

THE NECESSITY FOR NEW PERSPECTIVES IN SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORY WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE GREAT TREK

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Philosophic analysis of the reason for differing perspectives in History should begin, paradoxically, with the present. This is because 'History' is in fact a construct of the constantly renewed human minds in an ever-changing present. Figuratively, these minds balance for brief periods upon the rim of the irreversible, ever-rolling wheel of the 'present'. Behind it stretch the tracks of the past — sometimes quite well-defined but, more often, obscured by the drifting sands of time and distance. Because the motion of this wheel is ever-forward, the full reality of the past that lies behind remains physically irrecoverable: it cannot be repeated or reconstructed — as in a laboratory experiment — for it has forever slid away backward into Hamlet's "undiscover'd country from whose bourne no traveller returns." All that the historian can do, as Collingwood emphasises, is to use the surviving traces of this lost past to enhance a present perception or perspective.¹ Rightly, Oakeshott observes: "the past varies with the present, rests upon the present, is the present."²

Thus, the historian, like the man-in-the-street, is the product of his own time — as also, indeed, is his history. Professor Pieter de Klerk puts it thus: 'Wetenskapsbeoefening kan nooit losgemaak word van geloofsoortuiging nie.'³ And because the present intellectual and social environment is always changing, so, too, will the historian's own perspectives — and those of the scholars who come after him — be in constant flux. Professional historians over time may get nearer to that elusive concept 'objective truth', but it is in fact philosophically and practically impossible to satisfy Ranke's ideal of establishing '*wie es eigentlich gewesen*' ('what really happened') during the Great Trek or, indeed, during any other event. The historian's real position is better captured in E.H. Carr's *caveat* that he should not 'think of himself as an eagle surveying the scene from a longely crag or as a V.I.P. at the saluting base ... The historian is just another dim figure travelling along in another part of the procession.'⁴

Given, therefore, the fact that every historian's perspective is limited and relative and the fact that new perspectives must develop as new generations of historians balance on the ever-rolling wheel of Time, the contours of the past will inevitably look different as the light of inquiry is beamed upon them from these other — newer — angles and directions. In Tawney's words:

'the past reveals to the present what the present is capable of seeing, and the face which to one age is blank, to another will be pregnant with meaning.'⁵

There is a further paradox: not only is the so-called 'present' constantly changing our

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1. R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1946), pp. 282—315.
 2. M. Oakeshott, *Experience and its Modes* (Cambridge, 1933), p. 107.
 3. P. de Klerk, *Geskiedenis as Kultuurontwikkeling* (Durban en Pretoria, Butterworth, 1981), p. 153.
 4. E.H. Carr, *What is History* (London, MacMillan, 1962), p. 30.
 5. R.H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (London, 1926, rev. Penguin ed. 1965), p. 11.

historical perspectives; but also the 'past' itself is never fully and finally defined! The reason is that the great forward-rolling wheel of Time is constantly adding further treadmarks to the track of the past, making of it a "continuing continuity". Thus, an event by itself, at its immediate completion, will not be the same as "itself" together with its own or related consequences — first over years, then over centuries. 'A' does not equal 'A' + 1 year; nor is 'A' + 1 year the same as 'A' + 100 years. In 1919, from the perspective of Versailles, the First World War seemed to be 'the war to end all wars'; in 1933, with the rise of Hitler, some felt it had established an imbalance that needed redress; and, in 1945, the recent atomic and genocidal holocausts of the Second World War made the Great War seem simply the first act in an as-yet-incomplete trilogy by which Mankind was committing suicide in the 20th century.

South African history, too, can never be fixed and static while Time constantly yokes new events in front of the original conjunction of circumstances, thereby changing it. Johannes de Bruyn's recent comments on the Great Trek itself show well how the 'addition' of newer, more modern facts can change an original, older fact:

'It is not likely that the Voortrekkers themselves appreciated the significance of their exodus, but to their descendants the Trek was and is an inexhaustible source of inspiration for speeches, historiography, literary works, celebrations and the erection of monuments.'⁶

All of this latter-day addition, clearly, has altered the actual event of the original Trek. Here, then, is a second justification for the revaluation of perspectives being undertaken in the Great Trek conference of January 1988 — and for the further re-assessments that must undoubtedly come with future generations.

