

**Marxism and History:
Twenty Years of South African Marxist Studies.**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to contextualize the emergence and development of South African Marxist studies in terms of political and economic changes in South Africa, the influence of overseas Marxist and related theories and internal and external historiographical developments. The early Marxist approach was constituted by the climate of political repression and economic growth in South Africa during the 1960's, by its antagonism to the dominant liberal analyses of the country, and by the presence of indigenous Marxist theories of liberation. The unstable theoretical foundations of this approach prompted a critique and reassessment, which led to the coalescence of a stable Marxist paradigm and the start of the second phase of Marxist studies. The debate on the nature of the state that characterized this second phase was informed by the rival Marxist political theories of Nicos Poulantzas and the West German *Staatsableitung* school, and proved to be largely inconclusive. However, under circumstances of a resurgence of resistance and economic decline in South Africa, the late-1970's debate focussed attention squarely upon the revolutionary potential of the black working class.

The heightening of struggle and a growing awareness of crisis formed the basis for the 1980's shift away from the reductionism and instrumentalism of the earlier literature. Continuing research on the state highlighted issues of strategy, the spaces for struggle opened up by the restructuring of the state and capital, and the degree of state autonomy. The political and economic gains made by the oppressed also combined with the influence of elements of British Marxist historiography and a reaction to the 'structuralism' of the 1970's to produce Marxist social history, emphasizing subjective human agency and 'history from below'. The social historical perspective dominates Marxist studies in the 1980's, and has influenced both the tradition of Marxist Africanism, focussing on pre-colonial African social

formations, and the related approach to agrarian history. It is argued in the conclusion that recent calls for a synthesis of structuralist Marxism and social history within South African Marxist studies take for granted the dualist appearance of Marxism and fails to reflect upon Marxism's essentially monistic presuppositions.

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INTRODUCTION

Marxist studies on South Africa have been underway now for almost twenty years. The quantity and quality of this body of research has far outstripped that produced by any other theoretical perspective applied to South African history. Punctuating this research at irregular intervals, several review articles have addressed themselves to the question of the manner in which Marxist studies originally constituted themselves and thereafter followed a particular trajectory. More recently, two books which include specific chapters on Marxist studies have been published.¹ However, no attempt has yet been made to produce a full-length and detailed account of the process whereby the Marxist approach has come to dominate South African academic writing. The review articles and books have raised a number of important questions, but probably for reasons of space they have tended to adopt a broad focus and to content themselves with generalizations. For instance, the Marxist literature of the 1970's is commonly characterized as a 'race-class debate', while a 'structure-agency debate' has been perceived in the 1980's. As a result, both the inner nuances and the wider historical and theoretical context of Marxist studies have been either glossed over or ignored.

This thesis, as a contribution to the history of historical writing on South Africa, is an attempt to fill these gaps. Specifically, it seeks to contextualize the development of Marxist studies over the past two decades. By context is meant not only the changing political and economic circumstances within South Africa itself, but also external theoretical influences and internal historiographical developments. In

¹ C.Saunders *The Making of the South African Past* (Cape Town: David Philip) 1988;
K.Smith *The Changing Past* (Johannesburg: Southern) 1988

addition, this thesis hopes to contribute to the development of Marxist studies by prompting its practitioners to reflect more closely on the conditions of possibility of their own endeavours. A clearer understanding of the history of their discipline may provide Marxist and other social scientists with an awareness of the social construction of past analyses as well as insights into contemporary and future events. Given the theoretical and historiographical basis of this thesis, it does not presume to pronounce upon questions of empirical evidence or to judge the truth or otherwise of specific Marxist analyses; rather, it seeks to explain how and why Marxist studies developed as it did in terms of South Africa's political economy, theoretical developments abroad and a series of internal conceptual shifts.

The period under discussion can be dated roughly from 1970 to the present. The early Marxist approach arose in a milieu characterized by political repression and economic growth in South Africa. The liberation movements had been forced into exile and political retreat, but their analyses of the nature of South African society and the strategies they proposed to combat racism and exploitation had a marked effect on the political exiles who spearheaded the initial contributions to Marxist studies. It was also necessary for the early Marxists to establish themselves in relation to the long-standing liberal tradition which described South African history in terms of racial and ideological factors. Rejecting liberal explanations, the early Marxist approach attempted to focus on the structural economic determinants of South Africa's racial policies, but at the same time wished to align itself with liberation theories in which race and class coexisted rather uneasily. As a result, the early approach was unable to fully constitute itself as an alternative paradigm.

By the mid-1970's, however, entirely new circumstances prevailed in South Africa. Deepening economic recession and rising unemployment and inflation provoked a resurgence of internal worker and popular resistance. A new generation of Marxist

students, captivated by the revival of European Marxist theory, directed a penetrating critique at the early approach and sought to place Marxist studies on a firmer analytical foundation. The struggles by the dominated classes in South Africa led this second generation to focus on the nature of the state and the question of class struggle. This generated a highly polemical debate between supporters of Poulantzian political theory and those who took their cue from the West German state-derivation theorists, which resulted in the placing of the black working class firmly in the centre of South African Marxist theory and strategy. A by-product of this debate was the redefinition and eclipse of the white working class and an increasing emphasis on socialist revolutionary politics *vis-a-vis* the ongoing national democratic struggle.

As Marxist studies entered the 1980's, two distinct conceptual shifts occurred. Firstly, the continuing debate on the nature of the state sought to give more substance to the notion of class struggle as the apparent crisis in South Africa fractured the ruling classes and prompted the granting of certain concessions to the oppressed. The national question reasserted itself as the exiled liberation movements re-established their internal presence and as popular organizations and trade unions coalesced into national bodies. Marxist studies responded by taking up such issues as the nature of the black petty bourgeoisie and the question of union participation in state structures. The second shift affected Marxist studies as a whole. Drawing on elements of British Marxist historiography, a social historical perspective emerged seeking to overcome the economic determinist tendencies in the 1970's literature. With its focus on class agency and 'history from below', social history exerted a wide influence. The tradition of Marxist Africanism, which documented the responses of independent African societies to colonial and capitalist penetration, rapidly incorporated a social historical perspective, while fierce debates raged on the terrain of agrarian history and around the question of the nature of the state.

The history of South African Marxist studies has been the history of a vibrant and dynamic analytical approach. However, it is argued in the conclusion that Marxist studies has reached a critical theoretical junction. This is partly a consequence of the debilitating essentialism of Marxism itself, but it is also connected to changing political and economic circumstances and new theoretical developments. Only by engaging in a process of self-reflection can Marxist studies emerge reinvigorated and capable of facing the challenges of the present and future. At this point, I must acknowledge the financial assistance of the Human Sciences Research Council towards this research. All opinions expressed here, or conclusions arrived at, are mine and are not to be attributed to the Human Sciences Research Council or to anyone else. My special thanks to Paul Maylam for supervising this thesis and for ensuring that my attention remained focussed on the task of contextualization.

CHAPTER ONE

THE EARLY MARXIST APPROACH

South African Marxist studies originated in a politico-economic context in which the structures of domination and exploitation in South Africa had not only weathered the storm of popular resistance in the 1950's and early 1960's, but had emerged perceptibly strengthened in terms of spectacular economic growth and increased repressive capacity. The mass resistance campaigns and boycotts of the 1950's were brought to a halt with the Sharpeville massacre and the banning of the African National Congress and the Pan-Africanist Congress in 1960. The liberation movements went underground and turned to armed struggle, but the Rivonia arrests destroyed their internal structures and forced them into exile. What little opposition survived remained confined to the universities and some churches. The state's success in suppressing internal dissent prepared the ground for the massive penetration of monopoly capital and a dramatic economic boom. At the same time apartheid was tightened and extended. The defence budget escalated, industrial decentralization continued and Matanzima of the Transkei became the first to accept 'self-government'. During the 1960's, to many observers "the apartheid state appeared impregnable within and without".²

2 A.Callinicos & J.Rogers *Southern Africa after Soweto* (London: Pluto) 1978 p.4.
See also W.Freund "Review of *Economy and Society and Industrialization and Social Change*" in *Review of African Political Economy* 29 1984 p.157: "When the [1970's] began, the South African system seemed to be a juggernaut, able to destroy any opposition forces in its path."

The political retreat and silence of the Sixties framed the perceptions of the small group of South African exiles and sympathizers who made up the early Marxist approach. Martin Legassick, radicalized by Sharpeville, and Harold Wolpe, who escaped after being detained at Rivonia, worked together with a Canadian, Frederick Johnstone, and with Stanley Trapido, who came from a liberal historical background. Their ideas found a willing forum in Shula Marks' and Antony Atmore's Commonwealth Studies seminars, where they sought to explain the reality of a politically and economically rampant apartheid. In exploring the historical conditions of possibility of South Africa's peculiar form of racial capitalism, the climate of economic growth and political repression led them to emphasize the determining economic interests of the ruling class and their realization via an interventionist and near-omnipotent state.³ For the early approach, capital's demand for cheap labour explained economic growth, the maintenance of pre-capitalist modes of production, the racial division of the working class, and the form of state, together with the associated racist policies of segregation and apartheid. Cheap labour was thus the central consideration in the early Marxist analyses of the political economy of South Africa.

3 Gramsci discerned a similar situation of political retreat in the last days of the Second International, where "mechanical determinism [became] a tremendous force of moral resistance, of cohesion, and of patient and obstinate perseverance" - A.Gramsci "The Study of Philosophy" in Q.Hoare & G.Nowell-Smith (eds) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (London: Lawrence & Wishart) 1971 p.336, quoted in C.Boggs *Gramsci's Marxism* (London: Pluto) 1976 p.22. The sense of Gramsci's statement is clear, though 'mechanical determinism' would be far too harsh a characterization of the early Marxist approach. The Marxists were also not the first to be in such a position. The South African liberal view that economic growth would destroy apartheid did not decline but became stronger "as it became clear in the 1950's that there was no hope of removing the Nationalists at the polls" - C.Saunders "Historians and Apartheid" in J.Lonsdale (ed) *South Africa in Question* (Cambridge: African Studies Centre) 1988 p.18

However, Marxist studies were also constituted by and in large part in opposition to the prevailing intellectual winds in South Africa. The liberal 'conventional wisdom' of the time, which asserted (among other things) that apartheid was an irrational fetter on economic growth, seemed hopelessly naive, and was assailed on all sides.⁴ The recently published *Oxford History of South Africa*, which represented the zenith of 1960's liberal historiography, was subjected to a frontal assault, supported on the flanks by alternative explanations of certain key issues in the conventional accounts: the causes and effects of the skilled labour shortage; the issue of the job colour bar and the reactionary white working class; the nature and causes of segregation and apartheid, and their relationship to economic development; and the question of a 'dual economy' in South Africa. The ferocity of the attacks on the conventional wisdom has prompted some to argue that Marxist studies constituted a decisive "paradigm shift" in relation to the liberal approach.⁵ This argument is basically correct, but tends to treat liberal and Marxist studies as closed and separate spheres, the one unproblematically succeeding the other. In fact, it took several years and a number of theoretical reconceptualizations within Marxist studies before anything

4 At a crude and obvious level, as Legassick noted at the time, it was clear that "South African economic growth since 1948 has proceeded apace - exceeded in the 1960's only by that of Japan - while at the same time the system of racial discrimination has grown more effective and pervasive" (M.Legassick "Legislation, Ideology and Economy in Post-1948 South Africa" *Journal of Southern African Studies* 1,1 1974 p.6). Crude or not, this assertion was the most frequent Marxist criticism of the liberal approach, and was even repeated by the South African Communist Party: "What ought clearly to be dead is the liberal illusion that the system will be compelled to reform itself by the logic of economic necessity; an illusion which continues to be spread in spite of the fact that the worst excesses of racist oppression and brutality have been perpetrated during the period of nationalist rule when the economy made its most dramatic advances" - "Forward to People's Power - The Challenge Ahead" in *The African Communist* 1980, reproduced in B.Bunting (ed) *South African Communists Speak 1915-1980* (London: Inkululeko) 1981 p.440

5 F.A.Johnstone "Most Painful to Our Hearts': South Africa through the Eyes of the New School" *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 16,1 1982 pp.9-10, and J.Wright "Clash of Paradigms" in B.J.Liebenberg *Trends in the South African Historiography* (Pretoria: Unisa) 1986

approaching a firm Marxist theoretical terrain was established. Ironically, these successive shifts to firmer foundations often criticized their predecessors for remaining on a liberal theoretical terrain, which was equated with explanations based on race.

However, the difficulties faced by Marxist studies in their successive attempts to tame the recalcitrant concept of race were compounded by the salience of the 'national question' in the theories and strategies put forward by the ANC and PAC in exile. Racial discrimination in South Africa was interpreted by the national liberation movements as something more than the mere form taken by class exploitation; directed as it was across class boundaries, it appeared to involve a distinct colonial or national dimension. Arguably for strategic and historical reasons, the South African Communist Party conceptualized this dimension in terms of its theory of internal colonialism and its 'two-stage' revolutionary strategy. On the one hand, the early Marxist approach's antagonism to the conventional wisdom led it to attempt to explain race in terms of class; on the other hand, it was confronted by a Marxist theory in which race and class co-existed, if somewhat awkwardly. The immediate response, by Wolpe, was a wholesale incorporation of the theory of internal colonialism into Marxist studies, founded on the articulation of modes of production. But internal colonialism increasingly came under fire from Legassick who, stimulated by the revival of student and worker protest in South Africa in the early 1970's, began to fuse the national struggle into the class struggle. Though later theorists focussing on the state would complete this fusion, the national question continued to make its presence felt in Marxist studies.

It is often asserted by Marxist social historians that South African historiography in the 1970's was dominated by the 'race-class debate'. To the extent that it recognizes that Marxist studies was initially constituted in opposition to the liberal approach,

this view has some substance. However, it also contains a hidden agenda, permitting the social historians to collapse the early Marxist approach and the following focus on the state into a single 'structuralist paradigm' which is accused of reducing race to class. In fact, the early approach proved incapable, despite successive attempts and for reasons outlined above, of entirely subordinating racial discrimination to class exploitation. It took a fundamental conceptual shift, under the impetus of changing theoretical and political developments in the mid-1970's, before the concept of class achieved uncontested dominance over the terrain of Marxist studies. Not only does the generalization 'race-class debate' ignore this shift, but it also excludes several contextual factors. The stifling of political opposition in South Africa, together with the need to dispute the conventional wisdom and to establish a position *vis-a-vis* liberation theory, formed the wider context in which the early Marxist approach emerged.

The Critique of the 'Conventional Wisdom'

The first Marxist interpretations of South African history appeared in a milieu which reflected the dominance, since the 1920's, of the liberal approach of scholars such as W.M.Macmillan, C.W.De Kiewiet, E.Walker, and J.S.Marais.⁶ Liberal historiography during the 1960's was experiencing an 'Africanist' phase as the rest of Africa underwent decolonization. Its crowning achievement in bringing to the surface the 'African side of the story' was the publication in two volumes of *The Oxford History of South Africa* (hereafter *OHSA*).⁷ The central theme of the *OHSA* was that South African history was made up of the interaction between diverse peoples. It destroyed the myth that history in South Africa began in 1652, and

6 C.Saunders *The Making of the South African Past* (Cape Town: David Philip) 1988

7 M.Wilson & L.Thompson (ed) *The Oxford History of South Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon) 2 vols. 1969, 1971

pointed out that the past had been more black than white, though black resistance had been unsuccessful.⁸ African and Afrikaner nationalism were seen as the contending forces which would decide South Africa's future. However, the *OHS*A also repeated much of the conventional wisdom of the day: for instance, Afrikaner racial attitudes were still viewed as a product of frontier isolation and conflict and white worker racism was seen as responsible for job reservation.

Criticisms of the *OHS*A from the right - as mere anti-Afrikaner prejudice - were not unexpected,⁹ but from the left, "the editors could hardly have anticipated the scope and the extent of the scrutiny to which the volumes would be subjected nor how soon would be the call for revision".¹⁰ Whereas the first volume of the *OHS*A was generally criticized for extracting static conclusions from a history of change,¹¹ most of the fire was reserved for the volume dealing with the twentieth century. The division of this second volume into separate socio-economic and political segments was taken to obscure the actual dynamics of the society,¹² and to contrast rational economic growth against irrational racist political prejudices.¹³ The broad categorization of the major opposing forces in South Africa as African and Afrikaner nationalisms was rejected as abstract, mystificatory and metaphysical.¹⁴ The explanation of economic development on the basis of a 'dual economy'

8 Saunders *South African Past* p.155

9 *Ibid.* p.159

10 S.Trapido "South Africa and the Historians" *African Affairs* 71 1972 p.444

11 S.Marks "African and Afrikaner History" *Journal of African History* 11,3 1970 p.441

12 M.Legassick "The Dynamics of Modernization" *Journal of African History* 13,1 1972 p.146; S.Marks "Liberalism, Social Realities and South African History" *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies* X 1972 pp.244-45

13 Legassick "Dynamics" pp.146,147; Trapido "South Africa" p.444; Marks "Liberalism" p.246; A.Atmore & N.Westlake "A Liberal Dilemma: A Critique of the Oxford History of South Africa" *Race* 2 1972 pp.108-111

14 Marks "Liberalism" p.246; Trapido "South Africa" p.447; Legassick "Dynamics" pp.145-46

(‘modern and market’ versus ‘subsistence and traditional’) and of the failure of the latter because of backward farming methods, was criticized for ignoring the reality of cheap labour in a forced labour economy.¹⁵ Finally, it was argued that an adequate explanation of the South African economy requires that underlying economic relationships rather than individual actors ought to be considered:¹⁶ "it is not capitalists to whom we should look but to capitalism as a set of productive relationships".¹⁷

Over the next half-decade, most contributions to Marxist studies tended to begin with introductory critiques of the conventional wisdom, usually disputing the argument that industrialization would progressively undermine the ‘archaic’ political institution of apartheid. The critiques questioned not only liberal historiography but South African liberalism in general, which was seen as an ideological world-view mystifying and hence supporting the reality of racist domination.¹⁸ The less well-known though politically more acceptable historiographical tradition of radical scholarship was hardly mentioned by the new generation of Marxist academics.¹⁹ A major exception to this was Jack and Ray Simons’ "exercise in political sociology on a time scale", *Class and Colour in South Africa*.²⁰ Though banned, this work circulated widely within some South African universities,²¹ and came to be used extensively by Marxist scholars as a valuable empirical resource. Surprisingly, its major theoretical contentions, which repeated several liberal arguments, were never

15 Marks "Liberalism" p.247; Trapido "South Africa" p.446; Legassick "Dynamics" p.147; Atmore & Westlake "A Liberal Dilemma" p.119

16 Legassick "Dynamics" p.148

17 Trapido "South Africa" p.446

18 See, for example, Legassick "Legislation, Ideology and Economy" p.7

19 For a discussion of earlier radical scholarship, see Saunders *South African Past* ch.13

20 J&R Simons *Class and Colour in South Africa* 1983 (Originally published by Penguin African Library 1969) p.9

21 Saunders *South African Past* p.167

subject to any direct or serious critique by the fledgling Marxist current.²² For the Simons', "South Africa's malaise stems from the impact of an advanced industrialism on an obsolete, degenerate colonial order".²³ South African economic growth, that is "the dynamic potential of a multi-racial labour force", was being obstructed by "a white oligarchy which uses fascist techniques to enforce racial totalitarianism" and "perpetuate pre-industrial social rigidities".²⁴ The lack of explicit criticism of these arguments can perhaps be attributed to the heat of theoretical conflict with liberalism which, combined with the Simons' focus on the organizational resistance of the oppressed, obscured the links between *Class and Colour* and the liberal approach.²⁵

The Development of the Early Marxist Approach

From the start, the early Marxist approach stressed that "it is necessary to go 'outside' of [racial] groups and definitions, and this immediately involves an analysis of the systemic processes which generate social, political and economic power and

22 Some muted criticisms were made of the Simons' explanatory overemphasis on race and consciousness, particularly with regard to the white working class. See H. Wolpe "Capitalism and Cheap Labour-Power in South Africa" *Economy and Society* 1,4 1972 pp.428-29 and R. Davies *Capital, State and White Labour in South Africa 1900-1960* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities) 1979 p.37 n.23

23 Simons *Class and Colour* p.610

24 *Ibid.* pp.8,610. The thesis of a major contradiction between the economic and the political continues to be asserted today. Cyril Ramaphosa, general secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers, was quoted as saying that a society based on the Freedom Charter would "unleash immense productive forces presently fettered by apartheid" - *Weekly Mail* July 22-28, 1988 p.7

25 More recently, the Marxist social historical current has criticized *Class and Colour* as "narrative political history" which failed to discuss "the relationship between class formation, political consciousness and culture" - S. Marks & R. Rathbone (eds) *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa* (London: Longman) 1982 p.7

their relationship to the operative definitions".²⁶ 'Outside' of and underlying racism was the development of modes of production characterized by contradictory and exploitative relations between social classes. Hence the early Marxist theorists conceived of racial discrimination as a 'form' or 'expression' of more fundamental class relations.²⁷ As Wolpe put it, in South African capitalist society "the specific form of these [class] relationships is defined by the content of Apartheid",²⁸ and "the main contradiction in South Africa is in the relation of production between the white capitalist class and the non-white working class".²⁹ Given a climate of economic growth under apartheid, the liberal assumption of political/economic dysfunctionality was displaced by Althusser's functional analysis of the relationship between the economic and the political, such that the persistence of a social formation depends on the reproduction of its conditions of production.³⁰ Early Marxist functionalism was also connected to its essentialist theoretical approach, in which the apartheid 'form' or 'expression' was related to its capitalist 'essence'.

In these terms, the discovery of diamonds and then gold in the late nineteenth century marked the beginning of modern economic history in South Africa. The early Marxists turned to the structure of the gold mining industry in order to explain

26 H.Wolpe "Class, Race and the Occupational Structure" in *The Societies of Southern Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* vol.2, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London 1970-71 p.100

27 F.A.Johnstone "Class Conflict and Colour Bars in the South African Gold Mining Industry, 1910-26" *The Societies of Southern Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* vol.1 Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London 1969-70 pp.114,118,123. Also: "This argument, that segregation and apartheid (as legal forms through which racial/cultural categorization has been institutionalized) are essentially products of the domination of capital in South Africa, has been a central theme of the so-called neo-Marxists." - M.Legassick & D.Innes "Capital Restructuring and Apartheid: A Critique of Constructive Engagement" *African Affairs* 76 1977 p.464

28 Wolpe "Class, Race and the Occupational Structure" p.102

29 *Ibid.* p.103

30 See Althusser's essay on "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" in L.Althusser *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays* (London: NLB) 1971.

the development of racial discrimination in terms of the demand for and supply of a cheap black labour force. Here Johnstone challenged the conventional wisdom by pointing out that white workers were not the only group to benefit from colour bars: white workers sought to realize their class interests by protecting their privileged skilled position through job reservation (the 'job colour bar'), but mine-owners also expressed their class interests in the racial form of the 'wage colour bar', aimed at minimizing costs by maintaining a recruiting monopsony over cheap, rightless and controlled black labour.³¹ Wolpe, Legassick, Trapido and Johnstone also debunked the liberal argument that the tendency for black workers to move upward into semi-skilled occupations was undermining job reservation and hence apartheid, by showing the flexibility of apartheid in maintaining economic growth by fragmenting jobs and moving white workers into better-paid supervisory positions.³² And the liberal thesis that racial attitudes were now archaic products of the isolation, conflict, individualism and land-hunger of the eighteenth century 'frontier situation' between colonist and Xhosa, was dismantled point by point by Legassick. "Trade and war, therefore," he argued, "were but two sides of the same coin: so-called co-operation and conflict both entered simultaneously".³³

The central organising concept in early Marxist analyses was that of 'cheap labour'. Johnstone first brought this notion under the spotlight in terms of the following equation: "non-whiteness equalled rightlessness equalled powerlessness equalled

31 Johnstone "Class Conflict and Colour Bars" pp.115-118

32 Wolpe "Class, Race and the Occupational Structure"; Legassick "Legislation, Ideology and Economy"; Johnstone "White Prosperity and White Supremacy"; S.Trapido "South Africa in a Comparative Study of Industrialization" *Journal of Development Studies* 3 1971

33 M.Legassick "The Frontier Tradition in South African Historiography" in S.Marks & A.Atmore (eds) *Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa* (London: Longman) 1980 p.65 (Originally presented at an Institute of Commonwealth Studies seminar, 1970-71)

cheapness".³⁴ Given a fixed gold price and a low average grade of ore, the mining industry could only reduce costs and raise profits by paying low wages to unskilled workers. Hence it was in their interests to prevent black workers from acquiring either political or economic bargaining power; from this it followed that the disenfranchisement of blacks and their exclusion from skilled occupations was functional for capital accumulation. Legassick and Trapido extended this notion of cheap labour to characterize the social formation as a whole as a 'labour-repressive' or 'forced labour' economy.³⁵ However, Legassick was quick to note that this coercion of labour does not mean that in South Africa the economy is not capitalist, for though a distinguishing characteristic of capitalism is that it relies on the 'dull compulsion of economic relations' over the 'free labourer'³⁶ rather than the extra-economic coercion of labour, even the process of formation of the 'classic' Western European proletariat was not free from extra-economic coercion, nor are advanced capitalist processes free from state intervention.³⁷ Finally, Wolpe placed the concept of 'cheap labour' on its firmest footing yet, by relating cheapness not merely to the powerlessness of black labour, but to the reproduction of *labour-power* itself.

34 Johnstone "Class conflict and Colour Bars" p.116

35 Trapido "South Africa in a Comparative Study of Industrialization"; M.Legassick "South Africa: Forced Labour, Industrialization, and Racial Differentiation", written in 1971, published in R.Harris *The Political Economy of Africa* (New York: Wiley) 1975. (The term 'forced labour' was derived generally from Barrington Moore but more immediately from the work of John Rex; see, for example, J.Rex *Race Relations in Sociological Theory* (London: Weidenfeld) 1970)

36 Following Marx: "this worker must be free in the double sense that as a free individual he can dispose of his labour-power as his own commodity, and that, on the other hand, he has no other commodity for sale" - *Capital 1* (Penguin 1976) p.272

37 Legassick "Forced Labour" pp.233-35; Trapido "South Africa in a Comparative Study" p.310; M.Legassick "South Africa: Capital Accumulation and Violence" *Economy and Society* 3,3 1974 p.256. In line with the findings of underdevelopment theory, South African Marxist studies thus abandoned "the general [and Marx's] assumption that bourgeois democracy is a necessary or inevitable product of the capitalist mode of production" - Legassick "Capital Accumulation" p.255.

