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***The Humanities and Social Sciences in South Africa\****  
***Orphaning the orphan***

„Victory has many fathers but failure is an orphan”

**Abstract**

Using intellectual history and critical analysis, this paper traces the foundation and rise of the Humanities and Social Sciences in South Africa in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It looks at their creative and inspirational role during the struggle to end apartheid-especially their nurturing of the values of democracy, non-racialism and non-sexism – towards that century’s end. The chief interest however falls upon the corrosive effect that neo-liberal economics have had on these disciplinaries in the nearly two decades since the apartheid system ended.

John F Kennedy’s 1961 reworking of Count Ciano’s foreboding of his own death<sup>1</sup> nineteen years earlier has seldom been used in post-apartheid South Africa. The reason is obvious: apartheid’s ending was the seminal moment in the life of a country still less than a century old. This chapter is not concerned with apportioning guilt or advancing congratulations over apartheid and its ending; it is tasked with assessing the current state of the humanities and the social sciences in South Africa. However, the rather obscure opening

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\* The paper is printed as submitted.

<sup>1</sup> In his 1942 diary, the Italian diplomat, and son-in-law of Mussolini, Count Galeazzo Ciano (1903-44) wrote „La victoria trova cento padri, e nessuno vuole riconoscere l’insuccesso” („As always, victory finds a hundred fathers but defeat is always an orphan”). The Ciano Diaries 1939-1943. Vol 2.

quotation does have a heuristic point: the human sciences – to use a phrase whose meaning will shortly follow – played a central role in bringing an end to apartheid but have been orphaned, and are now seen as failing post-apartheid South Africa.

Country-specific studies of scholarly disciplines are always risky undertakings. This is especially so in a field such as the humanities. So, four preliminary markers are necessary. First, as far as can be ascertained, this kind of exercise has never been attempted previously in South Africa. One possible reason is that the humanities in the country have traditionally operated within three epistemological niches; two of which were located within language differences, a little like the situation in present-day Belgium; while, the third niche predates apartheid but was deeply influenced by it in paradoxical ways. Second, this chapter will not directly enter the debate around the averred Euro-centricism of both the humanities and the social sciences. Nevertheless, this issue hangs heavily over the argument; South Africa will not be able to escape this conversation and, if anything, this contribution may reinforce the importance of the debate. Third, although mindful of the establishment and development of the humanities in South Africa as opposed to elsewhere, this is not primarily an exercise in comparison. Finally, a careful reading will show that there is no mention of the disciplines of law or education which, in some definitions, fall into the humanities. On these two areas there is, understandably, much to say; South Africa's new Constitution has opened up a rich debate on social issues which have been touched by almost every facet of the law. Some have, however, stood out and merit a mention – transitional justice and restorative justice. In contrast, the report-card on education is not as satisfactory. This issue remains one of the country's biggest challenges, a full thirty-three years after Soweto's defiant pupils mounted an insurrection against apartheid education in June, 1976.

The facts and figures in this chapter on the status of the humanities and the social sciences in South Africa cannot be divorced from the profound social and political processes which have completely changed the country but, oddly enough, left many things in place. As social thinkers rediscover every day, this is not unusual. Even the deepest revolutions have left many, in fact most, social issues intact in their wake, confirming Weber's point that *ideas* that aim at change are worn down in the historical process as they are „codified and routinised by interpreters ... [and] ... gradually brought back in line with the status quo” (Abromeit, 1994: 27). The necessity of bringing South African

society back in line follows upon the near-revolutionary moment which the country had reached just before the breaching of the Berlin Wall twenty years ago. The revolt against apartheid, especially the struggle during the 1980 s, was embedded within a complex series of ideas and interpretations which had to be filtered by, amongst other influences, those of the Cold War. Through this incomplete optic, local demands for basic human rights took on a distinct insurrectionary tone which generated anti-enlightenment demands, such as 'No Education without Liberation', which now seem to have been counter-productive. In negotiating this world, the humanities played an enormous role, at times by causing the political sphere to pause, but mostly by creating a language of both struggle and emancipation which helped South Africans to see beyond colonialism, apartheid and the Cold War. Without understanding these developments, there is no appreciating the circumstances in which the humanities and social sciences currently find themselves.

And so to a central argument: What has happened to the humanities in South Africa mirrors a global trend. As the American educationalist Sheila Slaughter has suggested,

[a]cademics in the arts, social sciences and humanities were caught off guard by the rise of neo-liberalism. During the 1960 s and 1970 s, they had been at the centre of the university, close to the core of the social movements that expanded and changed undergraduate education. However, their ... narrative did not compel students, funders, or donors. Undergraduate and graduate students moved to the ... professional schools in droves. At many campuses, the arts and sciences became service courses that provided general education courses prior to students' entry into professional schools. (Slaughter, 2007: 14)

Today it is common knowledge that the humanities are repeatedly the target of higher education policymakers and planners as well as managers, who seem preoccupied with promoting the so-called 'knowledge economy'. Let this single example from the University of South Africa (UNISA) make the point. In July 2007, the university's College of Humanities announced cut-backs in several departments including African languages, visual arts, community health, and psychology, Italian, Russian and Modern Hebrew. Developments like these indicate the increased value accorded to the technical end of knowledge but they also, in Craig Calhoun's words, suggest „a failing” (McQuarrie, 2006: 107).

Understanding this situation requires that attention be given to the place of the humanities during apartheid. The intention here is to highlight the rise and the efficacy of a critical discourse and political practice which helped to bring apartheid to its end. Thereafter, consideration will be given to the rise of the technical rationality represented by neo-liberal economics, especially by the reductionist perspective embedded in the idea of globalisation, a marked feature of public policymaking in the post-apartheid years. Both this political history and rise of the technical end of social science will assist in the understanding of the third: an analysis of the trends within the humanities both across, and within institutions and disciplines. The chapter ends with a consideration of some recent attempts to revive the humanities, both within the country as a whole and in institutions committed to this task.

This is an ambitious undertaking given the limited space available here. As a result, the approach adopted follows a ‘Thieving Magpie’ perspective on social analysis (an idea borrowed from the historian Simon Sharma). This technique enables us to draw illustrations from a range of disciplines in order to illustrate the general points that drive the argument.

### **1 Explaining the humanities in South Africa**

In contemporary South Africa, the label ‘humanities’ is inclusive drawing together the traditionally defined ‘humanities’, ‘social sciences’ and the ‘arts’. This brand name – to intentionally use the term much-loved by the new generation of university administrators – invariably reflects what Ted Schatzki has called the contingent facts of institutional, cultural, and educational history (Schatzki, 2009: 31). It is important to note that the use of this name is recent. Until the 1980s, most South African universities used the label the ‘arts’ to name faculties which included the ‘humanities’, while some, but not all, of the country’s universities organised the ‘social sciences’ into separate faculties. These definitional issues will highlight the power of the metropolitan hold on academic organisation in South Africa, and explain how the social sciences, in particular, were used to serve the purpose of modernity in South Africa as, indeed, they have been elsewhere.