There is one final philosophical point regarding the need to accommodate new perspectives — and it tends to be of practical and methodological, rather than abstract, application. Most of our earlier South African historians were brought up on the Rankean tradition of hermeneutic documentary interpretation. This remains a valuable and still highly relevant technique. Yet it tends perhaps to overstress the role of the active agent of human intention — Man and, in particular, the so-called "Great Man" as a prime mover in History. But the expanding human and natural sciences have recently been invading the historical field. They show that human motive is often blended with impersonal aggregate forces which may be economic, ecological, climatological, sociological, demographic, anthropological, etc. Perhaps we have underplayed the importance of these disciplines to our own?

The example of analogy and comparison can help to show how the perspectives on certain great events of world history have been changed and refined by the clash and interaction of viewpoints and the forward roll of Time. Such an exercise in comparing, let us say, the evolving patterns in the historiography of the French Revolution, the German Bid for European hegemony in the 20th century, and the British Industrial Revolution, cannot but help to demonstrate to us how we must expect the great events in our own history — for example, the *Mfecane/Difaqane*, Great Trek, and Mineral Revolution — to change their shape as we view them from the newer perspectives of an ever-changing present.

The historiography of the French Revolution begins with contemporary comment which is concerned with the power and weakness of human motive and is consequently prone to value and moral judgements — in simple terms whether the Revolution was a

6. T. Cameron & S.B. Spies (eds.), *An Illustrated History of South Africa* (Johannesburg, J. Ball, 1986), p. 127.

good thing or, to take the harsher judgement of Burke, a retrogressive development in the slow cumulative process of human improvement.⁷ (If we are to seek a parallel to this preoccupation with human volition in the historiography of the Great Trek we might find it in some of the writings of Gustav Preller, for example in the human triumph and tragedy embodied in his view of Piet Retief.) Next, Hegelianism downplayed the individual and made the French Revolution one of those violent spasms by which the composite "mind" of Humanity advanced towards an idealistic freedom.⁸

In the first half of the 19th century the 'class' interpretation began to establish itself and, as a kind of 'religion of revolution' — Talmon's description — played a profound part in influencing the trend of socialist and later Marxist thought in the mid- and latter-part of that century.⁹ The institutionalization and refinement of this "class" perspective then fell to the Sorbonne and to considerable scholars of this century such as Lefebvre and Soboul.¹⁰ But, as the depth and width of investigation increased, the more convenient categories of the 'class' interpretation could no longer fit the findings even of these scholars.¹¹ And this duly became the cue for a re-emphasis upon the 'continuities' of French life by historians such as Cobban and Cobb.¹² Ultimately, the interpretation of the French Revolution seems likely to rest most heavily on the thesis that it was a re-alignment of forces that had slipped cumulatively out of balance during the process of modernization. More of this anon ...

A similar, though not entirely parallel, development to that of the French Revolution can be noted in the historiography of the German bid for European hegemony in the 20th century. In the immediate post-1945 period the emphasis of historians was very much upon morality — with outrage at what was perceived as the militarist-racialist motor of German national life being a defining characteristic.¹³ But because the sources of this scholarship remained relatively narrow, the way opened up for a much more sophisticated reply by scholars of the calibre of Ritter and Meinecke.¹⁴ By them the peculiar continuities of German life were skilfully blended and submerged into the wider background of European developments. Nazism, as such, thus seemed more and more of an aberration and discontinuity.

7. See J.M. Roberts, *The French Revolution* (London, O.U.P., 1978), pp. 138–140.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 140.

9. See J.L. Talmon, *Political Messianism: the Romantic Phase* (London, 1960), pp. 17–18; see Marx's classic statement of the materialist and class position in *Preface to the Critique of Political Economy*, cited in D. McLennan, *Selected Writings of Karl Marx* (Oxford, O.U.P., 1977), pp. 389–90.

10. A. Mathiez, *The French Revolution* (London, 1928); Georges Lefebvre, *The French Revolution from its origins to 1793* (Vol. 1, London, 1962); *idem*, *The French Revolution: from 1793 to 1799* (Vol. 2, London, 1964); Albert Soboul, *The French Revolution 1787–1799* (London, 1974).

11. See G. Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1959); Lefebvre's doctoral thesis revealed some of these anomalies: *Les Paysans du Nord pendant la Révolution française* (2 vols., Lille, 1924), (New edn., Paris, 1972).