Capitalism in South Africa conserved the pre-capitalist redistributive reserve economies so that they continued to provide "a portion of the means of reproduction of the migrant labour force", allowing capital to pay wages sufficient only for a single worker and not his/her family as well, that is, "to pay the worker *below* the cost of his reproduction" in order to increase the quantity of surplus-value extraction.³⁸

Broadly, then, South Africa was characterized as a labour-repressive capitalist economy in which racial discrimination was functional to capital accumulation. Apartheid, for Johnstone, regulated the particular interests of capitalists, white workers and Afrikaner nationalists so as to permit the maximization of their "common commitment to an economically prosperous white supremacy".³⁹ For Wolpe, in 1971, apartheid was "an attempt to order the non-white working class in terms of the specific demands of different classes and sectors of class".⁴⁰ And for Legassick,

Apartheid, or separate development, has meant merely ... modernizing and rationalizing the inter-war structures of 'segregationist' labour control. Or, to put it in another way, *apartheid* has meant the extension to the manufacturing economy of the structures of the gold-mining industry.⁴¹

38 H. Wolpe "Capitalism and Cheap Labour-Power in South Africa: From Segregation to Apartheid" *Economy and Society* 1 1972 pp.432,434 (Original emphasis). Wolpe's conception of the reproduction of cheap labour-power, derived from Claude Meillassoux, was not new in terms of radical analyses of South Africa; compare David Ivon Jones: "This, then, is the function of the native territories, to serve as cheap breeding grounds for black labour - the repositories of the reserve army of native labour - sucking it in or letting it out according to the demands of industry" - D.I. Jones "Communism in South Africa" c.1920 in *South African Communists Speak 1915-1980* (London: Inkululeko) 1981 p.50

39 Johnstone "White Prosperity and White Supremacy" p.130

40 Wolpe "Class, Race and the Occupational Structure" p.103

41 Legassick "Forced Labour" p.261 (Original emphasis); Legassick "Capital Accumulation" p.276; Legassick "Gold, Agriculture, and Secondary Industry in South Africa, 1885-1970: from Periphery to Sub-Metropole as a Forced Labour System" in R. Palmer & N. Parsons (eds) *The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa* (London: Heinemann) 1977 p.191

From the above accounts, it appears that the early Marxist approach experienced little difficulty in explaining racial discrimination by referring it to a more fundamental system of class relations of production. It seems that *class* and not *race* was more important in explaining South Africa; indeed, on the face of it, the latter was reduced to the former. This is the basis for the characterization of South African historiography as a 'race-class debate',⁴² a debate which has been criticized as reductionist.⁴³ But this argument is itself reductionist, conflating the early Marxist work with the later debate on the nature of the state. In fact, the concept of race retained a remarkable degree of autonomy upon the terrain of the early Marxist approach, and consistently evaded repeated attempts to capture and subordinate it. This is particularly apparent when one considers two key issues: the problem of defining the nature of apartheid, and the salience of the 'national question' in liberation theory.

In Johnstone's work, the concept of race is taken to be the "second important determinant of group interests (in addition to [the] relationship to the means of production)".⁴⁴ In this particular example, race is subordinate to class. But at other places in the same text, race is attributed with explanatory power equivalent to that of class: in 1924 the Pact government protected the racist interests of white workers by establishing an "equilibrium" between them and mining capital, permitting them to continue reaping the benefits of "collective colonial dominion".⁴⁵ This differs from liberal explanations of the Pact only in the terminology used (and in the fact

42 S.Marks & R.Rathbone (eds) *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa* (London: Longman) 1982 p.4

43 D.Posel "Rethinking the 'Race-Class Debate' in South African Historiography" *Social Dynamics* 9,1 1983

44 Johnstone "Class Conflict and Colour Bars" p.114

45 *Ibid.* p.120

that capital is seen as equally racist);⁴⁶ both capital and labour are subsumed under white colonial domination, a concept that draws as much of its strength from race as from class. Legassick dealt with the job colour bar in much the same way: it was not only a product of white racist attitudes, but a combination of *both* the forced labour system *and* the (racial) access of white workers to state power.⁴⁷ Even more revealingly, Legassick argued that "the patterns of power, ideology and privilege characteristic of a colonial society of conquest amplify those class differentiations which coincide with the system of racial differentiation and suppress those within each 'racial' community".⁴⁸ If racial/colonial forces retain the power to 'suppress' class forces, they cannot be seen as reducible to such forces. However, these are but minor examples, and some may argue at this point that it was precisely in order to exorcise such 'liberal hangovers' from Marxist studies that Wolpe intervened in 1972 with his seminal article on cheap labour-power. Let us discuss that intervention in more detail now.

Wolpe began by criticizing those, including Johnstone and Legassick, who responded to the apparent salience of race in South Africa by taking apartheid to be simply the increasingly repressive and racist *intensification* of the earlier policy of segregation.⁴⁹ As we have shown, Johnstone assumed that the cheapness of black

46 This point is also made by Yudelman in his review of Johnstone's book *Class, Race and Gold* (1976), the published version of a doctoral dissertation of which this article, "Class Conflict and Colour Bars", forms a part. See D.Yudelman "The Quest for a Neo-Marxist Approach to Contemporary South Africa" *South African Journal of Economics* 45,2 1977 p.205

47 Legassick "Forced Labour" pp.255-56; Legassick "Gold, Agriculture, and Secondary Industry" p.187

48 Legassick "Forced Labour" pp.267-68. This sentence is not reproduced in Legassick's later "Gold, Agriculture, and Secondary Industry" (1977).

49 The theorist who went furthest in emphasizing the factor of race was A.Asheron (pseudonym?), arguing that "in its unintended consequences the ideology of race has outrun its 'ideologues' and become an additional independent variable, as significant as the economic base, in the future development of South Africa". A.Asheron "Race and Politics in South Africa" *New Left Review* 53 1969 p.64

labour was consequent upon its political and economic powerlessness, that is, that cheapness resulted from the *racial* exclusion of blacks from the state and skilled jobs. Wolpe proceeded to provide a more structural, as opposed to superstructural, explanation by relating cheapness to the reproduction of capitalist labour-power. Hence, in the early capitalist period from 1870 to the 1930's, the basis for the ultra-exploitation of black labour depended not mainly on their exclusion from access to political and economic power, but rather

the rate of surplus value and hence the rate of capital accumulation depended above all upon the maintenance of the pre-capitalist relations of production in the Reserve economy which produced a portion of the means of reproduction of the migrant labour force.⁵⁰

In terms of the articulation between the dominant capitalist and subordinate pre-capitalist modes of production, the 1913 Natives Land Act sought to halt the processes of land expropriation and class differentiation within the reserves by conserving family social relations and restructuring the 'tribal' political institutions. The provision of cheap labour through the labour-reproducing functions of the reserves constituted the policy of segregation. However, capitalism increasingly undermines this function of the reserves, to the extent that the major contradiction in South Africa began to be transferred "from the relationship *between* different modes of production to the relations of production *within* capitalism".⁵¹ Apartheid, as the response to this crisis of capital accumulation, that is, to the increasing black militancy consequent upon the decline of the reserves, "combined both institutionalizing and legitimating mechanisms and, overwhelmingly, coercive mechanisms".⁵² Therefore Wolpe agreed with Legassick that apartheid constituted an intensification and modernization of segregation (involving repression, restrictions on black trade unions, the modernization of the pass laws and other

50 Wolpe "Capitalism and Cheap Labour-Power" p.432

51 *Ibid.* p.432 (Original emphasis)

52 *Ibid.* p.446

movement controls, and control of black education), but argued that apartheid differed from segregation in that the decline of the labour-reproductive function of the reserves required their restructuring to facilitate instead "the political, social, economic and ideological enforcement of low levels of subsistence".⁵³ Hence his new definition of apartheid:

Apartheid, including separate development, can best be understood as the *mechanism specific to South Africa* in the period of secondary industrialization, of maintaining a high rate of capitalist exploitation through a system which guarantees a cheap and controlled labour-force, under circumstances in which the conditions of reproduction (the redistributive African economy in the Reserves) of that labour-force is rapidly disintegrating.⁵⁴

Wolpe's intervention, geared as it was to overcome what he saw as liberal importations into Marxist studies, attempted to place Marxist studies on a new theoretical terrain by subordinating the racial/colonial relation of domination to the 'political form' of capitalist development specific to South Africa.⁵⁵ In terms of explaining the relationship of segregation to economic growth, Wolpe's argument was rapidly entrenched as a Marxist conventional wisdom. But, for many Marxists, Legassick included, Wolpe failed to provide an adequate account of the relationship between the 'national question' and the struggle for socialism. For almost in the same breath as he asserted the subordination of race to class, Wolpe proposed the fundamental dependence of capitalism on the non-capitalist reserves, that is, "in certain circumstances capitalism may, within the boundaries of a single state, develop predominantly by means of its relationship to the non-capitalist modes of production".⁵⁶ This implies that either the capitalist mode is not dominant, or that its 'dominance' is secured by essentially non-capitalist mechanisms. It is equally

53 *Ibid.* p.450

54 *Ibid.* p.433 (Original emphasis)

55 Wolpe "The Theory of Internal Colonization" p.113

56 Wolpe "The Theory of Internal Colonization" p.113

possible to conceive of Wolpe's position as viewing South Africa as only semi-capitalist.⁵⁷ Furthermore, apartheid appears to be a defensive (and mainly political) *reaction* to pressures originating in the reserves. On the one hand, in his efforts to base African nationalism on the pre-capitalist modes of production, Wolpe failed to situate apartheid in the context of specific changes in capitalist production itself, particularly the process of creating (relative) surplus value in secondary industry.⁵⁸ On the other hand, if the major contradiction in South Africa is being displaced from between modes of production to entirely within the capitalist mode, "what is the objective meaning of African nationalism?"⁵⁹

These criticisms by Legassick ironically display the same tensions as Wolpe's argument. The problem revolves around wishing to assert that apartheid is a product of capitalism while at the same time trying to find a structural explanation for African nationalism. If South Africa is not fully capitalist, then racial discrimination cannot be reduced to capitalist exploitation and must involve an additional element, such as colonial oppression. Partly for these reasons, Wolpe adopted the SACP theory of internal colonialism. If, on the other hand, South Africa is entirely capitalist, then racial discrimination can be analyzed in two ways. Either it remains a powerful mobilizing factor for African nationalism which then becomes the specifically South African form of socialist revolution, or it is an epiphenomenon which conceals the centrality of the (class) struggle for socialism. Legassick explicitly took the former position; the latter position was implicit in the

57 D.Du Toit *Capital and Labour in South Africa: Class Struggle in the 1970's* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul) 1981 p.186. However, Du Toit bases this on the idea that black migrant workers are only semi-proletarianized, retaining access to the means of production, and hence do not constitute a classic 'free labour' force. But, as noted above, neither Trapido nor Legassick take extra-economically coerced and thus unfree labour to be incompatible with capitalism.

58 Legassick "Legislation, Ideology and Economy" p.9

59 *Ibid.* p.9

critiques of Wolpe and Legassick by those who initiated the mid-1970's theoretical shift in Marxist studies. To clarify the ambiguities in both Wolpe's and Legassick's positions it is necessary to discuss the liberation theory with which they were confronted.

In 1962 the South African Communist Party adopted a program calling for a revolution in two stages: first, 'national democracy', then socialism. This strategy was based on its theory of 'internal colonialism' or 'colonialism of a special type'. According to the SACP,

On one level, that of 'White South Africa', there are all the features of an advanced capitalist state in its final stage of imperialism. ... But on another level, that of 'Non-White South Africa', there are all the features of a colony. ... Non-White South Africa is the colony of White South Africa itself.⁶⁰

The theory of internal colonialism provided an explanation of the national oppression of black South Africans, and equally for a united front strategy designed to overcome this oppression via a 'national democratic revolution', led by the black working class. By arguing that real power rests in the hands of monopoly capital, which is nevertheless joined by other white groupings in "the perpetuation of the colonial-type subjugation of the non-White population", the SACP is able to mobilize support for socialism by tying it to a national democratic strategy which, in its opinion, is in the interests of not only blacks but even white workers.⁶¹ Thus it argues that "there are no acute or antagonistic class divisions at present among the African people", and that the ANC "is representative of all the classes and strata which make up African society".⁶² On the other hand, the SACP appears to relegate socialism to the distant future, and fails to comment on the role of the

60 SACP *The Road to South African Freedom* 1962 in *South African Communists Speak 1915-1980* (London: Inkululeko) 1981 p.300

61 *Ibid.* p.302

62 *Ibid.* pp.302,307-8

working class after carrying out a revolution based on the Freedom Charter, which, it admits, "is not a programme for socialism".⁶³ Hence there exists a tension between the strategy for a national democratic revolution and the longer-term strategy for socialism, based on the underlying assertion that South Africa involves a mixture of capitalism and colonialism.

In the light of the above, Wolpe's analysis of cheap labour-power in South Africa should be seen as a theoretical intervention with political overtones. By explaining the relationship between race and class in terms of the articulation between modes of production, Wolpe was attempting to overcome the analytical gap between colonial and capitalist exploitation in the SACP's analysis. He integrated colonial or national oppression into capitalist exploitation of cheap labour to the extent that a challenge to the one became a challenge to the other.⁶⁴ The national question was taken to manifest itself in the form of the preservation of the reserves, because the reserves were assumed to retain an essentially non-capitalist nature. In this view, an ANC victory in South Africa is a necessary precondition for the construction of socialism; but like the SACP, Wolpe did not clarify the struggle for socialism itself. Furthermore, as Du Toit has pointed out, while the SACP viewed all blacks, including coloureds and Indians, as subject to national oppression, Wolpe confined his argument to the reserves and black migrant workers.⁶⁵ In Wolpe's argument, it is the Bantustans that constitute the basis of the national dimension in South Africa and of African nationalism and its strategy. In the 1980's, Wolpe would extend this position by arguing, contrary to the prevailing strategy of boycotting government-

63 *Ibid.* p.314. On the one hand, the Freedom Charter will 'lay the foundations for socialism' by nationalizing mining, banking and industry, and on the other hand, it will protect the interests of and offer assistance to non-monopoly private business - *Ibid.* p.317. See also Du Toit *Capital and Labour in South Africa* pp.183,189,193

64 Wolpe "Capitalism and Cheap Labour-Power" p.454

65 Du Toit *Capital and Labour in South Africa* pp.186-7

created institutions, that the Bantustans constituted potential sites of mass struggle.⁶⁶

Both Wolpe and Legassick took pains to incorporate the national question into Marxist studies. However, whereas Wolpe bolstered the theory of internal colonialism by founding the national struggle on the major contradiction between modes of production, Legassick's political trajectory went further. In 1971 he was of the opinion that the cultural tradition of African nationalism, including not only Bantustan leaders but also the Black Consciousness movement, may prove to be "the most powerful lever of hegemony" for the liberation of South Africa.⁶⁷ By 1974, this nationalist strategy had been absorbed into a wider struggle for socialism, and the theory of internal colonialism, initially accepted in a broad sense,⁶⁸ was now seen as "vague, inconsistent, and unsatisfactory".⁶⁹ Highlighting the world capitalist context and the specific totality of a forced-labour system in South Africa in which capitalism has harnessed or recreated non-capitalist modes of production,⁷⁰ Legassick argued that the "principal contradiction [is] between capital and labour", though this is mediated by "other [national] contradictions".⁷¹ This opened the way for a rejection of the SACP's 'two-stage' strategy: "national liberation is not the prelude to, but the form of, social revolution",⁷² hence apartheid "can be ended only by a struggle against capitalism itself".⁷³ However,

66 H.Wolpe "Towards an Analysis of the South African State" *International Journal of the Sociology of Law* 8,4 1980

67 Legassick "Forced Labour" p.269. See also pp.241-242

68 M.Legassick "Class and Nationalism in South African Protest: The South African Communist Party and the 'Native Republic', 1928-34" *Eastern African Studies Program*, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York, July 1973 pp.53-4

69 Legassick "Capital Accumulation" p.255

70 Legassick "Class and Nationalism" pp.32,34

71 *Ibid.* p.32

72 *Ibid.* pp.34-36

73 Legassick "Capital Accumulation" p.285

this rather one-sided fusion of the national struggle into the class struggle was balanced by an equivalent stress on the liberatory aspects of nationalism, with echoes of Black Consciousness economic and political self-help, consciousness-raising and 'reformist' popular mobilization.⁷⁴

In conclusion, the early Marxist approach bears indelible traces of the context in which it emerged. This context includes the climate of political repression and economic growth, the antagonism towards the liberal approach, and the presence of indigenous Marxist theories of liberation in South Africa. Each of these factors contributed to the ambiguities and internal contradictions of the early approach, particularly its inability to fully explain racial discrimination in terms of class domination. Wolpe himself later admitted this, with reference to the Marxists' opposition to the liberal approach: "the early work of Marxist academic writers, had not yet managed to free itself of certain conceptions which belonged to the liberal analysis. That is to say, the Marxist work, in responding to the liberal analyses remained, to some extent, on the conceptual terrain and within the 'problematic' of that analysis".⁷⁵ This chapter has argued that the early Marxist attempts to construct a firm, alternative paradigm were debilitated not only by their opposition to liberalism but also by their need to take liberation analyses into account. Since liberation theory has continued into the 1980's to be an active influence on Marxist studies, one should be careful not to take at face value Wolpe's assumption that Marxist studies *have* 'managed to free itself'. Rather, as Marxist studies have changed under the influence of new theoretical and political developments, so their relationship to liberation theory has taken on different forms and raised new issues.

74 Legassick "Class and Nationalism" pp.57-62

75 H.Wolpe "A Comment on "The Poverty of Neo-Marxism"" *Journal of Southern African Studies* 4,2 1978 p.254

The Critique of the Early Marxist Approach

In the mid-1970's a significant theoretical shift took place in Marxist analyses of South Africa. It was on this basis that the earlier focus on the structural and historical conditions of capitalist development was replaced by a focus on the nature of the State. Several factors were instrumental in prompting this shift. In South Africa itself, the economic boom had petered out in the early 1970's, giving way to a lengthening series of recessions, and increases in both unemployment and inflation. At the same time, the silence of the 1960's was broken by the voices of student activists heralding the rise of the Black Consciousness movement, and by the 1973-74 strike wave, followed by the slow but steady growth of the trade union movement. Regionally, the borders of independent black Africa pressed closer to the white South as Angola and Mocambique were liberated. When the students revolted in 1976, it seemed to confirm that the apartheid state was caught up in a predicament of critical proportions. In this new and exciting atmosphere of change, Marxist studies was galvanized by a spate of new theoretical and historical contributions which together launched a critique of the early approach and reconstructed the terrain of analysis.

Black education in South Africa has been an arena of struggle since its inception. In 1969, disillusioned with the dominance of liberal and at times paternalistic whites in the National Union of South African Students, black students broke away to form the separate South African Students Organization. By 1972 a national organization, the Black Peoples Convention, had been established, aiming in the tradition of the Pan-Africanist Congress to conscientize blacks and to set up black businesses and trade unions. An important aspect of this ideology of Black Consciousness was the grouping of 'coloureds' and Indians together with Africans under the rubric of 'black'. This, together with the radicalization of black students and the general

though limited effect of raising awareness within black communities, contributed to the growing resistance against apartheid.⁷⁶ In particular, the SASO breakaway left white radicals in a 'political limbo', marginalizing them from both white liberal and black radical politics, and leaving them Marxism as one of their few remaining options.⁷⁷

What initially contributed the most to the burgeoning struggles of the 1970's, however, was the wave of strikes by black workers beginning in Durban in 1973 and quickly spreading to the whole country. Precipitated spontaneously under the burden of increasing inflation and unemployment, workers demanded, and in most cases received, limited wage increases. Even more surprising, the state refrained from simply arresting strikers, and together with capital moved to review wages and to give black workers more access to industrial relations machinery and a limited right to strike. Such 'reformist' moves were intended to re-establish control over workers, but they had the additional effect of demonstrating to the oppressed that the 'silent Sixties' were over and that resistance could lead to change. The confidence generated was rapidly transformed into trade union organization, which, often debilitated by bannings and detentions, sought to concentrate on grass-roots organization and economic issues as opposed to political mobilization.⁷⁸ While Black Consciousness had adherents among the early Marxists, for example influencing Legassick's early position, it was rapidly overshadowed in Marxist studies by the sudden revival of worker struggles, leading to an increasing stress on the centrality of the working class for any theory or strategy in South Africa.

76 For this paragraph, see B.Hirson *Year of Fire, Year of Ash* (London: Zed) 1979

77 See K.Jubber "Sociology and its Social Context: The Case of the Rise of Marxist Sociology in South Africa" *Social Dynamics* 9,2 1983 p.61

78 See S.Friedman *Building Tomorrow Today* (Johannesburg: Ravan) 1987 ch's 2,4

The small group of South African Marxists working or studying in Britain tripled in number during the early 1970's. A 'second generation' of Marxist students had arrived in Britain to continue post-graduate studies, and were some five to ten years younger than Wolpe, Legassick, Johnstone and Trapido. Some had been recently radicalized by campus protests in South Africa in 1968, but more importantly, they made their contributions under very different circumstances. In the prescient words of the SACP, during "the silence of the past ten years ... the Government was able to boast that everything is quiet; the people are very happy and contented. But they are not happy and contented. The 1970's are going to show they are angry and militant; ready for revolution".⁷⁹ Though perhaps not quite ready for revolution, the South African working class began to stir and internal political and ideological resistance was re-awakening. In this atmosphere, Marxists such as Michael Williams, Mike Morris, Martin Fransman, David Kaplan and Rob Davies⁸⁰ accepted that the work of Wolpe and Legassick had laid the "groundwork" for 'an integrated theory of the South African social formation', in particular by placing the relations of production at the centre of their analyses; but this 'groundwork', the critics charged, remained insufficient: it required 'elaboration and sophistication'.⁸¹

Specifically, both Williams and Morris, as had Legassick, accepted Wolpe's explanation for segregation in terms of the labour-reproductive functions of the

79 SACP "Freedom can be Won" in *The African Communist* 1970, reproduced in *South African Communists Speak 1915-1918* (London: Inkululeko) 1981 pp.378-79

80 The critiques by Fransman, Kaplan and Davies are discussed more fully in the following chapter.

81 M.Morris "Capitalism and Apartheid: A Critique of some current conceptions of cheap labour-power", written in 1974, published in T.Adler (ed) *Perspectives on South Africa: A Collection of Working Papers* (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand) 1977 p.52; M.Williams "An Analysis of South African Capitalism: Neo-Ricardianism or Marxism?" *Bulletin of the Conference of Socialist Economists* 4,1 1975 p.3

reserves,⁸² but argued that he did not explain why it was that capitalism acted to cheapen labour-power *in this way* rather than, for instance, by completely dissolving the pre-capitalist relations of production. They proceeded to explain the necessity for segregation with reference to the 'inner laws of capitalist production', namely, that the dominant branch of the economy at the time, gold and diamond mining, could not lower the value of labour-power in the sense of extracting relative surplus value, since it did not produce, and hence could not cheapen, commodities upon which labour subsisted.⁸³ Lacking this recourse, and unable to prolong the working day beyond twenty-four hours, mining required the maintenance of the pre-capitalist reserves so as to cheapen labour-power. Williams and Morris in this way situated the pre-capitalist modes within the context of the capitalist mode of production: for Williams, the pre-capitalist modes had in fact been destroyed and replaced with a "travesty" dependent upon capitalism for its continued existence.⁸⁴ The analysis of cheap labour-power thus once again underwent a modification: it began with Johnstone's political explanation, moved to Wolpe's structural argument which, however, failed to explain *why* it was necessary to conserve the pre-capitalist relations, and finally ended with Morris and Williams' explanation in terms of the immanent logic of capitalism itself.⁸⁵

However, the critics went much further than merely elaborating upon what Wolpe had already argued. Essentially, they were concerned with a major implication of

82 Morris "Capitalism and Apartheid" pp.64-5; Williams "An Analysis" p.10

83 Morris "Capitalism and Apartheid" pp.59-61; Williams "An Analysis" p.6

84 Williams "An Analysis" p.31

85 However, none of these shifts were conscious of their lack of a sense of gender, despite the fact that women were assumed to play a salient role in the reproduction of labour-power. The reproduction of cheap labour-power and the maintenance of low levels of subsistence in both reserves and townships were predicated not only on the power of capital and the State but also on the prior subordination of black women, to the extent that it was *men* and not women who became the first migrants. See B.Bozzoli "Marxism, Feminism and South African Studies" *Journal of Southern African Studies* 9,1 1982

the early Marxist explanation of apartheid. If apartheid was a *political reaction* to the changing economic conditions within the *non-capitalist* reserves, then the early Marxist insistence that racial discrimination was the political form of capitalist development in South Africa seemed to be contradicted. Williams and Morris sought to overcome this contradiction by a more rigorous conceptualization of the theoretical terrain. They argued that Wolpe confused the conceptual abstraction of 'mode of production' with the way in which it may be concretized in a particular social formation, that he ignored the fundamentality of the 'value relation' or the 'law of value' in explaining capitalism, and hence that his account remains at the level of appearances.⁸⁶ Most importantly, they argued that when analyzing the relationship between the dominant capitalist mode and the subordinate pre-capitalist modes of production, "it is changes occurring in the former that will determine the overall relationship between the two";⁸⁷ "the relationship between the two can only be understood on the basis of the immanent laws and tendencies of the capitalist mode itself".⁸⁸ To the critics, Wolpe and Legassick had produced a Marxist theoretical terrain which however was defective because it failed to eliminate or subordinate prevailing non-Marxist conceptions: Wolpe's account implied that,

as a result of declining productivity in the so-called non-capitalist sector, social relations of production which are essentially external to the capitalist mode of production infuse the latter with its own internal contradiction,⁸⁹

86 Morris "Capitalism and Apartheid" pp.57,63-4,66; Williams "An Analysis" p.5

87 Morris "Capitalism and Apartheid" p.61

88 Williams "An Analysis" p.4

89 Williams "An Analysis" p.22

while, worse still, it "allows 'liberal' analysis so much theoretical and political room to manoeuvre".⁹⁰

Starting from the standpoint of 'total social capital', Morris and Williams produced an alternative account of apartheid. Referring to changes in the structure of South African capitalism particularly after 1945, they noted that the manufacturing sector was becoming the dominant branch of capital under circumstances of increasing organic composition of capital and a shift in the technical division of labour from an artisan/unskilled division to an operative/managerial-supervisory division.⁹¹ These changes, concomitant upon secondary industrialization, resulted in "a dual process of repulsion and attraction" of labour from the impoverished reserves, which was facilitated by state policies of influx control and labour bureaux.⁹² Hence apartheid, though certainly coercive, was essentially the product of changes in the capitalist mode of production, which sought to maintain the low value of black labour-power through the extraction of relative surplus value and the maintenance of low levels of subsistence.⁹³ Thus the critique of the early Marxist approach attempted to ground the terrain of analysis by referring it to the inner nature of the dominant capitalist mode of production. The dominant contradiction in South

90 Morris "Capitalism and Apartheid" p.68. Morris makes this point with regard to the early Marxists' tendency to claim (incorrectly) that African real wages are falling. However, Legassick later pointed out that the 'cheap labour' hypothesis "depends on the interpretation of 'cheapness', which does not necessarily imply either a declining or a static real wage". Rather, "institutions of racial discrimination and/or extra-economic coercion may serve to 'cheapen' labour, *to make it cheaper than it would have been in their absence*, whether or not the absolute magnitude of the wage of employed persons is rising or falling". M.Legassick "Postscript to 'Legislation, Ideology and Economy in Post-1948 South Africa'" in L.Schlemmer & E.Webster (eds) *Change, Reform and Economic Growth in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Ravan) 1978 pp.73-74 (Original emphasis)

91 Morris "Capitalism and Apartheid" pp.69-72; Williams "An Analysis" pp.10ff,12,13,14

92 Morris "Capitalism and Apartheid" pp.73ff

93 Morris "Capitalism and Apartheid" p.83

Africa was not between the rational economic and the irrational political, as the liberals had argued, nor was it between 'white colonial capitalism' and a powerless, coerced and cheap black labour force, as Johnstone and Legassick had argued, nor even was it between modes of production, as Wolpe had argued; instead, it was within capitalism itself.⁹⁴

The mid-1970's theoretical shift also had implications for political strategy. It has been shown how Wolpe's discussion of segregation and apartheid in terms of the demand for cheap labour was closely linked to the liberation analyses of South Africa as an 'internal colonialism'. By rejecting Wolpe's explanation, Williams was also implicitly rejecting the two-stage strategy of national liberation before socialism, and proposing instead a 'pure' class struggle.⁹⁵ Given an analytical starting-point that enclosed all forms of struggle within capitalism, and the revival of working class resistance, the terms of the shift in Marxist studies at best dissolved the national question into socialism; at worst, nationalism represented a petty bourgeois mystification of class reality. In this sense, the Williams-Morris critique took Legassick's disquiet on the issue of internal colonialism to its logical conclusion. If, as Legassick had argued, apartheid and capitalism must be abolished simultaneously,⁹⁶ then it seemed unnecessary to persist in asserting, as Legassick had done, the importance of a national struggle equivalent to the socialist struggle. With South Africa defined as unambiguously capitalist, and with socialism apparently on the agenda, the foundations had been laid for a debate on the nature of the state.