Given that South Africa was founded within a „network of imperial knowledge” (Dubow, 2006: 14), it is not surprising that the separation between the natural sciences and the humanities has been the primary feature of the country’s knowledge system. Nevertheless, from the very earliest days the humani-

ties were valued – certainly, early university leadership was provided by those who had trained in the field. An instructive example was Jan Hofmeyr, who was appointed the first principal of the University of the Witwatersrand at the age of twenty-four. After graduating with an MA degree from the University of Cape Town (UCT) at the age of fifteen, Hofmeyr read classics and ‘greats’ at Balliol College, Oxford, as a Rhodes Scholar. The post of university principal was to be the prodigy’s first real job. Hofmeyr went on to become the Administrator of a province and was a very effective Minister of Finance and of Education. A love of the humanities, however, never left him; when he died, aged fifty-four, he bequeathed money to the University of the Witwatersrand conditional upon the Chair of Classics being named after him. Most importantly for these immediate purposes, the fact that the university in question was previously called ‘The South African School of Mines’ suggests that in 1920 it was thought that the excesses of the ‘hard’ sciences might need to be tamed by the ‘soft’ ones.

The temptation of American-style ‘social sciences’, with their liberal confidence in the receptiveness of human problems to intervention, proved difficult to resist, however. In 1927, the president and secretary of the Carnegie Corporation of New York visited South Africa, and their interest was drawn to the problem of white poverty in the country. Amongst those who were to join the staff of *The Carnegie Commission Report into White Poverty in South Africa* was EG Malherbe, son of a Dutch Reformed Minister<sup>2</sup>, who had taken a doctorate at Columbia University’s Teachers’ College. Malherbe was a ready champion of applied social science and was unafraid of tackling sensitive issues such as ethnicity and race. He would go on to direct the Bureau for Educational and Social Research (a prototype for the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), which was established in 1969 and continues life in post-apartheid South Africa – see below). But it was the professionalisation of the social sciences in the country which was his lasting contribution. The founding of a Faculty of Social Science at Rhodes University in 1930 was a response to a request from the National Council of Women which had called for the creation of a Bachelors Degree in Social Studies. In the midst of the Great Depression, the goal was training social workers, something that fol-

<sup>2</sup> A family of Dutch Reformed Churches are seen by some as playing a major role in the implementation of apartheid. These are the progeny of the Reformed Churches which was brought to South Africa by the Dutch East India Company in 1652. A majority of Afrikaners continued to be members of the three strains of reformed thinking. In 1997 the reformed churches apologised for their role in apartheid before the country’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

lowed upon the professionalisation of this discipline in Britain and the United States. Indeed, the Carnegie Commission's Report, which appeared in 1932, recommended the creation of further training sites for social workers. The University of the Witwatersrand began this training in 1937 after an internal university memorandum from the liberal philosopher Professor RFA Hornlé urging its necessity „for the development of the scientific study of social problems and the university training of students to deal practically with these problems from a scientific perspective” (Ross, 2007: 1).

Professionalisation was only one aspect of the complex goals of social science in what Daniel Lerner later described as „Modernising Lands” (Lerner, 1959: 32). It reflected what Dubow calls „the international vogue for expert knowledge, quantification and the pursuit of social efficiency” (Dubow, 2006: 7). It is not therefore surprising that Rhodes University, in the early 1960 s, was able to claim that the

scientific knowledge of social phenomena is important for an understanding of the contemporary world. The emergence of social, economic, racial and psychological problems has brought into being specialised services requiring trained personnel with a sound knowledge of the various social sciences such as Sociology, Economics, Anthropology and Psychology, and other fields of a cognate nature. (Rhodes University Calendar, 1961: Chapter XX)

The very idea of a ‘science of the social’ raises questions around the purpose of knowing, and while it is not necessary to plumb these deep waters on this occasion, it is worth noting that many have suggested that the intent is not so much to advance knowledge (by exploring that which is not yet known), but rather, to discipline the social world. So, the basic task of the social sciences – which, along with those already mentioned, including political science – may well have been to assist authorities „to get a firmer grip on the existing social order” (Parenti, 2006: 502).

Given South Africa's social complexity and the continuous political struggle for the country, it should be no surprise that the social sciences in South Africa reflected this dark side. In intellectual circles, mainly (but not exclusively) those of the country's Afrikaners<sup>3</sup>, the social sciences were often associ-

<sup>3</sup> Afrikaners are South Africa's largest white minority, who speak Afrikans, which is a loose derivative of Dutch. Throughout the Twentieth Century they dominated the country's constitutional politics and, as such, were the backbone of the support for apartheid.

ated with the strengthening of racial ideology. One faux-discipline, known as *volkekunde*, played a decisive role in what Robert Gordon has called „the legitimating and reproduction of the apartheid social order on two levels: as an instrument of control and as a means of rationalising it” (Gordon, 1988: 536). Succinctly put, this approach to anthropology positioned the social category of race at the centre of its epistemology and, with time and the use of official resources, this view of the social cosmos rendered all alternative positions to be outside accepted routines of scholarship sanctioned by people, party and state. Nor was this an isolated case of ideology corroding knowledge. Consider the discipline of international relations, first taught in a separate academic department at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1963. During the apartheid years, positivist approaches to thinking about the international became trapped within Cold War logic. With time, this „modern counter-enlightenment” – to use Nicolas Guilhot’s recent description of early approaches to this discipline (Guilhot, 2008: 284) – had penetrated the very fabric of national life and extended beyond the country’s immediate borders where, mingling with apartheid’s racial ideology, it caused death and destruction throughout the southern Africa region.

These two examples highlight the difficulties in describing the humanities (which includes, in the current understanding, the social sciences) in a deeply divided society like South Africa. As noted previously, however, there has not been one, but a number, of approaches to knowledge within the country – each of which pursued separate epistemological niches, each drawn from (and contributing to) separate cultures. Because they are so integral to the development of the humanities and the social sciences in post-apartheid South Africa it is necessary to describe these – albeit briefly.

Three waves of knowledge-making – ‘Liberal/English’, ‘Nationalist/Afrikaner’ and ‘Pan-African’ – marked the path of the humanities in South Africa. The first of these descriptors are akin to the standard liberal rendition of apartheid history, and reflect the stance of these categories towards apartheid. So, the liberal or English-medium universities (Cape Town, Witwatersrand, Natal (now called KwaZulu-Natal) and Rhodes) readily embraced the idea of admitting students of all races. Although their enthusiasm for this approach to education was somewhat uneven, this choice flew in the face of apartheid policy, particularly of two notorious pieces of legislation: the Separate University Education Bill of 1957, and the Extension of University Education Act, *Act*



45 of 1959. Cumulatively, these pieces of legislation made the issue of race the only criterion for admission to higher education.

The cultural roots of the so-called liberal universities drew them towards Oxbridge even though (as with all the country's universities) they were originally dependent on the University of London for the issuing of their degrees. In their academic programmes and their administrative form they were closer to the Scottish university tradition, however. These affinities strongly influenced the early organisation and the content of the humanities, the arts and the social sciences, and the intellectual hold of the cultural/academic metropole – especially that of 'the golden triangle' of Cambridge, Oxford and London. Arguably, the latter was broken only by the intellectual ferment (and the progressive politics) which followed upon the establishment of the University of Sussex in 1961. A number of South Africans, who were to make a deep impression on the humanities in the 1970s and the 1980s, did postgraduate work at Sussex; it was from the same place that the country's second democratically elected President, Thabo Mbeki, graduated with an MA in economics from the School of Social Studies.