12. See Alfred Cobban, *The Social Interpretation of the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1964); R. Cobb, *The Police and the People: French Popular Protest 1789–1820* (Oxford, 1970); *idem*, *Reactions to the French Revolution* (1972), *Paris and its Provinces* (1975); the original stress on continuities comes in Alexis de Tocqueville's *L'Ancien Régime* (1856). On this historiography see generally J.M. Roberts, *The French Revolution*, pp. 136–158.

13. Examples of this view are: W.M. McGovern, *From Luther to Hitler: The History of Fascist-Nazi Philosophy* (London, 1946); E. Vermeuil, *L'Allemagne contemporaine 1890–1950* (2 vols. Paris, 1953–4) and even the well-known W.L. Schirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (New York, 1960).

14. Gerhard Ritter, *Europa und die deutsche Frage* (Munich, 1948); Friedrich Meinecke, *Die deutsche Katastrophe* (Wiesbaden, 1946).

Unwittingly, Fritz Fischer then suggested a fresh perspective upon the Wilhelmine Reich (and, by implication, upon the Third Reich) which helped to prompt a newer, social-structuralist analysis of the formations and dynamics of German late 19th century and 20th century existence.¹⁵ And, just as the coarse mesh of group- or class-analysis seemed about to sieve away the role of the individual, the corrective appeared. So the rôle of Hitler was carefully reinterpreted in relation to the context which surrounded and preceded him — and without skirting the crucial issue of the holocaust.¹⁶ But these were no longer naïve exercises in unqualified moral obloquy but, at least in one significant modern interpretation, skilful syntheses of the structural and individual factors that pointed to the 'primacy of politics' within the peculiar socio-economic expansion-dynamic of the Third Reich.¹⁷

What we note as common in the historiographical development of the French Revolution and the German bid for hegemony in Europe is the way apologia and condemnation on moral grounds gave way, first, to analysis of 'discontinuities' — on the one hand, the 'unparalleled' triumph of the revolutionary 'bourgeoisie' and, on the other, Hitler's 'unique' trajectory of successful *coups*, with their ultimately disastrous consequences! These then seem to have suggested the vital complementary exercise of identifying the "continuities" of European national life; and for this type of investigation the so-called 'science of society' had to be invoked. But the crude reductionist techniques of that new science in its infancy themselves proved inadequate as more-sophisticated and less-ideological perspectives began to present themselves. Too many exceptions to the rules of the models of materialist theorizing pointed to the need to reassess human motive — but in relation to prevailing psychological '*weltanschauunge*', mind-sets, and '*mentalités*' both of the social matrix and of the individuals who made it up. And here French *Annalian* analysis has presented itself as one of the most penetrating perspectives from which to measure how ideology shapes, and is shaped by, the events of the past.¹⁸

When we look at the general comparative patterns of accumulating historiography that have emerged from our digression into two great events of World History, and then apply the dominant *motifs* (as opposed to the actual material) to South African Historiography, we are immediately struck by the common features and 'resonances'. As the authors of works on both the French Revolution and the German bid for hegemony have shaken off their preoccupation with the immediate detail and personalities and ventured far beyond the chronological compartment of primary investigation, they have become preoccupied with 'contextualizing' the event within a wider framework. Gradually, both events have come to be seen by many of their interpreters as significant steps in the process which is labelled 'modernization'. (In comparative perspective, the French Revolu-

Fritz Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht* (Dusseldorf, 1961), Eng. trans. *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (London, 1966); for the 'Fischer Controversy' see the collected essays in Hans W. Koch (ed.), *The Origins of the First World War* (London, 1972); H-U. Wehler, *Das Kaiserreich, 1871—1918* (Göttingen, 1973), Eng. trans. *The German Empire, 1871—1918* (Leamington Spa, 1984). Though Wehler wrote mainly on the Second Reich, his thrust is towards a continuity in the structures of German society up to 1945.

For a summary of these viewpoints see Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (London, E. Arnold, 1985), pp. 8—10.

A.J.P. Taylor in 1961 had illustrated the shortcomings of attributing all to Hitler: *The Origins of the Second World War*; see Tim Mason, 'The Primacy of Politics' — The Primacy of Politics in National-Socialist Germany' in H.A. Turner (ed.), *Nazism and the Third Reich* (New York, 1972). Mason originally published his argument in 1966.