94 Williams "An Analysis" pp.1,22

95 *Ibid.* pp.2-3,28. This point is also made in Du Toit *Capital and Labour in South Africa* p.187

96 Legassick "Capital Accumulation and Violence" pp.285-86

The pertinence of the critique of the early approach was widely accepted, including by Wolpe and Legassick. Returning in 1976 to the issue of apartheid, they argued that it involved not only the rising organic composition of capital and the extraction of relative surplus value, but also that these developments tended to generate an industrial reserve army or an increasingly floating relative surplus-population.⁹⁷ The existence of this surplus-population is central to the understanding of both the maintenance of low wage levels and state measures to control and distribute this population through forced removals, labour bureaux and Bantustan social control.⁹⁸ In the light of this, they proceeded to reformulate Wolpe's 1972 definition of apartheid:

apartheid, as the mechanisms [*sic.*] specific to South Africa in the period of secondary industrialization under conditions of rising organic composition of capital, is an *expression* of the possibility of maintaining a cheap and controlled labour-force, and a high rate of capitalist exploitation, which is in large part a consequence of the character of the industrial reserve army.⁹⁹

This new definition appears to have reconciled the connection of apartheid to the reserves or bantustans with the latter's insertion into a capitalist mode of production. The 'character of the industrial reserve army' thus replaces the earlier causal factor of the disintegration of the reserves. In addition, the earlier rather dogmatic assertion that apartheid is "guaranteed" to maintain a high rate of exploitation has been watered down into a mere "possibility". Overall, it has been accepted that apartheid must be related to "the conditions of accumulation of *total social capital*".¹⁰⁰

97 M.Legassick & H.Wolpe "The Bantustans and Capital Accumulation in South Africa" *Review of African Political Economy* 7 1976 pp.97-98

98 *Ibid.* pp.91,94-95

99 *Ibid.* pp.102-103 (Original emphasis)

100 *Ibid.* p.102 (Original emphasis)

As noted above, Williams and Morris were not the only ones to criticize the early Marxist approach. The fundamental shift of the terrain of analysis, initiated by these two theorists, took place at the same time as other Marxists, namely Kaplan, Fransman and Davies, were beginning to focus more specifically on the character of classes and the state in South Africa. As we shall see in the next section, the early Marxist approach did not entirely neglect the question of classes and the state, but on the one hand it operated on a more macro-historical (Legassick) and abstract (Wolpe) level, and on the other hand it concentrated on the question of labour. For the early Marxists, segregation and apartheid, the two major 'political forms' of capitalist development in twentieth-century South Africa, were essentially the outgrowth of the need of capital for vast supplies of cheap and docile black labour. The state was thus premised on the provision of labour for capital. To this extent, argued Kaplan, the early approach suffered from 'an incomplete and inadequate conceptual framework', for it tended to assume that capital was an homogeneous and undifferentiated entity and also ignored "the question of surplus reallocation and reinvestment".¹⁰¹ To speak of segregation or apartheid as the 'political form' of capitalist development was insufficient; what was lacking in the early approach was a precise analysis of the internal class structure of the South African social formation.

Against Wolpe's alleged confusion of the abstract and the concrete, Morris argued that one cannot "treat the capitalist mode of production as an undifferentiated concept", because "in any particular capitalist mode of production in a particular historical moment in time, there is also a *dominant* branch (or fraction) of capitalist

101 D.Kaplan "Capitalist Development in South Africa: Class Conflict and the State" in T.Adler (ed) *Perspectives on South Africa - A Collection of Working Papers* (Johannesburg: African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand) 1977 pp.97,100

production".¹⁰² In the early period, this dominant branch was gold and diamond mining which was responsible for the conservation of the pre-capitalist modes of production as a means of cheapening labour-power. Similarly, Kaplan, arguing that "capital' cannot be treated as a single category", went on to analyze the class contradictions and changes in hegemony between 'foreign' (mining) capital and 'indigenous' (agrarian and manufacturing) capital in the early period.¹⁰³ The differentiation of the concept of capital was reinforced by the growing influence in South African Marxist studies of the work of Nicos Poulantzas, then in vogue in Britain, and reached a high point in the 'fractionalist' analyses of the state. Via the Morris-Williams critique, Wolpe's ambiguity over the dominance of capitalism in South Africa in the 'early period' (of segregation) was decisively displaced; as Legassick and then Kaplan argued, capitalism had achieved dominance 'at an early stage', if not with the mineral discoveries then with the South African War at the turn of the century.¹⁰⁴

In conclusion, the critique of the early Marxist approach aimed at placing Marxist analyses of South Africa on a firmer footing. By emphasizing the dominance of the capitalist mode of production with its inherent laws of motion, the critique subordinated race to an epiphenomenon of class and shifted to a politics of socialism. In addition, the mid-1970's shift in terrain coincided with the first debates on the nature of the state, and, apart from heralding this change in focus, also constituted its boundaries. Future developments in Marxist studies could now refer back to a single, stable centre: the capitalist relations of production, involving class conflict built on exploitation and domination. This defined both the necessary starting-point and the horizon of analysis, the latter now extended to cover South

102 Morris "Capitalism and Apartheid" pp.58-9 (Original emphasis)

103 Kaplan "Capitalist Development in South Africa" p.123

104 *Ibid.* p.118; Legassick "Capital Accumulation and Violence" pp.257,260

African history since the mining revolution. Hence it was only a half-decade after the first critiques of the liberal conventional wisdom that Marxist studies constituted itself as an alternative paradigm. But it remained far from closed. A debate on the relationship between the economic and the political raged anew on the terrain of the state, bolstered by the importation of European Marxist political theory, and the national question continued to hover uncertainly in the background.

CHAPTER TWO

THE DEBATE ON THE NATURE OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN STATE

In the 1960's international Marxism began to re-awaken after the long Stalinist night. Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin, the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian uprising, and worsening relations between the USSR and its erstwhile Chinese proteges combined to shatter the near-monopoly that the 'motherland of socialism' had held on Marxist theory and practice. The revival of Marxism was also able to build on the tradition of 'Western Marxism', within which theorists such as Gramsci, Sartre, Althusser and those of the Frankfurt School can be numbered. Western Marxism sought to counter the prevailing emphasis on economic determinism by focusing primarily on the political and ideological 'superstructure' of capitalist societies; hence their concern with culture, ideology, human agency, and in the sole case of Gramsci, political hegemony.¹⁰⁵ The key figure in this revival was Louis Althusser, whose marriage of structuralism and Marxism reacted not only against economic determinism, but also against the 'humanism' and 'historicism' of Western Marxists. Instead of confining itself to 'superstructural' problems, the revival produced studies of politics and ideology side by side and often integrated with studies of economics. Most importantly for our purposes, it was during this period that a concerted effort was made to revise and extend the relatively sparse and stark comments made by Marx, Engels, and Lenin on the state.

105 P.Anderson *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: NLB) 1976

The two most important new developments in Marxist political theory were initiated by Ralph Miliband and Nicos Poulantzas, on the one hand, and on the other, by the West German *Staatsableitung* debates. It was the Miliband-Poulantzas debate that dominated Marxist political theorizing in Great Britain during the early 1970's, to be superseded by the criticisms leveled at the victorious Poulantzian position by the 'state-derivationists' or 'capital-relationists'. Each of these positions aimed to overcome the predominant themes of economic determinism and instrumentalism regarding the state in the works of Marx, Engels, and Lenin.¹⁰⁶ In Marx's famous wording, "the executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie".¹⁰⁷ As for Lenin, his formulations, derived more from Engels than from Marx, are far more naked and direct: the state is "an instrument for the exploitation of the oppressed class", and is composed of "special bodies of armed men".¹⁰⁸ Stalinized Marxism transformed these arguments into crude positivistic theses based on the assumption that the class struggle was a simple expression of 'inexorable' capitalist laws of motion; in this conception, an understanding of politics and strategy was superfluous since the self-destruction of capitalism and the advent of socialism were inevitable.

Poulantzas' main contribution was to stress the 'relative autonomy' of the capitalist state *vis-a-vis* the dominant classes. The fragmented bourgeoisie not only required such a state to achieve unity, but the functioning of this unstable power bloc

106 B.Jessop *The Capitalist State* (Oxford: Martin Robertson) 1982. Note that these 'predominant' themes were not the only themes - Jessop points out that Marx and Engels, at least, attempted to balance these structural themes against the theme of class agency in their concrete historical analyses - Jessop p.13

107 K.Marx *The Communist Manifesto* in D.McLellan (ed) *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* (Oxford: University Press) 1977 p.223

108 V.I.Lenin *The State and Revolution* (Moscow: Progress) 1985 pp.13,15

required the hegemony of a single fraction of capital.¹⁰⁹ Thus the state was viewed as a relatively autonomous "political organizer and unifier" of the ruling classes,¹¹⁰ at the same time as it disorganized and isolated the dominated classes.¹¹¹

Hegemony was defined as the constitution of the political interests of the dominant classes in relation to the state i.e. "as representatives of the 'general interest' of the body politic", as well as "the particular domination of one of the dominant classes or fractions vis-a-vis the other dominant classes or fractions in a capitalist social formation".¹¹² Though Poulantzas' 'class-theoretical' account gained a large following in Britain, it was criticized by the German 'capital-theoretical' approach.¹¹³ Here, the nature of the state was taken to 'derive' from the specific economic and historical *form* of the class struggle. Hence,

The economic should not be seen as the base which determines the political superstructure, but rather the economic and the political are both forms of social relations, forms assumed by the basic relation of class conflict in capitalist society, the capital relation, forms whose separate existence springs, both logically and historically, from the nature of that relation.¹¹⁴

From this perspective, Poulantzas' account was 'politician', insufficiently concerned with the limits imposed on the state by the economic.¹¹⁵ On the other hand, the

109 N.Poulantzas *Political Power and Social Classes* pp.298,284; "On Social Classes" *New Left Review* 78 1973 p.44

110 N.Poulantzas "The Capitalist State: A Reply to Miliband and Laclau" *New Left Review* 95 1976 p.71

111 Poulantzas *Political Power* pp.188-9

112 *Ibid.* pp.140-141

113 The *Staatsableitung* approach penetrated Britain under the auspices of the Conference of Socialist Economists and through the work of John Holloway and Sol Picciotto (eds) *State and Capital: A Marxist Debate* (London: Edward Arnold) 1978, and "Capital, Crisis and the State" in *Capital and Class* 2 1977

114 Holloway and Picciotto "Capital, Crisis and the State" p.82

115 *Ibid.* pp.82,92; Holloway and Picciotto *State and Capital* pp.6-7

capital-relationists tended to conflate the economic and the political and to reduce both to moments of an essentialist whole.¹¹⁶

While Europe was experiencing a revival in Marxist political theory, under the impact of worker resistance and popular protest South Africa entered a new period of political and economic struggle. Despite its coercive power, the state was revealed as precariously exposed: its direct management of the processes of proletarianization and urbanization had left it without recourse to depoliticized and universal institutions of conflict-mediation. Its hesitant attempts to reconstruct the patterns of domination intensified the divisions in white politics. In addition, the hard-won victories of the MPLA and FRELIMO in Angola and Mocambique in 1975, and South Africa's abortive invasion of the former, demonstrated that the apartheid regime and its allies were neither invincible nor imperishable. Both the renewed resistance and the consequent restructuring of the state raised questions about the nature of power, domination and resistance in South Africa: in particular, the nature of the state, the class struggle, and the relationship between classes and the state. In turn, these questions prioritized the issue of what political strategies ought to be adopted. Recently firmly grounded on the analytical starting-point of 'total social capital', Marxist studies took account of these new questions within the framework of the British Marxist debates. For a period of about six years, centering on the later 1970's, Poulantzian fractionalists vied with capital-relationists over the nature of the South African state.

In the early Marxist texts on the political economy of South Africa, the state, though not the specific focus of such analyses, was presented in an instrumentalist fashion,

as the weapon or tool of the ruling classes. For Legassick, the ruling class during the early colonial period was an "alliance of merchants and farmers", transformed with the mineral discoveries and under British hegemony into an "alliance of gold and maize" to which, "in 1910, Britain returned state power".¹¹⁷ This state completed the process of conquest of the semi-autonomous African social formations; it intervened to tax, to coerce, and to redirect surplus-value. State power was identified with governments acting in the interests of certain fractions of the bourgeoisie (and also white workers). Several of the themes in the late-1970's debate on the state were present in the early work. Regarding the centrality of class struggle, and the redistribution of surplus: "the state under capitalism reflects the balance of power in the class struggle between capital and labour, and therefore can extend or inhibit the power of capital to appropriate surplus".¹¹⁸ The state was also "the guardian of the interests of capital in general".¹¹⁹ Overall, the state appeared as a thing or object to be seized or utilized: "the South African state is ... an instrument of class rule in a specific form of capitalist society" and "has been utilized at all times to secure and develop the capitalist mode of production".¹²⁰

A central concern of the early approach had been the characterization of the nature of segregation and apartheid, and their respective relationships to economic developments. Under the impact of the mid-1970's critique, Wolpe and Legassick

117 M.Legassick "South Africa: Forced Labour, Industrialization, and Racial Differentiation" in R.Harris (ed) *The Political Economy of Africa* (New York: Wiley) 1975 pp.243-244,247

118 M.Legassick "South Africa: Capital Accumulation and Violence" *Economy and Society* 3,3 1974 p.256

119 M.Legassick "Legislation, Ideology and Economy in Post-1948 South Africa" *Journal of Southern African Studies* 1,1 1974 p.14

120 H.Wolpe "Capitalism and Cheap Labour-Power in South Africa: From Segregation to Apartheid" *Economy and Society* 1 1972 p.429

accepted that these 'political forms' must be understood in terms of specific and changing value relationships within the capitalist mode of production. As such, the view of the state as an instrument of the ruling classes - a simplistic class-theoretical approach - was expanded in the direction of a capital-theoretical approach by showing how the state was inserted in the fundamental processes of capital accumulation. However, as Martin Fransman argued at the time, the accounts of both Wolpe and Legassick and their critics were economistic: "the policies comprising 'apartheid' and the onslaught against the African working class are seen as the direct result of changes in value relationships", that is, "having automatic material effects at the political and ideological levels".¹²¹ What was required was an analysis of the political that was not simply reduced to the economic but took into account the fact that "these 'economic' processes, whilst having important consequences for class struggle, also have class struggle right at their heart".¹²² In other words, the state theorists from the outset emphasized that the relations within and between the dominant and dominated classes, and between these classes and the state, are as important as value relationships in explaining the relationship between the economic and the political.

Similarly, Kaplan argued that Wolpe and Legassick had analyzed the relationship of domination of the capitalist mode of production over the pre-capitalist modes in terms of the reproduction of labour-power, but had neglected the relationship of

121 M.Fransman "Theoretical Questions in the Understanding of South Africa"
Marxistisk Antropologi 2,2-3 1976 p.122

122 *Ibid.* p.125

domination at the level of the capitalist mode itself.¹²³ Though "*all elements of capital benefited from the domination exercised by the state in respect of the pre-capitalist mode in that, this relation enabled them to realise an additional surplus*", such congruence of interests was absent with regard to "the question of surplus reallocation and reinvestment".¹²⁴ Kaplan argued that in the early twentieth century capital was divided between foreign or mining capital, repatriating its profits, and the weaker national capital (agriculture and manufacturing) which required for its development economic protection and the diversion of gold-mining surpluses via the state.¹²⁵ National capital's struggles to gain access to a state dominated by mining capital led it into an alliance with white workers, themselves seeking state aid against the tendency of mining capital to replace them with cheaper black labour.¹²⁶ This alliance triumphed in the electoral success of the Pact government,¹²⁷ which entrenched the colour bar, initiated the 'civilized labour'

123 D.Kaplan "Capitalist Development in South Africa: Class Conflict and the State" in T.Adler (ed) *Perspectives on South Africa - A Collection of Working Papers* (Johannesburg: African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand) 1977 p.100

124 *Ibid.* pp.97,102

125 *Ibid.* pp.105-6,108

126 Kaplan also argued that Legassick erroneously assumed that capital took a "uniform line on white workers" (*Ibid.* p.114-115). This is incorrect - Legassick argued that agriculture, unlike mining, had an interest in industrialization, and in alliance with white workers in 1924 instituted industrial protection and the job colour bar "against the protests of mining capital". See Legassick "South Africa: Forced Labour" pp.253-55

127 This electoral success was predicated on (a) the alliance between national capital and white workers and (b) the fact that the domination of the pre-capitalist modes had destroyed the potential allies (peasantry and/or feudal landlords) of foreign capital.

policy, and introduced whites-only industrial relations machinery.¹²⁸ Thus, for Kaplan, following Poulantzas, "capital' cannot be treated as a single category and within capital the major contradiction is between 'indigenous' and 'foreign'".¹²⁹

Another contribution to the initial debate on the state was that of Fransman and Davies,¹³⁰ who offered arguments which, like Kaplan's, stressed the fact of capital differentiation. However, they took issue with Kaplan, Legassick, Johnstone and Williams, in particular as regards the supposed change in hegemony in 1924 from mining to national capital. Drawing on Poulantzas' distinction between juristic and economic ownership (or control), Fransman and Davies argued that the "mining capitalists" were those who controlled and undertook the actual production of gold and the extraction of surplus value, as opposed to those European financiers and individuals who provided the necessary loan- and equity-capital.¹³¹ On this basis, the interests of mining capital lay not in repatriating profits but "in the expanded reproduction of capital *within the South African social formation*"; hence mining capital was itself 'national capital'.¹³² On this basis Fransman and Davies rejected

128 Kaplan went so far as to argue that white worker support was 'vital' for bourgeois hegemony (though without explaining how foreign capital dominated the social formation before 1924 *without* white worker support), on the basis of Poulantzas' argument that bourgeois fractional hegemony requires compromises with other classes in order to present itself as the 'representative of the general interest of the people' (*Ibid.* p.120).

129 *Ibid.* p.123. See also the preceding footnote.

130 M.Fransman & R.Davies "The South African Social Formation in the Early Capitalist Period circa 1870-1939. Some Views on the Question of Hegemony" in T.Adler (ed) *Perspectives on South Africa - A Collection of Working Papers* (Johannesburg: African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand) 1977

131 *Ibid.* pp.265-66

132 The reasons given for the 'national' character of mining capital were its local influence, monopolistic power, and efficient technology, the 'group system', the international importance of gold and the opportunity for increased output, and the availability of cheap labour. *Ibid.* pp.258,264-66 (Original emphasis)

the claim of a change in hegemony in 1924, and proposed the "uninterrupted power" and hegemony of mining capital.¹³³ They pointed out that a redistribution of surplus to non-mining industries could reduce mining costs.¹³⁴ The South African state thus reflected "the broader ... interests of the power bloc"; rather than an 'alliance' between white workers and national capital, the former were 'contained' through 'psychological' concessions aimed at guaranteeing the squeezing of "high" rates of profit from *inter alia* white workers".¹³⁵

It is possible to see the contributions of Kaplan, and Fransman and Davies, as overtures to the central debate of the later 1970's between fractionalist and capital-relationist conceptions of the South African state. Kaplan's concern, on the one hand, with the pivotal contradiction between fractions of capital, the "crucial watershed" of 1924, the alliance between capital and white workers, and the redistribution of surplus in favour of national capital and towards indigenous industrialization, and, on the other hand, Fransman and Davies' concern with the fundamentality of the relations of production, the continuity and inclusiveness of hegemony, and the containment of white workers, include many of the defining characteristics of the forthcoming debate. Legassick and Wolpe, in their reply to the critics of their early work, precisely delineated the core claims made by the debaters, while themselves taking an intermediate position: the fractionalists argued that the state cannot be fully understood "unless the contradictory interests of different fractions of capital are specified", to which the capital-relationists replied that any

133 *Ibid.* pp.267-8,275

134 *Ibid.* p.274

135 *Ibid.* p.281. By crushing the 1922 Revolt, mining capital was able to reduce the wages, and levels and conditions of employment, of white workers. This debunked Kaplan's implication that under the Pact white employment conditions significantly improved (*Ibid.* pp.260-61).

examination of the state must be situated "in terms of a prior analysis of the conditions of accumulation of *total* social capital".¹³⁶ However, this analogy between the positions of Kaplan, Fransman and Davies, and the later debate, must not be taken too far. Though Fransman and Davies' text can be articulated to a capital-relationist position, their terminology and problematic remain Poulantzian; in addition, Davies himself became one of the fractionalists. We turn now to the central debate on the nature of the South African state.

The Debate on the Nature of the South African State 1976-1980

In the late 1970's, South African Marxist studies were dominated by the importation of theoretical developments from the mainstream of contemporary Marxist political theory. A highly polemical debate was initiated between the supporters of Poulantzas and those who adhered to the West German 'capital-relation' approach. The key issue concerned the precise characterization of the relationship between the political and the economic, and represented an outgrowth of the early Marxist analyses of segregation and apartheid. Though the debate proved inconclusive, and was often marred by reductionism and essentialism, in recent years it has been overtaken by a set of perspectives which have incorporated many of its insights. Its main achievement was to place the black working class squarely in the centre of both theory and strategy, and in turn this had important implications for the analysis of the white working class. In the 1980's, the controversy continued to spill over into

136 M.Legassick & H.Wolpe "The Bantustans and Capital Accumulation in South Africa" *Review of African Political Economy* 7 1976 pp.89,102 (Original emphasis). Note that the 'intermediacy' of Legassick and Wolpe's position tends to favour the capital relation; for example: "The process of capital accumulation is an uneven one, and is expressed in a multiplicity of contradictory economic, political, and ideological forms" - *Ibid.* p.103

other areas of concern to Marxist South Africanists, namely the nature of the black petty bourgeoisie, the origins of the racially exclusive state, and the question of the relationship between the trade unions and the state.

