AHR Roundtable

Hopeless Entanglement: The Short History of the Academic Humanities in South Africa

KEITH BRECKENRIDGE

Globally, the humanities seem to be experiencing a crisis of confidence, with declining student numbers and a loss of faith among scholars in the methods and powers of their research.[1] Few countries, however, have duplicated the South African strategy of officially announcing a "perceived crisis" in the *Government Gazette*, and creating a national institute for the humanities and social sciences to address it.[2] The statutory establishment in December 2013 of a generously funded but still to be named national institute for humanities and social science research is very curious—not least because there seems to be almost no agreement in the official documents, or the reports that have led up to them, on whether there is a true crisis in the humanities. Nor is there agreement on what the humanities—in which the crisis is perceived to lie—actually are as a scholarly field. Or whether the remedies proposed as functions of the new institute—most of which are by nature lobbying and curriculum-coordinating projects aimed at the universities—can address the most intractable problems that confront the disciplines.

The regulations establishing the new government institute draw on two reports, each of which describes a very different set of problems. The first was produced by the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) in 2011, and it argues that there is indeed a crisis in the humanities, "reflected in declining student numbers, falling graduation rates and decreasing government funding."[3] Drawing attention to the post-apartheid state's undeniable preoccupation with the developmental benefits of science and technology, the report warns darkly of the "intellectual stagnation" and "moribund

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[1] Tamar Lewin, "As Interest Fades in the Humanities, Colleges Worry," *New York Times*, October 30, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/31/education/as-interest-fades-in-the-humanities-colleges-worry.html.

[2] B. E. Nzimande, Minister of Higher Education and Training, Regulations for the Establishment of a National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences, Higher Education Act (101/1997), vol. 37118, 2013.

[3] Academy of Science of South Africa, *Consensus Study on the State of the Humanities in South Africa: Status, Prospects and Strategies*, August 2011, http://www.assaf.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/2011-Humanity-final-proof-11-August-2011.pdf, 17.

condition" of the humanities disciplines in the country. Yet the indices of crisis used in the report are ill-matched to the problem they describe.

To begin with, there is much confusion as to what the humanities should include as a field. South African universities have tended to mix the British and the American precedents in this matter, with faculties of arts granting degrees in the arts (and, more recently, social sciences) to students majoring in at least two of the nonprofessional disciplines, for example anthropology, English literature, and history. The crisis described in the ASSAf report—which is partly demographic and partly intellectual—is amplified by the inclusion of law, education, and other fields, such as communications, psychology, and public administration, which have little in common with the older subjects. These semi-professionalized subjects allow the ASSAf to bulk up the numbers of humanities students in the national university system, to 200,000 out of the 800,000 total, but they effectively obscure the condition of the traditional disciplines. And they are also the source of the scholarly mediocrity—diagnosed using citation counts—that so concerns ASSAf.[4]

There has certainly been a significant fall in numbers in the traditional humanities subjects—history, philosophy, religion, and many languages—in South Africa over the last two decades. But this was off an already very small base and, by international comparison, tiny (and sustainable) staff complements. Between 1990 and 2012, the traditional humanities subjects declined very rapidly in real and relative terms, as the overall population served by 23 institutions expanded from 500,000 to nearly 1 million students. In recent years, for example, this national university system has supported approximately 6,000 English majors across all levels, as compared to a total of just 1,500 history majors. If the ASSAf report is correct, fewer than 1,000 students are majoring in an African language. One reason for these very small numbers (and the declines in academic teaching staff) is much less mysterious than the report implies: they date from the rationalizing of the early post-apartheid state, and particularly to the withdrawal of state bursaries for teacher training and the shortening of the basic law degree to eliminate the requirement that students major in one of the humanities.[5] But another reason has been the rapid growth within the arts and social sciences of putatively career-oriented majors such as communications, public administration, and psychology, which now account for two-thirds of the students in those degrees. At some institutions, faculties of humanities offer management courses to very large numbers of their own students. The crisis described in the ASSAf report—the steady fall in the large numbers of students doing cognate subjects like law, psychology, and communications and the simultaneous decline in the quality of the research being produced in those fields—has little, in fact, to do with the humanities as they are understood around the world. In fields such as anthropology, English, history, philosophy, political science, religion, and even sociology, the numbers of both undergraduates and teaching faculty are comparatively small, but research is strong and globally respectable. This strength is partly a product of the remarkable scholarly solipsism of the South African universities: across both the

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[4] Ibid., 82–94.