Lawrence Wright has described South African English-speaking universities as instruments for „transmitting metropolitan knowledge and excitement in a colonial situation” (Wright, 2006: 73). The resulting sense of inferiority – the 'cultural cringe' as the Australian A. S. Philips famously called it – slowed the indigenisation of the humanities in these institutions. Rarely was there any desire to challenge the metropolitan-determined paradigm. A number of inspiring teachers did challenge the *status quo* by instilling what the late Richard Rorty called „doubts in the students ... about the society to which they belong” (Rorty, 1999: 127). These departures were sometimes less epistemological in their purpose than they were openly political, and, interestingly, they drew more from European ideas than British ones. So, in the early 1970s, the University of the Witwatersrand experienced a strong critical surge in disciplines like political studies, African studies and anthropology. This exposed students to Habermasian critical theory and French post-structuralism. One particular course, called 'Freedom and Authority', was almost entirely devoted to a consideration of the work of Hannah Arendt. But these dissenting approaches were not readily accepted. Academics and students who pursued them were often censured both within and without the university walls. Some, like Dr Rick Turner, were less fortunate. In early January 1978, the political scientist-cum-labour activist was assassinated in the port city of Durban.



By nurturing the idea that the university should offer the fruit of its labour to the building of a nation ('die volk'), the country's Afrikaans-speaking institutions faced restrictions of their own epistemological making. However, their success in achieving their political goals may explain why it is that the traditional Afrikaans universities continue to be associated with the legitimacy they offered to apartheid. These are Stellenbosch, Pretoria, Potchefstroom University for Higher Christian Education (now called the University of the North-West), Orange Free State (now the University of the Free State); and later, the Rand Afrikaans University (now the University of Johannesburg), the University of Port Elizabeth (now the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University) and UNISA). The oldest of these institutions, situated in the town of Stellenbosch, from which it draws its name, began as a Theological Seminary in 1863. An arts department was added in 1873 when professors were appointed to teach classics and English literature and mathematics and physical science. The arts department received its Charter from the Cape Parliament and, together with the seminary, became known as the Stellenbosch College. However, in 1877 – the Jubilee Year of Queen Victoria – its name, with Royal consent, was again changed – this time to the Victoria College of Stellenbosch. The University Act replacing the latter with the name Stellenbosch University came into effect in early April 1918.

This example confirms that South Africa's Afrikaans-medium universities were in fact also closely tied to the British tradition. As a result (and ironically) their origins were more diverse than those of their English counterparts; Pretoria University, for instance, commenced instruction in the English language, switching to Afrikaans a full twenty-three years after its founding in 1908. But their search for deeper involvement with Afrikaner nationalism, which commenced in the early 1900 s, inexorably drew them on a different trajectory and this change in direction was speeded by their links to European universities. The Dutch were a strong influence; Leiden University graduated successive generations of Afrikaner lawyers, while Utrecht made an early impact on the study of theology. The University of the Orange Free State (now called the University of the Free State) was founded in 1904; its first principal, Johannes Brill, had graduated in classics from Utrecht where his father had been a professor.

But the European impact was most strongly felt in the 1930 s and 1940 s, when the German universities, in particular, were an important source of succour and support. Of crucial importance to this direction was the idea of a 'volksu-

niversiteit' – defined by the intellectual, Merwe Scholtz, as „a university which belongs to the *volk* and must therefore be of the *volk*, out of the *volk* and for the *volk*, anchored in its traditions and fired by the desire to serve the *volk* in accordance with its own view of life” (Degenaar, 1977: 152). The intellectual and academic leader Jonathan Jansen has recently written *Knowledge in the Blood*, a powerful book on the legacy of this approach, which graphically captures the embeddedness of this perspective. In this nationalist project, the humanities were to play a crucial role: scarcely any of its sub-disciplines did not help to encourage the idea that a university education instilled in the student the notion of ‘being bound to the people’ (Degenaar, 1977: 156). As we have already noted, the faux-anthropology, volkekunde, was important but so, too, was the discipline of history: a distinctive feature of this „scientific historical writing” – almost all of it in the Afrikaans language – was „that the conception of the past is based on the point of view of the Afrikaner” (Van Jaarsveld, 1964: 135). Approaches represented by this „Afrikaner-centred” perspective on the humanities are drawn together in three volumes entitled *Kultuurgeskiedenis van die Afrikaner*<sup>4</sup>, which were published over a five-year period.

It was through the Carnegie Commission’s intervention that the importance of social science in building an Afrikaner nation became clear. The researchers in the investigation were drawn from both language groups, and amongst them was a young sociologist, HF Verwoerd, who used his involvement in the project to build a career successively in the academy, journalism and politics. Born in the Netherlands, Verwoerd was to become apartheid’s leading intellectual and, before his assassination in 1966, was Prime Minister of the country. To date, Verwoerd has been the only South African head of state to have taken a doctorate.

Given apartheid’s grand vision of separating the races, it might be thought South Africa’s other university tradition, the black (or in apartheid nomenclature, homeland<sup>5</sup>) institutions, would escape the narrowing strictures of the volksuniversiteit idea. But this was not to be the case. The oldest of these universities, the University of Fort Hare (UFH) (initially called The South African Native College), was founded in the enlightenment tradition by Scots

<sup>4</sup> Translate as *The Cultural History of the Afrikaner*.

<sup>5</sup> Homelands or Bantustans were areas set aside for the exclusive occupation of South Africa’s black majority. The idea was that these places would cater for the national aspirations of the country’s majority through the excise of their ethnic or tribal rights. The Bantustan policy was a cornerstone of apartheid.

Missionaries in 1916. In 1946, it gained semi-autonomous status with its degrees issued under the supervision of neighbouring Rhodes University. But UFH was far more than this mundane and linear account suggests. It was here that Nelson Mandela and other leaders had both studied and honed the politics that would help to free their country. As a student in the humanities, Mandela, who organised a boycott, was expelled by the College's Principal during his final year of study.

While, the institution's formal academic and intellectual authority was largely destroyed by the 1959 Universities Act, its social and political capital remained intact notwithstanding the state's harrowing assault. The Act established four new universities for 'non-whites', to use the language of the legislation. These were the University of Zululand, the University of the Western Cape, the University of Durban-Westville, and the University of the North. With the attack on UFH came a parallel destruction of a number of revered missionary schools, such as Healdtown, Lovedale, St Marks to name only a few, that had fostered a generation of leaders of which Nelson Mandela is undoubtedly the most famous. In his autobiography, Mandela describes the impression made on him by a visit to Healdtown by the Xhosa poet, SEK Mqhayi.

As apartheid's grip on these institutions tightened, Afrikaner-Nationalist<sup>6</sup> academics were circulated through these tribal colleges, as they were also known, with the best of these being drawn back into the mainstream Afrikaner universities after a few years. The result was that the reach of the humanities – certainly in the classroom – was narrow and restricted. Syllabi were somewhat formal and often very contradictory: for example, at UFH in the 1970 s, the political science syllabus was uncritically preoccupied with modernisation theory. While this pedagogy was taking place, the institution was, as Xolela Mangcu argues, „a cauldron of radical student politics” (Mangcu, 2008.24), and Mtutuzeli Matshoba recalled that he heard „the leading Black Consciousness figures including Strinivasa Moodley and Steve Biko, give inspirational talks at Fort Hare University in the early 1970 s” (McDonald, 2009.327).

Administratively, too, these institutions were tightly controlled; mostly, ideologues were appointed to leadership positions and their budgets were drawn, not from the national education budget, but from that of the state department which was designated to deal with black affairs. For almost a decade and a

<sup>6</sup> The ideology which sought to unite Afrikaans-speaking whites with a sense of their own ethnic identity in order to win political power through the National Party.

half, these institutions seemed to be formally positioned outside the struggle for their rights in which the other university traditions seemed all too self-righteously engaged. This apparent marginalisation, and whispers over the question of standards, especially in the humanities, denied them the formal voice to defend themselves against their rightfully angry students and the apartheid government.