The late-1970's debate on the nature of the South African state revolved around a seminal Poulantzian-inspired article by four Sussex-based Marxists.¹³⁷ These 'fractionalists' repeated Kaplan's original stress on the division between "foreign capital (largely mining) and national capital (principally agriculture or manufacturing)" and saw 1924 as a "crucial watershed".¹³⁸ The seizure of hegemony by national capital in alliance with 'white wage-earners' was "manifest at the party political level in the electoral pact" between the Nationalist Party and the Labour Party against the South Africa Party as the "authentic party political representative of mining capital"¹³⁹. The role of the state after 1924 lay not in "interfering with the production of surplus value in the mines" but rather in re-directing surplus to national capital in the form of tariff protection, subsidies and the establishment of ISCOR.¹⁴⁰ White labour gained neither wages nor jobs, only "statutory protection for their *existing positions* in the division of labour".¹⁴¹ Noting that fusion and coalition in 1933-34 represented only a party-political change in the 'form of regime', the fractionalists argued that agricultural capital lost its hegemonic position in the power bloc with Hertzog's resignation over the war issue in 1939. Hereafter manufacturing capital maintained a 'tenuous hegemony', but proved

137 R.Davies, D.Kaplan, M.Morris & D.O'Meara "Class Struggle and the Periodisation of the State in South Africa" *Review of African Political Economy* 7 1976

138 *Ibid.* p.6

139 *Ibid.* pp.7-8

140 *Ibid.* pp.9-10

141 *Ibid.* p.11 (Original emphasis)

unable to satisfy all fractions of the power bloc. This prepared the ground for the victory of the National Party in 1948, representing agriculture, white labour and the Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie.

Criticism of the fractionalists was immediate and sharp, particularly from Marxists like Simon Clarke, Duncan Innes and Martin Plaut who favoured a 'capital-relationist' perspective. On the one hand, the fractionalists were accused of reducing politics to economic interests.¹⁴² Alternatively, the Poulantzian-derived separation between the economic and the political could result in an 'overpoliticised' approach, leading to political pluralism.¹⁴³ Though they claimed that political contradictions are 'secondary',¹⁴⁴ the fractionalists, like Poulantzas, failed to sufficiently relate politics to economics. Unlike Poulantzas, however, they compounded this by relating changes in the state *only* to changes in the power bloc and the hegemonic fraction.¹⁴⁵ The most serious criticism of their approach was that "the working class is ... largely excluded from the class struggle at the level of the state";¹⁴⁶ in other words, the fractionalists did not locate the state "in the struggle between capital and labour".¹⁴⁷ Their account of class struggle tends to be restricted to the dominant classes, and to be located only in the political space of the

142 S. Clarke "Capital, Fractions of Capital and the State" *Capital and Class* 5 1978 p.38 (Original emphasis); D. Innes & M. Plaut "Class Struggle and the State" *Review of African Political Economy* 11 1978 p.53

143 Clarke "Fractions of Capital" p.38; Innes & Plaut "Class Struggle" p.53

144 Davies *et al* "Periodisation" p.4

145 For Poulantzas, changes in the form of State relate also to modifications in "the state's relation to the isolation of socio-economic relations, the economic struggle" - Poulantzas *Political Power and Social Classes* p.151 (Original emphasis)

146 Clarke "Fractions of Capital" p.47

147 Innes & Plaut "Class Struggle" p.51. See also B. Bozzoli "Capital and the State in South Africa" *Review of African Political Economy* 11 1978 p.47

state. In turn this derives from their tendency to conflate the form of state with the form of regime, and to concentrate their analysis on the parliamentary struggles of the party political representatives of capital.¹⁴⁸

What of the capital-relationists own analytical approach? They began by emphasizing the 'analytical priority' of Marx's concept of 'capital-in-general' i.e. the "fundamental unity of the social relations of production" within which the economic and the political only *appear* as separate.¹⁴⁹ Thus the relations of production or "class relations are prior to the specific economic, ideological and political forms taken by those relations".¹⁵⁰ By conceiving of the economic and the political as a unity, the avenue to a simple economism was closed; but by absorbing all relations within the *a priori* concept of the relations of production (that is, the capital relation), essentialism became the order of the day.¹⁵¹ For example, Clarke argued that "the state is subordinate to capital because it is inserted in social relations that are themselves defined by the dominance of capital"; thus "political relations do not *reproduce* economic relations, rather they *complement* them as different forms of the same fundamental social relations".¹⁵² Similarly, for Innes and Plaut, "the state is

148 Though Poulantzas rejected such an analysis (*Political Power* pp.248-9), he does in fact allow such a reading, often writing about the 'presence' of classes and fractions, and not merely political parties, on the 'political scene' - *Ibid.* pp.284,296

149 Clarke "Fractions of Capital" p.41; Innes & Plaut "Class Struggle" p.52

150 Clarke "Fractions of Capital" p.41

151 On this point, the South African capital-relationists differ from Holloway and Picciotto who stressed that what is 'functional' to capital in general (its interests and strategies, and State strategies) can only be established through class struggle, and more specifically, concrete historical research. J.Holloway & S.Picciotto "Capital, Crisis and the State" in *Capital and Class* 2 1977 p.100 fn.23

152 Clarke "Fractions of Capital" p.64 (Original emphasis)

the political form of the domination of capital in general over labour".¹⁵³ Thus the capital-relationists reduced *both* the political and the economic to an analytical concept of the whole: variously, capital-in-general, total social capital, class relations, or relations of production.¹⁵⁴ As one critic pointed out, this account "assumes that the determination of all moments (aspects) and their interrelations are absorbed in the meaning of the core concept".¹⁵⁵

Hence, whereas for the fractionalists the state is capitalist because its function is to politically unify capitals constituted in the economic, for the capital-relationists the state is capitalist because it exists in a capitalist society. Both accounts are instrumentalist; the fractionalist account is class reductionist, and the capital-relation approach is essentialist.¹⁵⁶ In addition, whereas the fractionalists tended to take the process of capital accumulation for granted, the capital-relationists tended to assume that the functionality of the state for capital is unproblematic. The Poulantzian relative autonomy of the state implies, in theory, that the state can act in ways inimical to the interests of capital (though in the long run, or in the final analysis, state actions are always in the interests of capital as a whole). But to derive the state in a non-complex manner from the capital relation is to assume without analysis that political relations will *always* complement economic relations, that the

153 Innes & Plaut "Class Struggle" p.55

154 D.Kaplan "Relations of Production, Class Struggle and the State in South Africa in the Interwar Period" *Review of African Political Economy* 15/16 1979.

Kaplan added that this approach is unable to theorise changes in the form of the State, since "the state is always capitalist" and "'capital-in-general' misses the internal contradictions within the bourgeoisie" - *Ibid.* pp.135,137,143

155 J.Solomos "The Marxist Theory of the State and the Problem of Fractions" *Capital and Class* 7 1979 p.145

156 See H.Wolpe "Towards an Analysis of the South African State" *International Journal of the Sociology of Law* 8 1980

state is *essentially* capitalist and hence functional. Thus, while the fractionalists produce a functionalist account of the state *because* it is seen as an instrument seized in the process of intra-capitalist struggle, the capital-relationists' starting point essentially assumes this functionality.¹⁵⁷

The criticisms directed at the fractionalists were not confined to the theoretical level. Innes and Plaut, focussing on the conjuncture of the 1920's, argued that after the First World War, the state and capital were on the defensive in circumstances of labour shortages, migrant and white labour militancy, and the formation of the ICU and CPSA. Consequently, they sought to "concede" to demands so as to "contain" them; however, the 1922 Rand Revolt, though crushed, forced a modification in strategy, because "the underlying resistance of white workers was so strong".¹⁵⁸

Parallel to and 'in correspondence with' capital's 'economic onslaught', the state initiated a three-pronged 'political assault' on white workers: (a) the provision of job opportunities for white workers through the policy of industrialisation (including protection, the establishment of ISCOR, and fiscal reforms); (b) continued division of the working class, through the incorporation of whites and not blacks into industrial relations machinery; and (c) the prevention of the *further* erosion of white job reservation, and the introduction of the 'civilized labour' policy. With regard to black workers and an 'emerging alliance' between sections of black and white workers, "the state mounted a massive campaign of terror".¹⁵⁹ Thus, "it was these struggles and the defeat suffered by the South African working class at this time,

157 Note also that this essentialism is balanced in Holloway and Picciotto by their stress on class struggle and concrete historical analysis, and in their argument that "it cannot be assumed that the state will act rationally in the interests of capital in general". Holloway & Picciotto "Capital, Crisis and the State" p.95

158 Innes & Plaut "Class Struggle" p.57

159 *Ibid.* pp.56-7 (Original emphasis)

which laid the basis for the period of rapid economic growth which characterised the thirties - the so-called 'golden period' of capital accumulation".¹⁶⁰

Reiterating the earlier work of Fransman and Davies, and prefiguring Yudelman's work in the 1980's, Innes and Plaut noted the effects of the crushing of white labour in the Rand Revolt in the form of lower wages and the restructuring of the racial division of labour, and thus rejected the fractionalist argument of an 'alliance' between white labour and capital. Instead, they argued, there was "an *assault* on white workers" in order to "*neutralise* the threat which they posed for capital".¹⁶¹ The conjuncture of the 1920's was presented as a period of continuity, because, by absorbing fractions of capital into capital-in-general, the theory did not recognize the existence of changes in hegemony.¹⁶² Innes argued not only that foreign mining investors may develop an interest in local industrialization in order to secure cheaper inputs, but in particular, the interests of the Anglo-American Corporation were more locally-oriented than those of any other fraction of mining capital: its overseas concerns were limited, and there were vast opportunities for regional expansion in diamonds, copper and gold. Hence the interests of fractions of both

160 *Ibid.* p.59. See also D.Innes *Anglo American and the Rise of Modern South Africa* (Johannesburg: Ravan) 1984

161 *Ibid.* pp.59-60 (Original emphasis)

162 In an earlier paper, co-authored with Manfred Beinefeld, Innes additionally noted the fact, raised by Fransman and Davies, that (some) sections of mining capital had an interest in internally re-investing capital and thus constituted a relatively independent and locally-based section of international capital. With regard to the issue of the 1920's representing political 'continuity' or a 'turning-point', however, Innes and Beinefeld appear to have favoured the latter: "In 1924 non-mining interests seized control of the State, which strengthened protective measures such as tariff barriers, as well as establishing an iron and steel works and expanding infrastructure" - D.Innes & M.Beinefeld "Capital Accumulation and South Africa" *Review of African Political Economy* 7 1976 pp.41-42,46

international capital and the supposedly 'internationally-oriented' mining capital, together with agricultural and manufacturing capital, were "inextricably bound up with the interests of the other capitalist classes in South Africa".¹⁶³ In these terms, the advent of the Pact government was simply the "popular rejection" of Smuts' brutal repression of the 1922 Revolt, involving a mere change in the 'political scene' without any effect on hegemony.¹⁶⁴

In a wider perspective, the fractionalist account was in part a reaction against the earlier explanation of segregation and apartheid solely in terms of economic changes, while the capital-relationist position represented a more complex reassertion of this argument, mediated through the Morris-Williams critique. To the extent that the fractionalists did not sufficiently relate the political to the economic, their account was 'politicist'. In contrast, the capital-relationists laid the emphasis on the totality of the relations of production. The commonplace characterization (by the social historians at least) of the 1970's literature as predominantly 'Poulantzian' is thus incorrect. Hereafter, important strands of state theory, though drawing on the analyses of both fractions of capital and capital-in-general, would ensure that the former were encapsulated in the latter.¹⁶⁵ Even the fractionalists, who had never disputed that inter-fractional struggles "have to be situated in the broader context of the fundamental contradiction between the bourgeoisie and the working class", conceded that by "concentrating on the former,

163 D.Innes "The Mining Industry in the Context of South Africa's Economic Development, 1910-1940" *The Societies of Southern Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* vol.7 Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London, 1977 pp.139,146

164 *Ibid.* p.140

165 This integration and encapsulation of the fractionalist/capital-relationist debate is prominent in the later work of Wolpe and Bozzoli.

we gave far too little attention to the latter and the net result was a number of weaknesses in the analysis".¹⁶⁶ The theoretical bedrock upon which South African Marxist state theory had been built, namely that all analysis must be based on the fundamental processes of capital accumulation, remained intact.

There are a number of political and strategic implications of this late-1970's debate on the South African state. Compared to the early Marxist approach, the issue of the national question was constantly downplayed, where it was not fused into the struggle for socialism.¹⁶⁷ The 1973 strikes, the growth of trade unions, and the 1976 stayaways in support of student protests were reflected in the increasing centrality accorded to the working class in Marxist studies. The unambiguous assertion, by the mid-1970's Morris-Williams critique, of the dominance of capitalism in South Africa had undermined the uncertain 'semi-proletarianized' status of black workers in the early approach; in turn, this coincided with growing theoretical ferment among SACP intellectuals over the adequacy of the theory of internal colonialism.¹⁶⁸ However, the fractionalist arguments provided implicit support for the 'national democratic' phase of the SACP two-stage strategy, in the sense that intra-capitalist struggles suggest the possibility of a tactical alliance between the working class and a

166 D.Kaplan "Relations of Production, Class Struggle and the State" pp.135-36

167 It was primarily those of a capital-relationist perspective who promoted the fusion of the national and class struggles; for Legassick and Innes, the Freedom Charter encapsulated "the goals which would reflect real liberation in South Africa", and expressed the understanding that there is "an integral connection between capitalism and the form of the apartheid state" - M.Legassick & D.Innes "Capital Restructuring and Apartheid: A Critique of Constructive Engagement" *African Affairs* 76 1977 p.477. Legassick later became a member of the Marxist Workers Tendency, which was expelled from the ANC in 1980 for accusing the leadership of petty bourgeois tendencies and emphasizing the centrality of the working class in the liberation struggle.

168 Du Toit *Capital and Labour* pp.412-18

discontented fraction of capital.¹⁶⁹ The main contribution of both the fractionalist and the capital-relation approaches was to highlight the issue of struggle. The latter insisted from the outset that the state must be located in the broader class struggle, and though the former focussed on the dominant classes, the fact remains that it was only through a process of struggle that a particular fraction could capture this instrument and assert its hegemony. Hence both approaches opened up an avenue for further development towards conceiving the state itself as contradictory and racked by intra-*state* and not merely intra-capitalist struggles, and towards an examination of its internal dynamics: the process whereby the 'interests' of hegemonic fractions or the 'requirements' of capital-in-general are transformed into state strategies. It is along these avenues that the more recent work of Wolpe, Bozzoli, Greenberg and Yudelman proceeded.

We digress for the moment to consider in more detail the Marxist approach to the white working class in South Africa, a development which is entangled in the debate over the nature of the state and which has certain political implications. The early Marxist approach dealt with this issue in terms of a critique of the liberal argument that white worker racism was instrumental in constructing segregation and apartheid. This racism was held to stem from fears of competition from cheaper black labour, particularly in the mining industry, and to result in agitation for protection in the form of the job colour bar. In politico-strategic terms, this argument implied not only that the operation of the capitalist free market was hindered by irrational racial and political forces, but that capital and black workers

169 Poulantzas also favoured such alliances in terms of the Eurocommunist parliamentary strategy. See especially *State, Power, Socialism* (London: Verso) 1980

shared an objective interest in opposing apartheid.¹⁷⁰ Frederick Johnstone countered by showing how the colour bars were equally in the interests of mining capital, since they divided the working class and permitted the intensified exploitation of cheap and rightless black labour.¹⁷¹ White worker support for racist policies was explained as a result of such workers' 'extreme structural insecurity' arising out of mining capital's need to maximize output (from cheap black labour) and minimize costs (particularly white wages).¹⁷² Under circumstances of repression and political retreat, Marxists conceived of the white working class as an aristocracy of labour, benefiting materially from and hence supporting the status quo.¹⁷³

Despite differences in terminology, the liberal and Marxist explanations of the white working class were not fundamentally dissimilar, and this contributed to the difficulties encountered by the early Marxist approach in establishing itself as a new paradigm. The issue of the white working class was a particularly thorny one. In Marxist theory, the 'objective interests' of the working class in a capitalist society

170 R.Davies *Capital, State and White Labour in South Africa 1900-1960* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities) 1979 p.3

171 F.Johnstone "Class Conflict and Colour Bars in the South African Mining Industry. 1910-26" in *The Societies of Southern Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* vol.1, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London 1969-70

172 F.A.Johnstone *Class, Race and Gold* (London: Routledge) 1976. Though published in 1976, this book primarily consists of Johnstone's Ph.D research conducted at the turn of the decade, and lacks any references to or comments on the bulk of the early Marxist work (of Wolpe and Legassick).

173 R.Davies "The White Working Class in South Africa" *New Left Review* 82 1973; J.Rex *Race, Colonialism and the City* (London: Routledge) 1973. For the SACP, too, "White workers represent an 'aristocracy of labour'" - SACP "The Road to South African Freedom" (1962) reproduced in B.Bunting (ed) *South African Communists Speak 1915-1980* (London: Inkululeko) 1981 p.302

ought to tend towards the overthrow of capitalism itself; in South Africa, white workers' support for the status quo seemed to contradict this theory. Conceptually, there are three ways in which Marxism can handle this problem: (a) by ascribing a 'false consciousness' to white workers; (b) by arguing that white workers constitute a 'labour aristocracy'; and (c) by redefining the white working class. The first solution was that held by the Communist Party of South Africa in its early years, and was based on a strategy of mobilizing white workers in support of the black proletariat. This historicist conception found no place in the fusion of Marxism and structuralism by Althusser and his disciples in the 1960's and early 1970's, and the early Marxist studies of South Africa gravitated to the second solution. For a number of reasons, however, the characterization of white workers as a labour 'aristocracy' was rapidly displaced by a shift to the third solution.

Not only did the economic boom of the 1960's draw in a huge quantity of new black workers, some of whom began to be placed in skilled and semi-skilled positions, but for the first time the numbers of unionized blacks began to rival unionized whites. Simultaneously, white workers were moving steadily upwards into supervisory and managerial positions. The theory of a white labour aristocracy, presupposing that *whites as workers* monopolized the *skilled* positions in industry, was thus becoming increasingly untenable. Furthermore, the growing fragmentation of the working classes under advanced capitalism had led to European Marxist attempts to establish a firm foundation for unity and action by precisely defining the working class as distinct from the 'new petty bourgeoisie'.¹⁷⁴ In South African Marxist

174 H.Braverman *Labour and Monopoly Capital* New York 1974; G.Carchedi "On the Economic Identification of the New Middle Class" *Economy and Society* 4,1 1975; N.Poulantzas *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism* London 1975

studies, particularly after the mid-1970's reconstruction of the terrain of analysis, the penetration of Poulantzian theory and the ascendancy of the black proletariat combined in the work of Harold Wolpe, Howard Simson and Robert Davies to relegate the white working class to the ranks of the supervisory new petty bourgeoisie. In effect this move largely defined the white working class out of existence,¹⁷⁵ and cleared the ground for an emphasis on the centrality of the black proletariat.

The theory of the white labour aristocracy, being a by-product of the early Marxist approach, was criticized in similar terms, namely that it was not grounded at the level of the capitalist relations of production and remained under the sway of the factors of race and political causation.¹⁷⁶ Both Simson and Wolpe made use of Poulantzas' distinction between productive and unproductive labour, and applied the latter term to white workers who were taken to perform the 'global function of capital', involving the surveillance and control of black labour. But it was the lengthy study by Davies that placed white workers in the full historical context of

175 Consider Howard Simson "The Myth of the White Working Class in South Africa" *African Review* 4,2 1975 p.202: "By objectively defining the class of the white labourers as nonworking class on account of its authoritative role on the production front, we have discovered the scientific basis for the historically anti-proletarian political behaviour of the white labourers in the class struggle". See also F.Johnstone "'Most Painful to Our Hearts': South Africa through the Eyes of the New School" *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 16,1 1982 p.18 fn.16

176 H.Wolpe "The 'White Working Class' in South Africa" *Economy and Society* 5,2 1976 p.212. Similarly, Davies criticized Johnstone for explaining the differences between unskilled white and black workers in terms of white 'rights' and 'freedoms' and not in terms of differential structural relations to the means of production and reproduction - R.Davies "Mining Capital, the State and Unskilled White Workers in South Africa, 1901-1913" *Journal of Southern African Studies* 3,1 1976 p.44.

twentieth century capitalist development and state intervention in South Africa.¹⁷⁷ He argued that for several reasons the 'white wage-earning classes' between 1900 and 1960 became the targets for state intervention and capital restructuring, which aimed to defuse the militancy of white workers and to minimize the costs of production by increasingly re-allocating white workers from their function of productive labourers to the supervisory functions of the new petty bourgeoisie. The crushing of the 1922 Rand Revolt was followed by the slashing of wages and the reorganization of the labour process, and accompanied by the incorporation of white workers into industrial relations machinery to the extent that they became a tame 'supportive class' of the capitalist power bloc.¹⁷⁸

As noted in the previous section, the issue of the white working class was a central battleground between fractionalists and capital-relationists. Though both sides accepted that capital was successfully able to disarm white workers in the course of the 1920's, the implications of each position were entirely different. The fractionalists saw 'white wage-earners' as a crucial element affecting the reorganization of the power bloc both in 1924 and in 1948, yet argued that this class received little reward for its support apart from "statutory protection against displacement from *their existing places* in the [mining] industry's division of

177 Davies *Capital, State and White Labour* 1979

178 Stanley Greenberg has recently shown how white workers were not simply tamed and co-opted, but took into account the difficulties of organizing open mass industrial unions in a racist society. Skilled unions, though identifying with the racial order, did not require State support since they could create job monopolies based on skill scarcity, while the tendency of industrial unions to organize on a broad basis was satisfied instead by taking advantage of artificial State supports. S.Greenberg *Race and State in Capitalist Development* (Johannesburg: Ravan) 1980 pp.275-287

labour".¹⁷⁹ The capital-relationists were less circumspect: both black and white workers were 'assaulted' and 'neutralised'.¹⁸⁰ Curiously enough, whereas Poulantzas did not rule out the possibility of an alliance between the working class and the new petty bourgeoisie,¹⁸¹ the fractionalist application of his theory to South Africa denied this possibility. In contrast, the capital-relationists' argument that during the 1920's capital defeated the working class as a whole suggests that white and black workers were in the same boat. However, despite comments by other Marxists on a possible non-racial working class struggle,¹⁸² the fractionalist interpretation appears to have won the day in this regard, not least because of its affinity to ANC and SACP liberation theory.

The Debate on the Nature of the South African State: the 1980's

South Africa entered the 1980's bearing the accoutrements of crisis: increasing resistance and organization on the part of the oppressed and a deepening economic malaise. The Vorster regime had responded to the Soweto uprising by repression, the banning of Black Consciousness organizations in 1977 and taking steps to

179 Davies *Capital, State and White Labour* p.187 (Original emphasis); Davies *et al* "Periodisation" p.11

180 Innes and Plaut "Class Struggle" pp.59-60

181 N.Poulantzas *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism* (London: Verso) 1978 p.289; M.Goldberg 'Review of R.Davies *Capital, State and White Labour*' in *Social Dynamics* 6,2 1981 p.71

182 Wolpe argued that the theory of the white labour aristocracy precluded any possibility of an alliance between white and black workers, and noted that not all white workers became part of the new petty bourgeoisie - Wolpe "White Working Class" pp.213,224,237. More recently, Jon Lewis has argued that "the incorporation of the white working class was an uneven and lengthy process", and that white craft unions were able to impede capital's reorganization of the labour process until the 1940's - J.Lewis *Industrialisation and Trade Union Organisation in South Africa, 1924-55* (Cambridge: University Press) 1984 p.7

reshape the constitution. But Vorster, presiding over an overt intra-party split between reform-minded Afrikaner capitalists and more conservative proponents of Verwoerd's apartheid legacy, had his hands tied. The 1978 Information scandal broke the deadlock as capital and the military joined ranks to oust Vorster and his conservative heir, Mulder, and to elect P.W.Botha as Prime Minister. South Africa's crisis, defined in terms of a 'total onslaught', required a coherent response not only on the military and security front but also on the social, economic and political fronts. Botha's 'total strategy' thus ranged from the abolition of petty apartheid through the adoption of elements of the Wiehahn (labour), Riekert (influx control) and De Lange (education) commissions to military support for anti-government forces in Angola and Mocambique. A key aspect of this strategy involved the creation of a new tricameral parliament including 'coloureds' and Indians, designed to widen the government's support-base and to defuse conflict, while blacks were expected to remain content with Bantustan government and urban local authorities.

Despite the crushing of the Soweto uprising and the bannings that followed it, the momentum of worker and popular resistance was not checked. In 1979 the creation of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) consolidated part of the labour movement on a national footing, followed by the formation of the Black Consciousness-aligned Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA). The proliferation of student, youth and community organizations coalesced in the United Democratic Front and the National Forum in 1983, and organized a successful boycott of the elections to the tricameral parliament. The negotiated transfer of power to the Patriotic Front in Zimbabwe in 1980 had removed yet another link in apartheid's *cordon sanitaire*, and the ANC reasserted its internal presence by increasing the level of its guerilla activities. Despite setbacks such as the Nkomati Accord between South Africa and Mocambique, the liberation movements both internally and externally expanded their membership and grew in experience.

Hence, when the townships exploded again in 1984 over the issue of rent increases, residents, students and workers were able to take advantage of a vast network of local and national structures. Indeed, the process of organizational consolidation reached its peak only at the end of 1985 with the formation of the giant Confederation of South African Trade Unions.

In the 1970's, resistance had tended to manifest itself in the form of spontaneous outbursts followed by a period of retreat, regrouping and relative calm. In the early 1980's, resistance was more continuous and more organized, and advances were rapidly consolidated. The once impassive but now weatherbeaten edifice of domination and exploitation revealed cracks which widened into spaces for popular mobilization. Marxist state theory under these circumstances underwent a process of adaptation. The process of restructuring of the political economy, and the concomitant political uncertainty and infighting among dominant groups exemplified in the Conservative Party breakaway in 1982, raised the question of the functionality of apartheid for capitalism and the possibility of contradictions within the state. Attempts by the state and groups like the Urban Foundation to foster a black middle class and to modify the racial structure of parliament prompted a historical investigation of the origins of the racially exclusive state, and led to a debate on strategy centered around the nature of the black petty bourgeoisie and the question of trade union registration. The entire process of reform was brought under the spotlight and probed for its political implications. Finally, new issues were raised as the repercussions of the social historical reformulation of the theoretical terrain of Marxist studies impinged upon the debate on the nature of the state.