[5] Taryn Lamberti, "Legal Practitioners to Debate Overhaul of Governing Structures," *Business Day*, October 9, 1998, http://allafrica.com/stories/199810090156.html; Staff reporter, "A Drop in Education Students," *Sowetan*, October 13, 2004.

traditional humanities (English and other literatures, philosophy, theology, the performing and visual arts) and the social sciences (economics, psychology, sociology, political studies), almost all the full-time academics research South African problems, typically exclusively and, broadly speaking, using the same social and historical questions and explanations about the effects of racism and racial inequalities. This unusual preoccupation with the *Sonderweg* of the South African tragedy is a source of strength and also of fragility, and it shows few signs of weakening.

It is for this reason that the ministerial report on a charter for the humanities and social sciences (HSS) speaks of a "perceived crisis." Ignoring the claims about declines in student numbers, the report—which was produced by sociologists from the Universities of Cape Town (UCT) and the Witwatersrand (Wits)—stresses the unmanageable difficulties of large class teaching for the students. Describing the first year of undergraduate teaching as a "killing field," they insist that it is "the real crisis point in our entire HSS [humanities and social science] system."[6] Nor do the authors of this report have much sympathy with the idea that the quality of research and learning is being undermined by an influx of under-prepared students. Drawing attention to the fact that many of the existing black scholars in the universities were drawn from an even more fraught system of education, they write that they "could not find anything like a golden past in apartheid South Africa's HSS" worth defending.[7] Yet there is an element of self-delusion here. The repeated references to the urgent need to reawaken "traditions of popular education" suggest that what really concerns the authors of the ministerial report is the abrupt collapse of what could be called the popular humanities, and especially the explosion of theater, fiction, and poetry that fostered the political opposition of the United Democratic Front during the 1980s.[8]

This moment of politicized popular humanism was closely associated with a cheaply produced literary magazine called *Staffrider*, published from 1977 to 1993 by Ravan Press. This scruffy periodical worked as a talisman for an ideal of populist humanism that motivated that press and the wider intellectual moment. The magazine was named after the youths who took the deadly risk of riding on the outside of commuter trains, and it adopted a self-consciously anti-elitist, anti-Leavisite, politically militant editorial policy, publishing the work of dozens of aspiring artists and writers and their organizations. Most of these artists were black, and not employed by the universities. At its beginning, with only a commitment to the idea of democratic consensus as editorial policy, the magazine called on writers' collectives to provide it with copy and with sales.[9] And with some obscure outside funding, it worked. The magazine was also deliberately non-racial, encouraging, especially in its early years, the racial promiscuity that was forbidden by the state. *Staffrider*, as Ivan Vladislavić has

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[6] Ari Sitas et al., *Report Commissioned by the Minister of Higher Education and Training for the Charter for Humanities and Social Sciences*, June 2011, http://www.gov.za/sites/www.gov.za/files/DoHE_Charter_Humanities_0.pdf, 44.

[7] Ibid., 26.

[8] Ibid., 20, 38.

[9] Njabulo S. Ndebele, "The Writers' Movement in South Africa," *Research in African Literatures* 20, no. 3 (Autumn 1989): 412–421; Mike Kirkwood, "Staffrider: An Informal Discussion," *English in Africa* 7, no. 2 (September 1980): 22–31; *Ten Years of "Staffrider," 1978–1988*, ed. Andries Walter Oliphant and Ivan Vladislavić, Special Issue, *Staffrider* 7, no. 3–4 (1988); Andries Walter Oliphant, "Njabulo S. Ndebele: The Writer as Critic and Interventionist," ibid., 341–348. The eleven volumes of *Staffrider* have all been scanned, unfortunately at low resolution, and made available in JSTOR's *Aluka* collection, http://www.aluka.org.

observed, was unique "in the demented, divided space of apartheid" because "Douglas Livingstone of Durban and Mango Tshabangu of Jabavu were side by side" on the same page.[10] But *Staffrider* also gave expression to what can be described as structural faults of the humanities in South Africa. It supported the recovery of the obscured initiatives of black writers, in the present and the past, and a self-conscious desire to know more about and from the black writers on the continent.[11] After an initial period of enthusiastic and naïve non-racialism, the magazine quickly became a venue and a vehicle for bitter racialized debates between white and black writers and their organizations. These conflicts were continuous and episodic through the entire period of the magazine, eventually splintering all the key figures and organizations into discretely racialized camps. By the middle of the 1980s, many of the key black writers had broken away to form Skotaville Press, publishing their own magazine, *New Classic*, and their own book series.[12] In many ways this conflict was a product of success. There was a vibrancy and significance to the popular humanities that *Staffrider* triggered and nurtured in the 1980s (with substantial local and international philanthropic support) that has since disappeared. That decline lies behind the official distress.