18. For an example of *Annalian* analysis of an 'aberrant' *mentalité* see Emmanuel le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou: Cathars and Catholics in a French Village, 1294—1324* (tr. Barbara Bray, London, Harmondsworth Penguin, 1980).

tion features as a sudden acceleration in this process which forced a corresponding 'release' of long-accumulating tensions; the Nazi Era, by contrast, has been interpreted, along with Fascism, as an example of either a 'diseased' form of modernization, or of atavistic recidivism!¹⁹

Similarly, the historians of South Africa are perhaps less interested now than ever before with the individually compartmented, 'self-standing', and idiosyncratic event or phenomenon — and are also, therefore, much more concerned with how that event fits into a pattern or sub-pattern of this process of modernization. As Professor Flip Smit emphasised in his inspiring paper to the South African Historical Society in January 1987, this preoccupation with modernization and relevance to a wider context and longer time-span has come about because the past has suddenly *caught up* with the present in our Historiography: we are compelled to grasp the trends of modernization — and more particularly the sub-trends of that process called 'industrialization' and 'urbanization' — if we are to understand, mediate, and ameliorate the way these historical dynamics impinge on our national life today.²⁰

When we concern ourselves with modernization we find that the Mineral Revolution occupies centre-stage. Earlier historiography, from the 'settler historians' Theal and Cory, to the argument of their Liberal critics MacMillan, McCrone and Marais, that the blighting of race-relations resulted from persisting 'frontier attitudes' — and even the 'heroic' interpretation of the Great Trek as a nationally-uplifting exodus from a 'house-of-bondage' — have all, willy-nilly, found themselves shifting, or being shifted, before this inexorable new industrial imperative, with its power derived from the pressures of the present.²¹

The first South African historian really to get to grips with the process of modernization, industrialization and urbanization in its wide social context is De Kiewiet.²² But the themes he touched upon have all recently been taken up and greatly elaborated. Thus, the 'Second Great Trek' to the towns in the 20th century — and life of the Afrikaner in the new urban environment — has become the complement to the Great Trek itself of the 19th century. The RAU project "Die Afrikaner aan die Rand" illustrates this new slant, as do studies like Professor van Jaarsveld's *Verstedeliking in Suid-Afrika*. And if the earlier point is remembered — namely, that more modern events are always being added to older ones to change their meaning for the present generation — then the study of this new 'Great Trek' of white, black and brown peoples to the cities must inevitably change the perspective upon the original Great Trek into the wilderness — and upon the associated movements of the black *Mfecane/Difaqane*. Thus, the contention that the original Great Trek might have been, at least in one of its many dimensions, a means to solve the developing 'poor white' problem of land-availability for subsistence on the Eastern Frontier provides an example

19. For an interpretation of the French Revolution as a 'release' see J.M. Roberts, *The French Revolution*; for the differing interpretations of the 'modern' and 'anti-modern' dynamics in Nazism and Fascism see: H.A. Turner, 'Fascism and Modernization' in H.A. Turner (ed.), *Reappraisals of Fascism* (N.Y., F. Watts, 1975), pp. 117–39.
20. A.P. Smit & A. Wessels, 'Fagan en Tomlinson: Twee Perspektiewe ten opsigte van Verstedeliking,' Paper given to the South African Historical Society, Stellenbosch, 21 Jan., 1986.
21. This viewpoint results from a reading of a number of recent surveys of South African Historiography, notably as a member of the History Work-Committee for the H.S.R.C. Project on *Inter-group Relations*. Among the unpublished submissions were reports on 'Tussengroepverhoudinge soos weerspieël in die Suid-Afrikaanse Historiografie' and 'Radical Revisionist Historiography'. For an earlier published version of one debate see Harrison M. Wright, *The Burden of the Present* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1977).
22. C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South African Social and Economic* (London, O.U.P., 1941).

of how a latter-day rural/urban comparative perspective of the 20th century has helped to project a new interpretation a whole century backwards, into the early/mid-19th century!

When we take up our stance as historians in the modern era and look back toward the Great Trek, it is probably the contrast of situations — the 'discontinuity' — that strikes us most. The era of rural diaspora is replaced by the great magnetic convergence of industrialization, which draws individuals, peoples, resources, communications and cultures together into an all-embracing 'rationalization' — to use a Weberian concept.²³ One is struck, too, by the different perspectives from which historians have viewed this great industrial acceleration in the longer process of modernization. On the one hand, there is De Kiewiet's and O'Dowd's anticipation that barriers of race will be rendered anachronistic by the new dynamic.²⁴ On the other hand, some interpreters, often with socialist or Marxian commitments, align with the more pessimistic perspective that historians of the Left have taken towards the Industrial Revolution in England as the original example of the accelerative process. Here they have as their models authors like Engels, Arnold Toynbee, and the Hammonds, who all viewed this early British example of industrialization as exploitative and immiserating.²⁵

