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KEYNOTE ADDRESS *

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Abstract

“The separation of societies from their past: An under-appreciated tragedy”

South Africa’s population consists of several groups of peoples, roughly (linguistically) defined by the number of languages used in schools. Each of these groups has a past of its own, and many occupy land where generations of ancestors are buried. They have their own origins, kinships and customs. Government acknowledges (admits) the diversity of cultures and provided among others Heritage Day to commemorate and celebrate not only the separate but also the shared histories. Unfortunately its good intentions went up in the smoke of “Braai Dag”. Neither do the CAPS History syllabi support the government’s aims in this respect. I regard them as generally narrow and politically correct in outlook, because they ignore much of what is important to the remainder. A great need for people educated and trained in local and regional history exists across the country, which not only affects government’s Conservation Management and Education System but almost all walks of life, and dangerously so in politics and parliament.

Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen.

“The separation of societies from their past: An under-appreciated tragedy”²

Thank you for the invitation, Professor Carl of the Department of Education and Dr Visser of the Department of History, who provided me with a set of CAPS History syllabi and the following pretty lead line: *“The political sanity of the public depends on the quality of its history*

1 The *Yesterday & Today* editorial panel did not edit the content in any way. The author takes sole responsibility for the views expressed in this keynote.

2 For some ideas for this talk, including its title, I am indebted to T Hunt, “Gove’s paradox”, *The Spectator*, 21 April 2012, p. 24.

teachers". I assume that it was sent to me by "Education" and not by "History" as it was not accompanied by a footnote giving its source.

"The separation of societies from their past". Think of the people who were removed from District Six and dumped on the Cape Flats.

I work with History, in a variety of fields, daily. I write both History and historical fiction, I do freelance research for other authors, for legal practitioners in the Land Claims Court and Equality Court and for City Councils. I train tour guides, amongst others. History has been kind to me, so I give my time freely to all Conservation Bodies that need help. I wondered what kind of customers I would deal with in future, how well informed, how discriminating, how understanding? What does the future hold for Applied History? Will there still be able practitioners to serve the public sector? I examined the CAPS History syllabi of 2012 critically for sense and intention. It is more than twenty years since I formally taught History. I will tell you my general impressions as a concerned practitioner.

There are two old truths about our subject: Firstly: "First ask Why?" And after "Why", follow "Who, Where, When and What", all the chronology. And after the chronology comes the next big question: "With what result?" The first and the last, "Why" and "With" what result, I regard as the historian's true task. Secondly: My favourite definition of our subject is, "History is the analysis and interpretation of documents". That is what I did with the CAPS History syllabi. I analysed and interpreted them.

I find them as "Politically Correct" (PC) as those of my own day. It makes them as exclusive (like a dog in the manger) and equally provocative. I regard them, from a personal and professional point of view, in conflict with their stated aims of "equipping learners with the knowledge, skills and values needed for self-fulfilment and meaningful participation in society as citizens".³ I experience them as limiting, and possibly stulti-fying and counter productive. Would they inspire History students to become History teachers? Because they are so PC, they do not interest me personally and I would not care to be on the teaching or the learning side of them. Because they are so PC, they invite PC text books, examples of which were shown to me. I discovered that the manipulation of (tampering with) young minds starts at a very early age (Grade 5.) I also find that they raise many questions, and in some instances, eyebrows. ("How colonization led to

³ Department of Basic Education: National Curriculum Statement, Grades R-12 (2011).

slavery". Grade 10.) Also, I miss a sequence in things, the chronology. There is no coherence without chronology. I see great gaps, particularly in Grades 10-12. History, like Truth, does not refuse to bridge gaps.

It happens in Africa that there are people without a history. They are like birds and plants.

The problem is that they have minds, with a feeling that they have been left out, they don't belong.

Now "not belonging", is taught here, in our schools.