Yet, as the authors of both reports know all too well, this outpouring of what at the time was sometimes called "people's education" was directly linked, albeit always unhappily, with the parallel Marxist radicalization of the predominantly white universities. Mike Kirkwood, the founding spirit behind *Staffrider* and the most influential of the Ravan Press editors, was also a severe Marxist critic of the white literary tradition, a distinctive scholarly product of the intellectual upheaval at the University of Natal in the 1970s.[13] Popular humanism in the 1980s was also intensely—although, again, nervously—fostered by the growing institutional power of radical history in the South African universities, and Wits in particular. It was because of this institutional support that the epoch of the popular humanities in South Africa—so neatly captured by the lifespan of *Staffrider*—also represented an easily distinguishable golden age of the South African humanities.[14]

WHAT, THEN, ARE THE BASIC FEATURES of the history of the South African humanist academy? In comparison with other societies, this is a very short story, dating in earnest only from the 1920s.[15] The nineteenth-century intellectual history—of John Philip, Francis Galton, John William Colenso, Sir Henry Bartle Frere, Olive Schreiner, and a host of erudite imperial travelers—was embraced by metropolitan institutions and audiences, treating black and white locals with impressively consistent disdain.[16] In contrast with colonies such as Australia, India, Brazil, or (even more starkly) Mexico and Peru, the universities in South Africa were formally established only after World War I.[17] The origins of most of them—of Natal, Rhodes in Grahamstown, Cape Town, and Stellenbosch—lay in all-boys high schools that prepared students for exams set by an examining institution in Cape Town after 1868. These embryonic universities are sometimes used to push the institutional history of tertiary education in South Africa further back in time than the evidence really allows.[18] By 1892, Victoria College in Stellenbosch—an institution that trained more university students than the other high schools before 1900—could claim a total of fifty-eight B.A. graduates (Jan Smuts among them), amounting to only a handful each year, trained by a similar handful of grandly named professors who were also responsible for high school teaching.[19] Before 1915, it is possible to discern the very early beginnings of what would become the academic humanities, but it was only with the formal legal establishment of the universities and the very large private and state investments the following year that the field came properly into being.[20]

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[10] Ivan Vladislavić, "Staffrider: An Essay," March 2008, *Chimurenga Library*, http://chimurengalibrary.co.za/staffrider-an-essay-by-ivan-vladislavic.

[11] Lionel Abrahams, "From Shakespeare House to the Laager: The Story of PEN (Johannesburg)," *Sesame*, no. 3 (Summer 1983): 5–19; Mike Kirkwood, "Reflections on PEN," ibid., 22–26; Mothobi Mutloatse, comp. and ed., *Reconstruction: 90 Years of Black Historical Literature* (Johannesburg, 1981); Sarah Nuttall, "Literature and the Archive: The Biography of Texts," in Carolyn Hamilton et al., eds., *Refiguring the Archive* (Cape Town, 2002), 283–300.

[12] Paul Van Slambrouck, "Black South African Writers 'Break Free,' Publish Own Books," *Christian Science Monitor*, April 16, 1984, http://www.csmonitor.com/1984/0416/041621.html.

[13] Mike Kirkwood, "Literature and Popular Culture in South Africa," *Third World Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (1987): 657–671; Tony Morphet, "'Brushing History against the Grain': Oppositional Discourse in South Africa," *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, no. 76 (October 1990): 89–99; Belinda Bozzoli, "Intellectuals, Audiences and Histories: South African Experiences, 1978–88," *History from South Africa*, ed. Belinda Bozzoli and Peter Delius, Special Issue, *Radical History Review*, no. 46–47 (Winter 1990): 237–263; Philip Bonner, "New Nation, New History: The History Workshop in South Africa, 1977–1994," *Journal of American History* 81, no. 3 (1994): 977–985.

[14] For a succinct sample of the ferment, see *Radical History Review*, no. 46–47 (Winter 1990).