But outside the country, South African exiles, including the sociologist Ben Magubane and the anthropologist Archie Mafeje, were reinforcing a long-established critical tradition which apartheid simply denied. These scholars not only made deep contributions to both the humanities and the social sciences, but by challenging apartheid policy called into question the Westernesque epistemologies that were used in framing the very question of modernity. This work drew on a still-to-be-fully-explored intellectual tradition that reached back to the origins of Pan-Africanist thinking with its „concern for the emancipation of the continent from the ravages of foreign domination and underdevelopment and ... (towards)...the building of a new Africa” (Mkandawire, 2005.2). In South Africa, this can be dated to the early-1880s with the founding of the first secular newspaper *Imvo Zababantusundu*<sup>7</sup> by John Tengo Jabavu. With an emancipatory impulse at its centre, this trajectory was continued by John Langalibalele Dube (author of the first Zulu language novel), R V Selope Thema (journalist, editor, historian), Pixley ka Isaka Seme (a Columbia and Oxford-trained lawyer and journalist), and Solomon T Plaatje (linguist, journalist and author). With other organic intellectuals, these men helped to launch the anti-tribalist New African Movement in 1904-6 and, in 1912, the African National Congress<sup>8</sup>. Although a remarkable community, history seems to have judged them harshly for their inability to look beyond the local and the parochial. However, their work continued in the 1940s in the writings and debates of HIE Dhlomo, a major figure in South African literature, Benedict Wallet Vilakazi, novelist, educator and the first black South African to receive a PhD and Jordan Ngubane, who was a journalist novelist.

The tri-focal optic used in this analysis needs, however, to be drawn together to gain a sense of the contradictory state of South African humanities in the early 1970s. An American political scientist then living in South Africa, John

<sup>7</sup> Translate as *Native Opinion*.

<sup>8</sup> Known by its initials, ANC, this is the party of Nelson Mandela and the governing party of South Africa. It was formed in 1912 and is the oldest political organisation in the country. It was banned for almost 50 years and operated both clandestinely and from exile.

Seiler, offered a depressing assessment of the state of the country's international relations community of those times, which might be viewed as a reflection of the moribund state of some of the social sciences near four decades ago. „The published work”, Seiler wrote,

[t]ends to be justificatory, rather than analytical; often contains a moralising, or even specifically religious content; and shows a penchant for thoroughness, which is explicable by a notion of 'science', which is often no more than an unquestioning and uncritical search for and regurgitation of authoritative sources. Since the authorities turned to reflect these same characteristics, there is a repetitious resonance. (Seiler, 1973: 37)

But beneath the arid surface that Seiler described, the ground was shifting, as the facet of the humanities most difficult to pin down – the interface between theory and practice – underwent a profound change. Although John Seiler had read the works of Sol Plaatje, he seems to have missed the shifting ground of which anti-assimilationists would have approved. Provisionally, two possible reasons for this may be suggested. first, state censorship kept much of the emerging literature underground and, second, his positivist instincts (and training) may well have kept his analysis within water-tight compartments.

But reflecting later on the changes which were then underway, sociologist Ari Sitas speaks of an „indigenous hybridity” (Sitas, 1997: 16) which marked the radical intellectual formations of those years. „What can be traced”, he writes,

as an intellectual formation started being developed outside and despite University 'disciplinarity'. What started from the early 1970s onwards through marginal and harassed groupings of left intellectuals, white and black, was a social discourse which had a normative and political foundation...(this) a formation ... provided the cultural levers to prize open departments and disciplinary fields of inquiry...(by promoting)..... narratives of emancipation...animated by egalitarian norms. (Sitas, 1997: 13)

The diversity within this new formation included not just white, left-inclined academics and students, but also intellectuals linked to the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), which was founded in 1972 by a young medical student, Steven Bantu Biko, who would also die at apartheid's hands and whose legacy will linger forever in the humanities and, indeed, the country. These developments were to position the humanities at the centre of the university

and the country in the 1980 s. But, to explain this, it is necessary to return to intellectual history.

## 2 Discovering what will set you free

After World War II, liberal interpretations of South Africa's deepening racial quagmire argued that continued white domination undermined capitalist development and stifled economic growth – this, the argument ran, subverted any hope of social emancipation. The approach was exemplified in the two-volume *The Oxford History of South Africa* edited by Monica Wilson and Leonard Thompson. However, as soon as it appeared, a number of scholars, including South African exiles and émigrés, attacked the work of this 'Liberal School' of Southern African Studies. The 'New School' instead argued that racial domination was integral to the functioning of the South African economy. The most widely cited of this work is an article by Harold Wolpe, a lawyer turned sociologist, which argued that the [African] Reserves (later called the Bantustans), by preserving limited access to agricultural land by the families of black migrant labourers, subsidised urban wages and therefore served as a source of cheap black labour for industrial and mining capital.

The influence of the new thinking was immediately felt in the country's (still largely white) English-language universities. Its march, and the simultaneous re-activation of work-based and community-based organisation during the 1970 s, enhanced a Marxist explanation of South African events and drew social theory and political practice closer. This was seen in the role played by intellectuals – academics and students, mainly – in the formation of black trade union movements in Durban and later in the country's financial capital Johannesburg and Cape Town, which is called the country's Mother City. The leading figure in this intellectual-activism was the Sorbonne-trained Rick Turner, whose name has already been mentioned. This is not the occasion to discuss Turner's life's work – neither his activism nor his writing – but it is necessary to note that long after his death, his ideas continue to inform many South African debates. We must however turn to the influence of the Western Marxism which inspired him, to appreciate the role of the humanities in South Africa's political change.

Two main perspectives and one theme emerged during early years of this 'Kuhnian revolution in South African studies (Jubber, 1983: 54). The sociologist Wilmot James called the two sides of the divide 'social history and 'his-



torical sociology'. The second issue, the thematic focus, was directed towards the study of labour – here the work of the sociologist Eddie Webster stands out. Unfortunately, there is no space here to discuss Webster's work and the profound effect he (and others) have had on the development of labour activism. This work, however, is in the case study mould, in which theory and practice are drawn together in a single emancipatory project.

The 'social historians' were associated with the work of London University's Institute of Commonwealth Studies, which, in the 1970s and into the 1980s, was directed by the South African-born historian Shula Marks. But the form and influence of this stream is best appreciated through the writing of the historian Charles van Onselen – especially his two-volume *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand*. This approach to understanding South Africa's past, its present and its future was widely disseminated throughout the South African academy by the Annual History Workshop at Johannesburg's University of Witwatersrand. The cohort stressed social agency, and sought to reconstruct understandings of the country's history through sensitivities to the activities and practices of the country's popular classes. The other thread of Marxist thinking, as noted previously, was historical sociology: here the leading figure was Harold Wolpe; other members included the Canadian sociologist Frederick Johnstone and another exiled South African historian, Martin Legassick. They represented the structuralist tradition in sociology and, with time, their writing was strongly influenced by Nicos Poulantzas, whose impact was evident in the work of a second generation of South African writers.