I see, for example, in the new syllabi, plenty of Africa but very little of the Cape; much political struggle, not enough struggle against forces, bounds and needs - natural as well as human - which shaped this region. I mean that, three centuries ago, it took our ancestors nine months to put a loaf of bread on the table. Why? And with what result? That is essential knowledge, but missing.

We have here descendants of Koina, hundreds of thousands of them, in the Western Cape and elsewhere - a people in a diaspora. I notice a cultural renewal among them, a revival of interest in their origins and ancestry. They are keen to learn the old language. They assume ancient but extinct clan names like Cochoqua, Hessequa, Chainouqua. Some even refer to themselves as Outeniqua - there is even a king of the Outeniqua, which is an unfortunate fallacy, because no such clan existed. In ignorance some?, like the CAPS syllabi, refer to themselves as Koisian, which is not historical but an unholy? anachronism, a modern (1928) artificial construction, coined for the convenience of anthropologists.⁴ But the interest and historical awareness are clearly there. It is visible on the streets when they march demonstrate with placards. There is a demand for knowledge that the present syllabi do not recognise.

Where, in all of the syllabi, do we find the Koina and Sonqua? - down in Grade 5, for 10-12 year- olds, in a series of crude generalisations. Why are they virtually written out of our History? Do the compilers hope to parade the Koina and Sonqua under the Black banner? Are they afraid that Koina and Sonqua descendants, educated about their origins, will deny that they are Black, since their own ancestors lived here in isolation for hundreds of centuries? Or, are they afraid of inconvenient Koina land claims, or to a certain preference, as First People?

⁴ L. Schultze, *Zur Kenntnis der Körper der Hottentotten und Buschmänner* (Jena, 1928), p. 211.

These are just two societies separated from their past. Our past should be at the heart of education. We live at the Cape, not in Ghana or Vietnam. You hear that I advocate a largely regional syllabus, with much more local content. Why? I am from the Cape; I earn my bread here.

Please see this need for local History teaching in the context of your own province or region of origin. If, for example, I were a Grade 11 pupil born at Entonyaneni, or at Nongoma or Mahlabatini, and spoke Zulu, I believe I would enjoy it tremendously if my teacher, in that lovely language where every word, every syllable, ends in a vowel, said something like: “Three sons of Senzangakhona became king of the Zulu. Notice, grade 11’s, that the title was not passed down but sideways, which is a sign of distress, great distress,” and he or she would then tell us about uShaka and the *mfecane*, and Dingane and the Boer invasion, and Mpande the peacemaker, and then Cetzwayo and the British invasion, and the magnificent fight at Isandhlwana, and the final loss of independence. But what do they get? Ghana and Vietnam, in Grades 11 and 12. Let me tell you what Churchill said about this kind of education: “I have lived seventy-eight years without hearing of a bloody place like Cambodia.”⁵ There on the map I would see Botswana (independent), Lesotho (independent), Swaziland (independent). But where is Zululand? Why is the Afro-American civil rights movement (Malcolm X and Martin Luther King) more important than a South African community’s own history?

Crimes are committed and evil flourishes in ignorance of regional history. Take as an example Picture 1: **[PIC 1]:** We have here, growing in Klaassens Road, Bishopscourt, some *L. Brabeium stellatifolium*, wild almond trees, as you can see it is a proclaimed national monument: **[PIC 2]:** The so-called “Van Riebeeck’s hedge”. The plants grow wild on mountain slopes in the Western Cape. The Koina ate their fruit. **[PIC 3]:** It is a proper *kreupelhout* or tanglewood, that given time to grow, would under pioneering conditions make a good natural enclosure for animals. It is common knowledge that Van Riebeeck attempted, in 1660, to fence in a piece of land using these indigenous trees, to protect the Company’s draught and breeding stock against theft and its wheat fields against intrusive grazing.⁶ This information found its way into school books. One book was copied from the other, and the fact that the whole project was abandoned after two years as unnecessary, difficult to maintain, expensive and a waste of time, never

⁵ R Hyman (comp.), *A dictionary of famous quotations* (London, 1973), n.p.