We have been taught, over the last two decades, not to write the history of the colonial world as a story of absence, presenting differences as failures to match a European standard.[21] Yet the differences between institutions of education in southern Africa in the nineteenth century and those in many other regions of the world are startling. The first of these was the almost complete absence of primary and secondary education, especially among the settlers and north of the Orange River. In the massive territories of the Boer Republics, there was only one high school in the 1880s—Grey College in Bloemfontein, endowed by an unusually progressive governor of the Cape.[22] Even in the Cape itself, the figures for school enrollment among whites were very low: in 1883, as Sarah Emily Duff notes, "only one sixth of white children (of whom there were roughly 50 000) of school-going age were attending school regularly in the Colony."[23] By comparison, Africans—especially those in Natal and in the eastern Cape—had access to a relatively thick infrastructure of mission and independent schools.[24] Yet, importantly—given the centrality of conflicts over religious doctrine in the development of universities around the world—there was only a very rudimentary seminary system for the training of white or black priests.[25] Judging by the enormous influence on black intellectuals in the early twentieth century of the single high school that was established by Trappist missionaries at Mariannhill, and the importance for the development of black consciousness from the mid-1970s of the single federal seminary based in the Eastern Cape and Pietermaritzburg, the absence of church higher education has been telling.[26]

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[15] E. H. Brookes, *A History of the University of Natal* (Pietermaritzburg, 1966), 1–2. The University of the Cape of Good Hope was established as an examining institution, without students of its own, in 1873. The students were scattered among the elite high schools in the Cape Colony and beyond it. Howard Phillips, *The University of Cape Town, 1918–1948: The Formative Years* (Cape Town, 1993), 1–3.

[16] Jeff Guy, *The Heretic: A Study of the Life of John William Colenso, 1814–1883* (Johannesburg, 1983), chap. 9; Ruth First and A. Scott, *Olive Schreiner* (New York, 1980), chaps. 3–5; Saul Dubow, *A Commonwealth of Knowledge: Science, Sensibility, and White South Africa, 1820–2000* (Oxford, 2006), “Introduction” and chaps. 1–2; J. M. Coetzee, *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (1988; repr., Braamfontein, 2008), chap. 2.

[17] Julia Horne and Geoffrey Sherington, “Education,” in Alison Bashford and Stuart Macintyre, eds., *The Cambridge History of Australia*, vol. 1: *Indigenous and Colonial Australia*, pt. II (Port Melbourne, 2013), 367–390, here 388–389. In South Africa there was no equivalent of the Latin American preoccupation with literate authority; Angel Rama, *The Lettered City*, trans. John Charles Chasteen (Durham, N.C., 1996), 28–29.

[18] Harold Perkin, “History of Universities,” in James J. F. Forest and Philip G. Altbach, eds., *International Handbook of Higher Education* (Dordrecht, 2007), 159–205; J. F. Ade Ajayi, Lameck K. H. Goma, and G. Ampah Johnson, *The African Experience with Higher Education* (Athens, Ohio, 1996).

[19] G. S. (Gerrit Stephanus) Venter, “Hoër onderwys op Stellenbosch, 1859–1918” (doctoral thesis, Stellenbosch University, 1967), 371.

[20] Phillips, *The University of Cape Town*; Howard Phillips, “The South African College and the Emergence of History as a University Discipline in South Africa,” *Historia* 49, no. 1 (2004): 1–11; Bruce K. Murray, *Wits, the Early Years: A History of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, and Its Precursors, 1896–1939* (Johannesburg, 1982); W. M. Macmillan, *My South African Years: An Autobiography* (Cape Town, 1975); Hermann Giliomee, “Aspects of the Rise of Afrikaner Capital and Afrikaner Nationalism in the Western Cape, 1870–1915,” in Wilmot G. James and Mary Simons, eds., *The Angry Divide: Social and Economic History of the Western Cape* (Cape Town, 1989), 63–79.

[21] Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for ‘Indian’ Pasts?,” *Representations*, no. 37 (1992): 1–26, here 5; Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley, Calif., 2001), 8.

Education on the highveld—the flat plains that run for a thousand miles down to the Atlantic Ocean from the Drakensberg escarpment—which is now the heartland of the South African economy and society, began in earnest when Alfred Milner undertook the reconstruction of the Boer Republics in 1900. In Johannesburg it was Milner who established the first public high schools, importing English-speaking teachers to socialize the tens of thousands of children emerging from the concentration camps that the British military had used to clear the population of the highveld. The six English high schools that Milner fostered in the Transvaal between 1902 and 1905—and the corps of 500 teachers he recruited to South Africa—changed the trajectory of popular education. By 1910 there were 50,000 white children in free public schools in the Transvaal and the Free State, eclipsing the 12,000 African children attending mission schools that were very modestly supported by the state.[27]