A few further comments on this 'Marxist Moment' are required to round the point out. Generally speaking, South African Marxists were known for their parochialism and for treating racial domination in South African society as exceptional. But it was Belinda Bozzoli who raised the most difficult (if not embarrassing) concerns about South African Marxism by claiming that „[w]hat South African reality could demonstrate to the intellectual world has increasingly been pushed aside in favour of what that world can tell us about South African reality” (Bozzoli, 1981: 54). This critique is a timely reminder of the hold of metropolitan thought over the development of the humanities in the country. Evidence of this was to emerge elsewhere too. Tracing a century of development of the social sciences at UCT, Ken Jubber suggested that, in terms of what was taught, the institution was like a 'displaced British university' (Jubber, 1983: 58). But, whatever its lack of local authenticity, the Marxist



Moment did raise questions far beyond mundane disciplinary debates, as the following example indicates: „What is this new South Africa we are working for?” a former Professor of Afrikaans literature and a Vice-Chancellor asked in the 1980 s. „We are trying to find out. The ... liberals ... are geared for capitalism. We research alternatives” (Crary, 1988). Undoubtedly, then, the Marxist Moment sparked intense debates within and without the academy. Looking back on those times, the acclaimed South African historian Charles van Onselen called them „the most exciting two decades in the social sciences ... [and the humanities] ... in this country” (van Onselen, 2004).

But the deep epistemic break – as Foucault called the moment when the unthinkable becomes thinkable – lay in the much-researched, but poorly understood, issue of race. The question, put in crude terms, was this: Who were South Africans? Were they, as the country’s English-speakers claimed, bearers of the liberal heritage of imperial power? Were they, as Afrikaners hoped, an anointed European folk in Africa? Were they, as more crude Marxists often declared, an exploited proletariat on the periphery of a capitalist world? Or were they, as Pan-Africanists might have argued, colonised minds waiting emancipation in order to contribute to the rise of a new Africa?

Of course, South Africans were all of these, and none of them. The country was a community-in-the-making – to use Benedict Anderson’s iconic idea of the nation as an ‘imagined community’ – and its making was contingent on the assumptions upon which thinking was provided by the humanities. But accepting the inherent instability of this idea was not possible within the dominant scientific formulations that promised permanence and predictability. Drawing upon the writing of the Martinique intellectual Frantz Fanon, Steve Biko broke the impasse by famously declaring: „Black man, you’re on your own” (Biko, 1978: 97). This, the idea of Black Consciousness, was a fresh framing of South Africa’s deepest social issue and, as importantly, its framing was not wholly anchored in metropolitan ideas. The body of this approach to social relations was forcefully drawn into an analysis of racism by the psychologist, Chabani Manganyi’s 1973 book *Being Black in the World*. Its impact outside of its obvious political setting was profound because, as Biko had argued:

The call for Black Consciousness is the most positive call to come from any group in the black world for a long time. It is more than just a reactionary rejection of whites by blacks...The philosophy of Black Consciousness ...expresses group pride and determination by blacks to rise

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and attain the envisaged self. At the heart of this kind of thinking is the realisation by the blacks that the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed (Biko, 1978: 149)

This thinking had been brought to the humanities in South Africa by what was later (recklessly called) global change. The colonialism which had given birth to the very idea of South Africa was changing, and Pan-Africanism was emerging as a powerful social idea. In the United States a new form of nationalism – which affirmed blackness, black pride, black solidarity, and (in some cases) argued for no alliances with white activists – was on the rise. But other influences were of longer duration: the *Négritude* movement of Léopold Sédar Senghor and Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, and the music of artists like Nina Simone (notably, her track „To be young, gifted, and black”). In South Africa there were clear antecedents for Black Consciousness in Africanist movements of earlier periods which we have already considered, and which were identifiable with figures like Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo<sup>9</sup>, and the Pan-African Congress<sup>10</sup>.

As the appeal of Black Consciousness widened, the country’s majority – confident of their ownership and power – played an increasing role in setting political and, indeed, intellectual agendas. Our immediate interest is in the second, so we must record that in the field of English literature, David Attwell points out that the resulting upheaval marked „a serious rift ... between liberalism and radicalism” (Attwell, 2005: 138).

If the rise of Black Consciousness formed one of the strategic wedges that brought apartheid to an end, another came from within Afrikaner ranks where, over time, intellectuals abandoned the ideology. Understandably, this did great damage to the idea of the volksuniversiteit and freed up room for adventure in the humanities – but breaking away was not easy. In a convoluted fashion, the acclaimed poet NP van Wyk Louw described how difficult it was to escape the gravitational pull of Afrikaner nationalism. Effective criticism,

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<sup>9</sup> Close friend and confidant of Nelson Mandela. They both studied at the UFH and set up a legal partnership in Johannesburg. Tambo left for Lusaka, Zambia, in 1960 to set up the ANC in exile. He was the organisation’s President during his years in exile. Tambo died in South Africa in 1994 shortly before the ANC was elected to power.

<sup>10</sup> A political movement which was established in 1959 as a breakaway movement from the ANC; it was established by Robert Sobukwe, a leading intellectual. The PAC (as it is known) supported Pan-Africanism and was greatly influenced by anti-colonial movements elsewhere on the continent.

he argued, „emerges when the critic places himself in the midst of the group he criticises, when he knows that he is bound unbreakably ... to the *volk* he dares rebuke” (Saunders, 2002: 62). Although this ‘loyale verset’ – or loyal dissent – was the early form of breakout, eventually Afrikaner intellectuals were more daring. Another poet, the intellectual and activist Breyten Breytenbach, who was jailed for high treason in the early 1970 s, was the most famous example of rebellion. But the real revolt by Afrikaners came as apartheid was collapsing in the 1980 s, and in this the humanities – in literature, in music, in journalism, especially amongst the young – turned away from all that had gone before.

### 3 A new beginning

Although it was plain that the politics which underpinned apartheid were unsustainable, few predicted that ‘New South Africa’ would enthusiastically and so quickly embrace a new form of social conformity. This is not to suggest that those in humanities had no interest in, or concern for, the issue of liberation: indeed, this chapter has argued the very opposite view, namely, that they were at the forefront. Cumulatively, this energy was imagining a new society which was everything that apartheid was not. The form on offer was citizenship free of the fear and discrimination that had marked the country’s unhappy past. It is necessary here to point out that at this time there was a deepening nexus between the humanities – especially in their critical form – and the world of policy. This emerging narrative was imbued with the enlightenment values that for two centuries had inspired the growth and the flourishing of the humanities throughout the world and from which South Africa, from the beginnings of apartheid, had increasingly been excluded through academic boycotts and the like.

As the struggle for South Africa intensified, much of the Marxist thought which has been discussed here (and its relevance for the country and its future) became acerbic and debased. In the politically charged atmosphere of the mid- and late-1980 s, political rhetoric was heady and often by-passed open and free discussion. As a result, not a little vulgar thinking found its way into the curricula in all of South Africa’s universities, with the humanities frequently acting as simple vehicles for political struggle. Quite rightly, these distortions were criticised, but it took a decade to realise the damage that was done during these years. But, in responsible places, the drawing together of theory and practice which had marked the humanities in the 1970

s had reached an interesting point. So, with apartheid on the verge of collapse, and following the release from prison of Nelson Mandela, the American sociologist Michael Burawoy visited the country and glowingly wrote that „everywhere there were sociologists [and other academics] acting as organic intellectuals of the home-grown liberation movements” (Burawoy, 2004 a: 11). In the early 1990 s the humanities in South Africa seemed all but on the edge of an age of retreat.

Ten years later, all this had changed, as research into the ‘employment prospects’ for graduates attested.