However, Marxist state theory in the 1980's was also constituted in relation to the earlier debate between fractionalists and capital-relationists. The first attempt to go

beyond the instrumentalism and economism of this debate was made by Wolpe, who argued that neither of the late-1970's approaches had succeeded in specifying the "arenas of political struggle".¹⁸³ Starting analytically from the relations of production, Wolpe cautioned against assuming either that classes are necessarily "unified social forces" or that their 'objective interests' can be directly derived from these relations.¹⁸⁴ Rather, classes exist in multiple forms of organization, and "the unity of a class as a social force has to be 'constructed' through the articulations and unification of the organizational form in which that class exists".¹⁸⁵ Following Poulantzas, Wolpe conceived the state as comprising "determinate forms of organization of social classes, that is of social relations", that is, as a set of complex, contradictory structures which are themselves the site of political struggles and class conflict.¹⁸⁶ Discussing class "access" to the state, he argued that though "the entire range of state apparatuses ... is, in principle, open to become a means of organisation and definition of specific classes and class interests", "not all state apparatuses are equally accessible", especially those concerned with the law and policing.¹⁸⁷

Wolpe's most innovatory argument was that class unity and interests are both constructed and articulated in struggle. It is on the basis of these notions that Wolpe was able to produce a non-economistic account of the state, for the

183 H. Wolpe "Towards an Analysis of the South African State" *International Journal of the Sociology of Law* 8 1980 p.411

184 *Ibid.* pp.412,413

185 *Ibid.* p.413

186 *Ibid.* pp.412-14. Marxist studies thus mirrors the trajectory of Poulantzas' own development, from stressing structural determination in *Political Power and Social Classes* (1973) to emphasizing class struggle and relational forms of power in *State, Power, Socialism* (1980).

187 *Ibid.* p.416

organizational forms, unity and interests of classes are not given *a priori* by the economy but require political and ideological conditions of possibility and struggle. But this leaves one wondering what role Wolpe's initial structural definition of class at the level of the economy has to play. Were one to relinquish this starting point, one could still argue that social agents construct their unity and articulate their interests in struggle. However, and this is the crux, this structural definition permits Wolpe to presuppose the answer to the question of what social agents consist of, what they are trying to unify, and what interests they are attempting to articulate. Wolpe's composite answer is *class*. In other words, it is *presupposed* that class has an essential identity, and this precludes Wolpe from taking the relatively easy step from the reality of the multiple and differentiated organizational existence of classes to an argument that these very organizations (from the division of labour to trade unions, parties and state apparatuses) do not simply emerge fully constituted from thin air but themselves require construction through struggle, that class itself only has a relative and unstable identity. Hence Wolpe advanced beyond the economism of the 1970's only to substitute for it a classist account of the state.¹⁸⁸

Wolpe's account of the state reflects the increasing importance accorded to the notion of class struggle in Marxist studies, itself conditioned by the consolidation and advance of resistance in South Africa during the early 1980's. On the basis of

188 Wolpe also failed to shrug off all traces of instrumentalism. Firstly, he implies that state apparatuses concerned with the sanctioning and policing of the law are more accessible to the dominant classes. Secondly, he suggests that though a state apparatus (but not the central state) may operate so as to "contradict certain conditions of reproduction of a capitalist social formation", such situations tend to be "short-lived" (*Ibid.* p.416). In other words, some state apparatuses are off-limits to the struggles and hegemonic articulations of the dominated classes, and appear as unproblematic instruments of bourgeois domination.

Wolpe's concern for the struggles of the dominated classes, the social historians have attempted to appropriate his work in support of their critique of the 1970's literature. Shula Marks has argued that Wolpe has abandoned his earlier concern for 'structures' in favour of a concentration on 'struggles'.¹⁸⁹ Wolpe, for his part, has strongly denied both this and the very structure/struggle dichotomy,¹⁹⁰ and his later work provides plenty of evidence for a continued attachment to the importance of 'structures', particularly in the form of organizations and institutions. Far from abandoning structural analysis, Wolpe has attempted to combine intra-capitalist struggles with the primacy of the capital relation: "contradictions and conflicts within the state apparatuses are, in a variety of complex ways constituted by the 'external' struggles to which they are linked and, simultaneously, constitutive of the form of those external struggles".¹⁹¹ Furthermore, whereas in 1980 he argued that mere dominated class 'access' to a state apparatus turns such an apparatus into a "site of mass struggle", by 1985 he had modified his stance to suggest that "the possibility of mass struggles within state apparatuses [is] a function of both the

189 S.Marks "Recent Developments in the Historiography of South Africa" *Research Bulletin, Southern Africa and the World Economy* Fernand Braudel Centre 3 July 1982

190 H.Wolpe "The Analysis of the Forms of the South African State" *Southern African Studies: Retrospect and Prospect* Centre of African Studies, University of Edinburgh, 1983 p.53. Wolpe also made it clear that social history is not immune to the kinds of problems associated with the late-1970's debate on the state, by criticizing Marks and Trapido for producing a simultaneously instrumentalist and autonomous conception of the state which "is incapable of generating an adequate analysis of the relationship between classes and the state" (*Ibid.* p.52). See S.Marks & S.Trapido "Lord Milner and the South African State", originally in *History Workshop Journal* 8 1979, reprinted in C.Allen and G.Williams (eds) *Sociology of 'Developing Societies': Sub-Saharan Africa* (London: Macmillan) 1982

191 *Ibid.* p.58

structure *and* the form of access to the state".¹⁹²

The current restructuring of the South African state has been an important theme in recent Marxist studies. During the 1970's, the amendments made by the state to industrial relations legislation were as often as not perceived to involve new forms of control over the working class.¹⁹³ But, argued Marxists such as Wolpe, Davies and O'Meara, to uncritically reject reforms as narrow or a sham was not only analytically insufficient but could be strategically disastrous. Rather, the relevant questions to ask of state restructuring concern its *effects*: on class realignments, on political strategies, and on the enlargement of political 'space'.¹⁹⁴ Arguing that the state is not deracializing nor jettisoning its white subordinate classes, Wolpe pointed out that the new spaces opened up for worker organization and struggle are within a context of intensified repression and control, while the structures and policies which reproduce the advantageous position of white class fractions are still in place.¹⁹⁵

192 H.Wolpe "Political Strategies and the Law in South Africa: Analytical Considerations" *Journal of Southern African Studies* 12,1 1985 p.17 (Original emphasis). Wolpe reformulated his argument after being criticized for ignoring "the 'shape' and limits that the state apparatus imposes on the struggle within it" - Anonymous "Colonialism of a Special Kind and the South African State" *Africa Perspective* 23 1983 p.84.

193 However, some left open the question as to whether or not any "tactical or strategic advantages ... for the African working class" could derive from an industrial relations system. See R.Davies & D.Lewis "Industrial Relations Legislation: One of Capital's Defences" *Review of African Political Economy* 7 1976 p.68

194 H.Wolpe "Apartheid's Deepening Crisis" *Marxism Today* January 1983 p.10; H.Wolpe "Strategic Issues in the Struggle for National Liberation in South Africa" *Review* 8,2 1984 p.233

195 *Ibid.* pp.10-11. Similarly, for Davies and O'Meara the reforms are a limited but real recasting of "the conditions of racial capitalist rule" - R.Davies & D.O'Meara "The State of Analysis of the Southern African Region: Issues Raised by South African Strategy" *Review of African Political Economy* 29 1984 p.66

However, the restructuring of the state is not "cosmetic and unimportant": the vulnerability of the black petty bourgeoisie to co-option, the increased power of the black working class, the emergence of extremist white elements, the entry of the military and big business into the state apparatuses, and the alignment of English and Afrikaner monopoly capital are "extremely important changes" vis-a-vis the strategy of the liberation movements.¹⁹⁶ In all this Wolpe perceived "a major contradiction at the political level", between the "coercive management" of mass opposition by the opening up or the reinstatement of terrains of struggle, and the expansion of the repressive state apparatuses accompanied by increasing militarization and the growing independence of the executive.¹⁹⁷

Given the potential co-option of the black petty bourgeoisie, the state's 'total strategy' prioritizes "*the questions of the class leadership of the liberation struggle and ideological clarity*", that is, the strategic relationship between the workers and the petty bourgeoisie.¹⁹⁸ Ever since the working class re-asserted its presence both politically and on the terrain of Marxist studies, the nature of this relationship has

196 *Ibid.* p.11. Many of these aspects of state restructuring had already been analysed by the SACP. On the militarization and centralization of the state, see "Forward to People's Power" in *The African Communist* 1980, reproduced in *South African Communists Speak 1915-1980* (London: Inkululeko) 1981 p.438. On the contradictions within the black petty bourgeoisie, see "The Way Forward from Soweto" 1977 in *Ibid.* p.428

197 *Ibid.* p.11. Wolpe periodizes the 'structuring of the political terrain since 1948' broadly thus: 1948-60 mass mobilization; 1960-73 sabotage and armed struggle; 1973- opening-up of new (and old) spaces for mobilization and struggle. See Wolpe "Strategic Issues in the Struggle for National Liberation in South Africa" pp.236-9. On the executive, see also D.Kaplan "The South African State: The Origins of a Racially Exclusive Democracy" *The Insurgent Sociologist* 10,2 1980 p.94

198 Davies & Meara "The State of Analysis of the Southern African Region" p.74 (Original emphasis)

been subjected to close scrutiny. On the one hand, a working class alliance with the petty bourgeoisie would deprive the state of a potential ally. On the other hand, such an alliance may dilute or divert the workers' struggle for socialism. These issues are thus closely linked to the debate over the relative merits of the national and class struggles. The ANC itself has at times been described as petty bourgeois, its 'national democratic revolution' merely a disguise for national capitalist accumulation.¹⁹⁹ Similarly, the pluralism of the SACP's internal colonialism thesis and of Point Two of the Freedom Charter which asserts that "All National Groups shall have Equal Rights", has been seen as "inextricably linked with the proposition that the national struggle shall be led by the liberal bourgeoisie and the aspirant bourgeoisie, rather than by the working class".²⁰⁰ Such criticisms derive in part from hostility to the SACP's united front strategy designed to incorporate the widest possible cross-section of the oppressed in the struggle against apartheid; the SACP argued in 1962 that South Africa's special form of colonialism had "strangled the development of a class of African capitalists" and thus "the interests of the African commercial class lie wholly in joining the workers and rural people for the overthrow of White supremacy".²⁰¹

199 A.Callinicos & J.Rogers *Southern Africa after Soweto* (London: Pluto) 1978 p.195; A.Callinicos "Marxism and Revolution in South Africa" *International Socialism* 31 c.1986 pp.7-8,45; R.Fatton "The African National Congress of South Africa: The Limitations of a Revolutionary Strategy" *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 18,3 1984 p.603

200 No Sizwe *One Azania, One Nation: The National Question in South Africa* (London: Zed) 1979 pp.106-7

201 SACP "The Road to South African Freedom" (1962), reproduced in B.Bunting (ed) *South African Communists Speak 1915-1980* (London: Inkululeko) 1981 pp.304-5. However, the SACP was more circumspect about the African intellectual and professional class: "Either they align themselves with the struggles of the masses, or else they accept the role of assistants and agents in maintaining White colonialism" (*Ibid.* p.305).

The growth of the black petty bourgeoisie over the last two decades, and particularly ruling class efforts to create a class bulwark against revolution through home-ownership, the removal of trading restrictions and the development of the small and informal business sectors, has highlighted the relationship between this class and black workers. Dividing the petty bourgeoisie into the Bantustan bureaucracy, and small traders and producers, Wolpe argued that though both depend on the apartheid state for their development, the latter is driven to articulate economic demands due to the lack of a powerful, legal liberation organization to which it could articulate, and hence the state is able to deal with its demands in a piecemeal fashion.²⁰² The SACP, too, has recently distinguished between these two sections of the petty bourgeoisie, and in so doing seems to have been motivated to re-affirm the inseparability of the class and national struggles in the transition to socialism. Whereas in its 1962 Programme, the SACP had left unanswered many questions concerning the struggle for socialism *after* the completion of "the central and immediate task" of national liberation,²⁰³ now, faced with a state drive to incorporate the black petty bourgeoisie, the Party stated unambiguously: *"It is clear that the dominant force in this [liberation] alliance must be the working class and it is their supremacy in the new state form which will emerge after victory, which will prevent our revolution from grinding to a halt at the point of a formal political take-over"*.²⁰⁴

202 Wolpe "Strategic Issues in the Struggle for National Liberation in South Africa" pp.246-7

203 SACP "The Road to South African Freedom" (1962) p.311

204 SACP "The Way Forward from Soweto" 1977 in Bunting *South African Communists Speak* p.428 (Original emphasis). Again, the centrality of the working class will ensure that the national democratic revolution "does not stop until the root cause of racial domination - capitalist exploitation - is eradicated" - SACP "Forward to People's Power" in *The African Communist* 1980, reproduced in *South African Communists Speak* p.458

Thus new political circumstances and the cut and thrust of state strategy have forced a recasting of liberation theory, which in turn has informed Marxist studies.

The realization that working class leadership of the liberation struggle cannot be assumed but must be actively promoted derived also from the debate within the trade union movement over the question of registration in or boycott of industrial relations machinery, after the state had accepted the 1979 Wiehahn Commission report which aimed to incorporate, depoliticize and control the emerging black unions. FOSATU's decision to register came after the state amended the legislation to include migrant workers, and was justified on the basis of nonracialism and the possibilities for extending union gains.²⁰⁵ Attacking FOSATU for collaboration with state machinery, and for endangering workers control, the 'community unions' such as the South African Allied Workers Union took up a boycott position. Within Marxist studies the debate took the form of theoretical exchanges between Duncan Innes, Francine de Clerq and Bob Fine, on the one hand, and Rob Davies and Dan O'Meara on the other, and to some extent was a sequel to the late-1970's debate on the state. For Fine, de Clerq and Innes, the state is not merely the repressive instrument of the ruling class but is "located in a nexus of contradictory social relations and whose character is determined by the changing relations between the classes involved";²⁰⁶ in order to control, the state must also concede, thus potentially opening up spaces for struggle which a principled boycott strategy cannot exploit. For the authors, taking advantage of the contradictions within the state can

205 J.Lewis "Capital, the Trade Unions and National Liberation Struggle" *Monthly Review* April, 1986 p.87; J.Lewis "Overview: The Registration Debate and Industrial Councils" in J.Maree (ed) *The Independent Trade Unions 1974-1984* (Johannesburg: Ravan) 1987 p.171

206 B.Fine, F.de Clerq & D.Innes "Trade Unions and the State: The Question of Legality" in Maree *The Independent Trade Unions 1974-1984* p.193

extend "the narrow economic concerns of unions into larger political concerns of democracy and influence over the state".²⁰⁷

Those who opposed the position of Fine, de Clerq and Innes cannot simply be grouped under a boycott label. Though the SACP rejected the Wiehahn Commission report outright as "a Bosses' Charter",²⁰⁸ Davies and O'Meara accepted that both legal and illegal methods can be utilized in the struggle for state power.²⁰⁹ However, they criticized Fine *et al's* 'relational' conception of the state, which underestimated the limits which the racial capitalist state could impose on working class struggles.²¹⁰ Whereas FOSATU, influenced by the experience of unions in Zimbabwe, favoured a democratic workers' organization independent of the 'populist' liberation movements,²¹¹ Davies and O'Meara defended the ANC's 'popular frontism' as a class alliance led not by the petty bourgeoisie but by the working class.²¹² This debate over 'workerist' or 'populist' politics was initiated within the Congress Alliance itself, when Martin Legassick, David Hemson and others criticized the ANC for failing to emphasize the hegemony of the working class in the liberation alliance, and were expelled for their pains. However, the issues of registration or boycott, workerism or populism, have become diluted in practice after the proven success of both camps in enlarging their membership and building their strength during the early 1980's, even in the face of recession. Indeed,

207 *Ibid.* p.206

208 SACP "Forward to People's Power" p.454

209 R.Davies & D.O'Meara "The Workers' Struggle in South Africa: A Comment"
Review of African Political Economy 30 1984 p.114

210 *Ibid.*

211 J.Foster "The Workers' Struggle - Where does FOSATU stand?" in Maree *The Independent Trade Unions 1974-1984*

212 *Ibid.* pp.111-112

after the military occupation of the townships following the Vaal Triangle uprising against rent increases, FOSATU worked together with CUSA and the Congress of South African Students (a UDF affiliate) to stage the November 1984 stayaway, and the largest union federation of all, COSATU, has adopted the Freedom Charter. Hence Wolpe's intervention into the debate, by arguing that neither the registration nor the boycott strategy adequately analyzed either the legal conditions or the historical conditions for different strategies,²¹³ was a retrospective summation of the fact that no strategy can be upheld as an inviolable principle.

The Origins of the Racially Exclusive State

Another aspect of the debate on the nature of the state concerned the alleged transition in hegemony from imperial to national capital. How, asked Belinda Bozzoli, did South Africa succeed in breaking out of imperialist underdevelopment, and related to this, why is the South African state not based, even nominally, on the incorporation of the majority of its working class?²¹⁴ The fractionalists had explained indigenous industrialization in terms of the seizure of state power by

213 Wolpe "Political Strategies and the Law in South Africa"

214 B.Bozzoli "Capital and the State in South Africa" *Review of African Political Economy* 11 1978 p.41. For Bozzoli, and many other Marxists, such defining characteristics make the South African State 'unique'. See, *inter alia*, M.Legassick "Forced Labour" (1971, pub.1975) p.232; S.Trapido "South Africa in a Comparative Study of Industrialization" (1972) pp.310,313; H.Wolpe "The Theory of Internal Colonization" (1973) p.117; R.Davies *et al* "Class Struggle and the Periodisation of the State in South Africa" (1976) p.29; T.Keegan "The Dynamics of Rural Accumulation in South Africa" (1986) p.630; and C.Bundy "Street Sociology and Pavement Politics" (1987) p.313. More recently, opposition has been voiced to the search for the capitalist yet unique origins of the racially exclusive State; see S.Greenberg's comparative perspective in *Race and State in Capitalist Development* (1980), and D.Yudelman *The Emergence of Modern South Africa* (1984) pp.13-14,33.

national capital in the 1920's. The capital-relationists proposed instead the continuity in hegemony of mining capital, and argued that state repression of the working class created the conditions for the expanded reproduction of capitalism within South Africa. Bozzoli's focus on the development of manufacturing led her to provide the following reasons for indigenous industrialization: the earlier destruction by mining capital of pre-capitalist social formations; the creation of a free (white) proletariat out of the ruins of the Boer Republics; the growth of small capitalists in industry under the prior hegemony of merchant capital, and thus not subordinated to the interests of mining capital; and the existence of the mining industry as a voracious market.²¹⁵ In this respect, Bozzoli's argument is closer to the fractionalists than to the capital-relationists, given that she accepts the thesis of a change in hegemony in the 1920's and does not relate industrialization to a prior defeat of the working class.

Kaplan was the first to take up Bozzoli's second question as to why the state retained a racially exclusive form. Following Wolpe and Legassick's early work, Kaplan argued that the demands of the mining industry required the provision of cheap migrant labour through the maintenance of the pre-capitalist reserves, which on the one hand ensured the decline of peasant classes, and on the other permitted the exclusion of black subjects on the basis of their continued attachment to the land. Since capital "met its antithesis in the 'free' [white] labourer", the state incorporated white labour as free and equal citizens, but semi-proletarianized black labour was relegated to the control of alternative "tribal juridical-political

215 B.Bozzoli *The Political Nature of a Ruling Class* (London: Routledge) 1981 pp.279-280

apparatuses".²¹⁶ Hence, for Kaplan, South Africa's racially exclusive bourgeois democracy was built upon the differential degree of proletarianization of its working class. The results of Bozzoli's research on the issue led her to the same conclusions. The 'unique' subordination of black labour through "essentially pre-capitalist mechanisms" made it into an unfree labour force; thus capital, unlike in relation to the classic 'free labourer', did not need to exert control over black labour through even at least nominal incorporation in the state.²¹⁷ Bozzoli added that manufacturing's liberal incorporationist but hierarchical ideology sought to displace conflict through the use of para-statal as opposed to the all-white state that was being created;²¹⁸ and national capital benefited from this state form, especially its racial division of labour, and besides was too weak to change it.²¹⁹

Kaplan noted that with the development of manufacturing and the decline of the reserves, the material basis for the racially exclusive state was being undermined. But its exclusivity not only "undermines the basis for common class struggle between black and white",²²⁰ but was also polarizing the class struggle along racial lines. In other words, the class struggle and the national struggle are intermeshed. Kaplan's analysis provides further support for the ANC and SACP conceptualization of a 'national democratic' stage by suggesting that black workers are only semi-

216 D.Kaplan "Relations of Production, Class Struggle and the State in South Africa in the Interwar Period" *Review of African Political Economy* 15/16 1979 pp.141-43

217 Bozzoli *The Political Nature of a Ruling Class* p.74

218 *Ibid.* p.189

219 *Ibid.* p.211,265-67. "National capital is not able to impose its hegemony upon the social formation at a stroke" - Bozzoli "Capital and the State in South Africa" p.50 (Original emphasis).

220 D.Kaplan "The South African State: The Origins of a Racially Exclusive Democracy" *The Insurgent Sociologist* 10,2 1980 p.85

proletarianized. Wolpe took up similar implications for liberation strategy, though he disagreed with Kaplan's argument that blacks as subjects were excluded from state apparatuses. Rather, the *inclusion* of black subjects in Bantustan administration, local councils and Bantu education suggested that these apparatuses "provide, by the nature of their structure and the forms of access to them, sites of mass struggles".²²¹ The black dominated classes thus do not only relate to the state 'at a distance', as Poulantzas' early work and Kaplan would have it. On one level, Wolpe's argument was an intervention into the debate over participation or boycott strategies; on another level, it involved a return to Althusser mediated by a reading of the later Poulantzas.²²²

The State as Autonomous

As the debate on the nature of the state moved into the 1980's, it was influenced by the wider shift in Marxist studies to a social historical perspective. Elements of this perspective can be discerned particularly in the work of Stanley Greenberg and Belinda Bozzoli, and to a lesser extent in David Yudelman's approach, with regard to the focus on the subject as conscious actor, on class formation, and on the concrete and particular as opposed to the abstract and general. For both Greenberg and Bozzoli, it is "class actors" who through "their actions - their labour and 'praxis' - make society and history".²²³ Secondly, for Greenberg, 'class formation' implies an

221 Wolpe "Towards an Analysis of the South African State" p.418

222 Particularly Althusser's argument that ideological State apparatuses may be the site and stake of class struggle (in *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays* (London: NLB) 1971 p.140), and Poulantzas's conception of the State as a relationship of class forces, in *State, Power, Socialism* 1980.

223 S.Greenberg *Race and State in Capitalist Development* (Johannesburg: Ravan) 1980 pp.x,24,24 fn.74; Bozzoli *Political Nature* pp.13,16

extended process of struggle. It is insufficient to define classes according to their structural relationship to the means of production simply on the basis of an abstract and *a priori* theory; rather, one needs to concentrate on the "concrete process" and "particular historical situations rather than formal theory".²²⁴ But despite their emphasis on the relative autonomy of the state, these authors have not been particularly successful in overcoming the economism and instrumentalism of the late-1970's debate. Moreover, they tend to concentrate on the dominant classes at the expense of the dominated: for Bozzoli, "the prime movers of industrial capitalism [are] the members of the class of capitalists itself",²²⁵ and for Greenberg, racially dominant class actors are "the motor forces in capitalist development and racial orders, particularly in the early stages".²²⁶

Greenberg's main argument is that "capitalist development ... both preserves and remakes the racial order, extending and reinforcing racial barriers, but also creating new contradictions that paradoxically threaten to dismantle them".²²⁷ 'Business enterprise', initially mining, is "intimately associated with labour-repressive policies", but later, as manufacturing industry, tends to 'accommodate' to "custom and the needs of the primary producers", that is, "they readily adjust to the requirements of the state and other powerful groups in the society",²²⁸ which included politically dominant farmers as well as white workers. The dominant racial groups thus created and elaborated upon labour-repressive state machinery, but since about the

224 Greenberg *Race and State* pp.23,24 fn.73

225 Bozzoli *Political Nature* pp.3,261

226 *Ibid.* p.23 fn.71

227 Greenberg *Race and State* p.26. With this argument Greenberg claims to combine the 'accommodative school' (Herbert Blumer) and the 'neo-Marxist school' (particularly Wolpe and Legassick).