South African universities were racially exclusive, by design, from the outset.[28] Each of the early institutions—Cape Town, Stellenbosch, Pietermaritzburg, Pretoria, and Wits—pursued the project of white supremacy with distinctive local objectives, often played out around the relationship between English and Afrikaans. But it is not too strong a statement to say that the richly endowed white universities were justified as an effort to reverse the educational advantages that Africans had secured in the last half of the nineteenth century.[29] The institution that the leaders of the mission-educated elites—especially D. D. T. Jabavu and H. Isaiah "Bud" Mbelle—managed to found in the wilderness at Fort Hare was born in the same year, but it had only a fraction of the institutional and financial resources at each of the white institutions.[30]

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[22] On the disheveled state of education for settlers in Natal, the Transvaal, and the Free State, see Ernst G. Malherbe, *Education in South Africa*, vol. 1: *1652–1922* (Cape Town, 1925), chaps. 9–19.

[23] Sarah Emily Duff, "Head, Heart, and Hand: The Huguenot Seminary and College and the Construction of Middle Class Afrikaner Femininity, 1873–1910" (M.A. thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 2006), 10.

[24] Norman Etherington, *Preachers, Peasants and Politics in Southeast Africa, 1835–1880: African Christian Communities in Natal, Pondoland, and Zululand* (London, 1978); Les Switzer, *Power and Resistance in an African Society: The Ciskei Xhosa and the Making of South Africa* (Madison, Wis., 1993).

[25] Perkin, "History of Universities."

[26] Bhekizizwe Peterson, *Monarchs, Missionaries and African Intellectuals: African Theatre and the Unmaking of Colonial Marginality* (Trenton, N.J., 2000), chap. 1; Bernard Makhosezwe Magubane with Mbulelo Vizikhungo Mzamane, *Bernard Magubane: My Life and Times* (Scottsville, South Africa, 2010). See Xolela Mangcu, *Biko: A Biography* (Cape Town, 2012), on Biko at Mariannhill; Daniel R. Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets: Black Consciousness in South Africa, 1968–1977* (Johannesburg, 2010), 59–99; Philippe Denis and Graham A. Duncan, *The Native School That Caused All the Trouble: A History of the Federal Theological Seminary of Southern Africa* (Dorpspruit, South Africa, 2011), chap. 1.

[27] W. Basil Worsfold, *Lord Milner's Work in South Africa: From Its Commencement in 1897 to the Peace of Vereeniging in 1902* (London, 1906), 78–91.

[28] Murray, *Wits, the Early Years*, 67; Paul Maylam, "Rhodes University: Colonialism, Segregation and Apartheid, 1904–1970," *African Sociological Review* 9, no. 1 (2005): 14–22.

Yet, paradoxically, the internationally meaningful humanist scholarship, most of it produced by white scholars at Wits and UCT, has always taken race and African society as its subjects. This is partly because a powerful feedback loop has informed the development of the humanities in South Africa, drawing widely read and elegant writers and teachers from the ancient universities in England and Scotland who were informed by humanist traditions that date to abolitionism—among them Alfred Radcliffe-Browne, William Miller Macmillan, and Monica Wilson. These scholars often trained and supported students with fine-grained local interests and a more plodding style, but they were always preoccupied with the problems that made South Africa globally distinctive. Since 1948, highly influential scholars such as Max Gluckman, Shula Marks, John Rex, Stanley Trapido, and, more recently, John and Jean Comaroff have straddled and nurtured the lines of this exchange from powerful institutions in the British and American academies. The debt that South African humanist scholarship owes to the metropolitan universities (especially UCLA, Oxford, Cambridge, and SOAS, University of London) is enormous. These relationships—as was the case with Henri Lefebvre, Jean-Paul Sartre, Rick Turner, and Steve Biko—have occasionally fostered powerful radical alternatives to the most entrenched and vicious forms of segregation and white supremacy.[31] If there has been a single source of intellectual strength across the last century, it has been in these relationships, a fact that might dilute some of the earnest Bandungism of the ministerial report, and the routinely presented aspiration for the decolonization of South African humanist scholarship.[32]

All three of the new universities—Stellenbosch, Cape Town, and Wits—began their work in the 1920s with already established chairs in history, and in the case of Wits and UCT, with incumbent scholars who would have a powerful effect on the long-term development of South African humanism.[33] At UCT, Eric A. Walker, a famous teacher and the author of the most influential histories of the country, took up the locally funded

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[29] Zolani Ngwane, "The Politics of Campus and Community in South Africa: An Historical Historiography of the University of Fort Hare" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2001), 94–95.