The employability picture is bleaker for graduates from the faculty of humanities. Commenting on learners’ chances of obtaining a job after graduation, deans said: ‘not anything significant’, ‘not with the current programmes’ and ‘not widespread within the faculty’. They realised that, so far, the programmes offered in their faculties are less demanded by employers and have a lower exchange rate in the market place, which puts students at a disadvantage. University funding for the faculties of humanities is yearly being reduced while funding for faculties that promise to produce more employable graduates is increased, so efforts are being made to turn the situation around. Innovative programmes like communication science and sport development are being introduced and strengthened. (Maharasoa and Hay, 2001)

Formulating the answer to the question of what had happened provides a window on the humanities in the post-apartheid years. It is a story of confusion, of lost opportunities, of crass instrumentalism and power-point managerialism, of government pressure, and, not surprisingly, of despair. But it is also the story of resistance, of rebirth, of renewal and of rediscovery – all the features which place the humanities at the very centre of the human experience.

The explanation begins with the issue of timing. The end of apartheid occurred at a moment of enormous international change. The fall of the Berlin Wall paved the way for the collapse of Socialism, entirely removing those Archimedean points of reference – east and west – that had dominated thinking about the social world for forty years. In important, though as yet undocumented ways, the apartheid experiment was over-shadowed by the Cold War and, as has been seen, individual disciplines often lent themselves to its ideology. In the changing South Africa the contest over ideas about the social world was heightened by increasing violence, which was linked to the

deepening political contestation. The holding power of the Marxist Moment quickly disappeared for two reasons. First, the collapse of the socialist states compelled political and social discourses to engage with neo-liberal social thought, which had been wholly ignored. Secondly, there was a flight of intellectuals from the academy towards policy research, consultancy or into the institutions of the state.

As a result, the increased influence of (what some called) 'the change-industry' used the self-styled ideas around 'freedom', on offer by free-market economics, to hone and stabilise an imaginary visioning of a 'New South Africa' based on the idea that history had ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall. This Hegelian-centred argument embraced the idea that liberal-democracy had emerged as the most desirable form of government, finally overcoming the challenge of Fascism (of which apartheid was a variant) and Communism (which had been embraced by many in the country's liberation movement). Public discourse was dominated by the idea that economics (especially its neo-liberal variant) had been at the centre of political change in the country. This was a return to the liberal logic of the post-Second World War world which, as illustrated, had been dislodged by the rise of Marxist thinking. In this narrative, the humanities had no place; indeed, the critical ideas that they fostered were threatening to the 'new order' under construction.

As this idea took hold, the promise of the enlightenment slipped further and further away from its open-endedness towards a vision of the future that rested on economics alone. These departures from the post-apartheid state's anticipated destination were often sponsored by northern institutions that were keen to see that South Africa should not deviate from the emerging consensus that there was no alternative to market-driven capitalism. In real ways, this outcome echoed earlier moments in the country's development. In his book on the history of scientific and social knowledge in South Africa, Saul Dubow repeatedly suggests that science in the country was flattered by „the glow of metropolitan attention” (Dubow, 2006: 14-15). He goes on to argue that the requirements of its science „were often articulated in terms of the country's international standing or ... (economic)... competitiveness” (Dubow, 2006: 198). After the end of apartheid, a deepening subservience to homogenising clichés like 'international best practice' in economic practice closed out any possibility that the local could offer anything fresh, or interesting, unless it had been approved by the metropolitan gaze.

The importation and appropriation of market fundamentalism was a re-run of the past horror for the humanities, because the approach passively accepted – as apartheid had once done with the question of race – a condition which should have been subjected to intellectual scrutiny and critique. Especially materially, but also methodologically, it was less and less possible to offer essential critique. Consider, as an example, the issue of method. The country witnessed a remarkable growth in the popularity of scenario-building – a reductionist approach to understanding social futures which is culled from management studies. Structured scenario-building exercises compress the possible futures which might be created from the social world into sound-bites which, when strung together, sketch a future which is predetermined and can only be mediated by market forces and its political twin, liberal democracy – a return to the ‘end of history’ thesis. Through this kind of reductionism, the arts, the critical social sciences – the humanities, in general – were increasingly regarded as superfluous to the imperative of exercising ‘rational social choice’ in the interests of a single outcome: economic growth.

This, of course, was the same intellectual pattern which makes up the popular master narrative called globalisation. Given the intensity of theoretical questioning that had once marked the humanities in South Africa, it was remarkable that this idea was accepted as a social fact, as the country’s only possible destination. By failing to raise questions, the humanities (both in South Africa and elsewhere) have paid a high price for the creation of what Emma Rothschild calls a „society of universal commerce” (Rothschild, 2002: 250). One of these costs Vrinda Nabar has described as the view that „the humanities and languages are unnecessary indulgences” (Furedi, 2004: 3).

This thinking, which has by now permeated deep into South African society, will now occupy our attention. Consider schooling: private schools report the view that parents assess education in investment terms, with the idea of ‘value for money’ playing a strong role; most want their children prepared for a ‘lucrative career’ and believe that the humanities will not equip their children for this trajectory. At the public end of schooling, the legacy of apartheid continues to blight the lives – and individual prospects – of the majority of the country’s population. Teaching is poor, facilities inadequate, and access to the social capital essential for higher education is largely lacking. Within the universities, the humanities are largely charged with setting right these structural failings. In addition, the newly introduced ‘outcomes-based’ school curriculum is prescriptive: every pupil is compelled to do a mathematics course

in the final three grades of school. Other compulsory subjects are English, a first additional language and a course called 'life orientation'. This leaves only three subjects to choose from to complete the total of seven. It is, therefore, not always easy to achieve a desirable balance between the sciences and the humanities. In addition, because they are considered to be an 'easy option' – even amongst the ranks of university recruiters – the bulk of poorly prepared students enter the humanities.

These issues are exacerbated by a public discourse which is unidirectional. The importance of mathematics, science and technology is a constant theme: their case is often highlighted by government spokespeople, by the business community and by think-tanks and public policy experts – the last two of which groupings seem entirely dominated by economists. Few examples of humanities-trained successes in the everyday world of commercial or industrial work are considered. In addition, television programmes, especially soap operas and sitcoms, depict characters with high-powered careers, usually in the field of business, which guarantee an affluent lifestyle. The value of a humanities education is seldom emphasised.

In general, these realities have expressed themselves in student growth rates in humanities that are substantially below the growth rates in total numbers of students, dominated by a fall-off in humanities students in the early- and mid-1990 s.

Within the higher education system, planning has forced South Africa's government to use the national purse to steer higher education towards the market. So, for more than a decade, the national subsidy for producing a humanities graduate was less than that of a graduate in other disciplines. The rationale for this decision (only partly based on costs of instruction) were also partly pure public-choice theory: a graduate in either science or commerce would help to 'grow the economy' while the value of a graduate in the humanities could be measured within the logic of economic rationality. This approach of course disregarded Edward Ayers's assertion that the „humanities are intrinsically inefficient” and that training in the humanities did „not obviously translate into the requirements for a first job” (Ayers, 2009: 30). A new funding formula, which came into effect in 2004, changed this evaluative balance somewhat. The subsidy is now calculated according to the field of study (in a simple funding grid where most of the subjects in humanities are in the lowest-yielding category), as well as the level of the degree – so, a Bachelor's



degree has less weighting than a Master's degree, which in turn is less than that of a Doctorate. This funding system is based on the input costs of training rather than on the output benefit to the economy. This has certainly increased the 'returns' – to intentionally use the accounting term – but the money available for humanities is still much less than it is for science fields.