228 *Ibid.* pp.132-133,178

1960's these class actors have no longer required such machinery (or else their power to demand it has diminished); this has inaugurated a "continuing crisis of hegemony" or a legitimation crisis, involving "a peeling away of the class basis for the racial framework" and "endemic instability".²²⁹ However, since half-hearted political alternatives put forward by business have clashed with entrenched bureaucratic interests, capitalist development has not yet succeeded in undermining the racial order.²³⁰ Furthermore, under crisis the state revealed 'Bonapartist' tendencies and emerged as "an increasingly autonomous agency representing the interests of the dominant [racial] section as a whole".²³¹

The autonomy of Greenberg's state under crisis stands in sharp contrast to the apparently automatic access to and use of the state as a class instrument by farmers, businessmen and workers in the earlier period of intensification. His contribution to the debate on the nature of the state thus wavers between instrumentalism and autonomy, similar to that detected by Wolpe in Marks and Trapido's work. During the period of intensification, African resistance is seen as having little effect on the state, but later, "in 1960, then in 1973 and 1976, the African population disrupted the prevailing accommodation", becoming a factor bringing on the crisis of hegemony.²³² However, in Greenberg's text, the struggle by the dominated classes remains an external threat; indeed, the class struggle between capital and labour is itself subsumed into the racial order, for the persistence of apartheid depends on the "clash between the subordinate population and the racial order and the clash

²²⁹ *Ibid.* pp.27,392 fn.14,401,407

²³⁰ *Ibid.* pp.178, 202-207,403

²³¹ *Ibid.* pp.388-390

²³² *Ibid.* pp.28,401

between the racial state and an aspirant bourgeois hegemony".²³³ Finally, Greenberg's efforts to avoid reductionism only led him to a dualist position: racial domination is not archaic but "essentially a class phenomenon",²³⁴ while on the other hand "race or ethnicity [has] an ontological status of its own".²³⁵

Bozzoli's primary focus is on "the relationship ... between the bourgeoisie's economic interests and their expression in particular ideologies ... and particular political forms",²³⁶ in terms of Gramsci's conception of 'organic intellectuals', who non-mechanically 'translate' the "economic nature" of capital into "political and ideological realities",²³⁷ thus bridging the gap between "abstract necessities, and concrete possibilities".²³⁸ To overcome economism, Bozzoli argued that not only are class relationships political, cultural and ideological as well as economic, but in fact, "classes cannot be defined, indeed do not exist, independently of the struggles between classes".²³⁹ She laid great stress on the role of ideology and intellectuals in unifying the capitalist class and constructing bourgeois hegemony,²⁴⁰ to the extent that the intellectual is taken to be a "real historical actor" within a context: "Instead of being the static mechanical 'end-product' of the abstract operations of the 'base', ideologies are the result of the activities of those formulating them".²⁴¹ Despite these efforts, however, the economic remains the primary referent in Bozzoli's work: capital "possesses an 'economic nature' which is specific to it as a class" and hence

233 *Ibid.* p.401

234 *Ibid.* p.406

235 *Ibid.* p.406

236 Bozzoli *Political Nature* p.5

237 *Ibid.* p.8

238 *Ibid.* p.7

239 *Ibid.* p.6

240 *Ibid.* pp.46,112,263

241 *Ibid.* pp.13,16

"must pursue certain relentless economic goals";²⁴² and even "ideologists recognised that the interests of capital were inexorable".²⁴³

Reformulating the fractionalist account of the change in hegemony in 1924, Bozzoli argued that this change was "slow to come into being",²⁴⁴ and the election of the Pact government in 1924 did not represent the achievement of national hegemony but rather "the beginning of the realisation of [national capital's] interests".²⁴⁵ Yet the entire period from the end of World War I to 1924 involved a "massive change in the nature of capital"²⁴⁶ - not a change within a single capitalist class (from mining to manufacturing), nor a change "*from imperial capital to national capital*", but a simultaneous change in *both* classes, with respective influence rising and declining and parts of one class dissolving into the other.²⁴⁷ Eventually in 1933, national capital, now led by commerce, was able to achieve a 'political revolution' in Fusion and the formation of the United Party. Bozzoli distinguished between the 'narrow state' (or the administrative, legal, and coercive aspects of the state) and the 'wide state' (apparently, what Althusser would have called the Ideological State Apparatuses - involving the construction of hegemony, and alliances with and subordination of classes in 'civil society').²⁴⁸ p.18ff However, her account of the relative autonomy of the state is confined to the 'narrow state' or government; for example, Hertzogite nationalism's last stand on the issue of the gold standard, which led to the belated but 'relatively easy' restructuring of the narrow state by national

242 *Ibid.* pp.6-7

243 *Ibid.* p.212

244 *Ibid.* p.24

245 *Ibid.* p.158

246 *Ibid.* p.170

247 *Ibid.* p.172 (Original emphasis)

248 *Ibid.*

capital,²⁴⁹ is seen as "a symbol of state autonomy".²⁵⁰ Hence, in Bozzoli's account, there remains a sense in which the state as a whole was inexorably gobbled up, piece by piece, by the ascending hegemonic class, with only limited opposition (or 'relative autonomy') from governments and political parties.

David Yudelman's *Emergence of Modern South Africa*²⁵¹ is one of the most recent contributions to Marxist state theory. Like Bozzoli and Greenberg, he focused on social actors derived from the dominant racial group; but unlike Bozzoli, he attributed subject status to the state itself, and unlike Greenberg, this status is not anomalous but is a necessary part of the state's relative autonomy. Broadly, Yudelman argued that "organized (white) labour was decisively subjugated and co-opted by an alliance of state and capital in the early part of the twentieth century; and that, partly as a result, a symbiotic relationship of state and capital was cemented, which has endured to the present".²⁵² On this basis he rejected the arguments that the 1924 Pact government represented a change in hegemony from mining to national capital.²⁵³ Like Fransman and Davies and Innes and Plaut (but apparently unaware of their arguments), he argued that the crushing of the Rand Revolt had major repercussions for white labour: white employment and wages were slashed; the black-white ratio on the mines increased sharply; and strikes by white labour became almost unheard of. Against Legassick, Kaplan and the fractionalists, he argued that "state revenue from gold mining as a percentage of

249 *Ibid.* p.273

250 *Ibid.* p.245

251 D.Yudelman *The Emergence of Modern South Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip) 1984

252 *Ibid.* p.4

253 *Ibid.* pp.24-28

total revenue actually *declined* quite steeply under the Pact".²⁵⁴ For Yudelman, the 1924-1933 period was one of "continuity"²⁵⁵ - "the state's need to minimize costs and maximize revenue did not change after 1924".²⁵⁶

The issue of the subjugation and co-optation of white labour, Yudelman argued, was the point of state-capital "symbiosis at its weakest link", for it was at this point where "the tension between legitimation (the state's need to mobilize political support) and accumulation (capital's need to maintain growth, profitability or even solvency) was at its height".²⁵⁷ On the one hand, the state depended on the mining industry for revenue and employment;²⁵⁸ on the other hand, mining capital depended on the state for stability and unity.²⁵⁹ Moreover, because of the concentration and homogeneity of mining capital, and the concentration of political power in the hands of minority "Afrikaners", neither state nor capital could dominate the other; but "combined, they very early established an effective dominance".²⁶⁰ Arguing that both liberal and Marxist approaches failed to see that "the state can become at least partially autonomous, with distinct interests of its own",²⁶¹ Yudelman at the same time did not wish to espouse a purely "autonomous state".²⁶² State-capital

254 *Ibid.* pp.25-28 (Original emphasis)

255 *Ibid.* p.249

256 *Ibid.* p.236

257 *Ibid.* p.8. The legitimation-accumulation distinction was derived from the work of J.O'Connor *The Fiscal Crisis of the State* New York 1973 and J.Habermas *Legitimation Crisis* Boston 1973.

258 Yudelman *Emergence* pp.38-9

259 *Ibid.* pp.52-3

260 *Ibid.* p.7

261 *Ibid.* p.30

262 *Ibid.* p.32

symbiosis is variously characterized as analogous to marriage,²⁶³ as "a congruence or overlapping of specific interests",²⁶⁴ as a non-explicit "informal co-optation" of capital by the state,²⁶⁵ as a "duumvirate",²⁶⁶ as "a *quid pro quo* relationship",²⁶⁷ and as a "relationship of mutual dependence".²⁶⁸

The conceptualization of the relationship between the state and capital as symbiotic certainly has merit: conflict between the two is not seen as zero-sum,²⁶⁹ but permits both state and capital to win simultaneously. However, the term 'symbiosis' is misleading, because it is in fact conceived of as a relationship of externality between two autonomous forces. Yudelman seems to assume that state power is monolithic, for given its concentration in 'Afrikaner' hands it was "relatively impermeable to direct infiltration by capital";²⁷⁰ at the same time, mining capital appears as a "relatively monolithic" and "distinct group with common interests".²⁷¹ Though this emphasizes the autonomy of the state, it prevents the state itself being conceived of as a relationship of forces and ignores the possibility of intra-state contradictions. Moreover, not only is the black working class not a factor in influencing this symbiosis, but Yudelman does not focus on black labour at all. He attempted to justify this by arguing that blacks were not "political actors" because

263 *Ibid.* p.208. See also D.Yudelman "Lord Rothschild, Afrikaner Scabs and the 1907 White Miners' Strike: A State-Capital Daguerreotype" *African Affairs* 81 1982 p.257

264 Yudelman *Emergence* p.38

265 *Ibid.* p.116

266 *Ibid.* p.216

267 *Ibid.* p.258

268 *Ibid.* p.263

269 *Ibid.* p.10. See also D.Yudelman "Capital, Capitalists and Power in South Africa: Some Zero-sum Fallacies" *Social Dynamics* 6,2 1980

270 Yudelman *Emergence* p.7

271 *Ibid.* pp.55,54

they had "scarcely any viable economic base, very few political rights, and hardly any access to the state".²⁷² But as one reviewer noted, "while black social actors are by definition absent from the dynamics of electoral processes, the bloated character of the state apparatuses is testimony to their struggles and causal significance in the trajectory of state development".²⁷³ The monolithicity of state power thus leads Yudelman to treat black workers in the same way as he argued they were treated by the state, as "objects of policy, not subjects".²⁷⁴

In conclusion, the similarities between the work of Greenberg, Bozzoli and Yudelman are readily apparent. Each focuses on the dominant classes, who are viewed as subjects or actors who make history, at the expense of the dominated classes, and each accords a substantial degree of autonomy to the state. Their incorporation of the notion of class agency is their primary link to the social historical perspective. Unlike the social historians, however, these authors are not anti-theoretical (though they do emphasize the need for concrete historical analysis to balance theoretical generalizations), and given their focus on dominant actors, their accounts do not fall within the ambit of a 'history from below'. Their work is also partially constituted by the late-1970's debate on the state: Bozzoli continues to accept some form of turning point in the 1920's, while Yudelman argues for continuity in the same period. Finally, each has attempted to rescue the concept of

272 *Ibid.* pp.19,34

273 W.James "Beyond Musical Chairs in the Power-Bloc" *Social Dynamics* 8,1 1982 p.74

274 Yudelman *The Emergence of Modern South Africa* p.18. Bozzoli treats the dominated classes in a similar way. By viewing South African history through the lenses of organic intellectuals attached to the two dominant capitalist classes (with only one reference being made to the possibility of the dominated classes having organic intellectuals), the black proletariat appears as an object to be manipulated, coerced and controlled.

race from the partial oblivion to which it had been relegated after the mid-1970's reconstruction of the terrain of Marxist studies - Bozzoli by perceiving the capitalist state as unique due to its racially exclusive nature; Greenberg by stressing the irreducibility of both race and class; and Yudelman, though only implicitly, by granting subject-status to the concentration of political power in the hands of Afrikaners.

The most striking difference between the work of Greenberg, Bozzoli and Yudelman, on the one hand, and the earlier literature on the state, on the other, is that though the former point to a contemporary crisis in South Africa, the contributions of worker and popular struggles to this crisis are virtually ignored. However, this difference is overshadowed by the fundamental similarities underlying the entire course of the debate on the nature of the state, from its beginnings to the present, which derive from the ambiguities in Marxism itself over the relative merits of structure or agency. Greenberg, Bozzoli and Yudelman have explicitly rejected the economism and instrumentalism of the 1970's literature, but Marxism is a monist conception of history, and attempts to overcome the inhibitions of a single essential determinant simply lead to an unfruitful dualism. For example, Greenberg's conception of the state wavers between the poles of class instrument and autonomous Frankenstein, while Yudelman's state either becomes a self-contained essential entity or remains subject to accumulation and legitimation imperatives derived from its location in a capitalist society. Bozzoli does not fall into dualism, because her concern with the political and ideological construction of hegemony is in the final analysis reducible to monist economic imperatives. Out of all the 1980's literature on the state, Wolpe went furthest in conferring a non-economistic specificity on the state, but his starting-point of the relations of production prevented his innovatory arguments about struggle from having effects outside a class-centered terrain.

CHAPTER THREE

MARXIST AFRICANISM, SOCIAL AND AGRARIAN HISTORY

Marxist Africanism

The decade of the 1960's evoked both euphoria and despair in Africa. When over most of the continent Africans were smashing the chains of colonial rule, the white settler states of South Africa and Rhodesia, together with the Portuguese colonies, brutally crushed and outlawed all political opposition and forced many abroad into exile and armed struggle. Much of southern Africa remained firmly under white minority rule; not so firmly its historiography. African nationalist historiography was swiftly etching an indigenous past of African initiative, achievement and change on a largely blank canvas, and in sympathetic response South African liberal historiography experienced its own Africanist phase. However, the first fruits of this event were experienced belatedly, at the end of the decade. Until the publication of the *Oxford History of South Africa*, wrote Shula Marks in 1970, "the major advances in reconstructing both the precolonial and colonial past which have been taking place in the rest of Africa over the past fifteen or twenty years have, by and large, stopped short at the Limpopo".²⁷⁵ But once initiated in South Africa, historiographical advance was so rapid that the *Oxford History* itself was soon

275 S.Marks "African and Afrikaner History" *Journal of African History* XI,3 1970 p.435

overshadowed by the 'new dawn'²⁷⁶ which, significantly, was of a Marxist and not a liberal Africanist hue.

Indeed, *African Societies in Southern Africa*,²⁷⁷ another of the fruits of liberal Africanism which appeared together with the first volume of the *Oxford History* in 1969, included contributions by Shula Marks and Martin Legassick who were to be in the forefront of the development of Marxist studies.²⁷⁸ The tenor of these articles closely reflected the influence of the 1960's revolution in African historiography, namely that African history did not begin with the arrival of the white man nor were Africans lacking in initiative or resistance after that date.²⁷⁹ Though these articles were hardly Marxist,²⁸⁰ the advent of Marxist studies more generally at the supposed moment of liberal Africanism's crowning glory can partly be attributed to the brief span of the euphoria accompanying decolonisation, following Africa's realization that political independence had not altered neo-colonial economic dependence. In African historiography, the 'African initiative' school began to be displaced by the radical pessimism of the Marxist-oriented

276 D.M.Schreuder "History on the Veld: Towards a New Dawn?" *African Affairs* 68 1969

277 L.M.Thompson (ed) *African Societies in Southern Africa* (London: Heinemann) 1969

278 S.Marks "The Traditions of the Natal 'Nguni': A Second Look at the Work of A.T.Bryant"; M.Legassick "The Sotho-Tswana People's before 1800"

279 See C.Neale *Writing 'Independent' History: African Historiography 1960-1980* (Westport: Greenwood) 1985; C.Saunders *The Making of the South African Past* pp.152-53; and T.Ranger (ed) *Emerging Themes of African History* (London) 1968. Another (liberal) Africanist work of the time was S.Marks *Reluctant Rebellion* (Oxford: Clarendon) 1970

280 Some of the scholars to be dealt with in this section, namely Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido, were practicing historians before the advent of South African Marxist studies. Their early publications tended to be narrative political history in the liberal tradition (see bibliography).

'political economy' school. But whereas African historiography passed from affirming African initiative to a less actor- or subject-oriented phase, in circumstances of continuing white domination South African Marxist studies began by concentrating on objective structures and only gradually introduced a more subjective dimension as internal resistance began to revive. The exception to this reversal of sequence is Marxist studies' own blend of Africanism.

Though Africanists were engaged in doctoral research and field-work throughout the 1970's, often under the auspices of Marks and the Institute of Commonwealth Studies Seminars, it was only after the publication of a series of books in the following decade that it became recognizable as a distinct strain within Marxist studies. The Africanists were able to draw on the early Marxist work and the debate on the nature of the state in order to place their investigations within the context of the articulation between capitalism and pre-capitalist modes of production. More immediate influences, however, came from the work of Colin Bundy on the rise and decline of the South African peasantry, while in the 1980's Africanist work has tended to incorporate various insights of the social historians, and to mesh closely with the related Marxist focus on agrarian history. Aside from the impact of local liberal and Marxist studies, the Africanists drew equally on Latin American and European approaches: the dependency or underdevelopment theory of Frank, the work of French Marxist anthropologists such as Meillassoux, Godelier, Rey and Terray, and the approach of Althusser's erstwhile disciples, Hindess and Hirst. However, explicit theorization has never been the Africanists' strong suit, and what insights they gleaned from contemporary theoreticians cannot be easily pinpointed in their work.

The Africanists sought explicitly to overcome the albocentrism of previous South African historiography by concentrating on the internal dynamics of precapitalist

African social formations. The specificity of these social formations was characterized in terms of a lineage and/or tributary mode of production in which surplus labour and wealth were appropriated and controlled by a ruling class of chiefs and elders. In a rare instance of explicit theorization by an Africanist, Philip Bonner defined the lineage mode as "communal appropriation of the social product and its extended or 'complex' redistribution among the lineage members".²⁸¹ In the South African case in particular, the lineage mode was often part of larger collectivities undergoing processes of state formation, characterized by an exploiting chiefly class identified with the state, the absence of private property, and communal production.²⁸² Chiefs and homestead-heads indirectly controlled production by their control of cattle, which as bride-wealth was necessary for marriage, the expansion of production, and the reproduction of labour-power. Processes of state formation were taken to originate out of, *inter alia*, the devastations of drought and war, population increase, restrictions on the circulation of wealth and access to trade. By demonstrating that Africans had a history before European colonization, the Africanists countered the dominant assumptions of "the backwardness and stasis of African societies";²⁸³ however, this recovery of African history was inclined to focus on the pre-colonial ruling classes, though this varied from scholar to

281 P.Bonner "Classes, the Mode of Production and the State in Pre-Colonial Swaziland" *The Societies of Southern Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* vol.8, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London, 1976-77 p.32

282 *Ibid.*

283 P.Bonner *Kings, Commoners and Concessionaires* (Cambridge: University Press) 1983 p.1

The major focus of the Africanists was not simply on the nature of precapitalist social formations, but particularly on the responses of African states to the penetration of first mercantile and then industrial capitalism into the subcontinent. In this they took over from the liberal Africanists and from African nationalist historiography the emphasis on African initiative, namely that "dominated groups contributed to shaping not only their own local world but also the wider society of which they were becoming part".²⁸⁵ For example, it was pointed out that African peasants responded with greater success than did whites to the market opportunities consequent upon capitalist development,²⁸⁶ and that in the power-politics of the Transvaal-Swazi region in the nineteenth century Boer military weakness meant that the white republics were "often no more than a secondary consideration".²⁸⁷ The liberal 'African initiative' approach was soon complemented by the Marxist social historians' concern with the dominated classes, and Africans in particular, as 'actors'

284 For instance, Beinart's work on the Mpondo, where State formation was weak, is more concerned with the 'view from below' than is Bonner's work on the Swazi, where first a conquest and then a tributary State was consolidated: see W.Beinart *The Political Economy of Pondoland 1860-1930* (Johannesburg: Ravan) 1982, and Bonner *Kings*. More recently, this 'ruling class' perspective has been balanced by a focus on rural resistance - see W.Beinart & C.Bundy *Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa* (Johannesburg: Ravan) 1987

285 Beinart *Political Economy* p.7

286 See the discussion of C.Bundy *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry* 2nd ed. (Cape Town: David Philip) 1988, in the following section.

287 Bonner *Kings* pp.4,68-70

or 'subjects', making history for themselves.²⁸⁸ Additionally, the Africanists share with the social historians an implicit aversion to theory and an explicit hostility to 'structuralism'.²⁸⁹ With regard to the latter, the Africanists rejected those approaches that assigned "too determinant a role to capital and the state";²⁹⁰ they emphasized instead the ways in which pre-capitalist social formations and actors shaped modern South African history, and proceeded to offer alternative explanations of migrant labour and the institution of chieftaincy under apartheid.

Whereas the early Marxists like Wolpe and Legassick explained migrant labour in terms of the demand of mining capital for cheap labour, which necessitated the subjugation of the independent African states, Peter Delius demonstrated that migrancy among the Pedi pre-dated conquest by some forty years and involved attempts to procure fire-arms and trade goods, often under the control of chiefs (and even missionaries).²⁹¹ For Delius, migrant labour cannot be taken to be a simple barometer of underdevelopment, for it "enabled the Pedi to secure the

288 See J.Peires *The House of Phalo* (Johannesburg: Ravan) 1981 p.180; Bonner *Kings* p.1; P.Delius *The Land Belongs to Us* (Johannesburg: Ravan) 1983 p.3; Beinart *Political Economy* pp.6,7,164,165. To some extent, the 'African initiative' approach was in fact replaced and not merely complemented by a social historical perspective. Beinart prefers to play down the (external) "causative influence of a 'market response'" to capitalist penetration, and emphasizes instead internal dynamics such as drought, disease, defence and the decline of game and pasturage. His study tries "to cast its subjects as actors even when their independence as producers was being undermined". See Beinart *Political Economy* pp.24-27,164

289 Delius *The Land Belongs to Us* pp.6,7,10 n.15; Beinart *Political Economy* pp.3-4,6,165

290 Beinart *Political Economy* p.6

291 Delius *The Land Belongs to Us* pp.62-3,67,75,164-65. Pre-dating even the Pedi migrants were the Xhosa, who were working for the Cape Colony by 1811. See Peires *The House of Phalo* p.104

commodities which the Swazi gained through raiding and trading".²⁹² Similarly, migrant labour among the Mpondo was aimed at the reaccumulation of their rinderpest-devastated cattle herds, and through accepting the cattle-advance system (labour in return for an advance of cattle), peasant families sought to ensure that the migrant would return to the land, as well as gaining an expansion in cultivation, and bride-wealth, in his absence.²⁹³ William Beinart also showed how Mpondo chiefs were not merely pawns of the segregationist state but "themselves waged a determined battle to secure their place within the colonial hierarchy":²⁹⁴ threatened by a dilution of power consequent upon the possible commoditization of their and their follower's land, Mpondo chiefs supported those aspects of the 1913 Natives Land Act which fixed African reserves and prevented land purchase by Europeans. In this the chiefs were often backed by the mass of the population who, apart from desiring continued access to land, also felt that they could have more influence over land allocation if the task remained in the hands of chiefs and not the state.²⁹⁵ Thus, far from being imposed unimpeded, "segregation was in some senses a route which followed the least line of resistance".²⁹⁶

292 Delius *The Land Belongs to Us* p.139

293 Beinart *Political Economy* pp.55-68. See also W.Beinart "Chieftaincy and the Concept of Articulation: South Africa ca. 1900-1950" *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 19 1985, and "Joyini Inkomo: Cattle Advances and the Origins of Migrancy from Pondoland" *Journal of Southern African Studies* 5 1979. For related studies of the differentiated nature of migrant labour and the uses made of it by chiefs, missionaries and Christian converts in Basutoland and southern Mocambique, see J.Kimble "Labour Migration in Basutoland c.1870-1885" and P.Harries "Kinship, Ideology and the Nature of Pre-Colonial Labour Migration", both in S.Marks & R.Rathbone *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa* (London: Longman) 1982. Note also an early Marxist reference to African attempts to acquire guns and cattle through migrant labour - F.A.Johnstone *Class, Race and Gold* (London: Routledge) 1976 p.27

294 Beinart *Political Economy* p.6

295 *Ibid.* pp.123-129

296 Beinart "Chieftaincy and the Concept of Articulation" p.98

By demonstrating that the demands and power of capital and the state were not overwhelming nor omnipotent, but were often blunted or refashioned by dominated groups, and hence rejecting the view that capitalist development in South Africa could be explained solely in terms of capital's own inner logic, the Africanists contributed to detotalizing the 1970's paradigm of Marxist studies. More generally, their investigations filled the void in the historiography of pre-colonial South Africa that had been the result of an over-concentration on the 'civilisation' brought to the 'Dark Continent' by Europeans. The Africanists deplored the 'formalism' and determinism of underdevelopment theory, in which the recovery of African actors took place in a theatre in which "the capitalist market is moved to the centre of the stage".²⁹⁷ Instead they emphasized productive relationships and internal dynamics, while also taking their cue from Althusser and the French Marxist anthropologists with regard to the importance of the 'superstructure' and the relations of production.²⁹⁸ Marxist Africanism also overlaps with the tradition of agrarian history, for both trace a direct heritage to the pioneering work of Colin Bundy on the South African peasantry. However, both Marxist Africanism and agrarian history have been deeply influenced by the shift to a social historical perspective in Marxist studies, and it is to this perspective that we now turn.

Social History

²⁹⁷ Beinart *Political Economy* p.3

²⁹⁸ For example, Bonner argued that "changes in relations rather than forces of production ... were the principal motor of change" in northern Nguni society - P. Bonner "The Dynamics of Late Eighteenth Century, Early Nineteenth Century Northern Nguni Society - Some Hypotheses" in J. Peires (ed) *Before and After Shaka* (Grahamstown: University Press) 1983 p.80

By the late-1970's, a new perspective in South African Marxist studies was in the making. In a context in which the steadily increasing black resistance to racist domination during the past decade had begun to force the state onto the defensive in certain respects, the issues of struggle and strategy became more and more prominent. Though the late-1970's debate on the state had placed class struggle on the agenda of Marxist studies, this notion remained to a large extent a "fleshless abstraction"²⁹⁹ subordinated to a functionalist and top-down analysis. Yet as the decade drew to a close, and the oppressed began to organize themselves on a national footing, it became increasingly apparent that the state was deeply mired in seemingly irresolvable contradictions. The apartheid system, which had served South African capitalism so well, now appeared to be increasingly dysfunctional not only to economic growth but also to political stability, and Marxists began to reflect upon and to criticize the functionalism and structuralism that were perceived to have dominated Marxist studies during the 1970's. In these endeavours they were able to draw upon a similar critical reaction taking place in British historiography against Althusser's structuralist Marxism. Following the work of historians such as E.P.Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm, the new social historians sought to recover "the lives of ordinary people"³⁰⁰ by writing 'history from below' and recreating the experiential self-generation or 'making' of the subordinate classes of society. Social history now dominates Marxist studies; elements of it have influenced the debate on the state, and it has been fully incorporated into Marxist Africanism and agrarian history.