[30] Switzer, *Power and Resistance in an African Society*, 179–180; Catherine Higgs, *The Ghost of Equality: The Public Lives of D. D. T. Jabavu of South Africa, 1885–1959* (Cape Town, 1997), 35–37; Ngwane, "The Politics of Campus and Community in South Africa," chap. 3.

[31] Duncan Greaves, "Richard Turner and the Politics of Emancipation," *Theoria* 70 (October 1987): 31–40; Ian Macqueen, "Black Consciousness in Dialogue in South Africa: Steve Biko, Richard Turner and the 'Durban Moment,' 1970–1974," *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, July 22, 2013, 2, 5, http://jas.sagepub.com/content/early/2013/07/22/0021909613493609; Mangcu, *Biko*, 132.

[32] Bonner, "New Nation, New History," 980.

[33] Phillips, "The South African College and the Emergence of History as a University Discipline in South Africa."

King George V Chair; at Wits, William Miller Macmillan, a prolific and radical scholar, was appointed the professor of history.[34] Both universities also quickly established departments that would eventually become Cultural Anthropology. UCT appointed Alfred Radcliffe-Brown as a professor in a government-funded School of African Life and Languages, and Wits—with funds from the Chamber of Mines—set up Bantu Studies, appointing Winifred Hoernlé as a lecturer. Some disciplines, especially English, had much larger enrollments, but their staffing complements remained tiny (at Wits, both history and geography had staff-to-student ratios of over 1:150). It was history and anthropology that dominated South African research, producing students in the first decade who would shape their fields both locally and internationally.

Another distinguishing feature of the South African universities, unlike the Scottish and English institutions that provided most of the first generation of teachers, has been their reliance on the professor as the source of knowledge. The lecture has long been the primary vehicle of education.[35] The strong connections between the high schools and the new universities in Cape Town, Pietermaritzburg, and Stellenbosch seem to have equipped those institutions with a model of more intimate undergraduate teaching, encouraging contact between lecturers and students from the beginning.[36] Smaller classes at Wits (which are confusingly called tutorials) were introduced into the humanities through the English Department in the 1930s, but most undergraduate teaching has long remained comparatively industrial, organized around the examination of the memorized content of professorial lectures.[37]

Until quite recently, the global prestige of the South African humanities—anthropology, history, and English literature—has not translated into influence at home: these disciplines have always served as accessories to the much more seriously funded project of training accountants, doctors, engineers, lawyers, or, in the new universities especially, teachers.[38] In most of these fields, students progress to their professional qualification without any meaningful exposure to the humanities. And, in contrast to the British classical and American liberal arts systems, from their beginnings South African universities have functioned primarily as schools of the professions. Resources and power have followed those goals.[39] After World War II and under apartheid, the sciences also attracted lavish state support, but the humanities have generally worked from the bottom of a rickety academic barrel.

[34] Eric A. Walker, *A History of South Africa* (London, 1928); Walker, *The Great Trek* (London, 1934); W. M. Macmillan, *The Cape Colour Question: A Historical Survey* (1927; repr., New York, 1968); Macmillan, *Bantu, Boer and Briton: The Making of the South African Native Problem* (London, 1929); Macmillan, *Complex South Africa: An Economic Foot-Note to History* (London, 1930).

[35] Brookes, *A History of the University of Natal*, 137; H. Phillips, "A Caledonian College in Cape Town and Beyond: An Investigation into the Foundation(s) of the South African University System," *South African Journal of Higher Education* 17, no. 3 (2003): 122–128; Bill Freund, "Reform and Academic Quality in South African Universities," *Theoria*, no. 81/82 (October 1993): 183–203.

[36] Phillips, *The University of Cape Town*, 12–13.

[37] Bruce K. Murray, *Wits, the "Open" Years: A History of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 1939–1959* (Johannesburg, 1997), 234; Freund, "Reform and Academic Quality in South African Universities."

[38] Murray, *Wits, the "Open" Years*; Freund, "Reform and Academic Quality in South African Universities." See Saleem Badat et al., *Differentiation and Disadvantage: The Historically Black Universities in South Africa—Report to the Desmond Tutu Educational Trust* (Bellville, South Africa, 1994), 8, which shows that fully half of the students at historically black universities were studying education in the 1980s.

[39] Venter, "Hoër onderwys op Stellenbosch," 226–227.