In the case of South African industrialization radical-revisionist scholars have tended to stress the congruence of race and class, with the latter being functionally predominant. And looking, for instance, to Hobsbawm's emphasis upon how capital was supposed to have 'bought off' and 'aristocracy of labour' during British Industrialization, they have discovered a ready-made model which can be used to explain — as a horizontal 'class' phenomenon — what might otherwise seem a vertical "ethnic" cleavage between the white and black segments of the working class in the South African mining context.²⁶

The earlier applications of the class struggle thesis to South African historiography tended to accept the starkly reductionist "base-superstructure" Marxist model before beginning to follow the Althusserian-Poulantzian stress upon the contentions of 'fractions of capital' for hegemony in the State.²⁷ But, again, it is the historiography of the British

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23. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber* (London, Routledge, 1948), p. 51, and *passim*.
 24. M.C. O'Dowd, 'South Africa in the Light of the Stages of Economic Growth' in A. Leftwich (ed.), *Economic Growth and Political Change* (1974), pp. 29–43; and *idem*, 'The Stages of Economic Growth and the Future of South Africa' in L. Schlemmer & E. Webster (eds.), *Change, Reform and Economic Growth in South Africa* (1977).
 25. F. Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* (1845, Eng. Trans. 1892); Arnold Toynbee, *Lectures on the Industrial Revolution of the Eighteenth Century in England* (London, Longman, 1912); John and Barbara Hammond, *The Village Labourer 1760–1832* (1911); *The Town Labourer 1760–1832; The New Civilisation* (1918); *The Skilled Labourer 1760–1832* (1919); *The Rise of Modern Industry* (1925); *The Age of the Chartists* (1930).
 26. See E.J. Hobsbawm, 'Trends in the British Labour Movement since 1850' (1949 rev. 1963) and 'Labour Aristocracy in Nineteenth Century Britain' (1954), both reprinted in *idem*, *Labouring Men* (London, Weidenfeld, 1968), pp. 316–43 & 272–315. Hobsbawm was elaborating the Leninist thesis of how the labour aristocracy is 'bribed' — cf. V.I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (New York, International Publishers, 1939), pp. 106–08; For examples of the 'buying off' thesis in South African Historiography see D. Denoon, 'The Transvaal Labour Crisis, 1901–1906', *Journal of African History* 7, 3 (1967); *idem*, 'Capitalist Influence and the Transvaal Government during the Crown Colony Period, 1900–1906', *Journal of African History* 11, 2 (1968); F.A. Johnstone, *Class, Race and Gold* (London, Routledge, 1976); R. Davies, *Capital, State and White Labour in South Africa* (Brighton, Harvester, 1979).
 27. One would include here the thrust of works by 'Majeke', 'Mnguni', and early S.A.C.P. pamphlets such as S.P. Bunting, *Imperialism and South Africa* (1928); more sophisticated, but also preoccupied with strict class analysis is H. Wolpe, 'Capitalism and cheap labour power in South Africa: from segregation to apartheid', *Economy and Society* I, 1 (1972); representative

Industrial Revolution that then influenced change.

As English Marxian scholars of that event were drawn into testing, high-powered debate with liberal-conservative opponents on such issues as the 'standard of living', they tended both to loosen and elaborate their hypothetical models into much more flexible vehicles of the social history which they had embraced.²⁸ Instead of identifying 'class' within the 'reductionist' — and consequently rigid — horizontal social structure of the relations of production, E.P. Thompson, for example, defined it in terms of historical-chronological experience toward greater 'consciousness'.²⁹

Thompson's desire to 'rescue' the casualties of British industrialization "from the enormous condescension of posterity" then helped to stimulate investigation into the marginalized groups and individuals — peasants and sharecroppers in the countryside and unemployed or labouring poor in the towns — who have been corresponding sufferers in South African industrialization.³⁰ Alongside studies that are directly focussed upon industrialization, there has, thus, developed a deeper pre-occupation with the "social history from the bottom up" of the subsequent, similar transition in this sub-continent.