⁶ DB Bosman & HB Thom (reds.), *Dagbregister gehouden bij... J.A. van Riebeeck*, deel III, 12 July 1660, p. 249.

became common knowledge.⁷ Our extensive VOC archives, readily available in Cape Town, cover the next 132 years in much detail, and as can be expected, there is no further reference to a hedge, neither is one shown on any of the hundreds of maps of the area after 1663. [PIC 4] examine [PIC 5]: That is the record.

Now for the Compton version: Professor RH Compton was the head of what became the world renowned Kirstenbosch Botanical Garden. He, a botanist, found some *Brabeium stellatifolium* growing both inside and outside his little kingdom and invented a history for them. Assuming that they were a remnant of a hedge that never existed, he appealed in 1935 to the then National Monuments Commission (NMC) to proclaim his folly as a National Monument. Why? Did he need a status symbol for his garden? Did he hope to draw school groups? But he was encouraged by the developers of the adjacent new millionaires' suburb, Bishopscourt ("the best address in Southern Africa,") who needed a marketable status symbol. Go there, and see how many of the mansions along Klaassens Road have names like Wild Almond, Wilde Amandel, Van Riebeeck House, etc. Shockingly, even for the time, Compton's written motivation, to be seen in the SAHRA files, does not contain one single syllable of archival reference.⁸ Yet, the NMC proclaimed the trees at Compton's request. Why? Can it really only be that no member of the then Commission had any knowledge at all of Cape history? Or can it? But so it remained, a national monument for 75 years.

[PIC 6]: Now for the SAHRA version: About twelve years ago the heavy bronze plaque was stolen to be sold as scrap, and the SA Heritage Resources Agency, successor to the NMC, replaced it with a new one of a synthetic material. And at the same time, illegally, secretly, like graffiti appearing on your wall overnight, a new line was mischievously slipped in to the old text. Illegally, because it was not published in the Government Gazette. Unnecessary to ask Who? That is chronology. Ask Why? Why is a small copse of completely innocent trees turned into a scapegoat, loaded with misinformation and a political label, and driven into the wilderness? Next, with reference to those trees, Kirstenbosch Garden's illustrated pamphlet for tourists takes it much further: "Van Riebeeck undertook the first act of Apartheid on South African soil."⁹ I was told about a teacher, accompanied by about 40 students, who kicked at, and cursed the poor plants: "You should die,

7 AJ Böeseken (red.), *Memoriën en Instructiën; Verklaring van P. Overtwater*, 7 September 1663, p. 60.

8 SAHRA / NMC file 11/K/Kaa 4, part 1.

9 Anonymous: *Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden: A 3-dimensional guide to Kirstenbosch Garden including interesting facts and historical information* (Copyright, Richard Smith), No date, Obverse.

you should die, for shame.”

Now for the Mbeki version, in which myth becomes malice. On 25 February 1999, the then deputy- president Mr Mbeki addressed a joint session of parliament on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Report. I quote:¹⁰

At Kirstenbosch Botanical Garden there are the remains of a 340 year old almond and thornbush hedge. Planted by Jan van Riebeeck, this thorn hedge was intended to ensure the safety of the newly arrived white European settlers, by keeping the menacing black African hordes of pagan primitives at bay. Black and white had to be kept apart, circumscribed by an equation which described each as the enemy of the other, each the antithesis of the other.

The brief statement contains some 12 strategic assumptions (e.g. that Koina are Black) and even a new religious slant: Pagan good, Christian bad. (Like in *Animal Farm*.) This is serious stuff. Did you notice that, although it was said in Parliament, there is not a word of truth in it? This is very serious. Why, in 1999, is a political attack on people long, long gone thought necessary? Why wage war on the dead, or waste words on them? Was it aimed at the minds of your students, to stir up Black indignation and evoke White guilt and a sense of not belonging? And, in spite of the much vaunted Constitution, to drive a wedge between Black and White? In other words, doing exactly that which he is ranting against? I believe that if you need a stick to beat a dog, it remains criminal to steal one. Although the Minister of Education mentions “healing the divisions of the past” as an aim in the introduction to the CAPS syllabi, not a History teacher across the nation made a whisper of protest at all this. Which raises a horrible suspicion: Are History syllabi designed to keep the truth from the people, to bury all in ignorance and leave politicians plenty of room in pursuit of power and the old gravy train? Is this not an under-appreciated tragedy?