The institutions also struggled to provide libraries adequate to the needs of their faculty and students. After thirty years of desultory collecting, both Wits and UCT had new library buildings in 1945 that housed about 100,000 books; in Natal, ever disadvantaged by the two-city model, a similar-sized holding was split across the campuses in Durban and Pietermaritzburg.[40] Books would long remain a scarce resource in the South African universities. In the new institutions that were established for black students by the apartheid state in the 1960s, books appropriate for humanities research were simply unavailable through the 1980s.[41] Both rich intellectual streams of the 1970s—black consciousness and Marxism—drew on conspicuously limited local libraries. For the former, the list always included Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Amilcar Cabral's *Return to the Source*, and pamphlets from the Black Power movement, such as Stokely Carmichael's *Black Power and the Third World*—all short, direct books that could be read quickly and easily circulated.[42] The Marxists—before the publication of E. P. Thompson's *Poverty of Theory*—favored a short list of notoriously impenetrable works.[43] Thereafter, especially, comparative reading mostly took the form of endlessly photocopied unpublished papers from the post-graduate seminars in Britain.[44] Prior to the development of JSTOR in the mid-1990s, genuinely comparative reading was restricted by limited library holdings.

It is also important to note that an elaborate system of official censorship operated from the late 1950s to 1990, with thousands of books prohibited every year by a board whose decisions were not subject to legal review.[45] Almost all critical and unconventional works produced by English and Afrikaans writers in this period were subjected to censorship. The project also involved the wholesale effacement of local publishing about black South Africans, foreclosing research questions across the disciplines, and in several infamous cases encouraging the professions to voluntarily prohibit the publication of research that dealt with the very widespread effects of the apartheid state on the law and public health. Perhaps the most famous metaphor of what amounted to almost a scholarly lobotomy was the voluntary publication in

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[40] Phillips, *The University of Cape Town*, 182–183; Murray, *Wit, the "Open" Years*, 161–163; Brookes, *A History of the University of Natal*, 138.

[41] Saleem Badat, *Black Student Politics: Higher Education and Apartheid from SASO to SANSCO, 1968–1990* (Pretoria, 1999), 211–212; Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie, "'A Blast from the Past': The Teaching of South African History at an Apartheid University, 1960s–1980s," *South African Historical Journal* 42, no. 1 (2000): 49–68.

[42] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth: A Negro Psychoanalyst's Study of the Problems of Racism and Colonialism*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York, 1966); Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York, 1967); Stokely Carmichael, *Black Power and the Third World* (Havana, Cuba, 1967); Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York, 1970); Amilcar Cabral, *Return to the Source: Selected Speeches* (New York, 1974). On the compact library, see Ashwin Desai, "Theatre of Struggle: Black Consciousness on Salisbury Island," *Journal of Natal and Zulu History* 31, no. 1 (2013): 101–116. The evidence of very constrained reading contradicts Rachel Matteau-Matsha, "'I Read What I Like': Politics of Reading and Reading Politics in Apartheid South Africa," *Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa* 83, no. 1 (2013): 56–85.

[43] Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (London, 1969); Barry Hindess and Paul Q. Hirst, *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production* (London, 1975); Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London, 1978).

[44] Belinda Bozzoli and Peter Delius, "Editors' Introduction: Radical History and South African Society," *Radical History Review*, no. 46–47 (Winter 1990): 13–45, here 22–23.

[45] Geoff Budlender, "Looking Forward: The University in a Democratic South Africa," *Philosophical Papers* 8, no. 1 (1979): 20–35, here 20–22.

South Africa of the second volume of the *Oxford History of South Africa* in 1971 with fifty-two blank pages in place of Leo Kuper's history of African nationalism. Nor did this effort decline in the years of reform after 1976. By the middle of the 1980s, the state had effectively criminalized almost all information about life in South Africa, censoring even the act of censorship itself, and leaving the Orwellian Bureau of Information as the only legal source of news.[46]