Simultaneously, an input from sophisticated neo-Liberals like Elphick has redefined the methodological limitations that rest upon all historical research; while Lipton and Yudelman have 're-revised' how various forms of capital have affected the material self-interest of groups, their political ideologies, and the semi-autonomous strategies of the South African "State".³¹ Not only, therefore, is the trend in the interpretation of industrialization in South Africa beginning to follow into the same increasingly refined dialectic of perspectives that we noticed in the three great World historiographic controversies already mentioned here, but it is hardly difficult to indicate a degree of borrowing and transference of ideas and perspectives.

Many have emphasized the contrast between the rural diaspora of the Great Trek in the early 19th century and the convergence of industrialization and urbanization in the late 19th and 20th centuries. But, if we remember that industrialization is but a sub-process — albeit the most dramatic — of the longer, wider process which we call modernization, perhaps we have stressed the discontinuity too much? (Indeed, the inclusiveness

examples of Althusserian 'fractionalist' work are R. Davies, D. Kaplan, M. Morris & D. O'Meara, 'Class Struggle and a Periodization of the South African State', *Review of African Political Economy*, 7 (1976); cf. R. Davies, *Capital, State and White Labour in South Africa, 1910—60* (Harvester, Brighton, 1979); D. O'Meara, *Volkskapitalisme: Class, Capital and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1934—48* (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1983).

28. The literature of the 'Standard of Living' debate is too voluminous to cite here, but representative studies from both sides are: T.S. Ashton, 'The Standard of Living of the Workers in England, 1790—1830', *Journal of Econ. History* IX, 1949, suppl. pp. 19—38; R.M. Hartwell, 'Interpretations of the Industrial Revolution in England: A Methodological Inquiry', *Journal of Econ. History* 1959, and 'The Rising Standard of Living in England, 1800—1850' *Econ. Hist. Rev.* 1961; E.J. Hobsbawm, 'The British Standard of Living, 1790—1850', *Econ. Hist. Rev.* Aug. 1957, and 'The Standard of Living during the Industrial Revolution: A Discussion', *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd ser., Vol. 16 (1963), No. 1.
29. See E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, Victor Gollancz, 1963, repr. with additions, Harmondsworth Penguin, 1968), *passim*.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 13; see, for examples of these studies, C. Bundy, *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry* (London, Heinemann, 1979); C. van Onselen, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand, 1886—1914* (2 vols., Johannesburg, Ravan, 1982); B. Bozzoli (ed.), *Town and Countryside in the Transvaal* (Ravan, Johannesburg, 1983).
31. R. Elphick, 'Methodology in South African Historiography: A Defence of Idealism and Empiricism', *Social Dynamics* 9, 1 (1983), pp. 1—17; D. Yudelman, *The Emergence of Modern South Africa* (Cape Town, D. Philip, 1984); M. Lipton, *Capitalism and Apartheid* (Aldershot, Gower, 1985).

and continuities of modernization moving through into its industrial phase mark a point where the Weberian paradigm contrasts with, rather than complements, the Marxian.) It is probably because South Africa's industrialization after the 1870s is so sudden and overwhelming — and seems so much fuelled by imported capital and immigrant individual entrepreneurs — that we see it simply as a *single* leap forward rather than as a more general phenomenon which includes, also, a number of significant and cumulative preliminary spasms. If we are to borrow Rostow's terminology, we are tending thus to miss out, or underplay, the importance of the stage defined as the "Preconditions for Take-Off".³² Consequently, the interpretation of the Great Trek as an escape from the modernizing dynamic, while certainly embodying one truth, is perhaps not the whole Truth.

The other possibility is to look at the elements of modernization that *were* being exported to the interior during the Great Trek. The personality of Piet Retief is an example: on the one hand, he was a 'traditional' frontier farmer with certain "traditional" views upon what labour relations in the interior should be; on the other, he was a thoroughly "modern" man — a builder, speculator, and town-dweller for considerable periods. And this combination was further reflected in the wider Voortrekker society. There is, for example, John Montgomery's evidence of how commercial relations were maintained during the diaspora — by his actually going on the Trek himself, with the emigrants!