Within the university funding formula, research outputs are rewarded by a cash pay-out to the author's respective home institution. The greater weighting of these rewards is for research which is published in academic journals, with books and especially book chapters generally yielding lower 'returns'. While some efforts are underway to repair this situation, there is an overall lack of appreciation of the deep scholarship necessary in the writing of a peer-reviewed book, which in turn shows a lack of understanding of the humanities on the part of policy steeped in free market thinking. This said, statistical and bibliometric evidence suggests that the humanities and social sciences (here the definition includes education) account for approximately 40 percent of all output in accredited journals in South Africa. However, this work chiefly appears in local journals which are not ISI-indexed and therefore not internationally recognised – interestingly, this outcome is a mirror of that in the natural and health sciences. When measured against ten similar science systems (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Egypt, Malaysia, Mexico, Portugal, Singapore, Spain and Turkey), South African humanities-authored articles in ISI-indexed journals compared favourably in terms of international visibility, measured as citation rates. Social science articles were ranked in the sample behind Singapore and Brazil in terms of field-normalised citation rates, while the humanities were ranked fourth behind Argentina, Portugal and Egypt.

Complications have also arisen from the way in which research funding is organised and managed in the country. In apartheid times, the chief funding agency, the Foundation for Research and Development (FRD), was devoted to the financing of the natural sciences and technology; around this focus a distinct, and quite effective, operating culture had developed. At apartheid's end, along with most other institutions in the country, the FRD went through extensive reorganisation, resulting in the establishment of the National Research Foundation (NRF), through a merger between the FRD and the Centre for Science Development (CSD), the granting arm of the HSRC. By legislation, the NRF became responsible for the promotion and support of research in the humanities and the social sciences. This has not been a happy development. For one thing, during the time of the FRD, a simple system of 'rated scientists'

was deployed, and these scientists were guaranteed access to funding; this system was re-crafted at the birth of the NRF to include the humanities. In its new (and very elaborate) form, guaranteed funding was removed from the rating, and the system began to operate on the basis of universities competing for the prestige attached to rated scientists. (More recently, however, in another revamp of the system, funding levels have been restored). Nevertheless, many in the humanities (and some in the experimental sciences, too) have turned their backs on the 'rating system' – as the programme is called. Because this is contested ground, a few lines of explanation are required. In a report issued in May 2009, the NRF claimed that the number of humanities and social science researchers had increased „from<sup>2</sup>1% to 31% of the total number of rated researchers over the last five years” (NRF, 2009: 15). But an earlier report (NRF, 2007: 4) – which supports this growth in numbers – indicated that in 2005 only 9.8 % of the total number of staff in both the humanities and the natural sciences in South Africa had been rated. A further obstacle in the relationship between the NRF and the humanities community involved an early effort to focus research into focus areas. These 'exclusionary modes' largely failed to take account of the critical tradition in the humanities.

In 2007, John Higgins, one of the country's leading thinkers and himself the recipient of the highest rating of the NRF, published a piece excoriating the NRF for its approach to the humanities (Higgins, 2007). The NRF has been responsive to this and other criticism, and sensitive management of the humanities portfolio may have made the academy more interested in co-operation, although several stumbling blocks remain. One of these has been the creation of government-funded research chairs which have been rolled out by the NRF. In these, 24 of 80 have been in the humanities and social sciences, including a number in the economic sciences, which are not routinely counted in with the humanities.

The humanities, as Edward Ayers (Ayers, 2009. 25) suggests, 'live' in many places and it is to a place other than the universities that attention will briefly turn. The HSRC, the prototype of which was suggested by Eddie Malherbe in 1921 (Smit, 1984), commands a central – if somewhat historically controversial – space in the humanities in South Africa. In the 1980 s, as the struggle to end apartheid drew to a close, the HSRC was accused of legitimising the reform initiatives of the apartheid government by offering scientific support for social programmes (White, undated). Its current mandate „to act as a knowledge hub between research, policy and action; thus increasing the impact of research” – as its website states – reflects the organisation's interest in making

a difference in people's lives. But this is not uncontroversial, since much of the HSRC's work is at the applied end of social *science*, in particular. It certainly has the greatest single concentration of researchers in the country (some 165 professionals in all), who are supported by technical colleagues, and it boasts that its four multidisciplinary research programmes, two cross-cutting research units and three research centres are focused „on user needs”. These are:

- Research programmes: Child, Youth, Family and Social Development, Democracy and Governance, Education, Science and Skills Development, and Social Aspects of HIV/AIDS and Health;
- Cross-cutting units: Policy Analysis and Capacity, Enhancement Unit and Knowledge Systems;
- Centres: Education Quality Improvement, Poverty, Employment and Growth and Centre for Service Delivery.

The HSRC has come in for criticism for the high salaries paid to its researchers and for recruiting academics from the university system. It has also not shown deep interest in developing – or, rather, redeveloping – interest in areas like literature, history, philosophy, religion, art history, music, drama and the like. There are, it seems, some discussions within the HSRC to fill this lacuna in its work by directing attention towards the humanities, but ways to achieve this appear still to be at the embryonic stage. It is fair to say that the applied policy direction of the HSRC is understandable in a country like South Africa where poverty levels are high and where the gap between the richest and poorest is the largest in the world. It is also true that the HSRC has helped to open up space for humanities in the country. Its publishing house, the HSRC Press, operates on an open access system which provides free access to all its publications as part of its public purpose mandate. This is no trifling matter in a country where the selling price of books has greatly increased. However, weaknesses in its approach are evident. One of these has been an unwillingness to engage in the debates on macro-economic policy which, as this chapter has made clear, has helped to drive the humanities to the margins of intellectual enquiry.

#### 4 In search of recovery

These are the somewhat gloomy circumstances that have confronted the humanities in South Africa for the best part of fifteen years. Once at the centre of

the university (and, indeed, in the country), and at the forefront of the struggle to end apartheid, they now face shrinking budgets, economic determinism and managerialism. Of course, as the responses to a number of enquiries have shown, the South African humanities are not alone in facing

declining proportions of students and faculty positions, low funding inside the university, a diminished audience beyond the academy, disorientating shifts in demography of students and faculty, and dislocating theoretical innovations. (Ayers 2009: 24)

But in South Africa, as these pages have argued, this outcome has been subjected to particular pathologies. To the question of how the humanities in South Africa have responded to these many challenges we must now turn.

In the late-1990 s, the government appeared to encourage the idea that all the country's universities should adopt what was called a 'programme approach' to under-graduate education. This approach reflected the thinking of planners whose ideal-model is that of the (mostly professional) faculties where planned curricula are the norm, but the approach also fitted the modular agenda of the National Qualifications Framework which was set up by the South African Qualifications Authority. In practice, across the country, the 'programme approach' resulted in long-standing (and often very strong) humanities departments being merged, reorganised or simply disestablished. Some of the 'programmes' have continued, while others reflected instrumentalist 'morphing' into occupational studies like museum studies, tourism studies and the like. The overall consensus was that the move was a disastrous step for the humanities. A powerful and intellectually rich department of German studies at UCT, for instance, was wrecked by 'programmatic rationalisation' and a Department of Afrikaans at the University of the Witwatersrand, which was at the cusp of literary studies in the country, was closed. Interestingly, one dean faced off the rush into programmes – it never was a directive from the government – by suggesting that all he would do was „learn the language”. Like all efforts that hope to rupture the crafted balance upon which the humanities rest, this approach was corrosive rather than creative. Notwithstanding this, the temptation to make the humanities 'useful' to the market continues. (One institution has recently out-imagined even the Hegelian ingenuity of Fukuyama by proposing to launch a programme called the Bachelor of Commerce Honours in Peace, Security and Economic Development!)