299 W.Beinart & P.Delius "Introduction" in W.Beinart *et al* (eds) *Putting a Plough to the Ground* (Johannesburg: Ravan) 1986 p.14

300 B.Bozzoli (ed) *Town and Countryside in the Transvaal* (Johannesburg: Ravan) 1983 p.vii

A central difficulty in analyzing the contribution of social history to Marxist studies lies in the reluctance of most of its protagonists to engage in theoretical reflection. Despite claims that social history does not mean "a move away from theory, and into mindless empiricism",³⁰¹ Belinda Bozzoli for instance has also argued that social history "should resonate with the lives of ordinary people rather than reflect the deliberations of the ruling classes or the theoretical concerns of structuralist abstractionism", should confine theory "to the middle level rather than to the grander heights", and should hope to "[keep] theory close to the empirical".³⁰² This reluctance to theorize, characterized by one observer as a conceptually retrogressive "epistemological retreat from Marxist theory",³⁰³ needs to be understood in terms of both E.P.Thompson's attack on (Althusserian) 'theoreticism', and the social historical criticisms of the substantially theoretically-informed Marxist work of the 1970's.³⁰⁴ This characteristic of social history should not blind one to the richness and depth of its contributions to Marxist studies. However, two practical points need to be clarified. Firstly, the usually broad term 'social history' is used in a restricted sense in this thesis, so as to differentiate it from the distinct traditions of Marxist Africanism and agrarian history which have recently appropriated a social historical perspective in focussing on pre-capitalist African modes of production and on black and white agricultural economies. Secondly, given the contextual and

301 B.Bozzoli (ed) *Labour, Townships and Protest* (Johannesburg: Ravan) 1979 p.5

302 Bozzoli *Town and Countryside* p.8

303 M.Morris "Social History and the Transition to Capitalism in the South African Countryside" mimeo 1987 p.5. Morris defines social history as "the ideological representation within social science of a political populism that is likewise anti-analytic and anti-theoretical". (*Ibid.* p.2)

304 Another (internal theoretical) reason for this reluctance to theorize lies in the stress on subjective experience and consciousness as opposed to objective, abstract generalization. See R.Johnson "Three problematics: elements of a theory of working-class culture" in J.Clarke *et al* (eds) *Working-Class Culture* (London: Hutchinson) 1979 p.216

theoretical focus of this thesis, much of what follows as regards the specification of social history relies upon isolated examples, sparse comments, and in particular the editors' introductions to volumes of articles presented either at various History Workshops or at the University of London's Institute of Commonwealth Studies.

In February 1978 the first History Workshop was held at the University of the Witwatersrand. Modelled on the workshops begun by British social historians earlier in the decade, and constituting the first South African Marxist attempt to overcome inter-disciplinary boundaries by producing a collection of work in progress,³⁰⁵ the History Workshop also offered the first intimations of a major transformation in the concerns of Marxist studies. In focussing on the regional history of the Witwatersrand, *Labour, Townships and Protest* aimed to allow analysis of regional political economies to inform "our understanding of the nature of the social formation as a whole".³⁰⁶ The editor, Belinda Bozzoli, pointed out that previous Marxist studies had focussed holistically on the central role of the Rand in shaping "some of the basic institutions of South African capitalism *as a whole*", and in so doing had downplayed the local and non-mining classes, their consciousness and struggles.³⁰⁷ Furthermore, such studies had tended to be too abstract, theoretical and economic.³⁰⁸ These were the targets which would be bracketed time and again as Marxist social history distanced itself from both the early approach of Wolpe and Legassick and the debate on the nature of the state.

305 Bozzoli (ed) *Labour, Townships and Protest* 1979

306 *Ibid.* p.2

307 *Ibid.* pp.2-3

308 *Ibid.* p.5

The Marxist social historians tended to equate all of the 1970's literature with the influence of Althusser, Poulantzas and 'structuralism'.³⁰⁹ Though for some this influence had not been all bad, for others it had inhibited the growth of an alternative conception of history (an alternative viewed as not merely radical but social-historical, and fourth in succession following Christian-National, liberal and radical historiography).³¹⁰ Such 'structuralist' historical examinations, confined to 'objective tendencies', were accused of sterility, abstractionism, economism, manipulative tendencies, elitism and lack of contact with the people.³¹¹ In contrast, social history sought to undermine the basis of previous studies by focussing on the particular as opposed to the general, on 'the people' as opposed to capital and the state, and on subjective human agency as opposed to objective structural determinants. Further issues raised concerned historical relevance, and the relationship between 'people's history' and the liberation movements, but probably the most important issue to be discussed involved a redefinition of the Marxist concept of class.

Developments in the European theoretical context played an important role in fostering the rise of Marxist social history in South Africa. Althusser's insanity and Poulantzas' suicide set the seal on the decline of Marxist structuralism, which even before was being assailed in France by the *nouvelles philosophes* and the post-structuralists, and in Britain by E.P.Thompson's *Poverty of Theory* and the West German *Staatsableitung* school. In 1978 Thompson launched a scathing attack on the inability of Althusser's 'structuralism of stasis' to handle culture, politics and

309 S.Marks & R.Rathbone (eds) *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa* (London: Longman) 1982 pp.6-7; Bozzoli *Town and Countryside* p.2

310 Bozzoli *Town and Countryside* p.2

311 *Ibid.* pp.7-8

historical process. For Thompson, it is through "experience" (or social being's impingement upon social consciousness) that "structure is transmuted into process, and the subject re-enters into history".³¹² Though Thompson, like Althusser before him, wishes to do away with the 'mechanical and unsatisfactory' spatial analogy in which the Marxist totality was characterized by a relationship of determination between 'base' and 'superstructure', which denied any specificity to politics and consciousness, he found it difficult to overcome an essentialist framework. Althusser's problem consisted of rejecting economism while holding to "the determination of the economy in the final analysis";³¹³ likewise, whereas Thompson proposes that we ought to study "rule-governed structuration of historical eventuation (within which men and women remain as subjects of their own history)",³¹⁴ this has to be conceived of as "a model for the social process which allows an autonomy to social consciousness within a context which, in the final analysis, has always been determined by social being".³¹⁵ Some Marxist social history in South Africa goes even further than Thompson in seeking to escape structural determinism, but also falls short of the mark.

The first History Workshop was closely followed by the publication of two editions of work in progress by South Africans studying in Britain, *Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa*, and *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa*.³¹⁶ The introduction to the first volume, possibly because it did not focus on

312 E.P.Thompson *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (London: Merlin) 1979 pp.362-63

313 A.Callinicos *Althusser's Marxism* (London: Pluto) 1976 p.46

314 Thompson *Poverty of Theory* p.345

315 *Ibid.* p.289

316 S.Marks & A.Atmore (eds) *Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa* (London: Longman) 1980; Marks & Rathbone *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa* 1982

the twentieth century, the time-period in which most previous Marxist work was located, did not betray any hint of criticism. In the second volume, covering the period 1870-1930, Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone proceeded somewhat cautiously, as if 'steering a judicious path through warring factions',³¹⁷ and argued that social history apparently seeks *both* to "modify" *and* to make "a departure from" the Marxist orthodoxy of the 1970's. They rejected the latter's 'mechanical functionalism',³¹⁸ but recognised social history's own conditions of possibility in the "enriched understanding" provided by this earlier literature.³¹⁹ Their main criticism of their Seventies' heritage was that black agents were treated as "as much 'dominated classes' in these texts as their authors see them in reality".³²⁰ In other words, Marks and Rathbone aimed to develop a perspective that took account of resistance to domination, a perspective that clearly recognised the reality of the growing resistance to apartheid during the 1970's.

The solution that Marks and Rathbone proposed was directed at opening up a space for human agency, a space in which one can understand "the relationship between class formation, political consciousness and culture".³²¹ But Marks and Rathbone's reaction against structural determination remained a decidedly historical materialist one, and they grounded their key concept of class in its "objective place in the network of ownership relations".³²² It is this 'economic determination in the final analysis' that marks the limits of their attempt to overcome the problems they

317 W.Freund "Review of *Economy and Society and Industrialisation and Social Change*" in *Review of African Political Economy* 29 1984 p.158

318 Marks & Rathbone *Industrialisation and Social Change* p.4

319 *Ibid.* p.6

320 *Ibid.*

321 *Ibid.* pp.6-7

322 *Ibid.* p.8

perceived in Althusserian structuralism. This is the benchmark from which their other, and more penetrating, insights must be measured - and paradoxically found to be limited and constrained. For instance, they rejected the idea of a "ready-made revolutionary working class" in favour of "an immensely complex and often painful making of this working class in all its cultural specificity".³²³ The problem here resides in the phrase 'this working class': it is already assumed that *a specific class, identified* as the proletariat, will emerge from this 'making' process, and more importantly, the 'nature' of this class is ultimately derived from its economic position. In other words, regardless of what actually happens in the 'making' process, the *identity* of the class involved will remain inviolate (though not 'unmade'), and if this is the case, the whole process of 'making' can only result in superficial, or, more appropriately, *superstructural* transformations on the 'levels' of culture, politics and ideology.

It is in this context, then, that Marks and Rathbone's use of *both* the terms 'modification' and 'departure' in characterising the relationship between the new literature and the orthodoxies of the 1970's must be understood. For to modify an approach is to make internal changes to the theory, but to depart from it is to make an external break, and it would appear that though the authors in some ways favour the latter, they remain imprisoned by the former. They wished to do away with an instrumentalist approach and, commenting on Turrell's work on the Kimberley diamond fields, recognised that "the nature of the struggles which produced particular solutions ... did not necessarily seem at the time to accord quite so neatly with the needs of capital".³²⁴ But ultimately, we are left to surmise, they *did* accord

323 *Ibid.* p.7

324 *Ibid.* p.5

with capital's needs, even if not 'quite so neatly'. They also accepted Clarence-Smith's characterisation of racism as a 'social practice',³²⁵ and argued that "both capital and the state - and indeed workers - can use this social practice for their own instrumental purposes".³²⁶ They did not recognise, however, that not only may such an 'instrument' be 'used' by diverse subject positions, but that the 'instrument' will also have a marked effect on the user, to the extent that the user may be different as a result of its use. Thus, Marks and Rathbone's insights remain insights within the boundaries of the literature of the 1970's: social history is perceived as a corrective modification by introducing black actors, their consciousness and culture into a prior structural economic framework.

This qualified acceptance that the theoretical and structural boundaries of the South African past have already been largely erected, and that all that remains (in itself a great deal) is to fill in the content, also has echoes in the work of the South African social historian *par excellence*, Charles van Onselen. Van Onselen's *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand*³²⁷ seeks to situate "ordinary people" such as liquor barons, prostitutes, cab-drivers, domestic workers, laundrymen, brick-makers and lumpenproletarians within the context of the industrial revolution during which "the ruling classes gradually came to assert their control over the subordinate classes on the Rand".³²⁸ Rejecting the "grinding and grating of so many abstracted categories against the processes of history", he seeks to "do

325 G.Clarence-Smith "Ideology and Racism in South Africa" (unpublished) London 1981

326 Marks & Rathbone *Industrialisation and Social Change* p.5

327 *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand 1886-1914* 2 vols. (Johannesburg: Ravan) 1982

328 *Ibid.* p.xvi

justice to the simultaneous demands of both structure and process".³²⁹ Yet the most common of the (few) criticisms made of *Studies* is that the structural side of the coin is inadequately dealt with:

The processes of class self-production, of 'making', dominate the accounts of class formation in *Studies*. The processes by which class positions or locations are generated, locations systematically produced by capitalist development and independent of individual behaviours, gradually recede into the background.³³⁰

Van Onselen's work, like much of Marxist South African social history, wishes to relegate the structural determinism of the 1970's to the background and to focus instead on human agency and struggle. But the agency-structure dichotomy is only a surface emanation of the deeper monist and essentialist presuppositions of Marxism. The debate over the relative primacy of the one or the other of these twin 'motive forces' of classical Marxist theory is thus reproduced within South African studies. It is apparent that most of Van Onselen's critical reviewers, and Van Onselen himself, favour a synthesis of structure and agency, but given that Marxism assumes the existence of a *single* 'ultimate' determinant, it seems unlikely that this contradictory form of Marxist essentialism will ever be resolved.³³¹

329 *Ibid.* p.xvii

330 W.James "Materialist History, Materialist Theory: A Response to Charles van Onselen" *Social Dynamics* 9,1 1983 p.87. See also F.Cooper's review of *Studies* in *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 16,4 1983 p.704, C.Saunders "Review Symposium" in *Social Dynamics* 8,2 1982 p.85, and, for a feminist critique, D.Gaitskell, J.Kimble & E.Unterhalter "Historiography in the 1970's: A Feminist Perspective" in *Southern African Studies: Retrospect and Prospect* Edinburgh 1983 pp.182-3. For similar criticisms of E.P.Thompson, see P.Anderson *Arguments within English Marxism* (London: Verso) 1980 pp.32-39, and R.Johnson "Three Problematics: Elements of a Theory of Working-Class Culture" in Clarke *et al Working Class Culture* p.221

331 The question of synthesis is discussed in more detail in the conclusion.

At this point I would like to develop the consequences of two opposed positions within social history with regard to the definition of class. Marks and Rathbone, as noted above, accepted with G.A.Cohen the structural definition of class i.e. that "a person's class is established by nothing but his objective place in the network of ownership relations [and] his consciousness, culture, and politics do not enter the definition of his class position".³³² E.P.Thompson has argued against such structural definitions, and Bozzoli explicitly ranges herself on his side in attacking a 'judgemental Marxism' that views class as a 'thing' and then seeks to deduce the corresponding class consciousness that 'it' ought to have.³³³ Let us consider Cohen's critique of Thompson's position. He attributes to Thompson the error of proceeding from a true premiss, that 'production relations do not mechanically determine class consciousness', to an unjustified conclusion, that 'class may not be defined purely in terms of production relations'.³³⁴ Cohen points out, correctly, that there is no good reason for the conclusion to follow the premiss. One of Thompson's two possible alternatives, he argues, "is to regard community of production relationship as indeed necessary, but not sufficient, for class constitution".³³⁵ But this turns out to be little more than a restatement of Marx's distinction between 'class-in-itself' and 'class-for-itself', between a mere group of people and a group conscious of its group or class nature. Both types of group, for Cohen, are classes, and the traditional answer to the question 'In virtue of what do

332 G.A.Cohen *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence* (London: Oxford University Press) 1978 p.73; Marks & Rathbone *Industrialisation and Social Change* p.8

333 E.P.Thompson *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin) 1982 p.10; Bozzoli *Town and Countryside* p.33

334 Cohen *Theory of History* p.75

335 *Ibid.* p.76

the members of the working class count as members of that class?' is a structural one, excluding everything but the relationship to the means of production.

Thompson's second alternative relates to his denial that class is a 'thing', as contrasted to 'process'. It is at this point that Cohen's 'traditional structural answer' presents itself as an obstacle to perceiving the possibilities inherent in this alternative. He writes: "But this way of speaking is pointlessly paradoxical. Is it not better to say that a class *undergoes* a process of cultural and political formation? How could it *be* that process?"³³⁶ The problem with Cohen's formulation is that class is assumed to exist as an *a priori* fixed identity, while Thompson's approach suggests that class is constituted in process, *as* process, which in turn leads one to suspect that the nature or identity of a class (and any social group, for that matter) is relational and never fully fixed. Now Thompson never goes this far, and neither does Bozzoli for that matter, for to reject the ontologically privileged economic determination of class would call into question the very identification of social agents with classes. Hence, while Bozzoli stresses the "political, social, cultural and ideological character of classes", and argues that "the economic identification of classes is not the *last* word, but merely the first",³³⁷ she uncritically assumes that despite its multiple determinants, the concept of class in itself retains some inherent meaning. Like a chameleon, class discards its bland economic coat to don a coat of many colours, of theoretical complexity and richness; unlike a chameleon, these colours remain as fixed and essential as the original hue.

336 Cohen *Theory of History* p.77 (Original emphasis)

337 Bozzoli *Labour, Townships and Protest* p.5

Apart from this fundamental difference as regards the definition of class, Bozzoli's approach also stands in contrast to Marks and Rathbone in terms of a noticeable and more polemical attempt to actually go beyond the previous literature, to establish an alternative to the 'radical historiography' of the 1970's.³³⁸ Her main concepts are those of class, experience, and culture. She never goes so far as to explicitly reduce any of these to the economic base. Thus she remains aware of the dangers of both absolute autonomy and mechanistic determinism; though she favours "the humanistic thrust of the phenomenological viewpoint, like that of the existentialists" as an antidote to determinism, she noted that phenomenology's "denial of all structural determination and of all social and historical process renders it weak in crucial respects".³³⁹ The concept of culture (in E.P.Thompson's sense) is closely related to that of experience, but it is "not unrelated to the needs of capitalism"³⁴⁰ - in fact, one must concentrate on the relationship of culture to "the complex system of class relations which moves and underpins modern capitalism", involving hegemonic practices, which are, according to Raymond Williams, "a central system of practices, meanings and values, which we can properly call dominant and effective" and which is not simply superstructural.³⁴¹ Culture is thus explicitly not reducible to the economic, nor is it confined to the plane of consciousness or ideology alone, since it involves both practices and meanings. Because culture is *experienced*, it is neither monolithic nor reifiable - the former because it is not to be identified with a dominant ideology but embodies the resistance of the dominated classes as well, and the latter because there is no such thing as '*the state*' or '*the working class*' in any concrete social formation.³⁴²

338 Bozzoli *Town and Countryside* p.2

339 *Ibid.* p.10

340 *Ibid.* p.17

341 *Ibid.* p.18. R.Williams *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London 1980) p.38

342 Bozzoli *Town and Countryside* p.17

The Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci was an important resource not only for the debate on the nature of the state but for social history as well. His stress on the importance of the superstructure and the state in maintaining bourgeois hegemony, and on the need to struggle ideologically, politically and economically through the construction of historical blocs to contest and transform this hegemony, was absorbed by the state-theorists via the mediations of Althusser and Poulantzas. Social history, given its antipathy to 'structuralism', connected with Gramsci's thought in a more direct fashion. The chequered history of the concept of hegemony provides a good illustration. The fractionalists, we have seen, made use of this concept to characterize the dominance of a particular fraction of capital within the power-bloc. Criticizing this equation of hegemony with domination, Bozzoli and Kaplan restored to the concept a sense of the ideological transformation of a particular interest into the dominant general interest, in terms of the maintenance of bourgeois rule via consent as opposed to naked coercion. This conception of hegemony was incorporated into social history and elaborated into a shifting field of struggle. For Bozzoli, hegemony is defined not as a 'thing', but as "a process and an arena of class struggle" with, following Williams again, complex internal structures which "have continually to be renewed, recreated and defended" with varying degrees of success.³⁴³ Bozzoli also refers to Rich's article on John Buchan where he argues that hegemony is constituted by a struggle to establish common cultural meanings and to 'constitute a sense of reality'.³⁴⁴

343 *Ibid.* p.18

344 *Ibid.* p.19. P.Rich "'Milnerism and a Ripping Yarn': Transvaal Land Settlement and John Buchan's Novel 'Prester John' 1901-1910" in Bozzoli *Town and Countryside*

Hegemony, then, is never complete or uniform, but is differentiated and requires continual (re)construction.

Hegemony also surfaces more discretely in the form of 'people's history'. People's history, in Bozzoli's sense, challenges conventional wisdoms, reflects the cultural past of the poorest classes, and seeks to democratize the historical profession through community involvement. These aims are themselves weapons and strategies in an on-going struggle by diverse groups: "people's history, whatever its particular subject matter, is shaped in the crucible of politics, and penetrated by the influence of ideology on all sides".³⁴⁵ An important and interesting facet of people's history is its attempt to provide "an intellectually challenging revision of the common past of *all* South Africans, regardless of their present-day affiliations", a universalist ambition which does not fit into the interpretative straitjackets demanded by specific political movements.³⁴⁶ This assertion of the autonomy of historical research from the concerns of the liberation movements has much to commend it, but of course is as ideologically charged as a call for the subordination of history to strategy. By referring to 'the people', as opposed to the liberation movements, as the ultimate arbiter of truth and relevance, it seeks not only to overcome elitism but also to intervene politically against other ideologies which may try to mobilize the poor.³⁴⁷ The political implications of people's history thus widen the potential support-base for a socialist strategy, and reflect the attempts in the early 1980's to unify unions and community groups under the umbrella organizations of the National Forum and the United Democratic Front.

345 Bozzoli, quoting Raphael Samuel, in *Town and Countryside* p.6

346 B.Bozzoli (ed) *Class, Community and Conflict* (Johannesburg: Ravan) 1987 p.xvii (Original emphasis)

347 Bozzoli *Town and Countryside* p.7

Bozzoli's approach became more defined in her Preface and Introduction to *Class, Community and Conflict* (1987). She argued that the fundamental categories of 'class' and 'race' do not "hold true for all situations over the *whole* of the past".³⁴⁸ Rather, history should be written 'from the bottom up', and to this end Bozzoli introduced the category of 'community'. A real community combines elements of both myth and reality - it is not a "solid, timeless given" but "a creation on the level of myth", "in tandem with other forces".³⁴⁹ It is through formulations such as these that Bozzoli is attempting to escape economism; for example, she argued that "economic class position may determine *whether or not* you are a worker or a peasant, but *how you behave* as a worker or a peasant is not explicable only by reference to the type of labour you undertake".³⁵⁰ But once again, all Bozzoli succeeds in doing is to *supplement* structural determination with human agency and consciousness. The terms 'worker' and 'peasant' are already loaded with a structural bias, and no matter to what degree they are supplemented with other ('relatively autonomous') relations of determination, the economic persists, whether in the first or final analysis, in determining class position, and this is essentialist and reductionist.

Communities, for Bozzoli, are constructed both materially and ideally, the latter case involving interlocking sets of partially coherent common-sense ideological motifs which can be taken up by ideologists of both left and right.³⁵¹ Similarly, the History Workshop seeks "to retrieve from the controlling orbit of old-style white

348 Bozzoli *Class, Community and Conflict* p.xviii (Original emphasis)

349 *Ibid.* p.7

350 *Ibid.* p.8 (Original emphasis)

351 *Ibid.* pp.xvii,12-14

nationalist historiography the past of ordinary white people".³⁵² Bozzoli asked the question "how it was that race did succeed in *becoming* a critical criterion";³⁵³ yet it is not seen as necessary to direct the same question at the concept of *class*, and thus to reflect critically on one's own Marxist presuppositions. In this regard a more important question asked by Bozzoli is why the supposedly equalising tendencies of proletarianisation - the dull compulsion of the economic - do not result in political and social unity.³⁵⁴ This is answered with reference to the multiple cleavages in society along the lines of religion, gender, wealth, status, ethnicity, race, region, age and so on. This acceptance of the multiplicity and diversity of the social could lead one to question the determining power of the economic; but it also fits with the view that the economic is determining only in the final analysis. Thus, the problem with Bozzoli's general approach appears to rest with the fact that her perception of the growing complexity and diversity of the social is posterior to the assumption that class and community are *the* key analytical categories; it is assumed that in the process of proletarianisation a (admittedly diluted and heterogeneous) *thing* called the working class is made.

In conclusion, South African Marxist studies have been placed on a new theoretical footing in the 1980's by the rise of social history. Adherents see themselves as offering at least a modification of, if not an alternative to, the work of the 1970's. Their focus on the cultural-political making of a South African working class via experience and struggle has undoubtedly gone a long way towards rescuing subordinate groups, and black workers in particular, from their erstwhile status as a

352 *Ibid.* p.17

353 *Ibid.* p.25 (Original emphasis)

354 *Ibid.* p.20

'silent backdrop' to the machinations of capital and the state.³⁵⁵ The question arises as to whether or not social history has constituted itself as a new paradigm for South African Marxist studies. It has been argued that Marxist studies only constituted themselves as a relative firm and complete paradigm after the critique of the early approach in the mid-1970's. The sharp polemics surrounding the further shift to social history at the end of the decade, however, should be construed not as manifestations of another 'historiographical break' but rather as a reconstruction of the theoretical terrain of Marxist studies.

To some extent, social history initiated a *detotalization* of the paradigm of the late-1970's, by stressing the particular and regional, 'the people', and subjective human agency, all of which had either been ignored or reduced to what was seen as more fundamental, namely, the inner logic of the capitalist accumulation process. A similar process of detotalization is also evident in the anti-abstractionism and reluctance to theorize on the part of the social historians. However, when the social historians did raise theoretical issues, a counter-tendency to *retotalize* the theoretical terrain became apparent, particularly in terms of the redefinition of class and in the emphasis on class struggle as the motive force of history. Rather than deconstructing the 1970's paradigm, the social historians reconstructed it around a different centre: human agency as opposed to structural determination.³⁵⁶ In other

355 Marks & Rathbone *Industrialisation and Social Change* p.6

356 See G.Minkley "Re-Examining Experience: The New South African Historiography" *History in Africa* 13 1986 p.77. Linked to this 'metaphysics of presence' (a term that the French post-structuralist Jaques Derrida has used to describe the construction of a centred totality) is the problem of "the continued reduction of cultures to classes, via their economic positions" - Minkley *Ibid.* See also R.Johnson "Three Problematics" p.218. A further tendency in social history, to take human nature as "a historical, cultural given", has been noted by Gaitskell *et al* "Historiography in the 1970's" pp.182-3

words, the conceptual shift that took place within Marxist studies in the early 1980's was not from one paradigm to another, but between these two fundamental categories of Marxism. The reaction of social history to the previous work parallels successive attempts by Marxists world-wide to overcome economism and objective, structural determinism (usually associated with the Second International and thereafter Stalin, and deriving from Marx's *1859 Preface*) through recourse to the 'early Marx' and the subjective, voluntaristic class struggle of the *Communist Manifesto*. Both strands of Marxism remain embroiled in an essentialist framework. Social history thus represents not a new paradigm, but the same paradigm with a different centre.