[PIC 7]: History is also geography with people in it. This map shows where my bread, as a professional practitioner, comes from. Before 1652 the history of the Western Cape wore a sheepskin coat. From 1652 it wore a blue coat. From 1795 it wore a red coat. Now I do not see a coat; it seems to have been “liberated”. For a proper grasp of the forces that drove colonial settlement in these parts before diamonds and gold, it would be good to have this map of the sea route to the East in your lecture- or classroom, permanently. It shows “Why” and “With what result”. It shows the invisible building blocks of history, the high

¹⁰ T Mbeki, Statement of the President of the African National Congress, Thabo Mbeki, on the Report of the TRC; Joint sitting of the Houses of Parliament, Cape Town; 25 February 1999, p. 1.

pressure systems and the winds and currents that rotate around them. It shows “the East” (the source) and Europe (the market), and how you get there and back. It explains why a maritime replenishment service was required and how nature, as an agent of history, determined why it had to be at the Cape. This Cape, where so many of us were born, went to school and spent our working lives, but gets such scant attention in the History syllabi of the New South Africa.

A word about the Dutch thalassocracy which, like the Big Bang at the beginning of Creation, set vast positive and negative processes in motion. The Dutch state in its Golden Age depended on the East India Company as its biggest employer, biggest ship owner and biggest tax payer. The East India Company relied on Eastern trade. Eastern trade depended on successful shipping. Successful shipping depended on the Cape maritime replenishment service. And the maritime replenishment service depended on a system of productive outstations - 57 of them in fact, amongst others Hottentots-Holland, Simons Bay, Groote Schuur, Saldanha Bay, Mossel Bay, Houteniqualand (sic), Plettenberg Bay, Groene Cloof, Robben Island, ’t Nieuweland, etc. Those are the beginnings of the modern Western Cape Province, with its hundreds of schools and tens of thousands of students. This is where our roots are, where the tragedy of separating societies from their past is happening in government schools.

We have in our Archives meticulous records of 143 years kept by the Company on a variety of subjects. In the Company’s *Dagbregister*, a veritable treasure house of information, we discover amongst others, many particulars about the Koina, and the causes and the ways of their demise. On animal incidence: When, where and what were the “sea cows” of Zeekoevlei and the “horses” of Paardeberg and Paardeneiland? We read about extinction; we can tell the very day in 1702 when the last elephant in the Peninsula was shot down. We witness the dawn of science: The sea worm *pectinaria capensis* was described in the *Kaapse Dagbregister* three years before Petrus Pallas published a description in his *Zoologica* of 1769. We see rainfall patterns, drought patterns, summer floods in the Karoo, and a winter when 36 000 sheep died under deep snow. We can study earthquake incidence. (I, as a former a History teacher, can tell you that the Koeberg nuclear power station is not far enough from a fault line.) We see human incidence and nomadic patterns, on which land claims can be based. Settlement patterns, pre-industrial production systems, social, religious and legal systems, slavery, medicine, fishing, astronomy, wine, women, and war. I think Lewis Carroll had a very good peek in the old *Kaapse Dagbregister*

before he wrote: “*The time has come, the Walrus said, to speak of many things, Of Shoes- and Ships- and Sealing wax, of Cabbages- and Kings.*”¹¹
What need have we of Ghana and Vietnam?