Individual academics have published thoughts on their own fears for the humanities. This work is often a mix of fear for the future of the established canon mixed with the difficult political issues involved in political transformation, especially the consistent pressures to rethink and reconsider the curriculum in the cause of 'Africanisation' (see Cornwell, 2006). These same issues were dramatically highlighted in a controversy at the UCT in 1996 between the distinguished Africanist Mahmood Mamdani, who then held the AC Jordan Chair of African Studies, and the university authorities over the development of a syllabus for a foundation course in African studies. Mamdani's proposal, which drew strongly on a Pan-Africanist perspective, was rejected by his faculty colleagues; he later resigned to take up a Chair at Columbia. Undoubtedly, this was but the first salvo in deep and fierce debates that are certain to follow, and indicates why conversations on the epistemologies in the humanities and social sciences are necessary.

There have been interesting moves towards (what is sometimes called) the 'new disciplines' in South Africa. Embryonic interest in film studies has, for example, developed into a healthy and flourishing programme at UCT. The same university has also developed a strongly institutionalised gender programme through the African Gender Institute which publishes the continent's first regional gender studies journal, *Feminist Africa*. A number of other universities, too, have developed programmes in gender or women's studies. Other new disciplines have been developed around HIV/AIDS – an issue in which South Africa has an obvious interest given that it has the highest infection rate in the world. Here, the perennial interface between – in this case, medical sciences and the humanities – has generated many tensions, although an annual HIV/AIDS conference has witnessed interesting areas of co-operation. In this area, the HSRC has developed an international reputation in second-generation surveillance of the pandemic.

Studies into water have also seen innovative work done at the interface between the natural and the social sciences; some universities, like the University of the Western Cape (UWC), have developed cross-disciplinary postgraduate degrees in the field which are run through the recently established Institute for Water Studies. Equally successful, and at the same institution, has been the development of work dedicated to the sensitive issue of land, its redistribution and agricultural policy. This, the Program for Land, Agricultural and Agrarian Studies (the acronym 'PLAAS' is the Afrikaans word for 'farm'), is focused on one of the most challenging issues facing a country in which ac-

cess to the land was rigidly policed during the centuries of colonialism and decades of apartheid alike. Following Thabo Mbeki's championing of the notion, a Centre for African Renaissance Studies was established at UNISA in June 2003. A very interesting and innovative intellectual development was the establishment of a dedicated institute, called the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER), at this university in 2001. Five things stand out in the successes which WISER has undoubtedly enjoyed: an unhesitating willingness to be reflective; a desire to speak directly to the public; the courage to explore difficult and controversial themes; freeing good researchers from teaching; and foreign funding. In other places – the Centre for the Humanities at UWC and the Centre for Critical Racism at the University of KwaZulu-Natal are examples – newer efforts at developing and strengthening the humanities in the country are underway.

Some individual disciplines, like African languages, have effectively had to reinvent themselves. To briefly explain: early settlers were involved in the codification of these languages and, during the apartheid years, the teaching and associated research related to African languages, especially in Afrikaans universities, was mainly aimed at language fluency; in the English universities, a move towards linguistics took these languages away from their moorings in the community. After 1994, most African language departments in the country experienced a drop-off in students, including mother-tongue speakers. This fall-off was part of a multifaceted process: the shift towards English as the language of globalisation; the attitude of students towards studying their mother tongue; and the trivialisation of the teaching of African languages within the schooling system. As a result, the African languages have developed new courses for both mother tongue and non-mother tongue students. At Rhodes University this process has involved, ironically, access to foreign funding through the South Africa–Norway Tertiary Education programme (SANTED). This programme has involved the development of non-mother tongue vocational language courses in isiXhosa and the design of mother tongue courses in isiXhosa which are linked to market-related requirements. These offer courses in translation studies, language and technology, language and society, language planning, orthography and writing skills, communication and media studies, as well as the teaching of literature as a discipline which is related to society. While the result has been an exponential growth in student numbers, the turn towards the market in this success story seems undeniable.



More concerted efforts are underway to mobilise support for the humanities by organising across universities who are often forced to compete for students and funding. The deans of humanities faculties have recently met and committed themselves to the formation of an organisation called the South African Humanities Deans Association (SAHUDA). Whether these meetings can lead to anything more substantial – or even an organised process of lobbying – is still an open question. Perhaps, however, the most interesting development was a decision by the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) to create a consensus panel<sup>11</sup> on the state of the humanities in South Africa. Driven by some of the concerns that have been raised in these pages, the panel hopes to deliver a report on ways to revive the humanities within academe, and to explore ideas to reassert the centrality of the humanities in South Africa's national life. Of course, similar exercises have been tried elsewhere, and if Harpham (2005) is to be believed, these are merely reflections of the never-ending perception that the humanities are in crisis.

The new energy in South Africa's humanities – whatever its funding or its institutional base – has the single goal of bringing a deeper understanding of the importance of the humanities in a country in search of self. Recognising this brings us to a deeper explanation of the title of this chapter. From their commanding place in South Africa during the long struggle to end apartheid, the humanities have been orphaned by the rise of the 'New South Africa' and by the country's manufactured rejection of what the humanities can offer both the country and humankind. The challenge now is to find a way back – and to recognise, as the South African writer André Brink has suggested, that „*reality* only begins where *information* ends” (Brink, 2001: 3-4).

This chapter – a mix of report and analysis – has tried to convey the idea that the 'New South Africa' is not what it once promised. In the opening paragraphs it was suggested that South Africa's experience of change adds empirical force to Max Weber's claim that revolutionary ideas are invariably 'disciplined' by social and political processes. If the rationality which was first projected upon social science by Weber was even-handed, however, then the sense of loss experienced throughout the humanities in South Africa would be explainable, even perhaps tolerable. But policy in post-apartheid South Af-

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<sup>11</sup> The establishment of a consensus panel is an accepted practice to the investigation of an issue by ASSAf. The consensus panel on the humanities was established in 2008 and will submit a report in 2010. It is chaired by ASSAf Vice-President Jonathan Jansen and the author of this paper, Peter Vale.



rica is increasingly determined by 'experts', few of whom are trained in the humanities, and by a technical language upon which their decisions rest. This has dealt a double blow to the humanities in the country: first, their commanding position within the academy has been supplanted by the rise of new ways of both knowing and explaining; and, second, their role in freeing South Africa has been entirely ignored.

Legacy issues, too, hang heavily over the humanities in South Africa. The three approaches to the humanities which have been examined here have left huge areas of contestation and disparities. So, who talks for (and in) the humanities is at the heart of an intense debate. Are they – and the entire South African academy – still trapped in Dubow's „network of imperial knowledge”? What will happen to the Afrikaans language which, unlike English, does not speak „as outsiders in their own society” (Mkandawire, 2005:7)? Can a crusading Afrocentrism bring the humanities in South Africa 'home' to the continent and the diaspora? Given the history we have traversed, it is not surprising that these questions are played out in the everyday institutional life of the humanities where appointments, and funding and publishing remain mortgaged to the country's unhappy and divided past.

Notwithstanding the hurdles and divisions described in these pages, the humanities continue to challenge South Africa as much as South Africa challenges the humanities. Drawing from Max Horkheimer's thinking, the social theorist Ted Schatzki recently described South Africa as an „evolving societal constellation”. He goes on to say, „South Africa is positioned to contribute strongly in the future to the elaboration of social theories adequate to changing global constellations of power, finance, culture, production and governance”(Schatzki, 2009: 30).

But the perennial promise of the humanities is the never-ending hope of human ingenuity and the power of imagination, the spirit of enquiry, and the creation of a world of possibilities. This suggests that we should end with a question for the future. Do the orphan years of the humanities in South Africa lie before or behind us?

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