Agrarian History

The early Marxist critique of liberal historiography resulted in the rapid displacement of the theory of a 'dual economy' in South Africa,³⁵⁷ involving the provision of labour to the 'capitalist' sector by the 'subsistence' sector, by underdevelopment theory's insistence on the indivisible nature of the world capitalist economy.³⁵⁸ However, the only concerted effort to found this theoretical development in empirical terms was made by Colin Bundy, who disputed the liberal

357 Derived from W.A.Lewis *Economic Development with Unlimited Supplies of Labour* Manchester School 1954

358 For Frank's theory of underdevelopment, see below. The totality, 'world capitalist economy', was soon replaced in South African Marxist studies by Laclau's formulation of a single 'economic system' characterized by articulated modes of production. See E.Laclau "Feudalism and Capitalism in Latin America" *New Left Review* 67 1971 p.33, reproduced in E.Laclau *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* (London: NLB) 1977; see also H.Wolpe "Capitalism and Cheap Labour-Power in South Africa: from Segregation to Apartheid" *Economy and Society* 1 1972 p.431

arguments about the 'backwardness' and 'inefficiency' of African agriculturists. Bundy derived much ammunition from Giovanni Arrighi's study of Rhodesia, which argued that the supply of labour for the capitalist economy by previously self-sufficient peasants had been the result, not of 'market forces', but of extra-economic factors such as legislation, taxation and racially-selective subsidization.³⁵⁹ Bundy proceeded to demonstrate how the South African peasantry, initially under the encouragement of merchant capital and missionaries, was able to expand production not only to pay colonial taxes but also to purchase manufactured products. Continued peasant access to land permitted them to take advantage of the growing demands for produce after the opening of the diamond fields in 1867, and the gold fields in 1886. However, the mineral discoveries also increased the demand for labour, and poorer peasants who could not increase production swelled the ranks of migrant labourers. Eventually, the rising tide of state coercion, land expropriation, and evictions from white-owned farms culminated in the 1913 Natives Lands Act, and the African peasantry was reduced to "sub-subsistence rural dwellers", dependent for their survival upon wage-labour.³⁶⁰

Both Arrighi and Bundy followed Andre Gunder Frank in concluding that the 'dual economy' model assumed what was required to be explained: "the distance between the races in economic, cultural, and political spheres was not an original state lessened by capitalist development, but rather the outcome of that development".³⁶¹ Frank's theory of underdevelopment linked the peripheral Third

359 G.Arrighi "Labour Supplies in Historical Perspective: A Study of the Proletarianization of the African Peasantry in Rhodesia" *Journal of Development Studies* 6 1970

360 C.Bundy "The Emergence and Decline of a South African Peasantry" *African Affairs* 71 1972

361 Bundy "Emergence and Decline" p.388; Arrighi "Labour Supplies" p.222

World countries in a relation of dependence to the metropolitan capitalist economies, such that metropolitan development arose out of the exploitation and underdevelopment of the satellites.³⁶² In the climate of political repression and economic growth in South Africa in the 1960's, as well as the increasing disillusionment with political independence in the rest of Africa, underdevelopment theory seemed particularly applicable, and informed much of the early Marxist work. Yet the theory appears to have been rapidly relegated to the conceptual backwaters of Marxist studies. The most damaging criticism, from a Marxist perspective, was made by Ernesto Laclau, who argued that Frank imprecisely conceptualized capitalism in terms of the market and relationships of exchange, whereas Marx viewed capitalism as a mode of production.³⁶³ In this regard, underdevelopment theory was further undermined by the Morris-Williams critique of the early Marxist approach in the mid-1970's, which stressed the importance of the 'inner logic' of capitalist production. Other Marxists criticized the theory for ignoring the character of the different peripheral economies which capitalism proceeded to underdevelop, and more recently for assuming "the omnipotence of metropolitan capital".³⁶⁴

362 A.G.Frank *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* (New York: Monthly Review) 1967

363 Laclau *Politics and Ideology* p.22. In turn, Laclau took his cue from Althusser's attempts to establish Marxism as a science, which involved the concept of articulated modes of production.

364 M.Legassick "Perspectives on African Underdevelopment" *Journal of African History* 17,3 1976 p.438; T.Keegan "The Dynamics of Rural Accumulation in South Africa: Comparative and Historical Perspectives" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 28 1986 p.628

However, it was only after the flowering of the shoots of Africanism and social history in Marxist studies that Bundy's thesis, published in book form in 1979,³⁶⁵ came in for serious re-evaluation. The Africanist tradition had by this time repaid its debt to underdevelopment theory by going beyond it and detailing the internal productive dynamics of pre-capitalist African social formations. In the light of these advances, it was clear that Bundy's work was "not located within any theoretical and historical understanding of the dynamics of pre-capitalist modes of production in Southern Africa".³⁶⁶ Whereas the Africanists showed that African societies were characterized by political and economic cleavages, Bundy, much like the African historians of the 1960's, had attributed to the African past an "egalitarian and non-stratified nature".³⁶⁷ Bundy was also criticized for explaining peasant response to capitalism in terms of the "individual voluntarism of African initiative",³⁶⁸ for restricting the creation of the peasantry to the period of formal colonisation,³⁶⁹ and for uncritically accepting the determinism, Eurocentrism and exchangism of underdevelopment theory.³⁷⁰ In short, in the time between Bundy's 1972 article and the publication of his book, his insights had been overtaken by further research and by new conceptual approaches.

365 C.Bundy *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry* (London: Heinemann) 1979; 2nd edition published by David Philip, Cape Town, 1988

366 J.Lewis "The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry: A Critique and Reassessment" *Journal of Southern African Studies* 11,1 1984 p.3. See also F.Cooper "Peasants, Capitalists and Historians: A Review Article" *Journal of Southern African Studies* 7,2 1981 and J.Kimble Review in *Journal of Peasant Studies* 9,4 1982

367 Bundy *Rise and Fall* 2nd ed. p.16

368 Kimble Review p.289

369 Bundy 'Preface to the Second Edition' *Rise and Fall* 1988

370 Cooper "Peasants, Capitalists and Historians" p.288

The reaction against Bundy's work was part of the more general reaction against the perceived economism and determinism of the Marxist work of the 1970's. In this period, another contribution to agrarian history was Morris' "Development of Capitalism in South African Agriculture", which concentrated on the transition to capitalism in white agriculture.³⁷¹ Characterizing agriculture up to the 1913 Land Act as "semi-feudal",³⁷² Morris argued that the prevalent mode of obtaining a labour force during the 1920's and 1930's, labour tenancy, was not a pre-capitalist hangover but was specifically capitalist. Following Poulantzas, Lenin and Hindess and Hirst, he argued that this was because surplus was appropriated indirectly, and labour tenants were paid wages (in kind or in cash) and were separated from their means of labour and reproduction.³⁷³ Morris highlighted the class struggle between white farmers and black tenants, which was part of a transitional crisis in capitalist labour tenancy beginning in the late 1930's. The United Party proved unable to satisfy white agricultural capital, which was then instrumental in the National Party's 1948 election victory; this "signalled the victory of capitalist farmers over the direct producers (labour tenants); as the end of the phase of transition, it ushered in a new stage in the development of capitalist agriculture".³⁷⁴ It should be apparent from this outline of Morris' argument that it is closely connected to theoretical developments in the debate on the nature of the state. The insistence on characterizing South African agriculture as capitalist from the 1920's ties in with the

371 M.Morris "The Development of Capitalism in South African Agriculture: Class Struggle in the Countryside" *Economy and Society* 5,3 1976, also reproduced in M.J.Murray (ed) *South African Capitalism and Black Political Opposition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman) 1982. My page references are to the article in Murray.

372 Morris *Ibid.* p.248

373 Morris *Ibid.* pp.257-263

374 Morris *Ibid.* p.292

Morris-Williams assertion against the early Marxist approach that explanations of South Africa depend on its fundamentally capitalist nature, and more particularly with the fractionalists' conviction that agricultural capital was crucially involved in the seizure of hegemony from imperial capital in 1924.³⁷⁵

More recent contributors to agrarian history have shown Morris' characterization of nineteenth century agriculture as semi-feudal to be inadequate.³⁷⁶ It has also been argued that his structural definition of capitalism in terms of the presence of (a disguised form of) wage-labour is too economic, and that the 1913 Land Act was far from decisive in restructuring the relations of production in the countryside.³⁷⁷

As in Bundy's case, the conceptual basis for these criticisms is social history, exemplified in agrarian studies by the work of Tim Keegan. A recent exchange between Keegan and Morris demonstrated the degree of difference between the agrarian history of the 1970's and the 1980's. Keegan has rejected what he regards as the abstract, functionalist and overly economic approach of earlier writers such as Bundy, Morris, Greenberg and Lacey,³⁷⁸ who have described a "unilinear,

375 W.Beinart & P.Delius "Introduction" in W.Beinart, P.Delius & S.Trapido (eds) *Putting a Plough to the Ground* (Johannesburg: Ravan) 1986 p.13. Though Greenberg also views agricultural capital as politically important (if not dominant), he argued that to reduce agricultural development to capitalist development "underemphasizes what is transitional and contradictory in the process: the simultaneous development of wage labour and compulsory labour services" - Greenberg *Race and State* p.72.

376 See, *inter alia*, R.Ross "The Origins of Capitalist Agriculture in the Cape Colony: A Survey" in W.Beinart *et al* *Putting a Plough to the Ground* 1986, and A.Mafeje "On the Articulation of Modes of Production" *Journal of Southern African Studies* 8,2 1982

377 Beinart & Delius 'Introduction' pp.11,14,15-17; T.Keegan "Crisis and Catharsis in the Development of Capitalism in South African Agriculture" *African Affairs* 84 1985 p.371

378 Keegan "Crisis and Catharsis" pp.371-73

homogenous transition to capitalism", in favour of 'contingent and subjective factors'³⁷⁹ and "a far more complex, ambiguous and multi-faceted process of change".³⁸⁰ Morris in turn has characterized Keegan's position as an anti-theoretical and empiricist "historical phenomenology" akin to the liberal approach.³⁸¹ This criticism is applicable to statements of Keegan's such as: "The racially exclusive rural capitalism of today is the result of countless individual assertions of a powerful social ideal, backed up by the financial and coercive power of the industrial state".³⁸² Yet Keegan's social agrarian history has much in common with the early work.

Despite stressing black rural resistance and arguing, like Beinart on the 1913 Land Act, that sharecropping was not imposed but represented a "compromise" between black and white farmers,³⁸³ Keegan ironically paints a picture of an inexorable capitalist development. Not only does he view sharecropping as a "bridge to a more explicitly capitalist agriculture",³⁸⁴ thereby extending capitalism even further back into the rural past, but the transformation of the countryside under state coercion and 'racial populist mobilisation' left black farmers with "steadily diminishing" options while the assaults on their independence became "ever more effective".³⁸⁵

379 *Ibid.* p.373; Keegan "Dynamics" p.650

380 Keegan "Crisis and Catharsis" p.372

381 M.Morris "Social Agrarian History and the Transition to Capitalism in the South African Countryside" mimeo, University of Natal, 1987 pp.2,5

382 Keegan "Dynamics" p.650

383 Keegan "Dynamics" pp.629,638; Beinart "Chieftaincy and the Concept of Articulation" p.93. In fact, Beinart is reasserting what Morris and Williams criticized Wolpe for implying, namely that capitalism was initially dependent for its survival on modes of production extrinsic to itself, and in this way augmenting the legitimacy of a nationalist democratic struggle.

384 *Ibid.* p.639

385 *Ibid.* p.646

Keegan's work represents an advance on previous work only in that he emphasizes the 'view from below', which has often been obscured in Marxist studies, and downplays 'objective determination': "Racial domination was not a condition but a process, constantly being undermined and constantly reasserted and extended".³⁸⁶ Thus though it is true that rural history has undergone a shift from "more structural approaches to the history of struggle",³⁸⁷ this shift remains entirely within the bounds of a dualist Marxism debating the merits of structure or agency and restrained by cross-accusations of 'determinism' and 'populist romanticism'.³⁸⁸

386 *Ibid.* p.645

387 W.Beinart "Agrarian Historiography and Agrarian Reconstruction" in J.Lonsdale (ed) *South Africa in Question* (London: Currey) 1988 p.143

388 The latter term is used against Keegan by Morris in "Social Agrarian History" p.2, and against Beinart and Bundy by Peires in "A Critique of Beinart and Bundy's *Hidden Struggles*" University of Natal seminar, 29 Sept.1988

CONCLUSION

Marxist studies in the course of two decades has placed itself at the forefront of political and historical scholarship in South Africa. During this time it has undergone at least two fundamental conceptual shifts, responded to the resurgence of resistance on the part of the oppressed, decisively displaced the liberal historiographical tradition, imported new theoretical approaches from abroad and then criticized and replaced these with yet other approaches, and confronted the analyses and strategies of the exiled and internal liberation movements. It has been marked both by fierce polemics and by scholarly cooperation; it has reflected the political positions and divisions that have characterized the organizations of the oppressed; and it has given rise to a whole series of journals, publications and workshops aimed at elucidating the nature of the South African social formation. Some of its practitioners are banned and in exile; some are directly involved in liberation politics, while others would see themselves primarily as academics. Despite its internal feuds and often eclectic appropriation of diverse theoretical approaches, this mass of South African studies shares a common if not always explicit commitment to Marxism both as an analysis of political economy and as a revolutionary force for change. Though it can be said that Marxist studies, given its critical outlook, is likely to reconstitute itself in new forms under the pressure of future historical, political and theoretical developments, the direction in which it develops also depends on how it reflects upon its own presuppositions.

It was noted in the Introduction how several articles and books which have reviewed Marxist studies have periodized its development in terms of a 'race-class debate' in the 1970's superseded by a 'structure-agency debate' in the 1980's. This thesis hopes

to have shown that such generalizations are inadequate. To deal firstly with the term 'race-class debate', this recognizes that the early Marxist approach was partly constituted by its antagonism to the dominant liberal paradigm. However, the term is confined to a theoretical level and ignores a number of equally important contextual factors which shaped the emergence of Marxist studies; in particular, it refers neither to the climate of political stability and economic profitability that characterized most of the 1960's nor to the influence of liberation theories and strategies. Furthermore, while 'race-class' intimates that the debate took an 'either-or' reductionist form, it is also important to understand that this dichotomy was as much within Marxist studies as between Marxists and liberals. The concepts of race and class coexisted somewhat uneasily on the analytical terrain of the early Marxist approach, for its strong structural and macro-historical focus was counterbalanced by the salience of race in the analyses of the national liberation movements. The founding of the early Marxist approach on this loose conceptual coexistence prompted a series of reconceptualizations, culminating in the mid-1970's critique of Wolpe's and Legassick's pioneering work and the coalescence of a stable paradigm for Marxist studies.

The structural tendencies of the early approach derived from its rejection of the primacy attributed by the conventional wisdom to ideology and politics in the form of the concept of race, and were boosted by the influence of underdevelopment theory and Althusserian structuralist Marxism. These tendencies were also strengthened by the early Marxists' perceptions of a stable and profitable racial capitalism in South Africa during the 1960's, which was explained in terms of the functionality of the repressive system of cheap migrant labour for capitalist economic growth. However, to varying degrees the early Marxists accepted at the same time that the South African system involved an additional national or colonial element, which proved difficult to reduce to an effect of capitalism or the class

struggle. This non-class national/colonial dimension was reflected both in the respective political strategies favoured by Wolpe and Legassick and in their central project of defining the nature of apartheid. It is a measure of the power of the concept of race in early Marxist analyses that Wolpe gave an ambiguous answer to the question of whether or not the dominant contradiction in South Africa was internal to the capitalist mode of production. This ambiguity, or the unstable coexistence of race and class, prevented Marxist studies from constituting itself as a paradigm distinct from the liberal approach. It required new political circumstances, new theoretical influences and a new generation of Marxist students for an unambiguously affirmative answer to be given to the question of the capitalist nature of South Africa.

By the mid-1970's it was becoming increasingly apparent that South Africa's economic prosperity was a thing of the past, and the erstwhile political stability began to fracture under the impact of new worker and popular struggles. Founded now on the centrality of capitalist laws of accumulation, the second phase of Marxist studies reformulated the concept of cheap labour in terms of relative surplus value internal to capitalist production and once again took up the project of defining the nature of apartheid by focussing on the state. The structural tendencies evident in the early approach redoubled in strength during the second half of the 1970's, with a corresponding decline in significance of the national/colonial dimension of South Africa. This period was marked by the full penetration of European structuralist Marxism into Marxist studies via the work of Poulantzas, whose focus on dominant class fractions and on the state as a factor of cohesion reinforced the functionalist conception of the relationship between apartheid and capitalism. However, the resurgence of resistance inserted itself conceptually into the gaps left vacant by the concept of race as a result of the coalescence of a Marxist paradigm. Hence the state came to be seen as embroiled in struggle, between fractions of capital jostling

for hegemony and on the side of capital-in-general against the working class. Politically, the debate on the nature of the state took its cue not from the 1976 Soweto uprising but from the growth of the trade union movement, and Marxist studies placed the black working class at the centre of theory and strategy in South Africa.

The formation of national union and popular organizations in the late 1970's and early 1980's consolidated the struggles of the oppressed under circumstances increasingly described by Marxists as the crisis in South Africa. The populist connotations of the Soweto uprising and student and community boycotts resonated throughout Marxist studies, and was an important cause of the revival of debate over the national question. The continuing debate on the nature of the state, bolstered by Wolpe's non-economistic conceptualization of the state as a site of struggle, confronted the national question in the issues of union registration and the nature of the black petty bourgeoisie. The concentration on human agency and struggle which formed the backbone of the rise of Marxist social history was also conditioned on an implicitly populist political stance. Social history expressed its hostility to the structural tendencies of the 1970's by emphasizing the particular, the subjective and the concrete, but despite attempts such as those of Bozzoli to construct an alternative to the earlier literature, social history constituted itself largely as a modification of the late-1970's paradigm, as a filling-in of the gaps within a structural framework. The debate between structure and agency has been reproduced in Marxist Africanism, where the 'omnipotence' of state and capital has been shown to have been shaped by the resistance and initiative of pre-colonial African societies, and also in agrarian history in the form of the shift from Bundy's and Morris' structural accounts of the imposition of capitalist relations of production on black and white agriculture to Keegan's and Beinart's emphasis on rural struggles.

It is important to understand the wider theoretical and historical basis of the current debate between structure and agency in Marxist studies. Marxism is a monist theory the deficiencies of which lead to dualism. That is to say, in Marxist theory explanations of reality must ultimately refer to a single fundamental essence derived from economic contradictions (the relations of production or the class struggle). Yet the inability of such explanations to account for the irreducible specificity of non-economic contradictions led to successive attempts to reconceptualize the relationship between the economic and the political. People make history, Marx wrote, but not in circumstances of their own choosing, and since then Marxists have wavered between the poles of necessity and spontaneity, base and superstructure, structural determination and human agency. However, these dualisms continue to reflect their monist ancestry: for example, Althusser's structured totality remains determined by the economic *in the final analysis*, while the State is permitted only *relative* autonomy in Poulantzas' specification of the political. In addition, the prevalence of conceptual dichotomies in Marxism is a product of the theory's insertion in the dominant (and idealist) tradition of Western philosophy, which asserts the ultimately conceptual character of reality, that is, that there is an ultimate law of motion of history that can be conceptually grasped.³⁸⁹

In its twenty years of existence, South African Marxist studies has reproduced the trajectory and dichotomies of the history of international Marxism. The most visible expression of this is the manner in which the structuralist concerns of the 1970's literature have been supplemented or replaced by social history and its humanist

389 E.Laclau & C.Mouffe "Post-Marxism without Apologies" *New Left Review* 166
1987 p.88

'view from below'. However, it is also apparent in the co-existence of the concepts of class and race in the early approach; in the mid-1970's critique of this approach on the basis of fundamental capitalist laws of motion; in the contrast between the 'politicism' of the fractionalist account of the State and the essentialism of the capital-relation; and, in the 1980's, in the differences between a State seen as a structural relation between class forces and a conception of an increasingly autonomous State, and between the economism and essentialism of the 1970's and the highlighting of class agency and struggle in the 1980's. Moreover, Marxist studies has matured in a climate of world capitalist crisis which paradoxically has also turned out to be a crisis for Marxism itself. Marxist theory has proved to be weak on questions of race and nationalism; it's favoured proletariat has become outnumbered by the rise of the new middle class; and it is unable to incorporate nationalist, populist, women's, students', ecological, anti-nuclear and minorities' protests except as secondary adjuncts to the struggle for socialism. In South Africa, Marxist studies continues to grapple with the problem of race while the national question divides the liberation movements and the working class. A theoretical dualism has been Marxism's historical answer to such problems; now dualism is itself the problem.

As Perry Anderson has pointed out, the "one master-problem" in Marxism is the "nature of relationships between structure and subject".³⁹⁰ It is precisely this, the dichotomy between structure and agency, that characterizes South African Marxist studies at present. The social historians have built their critical position *vis-a-vis* earlier structuralist approaches on this dichotomy, and on this basis have declared

390 P.Anderson *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* (London: Verso) 1983 p.33

their distance from such approaches. Yet the Marxist literature of the 1970's and the 1980's is not fundamentally dissimilar. Their apparently opposed starting-points of structure and agency refer to a monist essence at the centre of Marxist theory, namely the assumption that a suitably scientific theory can capture reality in its pristine clarity and reduce its diversity and multiplicity to a totality governed by a single centre. In Marxism, the economic is ultimately determining yet remains fundamentally self-sufficient regardless of the degree to which relative autonomy is attributed to other elements within the conceptual whole. The recent calls within Marxist studies for a synthesis between "social history and...structural marxism...individual agency and social constraints"³⁹¹ recognize the duality between structure and agency in Marxism but underestimate their complicity in constituting an essentialist totality. Thus the proposed synthesis involves re-uniting what were never fundamentally separate; it involves the confirmation and not the transformation of a pre-existing conceptual formation.

It is debatable whether Marxism, and Marxist studies, can construct an escape route from their common dilemma. Marxism asserts that the economic is primary and autonomous, that is, determining yet itself undetermined; that social agents (classes) are unified on the basis of economic laws; and that the working class has a fundamental interest in socialism. To the extent that one abandons these

391 S.Marks *The Ambiguities of Dependence in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Ravan) 1986 p.8. For other calls for synthesis, see Marks "Towards a People's History in South Africa? Recent Developments in the Historiography of South Africa" in R.Samuel (ed) *People's History and Socialist Theory* (London: Routledge) 1981 p.304; W.James "Materialist History, Materialist Theory: A Response to Charles van Onselen" *Social Dynamics* 9,1 1983 p.89; F.Johnstone "'Most Painful to our Hearts': South Africa through the Eyes of the New School" *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 16,1 1982 p.24.

assumptions, one moves towards a post-Marxist terrain.³⁹² For the heart of the economic, the labour process, is shot through with political relations of domination; labour-power must not only be purchased but the maximum possible labour must be extracted from it.³⁹³ As Michel Foucault has argued:

It is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination; but, on the other hand, its constitution as labour power is possible only if it is caught up in a system of subjection (in which need is also a political instrument meticulously prepared, calculated and used); the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body.³⁹⁴

Once the economic has been dethroned, the unity and interests of social agents are no longer so clear-cut. Indeed, the very identity of social agents, including classes, can no longer be fixed but becomes relational, incomplete and pierced by contingency.³⁹⁵ It is at the moment when the central essential reference point is displaced that "everything [becomes] discourse - provided we can agree on this word - that is to say, a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely".³⁹⁶

The implications of a move from an essentialist totality to a decentered and boundless totality are immense. For example, the State in Marxist theory has been

392 E.Laclau & C.Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso) 1985 pp.76-77

393 S.Bowles & H.Gintis "Structure and Practice in the Labour Theory of Value" *Review of Radical Political Economics* 12,4 p.8

394 M.Foucault *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Harmondsworth: Penguin) 1979 p.26

395 Laclau & Mouffe *Hegemony* pp.86,110

396 J.Derrida *Writing and Difference* London 1978 p.280

viewed as the simple instrument or property of the ruling classes; more progressively, it has been seen as the relatively autonomous preserve of the dominant, whether alone or in relation to the struggles of the dominated. But underlying these views are the assumptions that classes constitute fixed identities, that their interrelationships are external to themselves, and the victory of one involves the defeat of the other. An alternative conception can be derived from the work of Foucault on power, where the State must be

conceived not as a property, but as a strategy, that its effects of domination are attributed not to 'appropriation', but to dispositions, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, functionings; that one should decipher in it a network of relations, constantly in tension, in activity, rather than a privilege that one might possess; that one should take as its model a perpetual battle rather than a contract regulating a transaction or the conquest of a territory. In short this power is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the 'privilege', acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions - an effect that is manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those who are dominated.³⁹⁷

Thus the State is located in a nexus not only between classes but also between diverse groups nor does it merely reproduce relations of domination but also involves resistance. The State is composed of "innumerable points of confrontation, focuses of instability, each of which has its own risks of conflict, of struggles, and of an at least temporary inversion of the power relations"; the overthrow of the State thus does not "obey the law of all or nothing; it is not acquired once and for all by a new control of the apparatuses nor by a new functioning or a destruction of the institutions".³⁹⁸

To renounce essentialism is also to reconstruct political strategy. In South Africa today, the dominant revolutionary strategies are based on the black working class,

³⁹⁷ Foucault *Discipline and Punish* pp.26-7

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.* p.27

whether alone or in alliance with popular or nationalist groupings. However, it is still assumed that the national and socialist struggles are distinct, and that only the working class has an uncompromising interest in socialism. But the proliferation of diverse struggles in South Africa, from students, youth and the unemployed to women and communities, suggests that an approach has to be found that accepts the specificity of these struggles and does not attempt to reduce them to secondary elements of the supposedly more fundamental struggle for socialism. If, as I have argued above, political relations are not fixed and enclosed within an essentialist core but are characterized by contingency and difference, then strategies must revolve around the practice of hegemony. Hegemony in this sense involves the construction in struggle of a discursive field upon which the identities of diverse groups become temporarily fixed as they articulate with and modify each other. The working class has no essential interest in socialism, nor is the national struggle necessarily a bourgeois one; rather, such 'interests' and 'necessities', as well as strategic alliances, have to be constructed in a process of struggle.

The South African social formation today is undoubtedly immersed in a crucial period of transition. However, though the structures of domination and exploitation in South Africa have been severely shaken by the uprising of 1984-87, there can be no question of their imminent collapse. The oppressors are in the process of constructing a new political economy and a new hegemony; it is not unthinkable that they may succeed in this regard, even in the weak sense of distorting and diverting the revolutionary struggle. In the face of this, it is now the task of the oppressed to rethink their strategies and reconstruct their alliances to include the widest range of opposition forces possible. Most importantly, the oppressed must start to think beyond both national democracy and socialism; the counter-hegemony envisaged must prepare itself to oppose the coalescence of all forms of domination, which include not only political and economic domination but also the theoretical

domination that seeks to order the world on the basis of a single essentialist core. Marxist studies has proved to be a vigorous and flexible analytical approach; now, confronted by the multiplicity and proliferation of points of resistance against domination, it must adapt again.

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