microscopic, the local and the marginal to the larger forces in society, to restore the balance between individual or subaltern agency and structural forces. Historians should ask the deeper, more significant questions, concerned above all with power, even if doing so inevitably means a return to a more elitist history.<sup>45</sup>

Whatever the desired intellectual agenda, there is now another, more fundamental crisis facing historians; the challenge to history as a discipline. This comes, in part, from the idea that the country should look to the future rather than the past, and from a state which seems ready to see history dropped from schools in favour of more immediately "useful" subjects. It will be a final irony if this country's historians, failing to attract students in sufficient numbers in the new era of programmes and restructuring, find themselves unable to continue to pursue their profession. For if there are no historians to write history, the debate over the role of agency in history will be lost, and the field will be left to those who may appropriate history: uninformed popularisers and mythmakers.

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<sup>43</sup> Patrick Harries, review of K. Atkins, *The moon is dead!* in *International Journal of African Historical Studies* (1997), p. 672. My thanks to Patrick for a copy of his outstanding review.

<sup>44</sup> Bozzoli and Delius, 'Radical History', p. 31.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Grundlingh, *Transcending transitions*; C. Saunders, "More protest and challenge", *South African Historical Journal* (May 1997). Excessive empiricism has been identified as the root cause of the crisis in South African historiography by Keith Breckenridge, in a review of J. Lambert, *Betrayed trust*, in *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* (May 1997), p. 340.