The same documents show why the directors of the English India Company for decades coveted the Cape. What brought them here in 1795, and again in 1806, and into the rest of the country after diamonds and gold were found? And then the great wars about them. And then sweeping the board with a Union of South Africa, an artificial, unsympathetic concoction to suit their own ends and purposes. What was so wonderful about the Union that the New South Africa adopted the same map? The USSR at least dissolved its union and gave its subjects a choice of freedom.

I suspect that the syllabi fail to encourage historical and conservation awareness. As an example, take Heritage Day, in my opinion our government’s best idea so far, with great goodwill, the most lofty ideals and a special school holiday - an idea which I believe deserves our strongest support as History teachers, to help instill a practical interest in local history. This excellent idea of Heritage Day was hijacked and corrupted into “Braai Dag”, a mind-rotting feast day to worship at the altar of Bacchus, with ill-health, alcoholism and pollution as by-products. What is behind the degradation? Lack of interest and a latent fear of history coupled with parasitic opportunism, commerce and bad education? Or an apparent failure on the part of the syllabi to inspire teachers and parents to take an active lead in Heritage Conservation, as they do so well with the football and the cricket?

Finally, do the subject syllabi prepare or empower students for a future career in History? We hear much about unemployment. Who knows, perhaps they can all enter politics and become ambassadors to Vietnam or Ghana. A great need exists for people qualified in local and regional history, for Heritage Management in all parts of the country. Indeed in several provinces the service is dysfunctional for a lack of competent staff. In addition, the current Heritage Act invites the public to participate in Heritage Conservation, but the present syllabi appear to withhold the necessary knowledge and stimulation. There are many other employment opportunities for History students, like cultural tourism, that the syllabi do not support. From personal experience I can provide various examples of very rewarding career opportunities in History:

¹¹ L Carroll, *Alice Through The Looking Glass*, Ch. 4.

There is the power of your own example. You, their teachers, are examples of successful academic careers in History. You actively practise the subject. You continue to study to improve yourself. Because of your love for of the subject you attend conferences and join conservation organisations. Encourage students to take your subject to matric, and afterwards continue at university and major in History, combined with a literature course, so that they can learn to read and write.

If they prefer not to teach, but want more freedom of movement and more money, then post- graduate study is necessary. They qualify themselves to specialise in a particular field, and become professional practitioners of some use to a community, like your medical man, although not as well paid. Who will pay your well-taught and fully trained history student for his or her knowledge and skills?

Other employment options include the:

- National and Provincial Archives, Cultural History Museums,
 - The National, Provincial and Municipal heritage and conservation authorities, and
 - City Councils' special committees, e.g. Street naming committee, Disaster Management Department (Catalogue of Disasters).
 - Alternatively they could become legal practitioners (as expert witness in Land Claims Court and Equality Court.) Help to formulate laws. (E.g. For a new anti-corruption law, translate, analyse and interpret a 1715 document "Placaat teegens neemen en geeven van giften en gaven" for the Department of Legal Studies, University of Pietermaritzburg). And there are more:
- Field archaeologists. Restoration architects.
 - Free lance research and contract work. (Histories of farms, firms, families, etc. TANAP for the Netherlands government.)
 - Authors and Own authorship (history and fiction).
 - Tourism: The employment, deployment and training of tour guides.
 - Treasure divers.

And when you are old enough, people's respect become more important than an income. What is satisfying, is giving your skill in voluntary service on committees of conservation bodies, like the VOC Foundation, the National Monuments Council, the Castle of Good Hope Advisory Committee, etc. Also satisfying are National and International awards. Even helping the police to identify stolen artefacts is spiritually rewarding.

In conclusion then: If it is so, colleagues, that the political sanity

of the public depends on the quality of its History teachers, always remember that Maki Skozana died for our sins. Put her picture on your wall. Thank you. Good luck to all.

Consider including headings in the text, change the oral style into a written style. It will be more in line with the other articles in this edition of the journal.

It is a very interesting and thought-provoking presentation. Although not a scientific, educationally-sound research report.

It is an example of a narrative biography research design. It interrelates the world of the author with his/her social and cultural world.