'I had three wagons, laden with merchandize, which I desired to dispose of, and at the same time collect my outstanding debts among the Boers ... We made the Sand River, and I found about 150 Boers assembled there under Pieter Retief, an acquaintance of mine since 1821 ... we formed a strong party, and when the Boers began to trek, one continuous string of wagons stretched as far as the eye could reach, for miles ... we had resort to many amusements, such as target shooting, putting the stone, racing, and leaping ... The evenings were spent by the old people in reading their bibles and singing psalms, whilst the young folks went in for music and dancing — a place being scuffled level in front of a tent, for a ball-room floor ...'³³

Such evidence of consciously preserved economic and cultural linkages suggests further perspectives on the issue of "modernization" and the Great Trek. Unavoidable here is the evidence of the perennial Voortrekker search for a port in order to maintain economic and social ties with the European metropole and, somewhat less enthusiastically, with the Cape sub-metropole. Second, the 'Overberg' trade with the British coastal colonies was always vital for the Trekker republics. Yet its routes, scale and precise involvement of Boer, Black and Briton still remain somewhat obscure. Third, the towns that were built by the Trekkers or by the commercial men and officials drawn into the interior in reaction — for example, Pietermaritzburg, Potchefstroom, Pretoria and even Bloemfontein — illustrate an intermediate pre-industrial stage in the modernization of the sub-continent, and, so, present fresh challenges of perspective.

The tantalizingly elusive "ways-of-life" of these early towns and their interaction with their rural neighbourhoods and with the old colony are only just beginning to be emerge as a new perspective in our historiography. Also, interesting research is being done by urban geographers into contrasting "dorpescapes" in the interior.³⁴ But further perspectives for analyzing the social context of 19th century towns may be sought in the work of

32. W.W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth* (Cambridge, 1963), *passim*, esp. pp. 6–7.

33. J. Montgomery, 'Memorials', quoted in G. Butler (ed.), *The 1820 Settlers* (Cape Town, H&R, 1974), pp. 280–1.

34. See, for example, R. Haswell, 'South African towns on European plans', *Geographical Magazine*, Vol. II, No. 10 (July 1979), pp. 686–94.

the Urban History Group and well-developed studies associated with Leicester University and with the name of the British pioneer urban historian, H.J. Dyos.³⁵ Indeed, some significant findings on 19th century South African colonial towns and their modern counterparts already reflect, among other influences, some of these perspectives.³⁶

Nevertheless, much more is likely to emerge in South Africa from what this Leicester urban history school would call "decoding the townscape and rural landscape as a 'palimpsest' of the past." Nor in this connection should we ignore the valuable insights into pioneer lifestyles that the new American school of "sociological archaeologists" can give us. As James Deetz has shown in his book, *In small things forgotten: the archaeology of early American Life* (N.Y., Anchor, 1977), the documents cannot always be 'everything' to the historian! Yet even if we do add architecture and artefacts to our sources, we shall all too quickly discover that it is one thing to collect and categorize the domestic artefact; quite another to *contextualize* it in wider socio-historical terms — even to the extent of showing how people used their household rooms in 19th century South African town and country houses.³⁷ Nevertheless, there is already considerable history building up around such everyday South African rooms as the 'Voorkamer' and the 'Kitchen' — the latter, too, telling us something about domestic labour arrangements and relationships.

Further back in time, too, as Professor Hattingh's investigations into Cape Town have shown, statistical and computer techniques associated with the so-called 'cliometrics' of certain modern American researchers are giving us a new perspective, in map form, on our earliest town. Much is also being done to help historical insight in the excellent reconstructions and preservation projects of our museums and cultural associations — as, for example, in the Stellenbosch preserved "village" of town houses from different eras. But our overall knowledge as historians in this field of social contextualizing from the archaeological evidence of material culture or computation techniques remains rather too thinly spread among too few individuals.

The need to expand our sources beyond what is purely documentary tends to emphasize a history in which a multitude of fractional "slices of past life" can gradually build up a patterned mosaic of a whole regional society in the past. Indeed, this procedure is appropriately called "slicing" and is currently being applied in another part of the southern hemisphere in the mammoth ten-volume project, involving more than 400 historians, called *The Australians*. The wide mosaic of Australian social life is not being treated entirely chronologically, but rather at 40 year gaps — 1788, 1838 (interestingly the main year of the Trek in South Africa), 1888, and 1938. At each of these points there is, then, an attempt to portray the contemporary social life of that continent in all its manifold complexity. Unavoidable, nevertheless, in work which aims at such massive and composite historical reconstructions is the *Annalian* emphasis upon the *local* — and it is reassuring to know that, in a journal like *Contree*, we are at least making a start with viewing the history of our countryside and towns at this important 'grass-roots' and 'paving-stone' level. The

35. See, for example, H.J. Dyos (ed.), *The Study of Urban History* (London, Arnold, 1968) esp. pp. 1–46: 'Agenda for Urban Historians'.
36. Urban History Projects, several of a collaborative nature, have been mounted by Pretoria University, U.C.T., Rhodes, and the University of Natal (Durban), the University of the Western Cape and elsewhere. In addition, there is the urban history work, already mentioned, at R.A.U. and Wits — esp. by the 'History Workshop' there. Two recent and interesting unpublished theses in the field are: D. Warren, 'Merchants, Commissioners and Wardmasters: Municipal Politics in Cape Town, 1840–54' (M.A., U.C.T., 1986) and P. Scott, 'An Approach to the Urban History of Early Victorian Grahamstown, 1832–53' (M.A., Rhodes, 1987).
37. *Ibid.*, *passim*; on the 'Voorkamer' see esp. 90–101, and citing the work of C. Woodward, 'The Interior of the Cape House, 1640–1714' (M.A., Pretoria, 1982).

collection of oral historical records by university and private organizations and the development of our film and video archives by the Government Archives Service is now also becoming systematic.

One of the ideas that has been implicit in this discussion of the comparative historiographies of the French Revolution, the German bid for hegemony in Europe, the British Industrial Revolution, South African Industrialization, the Great Trek, and new perspectives and techniques relevant to our historical research has been the contention that the "discontinuities" of history need to be balanced by the "continuities". Indeed, there are few better perspectives in historical research and writing than the *comparative* one in providing insight into such parallels and *continuities*.³⁸ One might perhaps argue that the socio-economic tissue of Cape society was "stretched" out into the interior during the Great Trek, but that it hardly 'snapped' into a total discontinuity. Even taking the perspective of what Braudel would call '*le temps de courte durée*' or '*l'histoire événementielle*' of political events, it is also possible to contend that important continuities have been overlooked. My study of the Imperial Factor, for example, attempts to bring out one such political continuity in policy toward the Trekkers by suggesting that the inner nature of imperial paramountcy in South Africa can be misread if one wrongly assumes that the Sand River and Bloemfontein Conventions were outright grants of sovereign independence to the Boer Republics.³⁹ Reinforcing this perspective is, further, the interesting recent study done by Dr Chris Venter into the life of the frontiersman and Cape official, Gideon Joubert.⁴⁰ The latter's life in the Colesberg district and his travels are a significant reminder that vital elements of Afrikaner society had remained behind in the colony, had developed their distinct communities and — through for example Joubert's various missions into the interior — had maintained contacts, official and unofficial, both with the Voortrekkers and, importantly, with their coloured servants and apprentices. In its own day the "discontinuity" and division involved in the Trekker movement was, thus, not necessarily an overriding factor in the lives of the South African population generally. When all is said and done, the percentage who emigrated was relatively small.

Another important perspective on continuity that is relevant both to the Trek and to a longer timespan is the study of the History of Ideas. An important sub-theme of this difficult field is political thought in its continuities and discontinuities; and here André du Toit and Hermann Giliomee have already provided a perspective that is both challenging and thought-provoking.⁴¹

Much in our history nevertheless still remains to be examined from this vital perspective, not least because it brings discussion round full-circle to current debates about the vertical mainspring of "ethnicity" and nationalism, as against the horizontal formation of 'class' and its associated 'consciousness'. And having made this full circle, with philosophical and comparative digressions, it is hoped that a persuasive case has been made out for 'the necessity of new perspectives in South African History'!

38. For two more recent works in this genre and an interesting review article on the strengths — and certain perceived shortcomings — of their comparative approach and findings see: G.M. Frederickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History* (N.Y. & Oxford, O.U.P., 1981) and J.W. Cell, *The Highest Stage of White Supremacy: The Origins of Segregation in South Africa* (Cambridge, 1982); Shula Marks, 'White Supremacy. A Review Article', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 29, No. 2, Apr., 1987, pp. 385—97.
39. J.A. Benyon, *Proconsul and Paramountcy in South Africa* (PMB, Univ. of Natal Press, 1981), pp. 29—48.
40. C. Venter, 'Gideon Daniel Joubert: Leiersfiguur op die Kaapkolonie se Noordgrens' (D.Litt. et Phil., UNISA, 1985).
41. See A. du Toit & H. Giliomee, *Afrikaner Political Thought* (Vol. 1, Cape Town, D. Philip, 1983), esp. pp. 195—229.