This censorship project could not bury the changes that were taking place around the world; by the end of the 1970s, South African humanities research was being profoundly enlarged and shaped by a project of interdisciplinary Marxism centered at the Wits History Workshop. This is a story that has been well told several times.[47] Some of its roots grew in the establishment by Shula Marks of a seminar at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies in London, and another run by Stanley Trapido in Oxford.[48] The critique was announced in a famous essay by a young Canadian doctoral student (eventually published in *African Affairs*) shredding the liberal orthodoxy that economic development would inevitably lead to the dismantling of apartheid.[49] This revisionist explanation of South African history, which argued that apartheid and capitalism were mutually reinforcing, quickly became the orthodoxy of an entire generation of highly productive researchers.[50] Inside South Africa, the movement also had origins at the University of Natal, where Rick Turner (who, like his friend Steve Biko, was assassinated in the summer of 1977–1978) encouraged students to begin documenting the conditions of black workers in the factories in Durban. The crossing between the university and the factories in the early 1970s produced a new kind of scholarship, and a political motivation that circumvented Biko's fierce denunciations of liberal hypocrisy.[51] Student politics and the growing union movement provided two domestic causes of this explosion of research, but a third—not often acknowledged publicly—was military recruitment for young white men, which could be postponed indefinitely until the completion of a master's thesis. This provided an incentive for ambitious projects and almost continuous revision. During the 1980s, the M.A. theses produced at Wits, in particular, became massive book-length works of intensive and outstanding scholarship.[52] By the middle of the 1980s, the universities established as part of the apartheid project—notably the University of the Western Cape—were providing institutional homes for forms of the humanities that brought together these black and white streams of the politicized humanities.[53]

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[46] Christopher Merrett, *A Culture of Censorship: Secrecy and Intellectual Repression in South Africa* (Macon, Ga., 1995), 60–69, 72–77, 136–137; A. Paul Hare and Michael Savage, "Sociology of South Africa," *Annual Review of Sociology* 5 (August 1979): 329–350.

[47] Bozzoli and Delius, "Editors' Introduction"; Christopher Saunders, *The Making of the South African Past: Major Historians on Race and Class* (Cape Town, 1988), chap. 17.

[48] For a detailed account see Saunders, *The Making of the South African Past*, chap. 16.

[49] Frederick A. Johnstone, "White Prosperity and White Supremacy in South Africa Today," *African Affairs* 69, no. 275 (April 1970): 124–140.

[50] The earliest histories were Charles van Onselen, *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1900–1933* (London, 1976); Frederick A. Johnstone, *Class, Race, and Gold: A Study of Class Relations and Racial Discrimination in South Africa* (London, 1976); Harold Wolpe, "Capitalism and Cheap Labour-Power in South Africa: From Segregation to Apartheid," *Economy and Society* 1, no. 4 (1972): 425–456. The most influential, across the humanities, was Charles van Onselen, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand, 1886–1914,* vol. 1: *New Babylon* (Johannesburg, 1982); and, politically, Bernard Makhosezwe Magubane, *The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa* (New York, 1979).

[51] See especially Greaves, "Richard Turner and the Politics of Emancipation"; Eddie Webster, "The Impact of Intellectuals on the Labour Movement," *Transformation*, no. 18–19 (1992): 88–92.

[52] Edward Koch, "Doornfontein and Its African Working Class, 1914 to 1935: A Study of Popular Culture in Johannesburg" (M.A. thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1983); Irwin Stanley Manoim, "The Black Press, 1945–1963: The Growth of the Black Mass Media and Their Role as Ideological Disseminators" (M.A. thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1983); Carolyn Hamilton, "Ideology, Oral

In 1990, the publication of a special edition of *Radical History Review*—just months before Nelson Mandela's astonishing release from prison—marked the apogee of the revisionist era in the humanities.[54] This volume showcased the work of historians, literary scholars, and sociologists examining—to use a phrase that was popular at the time—the warp and woof of the lives of the working class and the rural poor. The range, and variety, of scholars assembled suggested a wholesale adoption of the key problems of radical historical research that had been fostered by the History Workshop after 1977—conquest, dispossession, labor exploitation, segregation, and unionization—across the humanities. And the tone of some of the articles suggested confidence both in the methods of their writing and in its prospects.[55]

But this moment of coherence and collaboration did not last. The arrival of formal freedom also marked the disintegration of the unified project of the Thompsonian humanities. The splintering took many forms, some of them productive, others not. First came the adoption by younger scholars of the discursive analysis being developed by anthropologists, historians, and literary scholars in the U.S. This led to a bad-tempered battle between those who sought to interrogate historical sources and those who simply wanted to be able to use them.[56] Under the influence of David William Cohen's work, in particular, this discursive turn encouraged a rich new field, public history, especially at the University of the Western Cape.[57]

THE COLLAPSE OF THE APARTHEID STATE inevitably also led to a powerful reassertion of the centrality of race—and accusations of racial privilege—in the humanities academy. Then, as now, this often took the form of an unresolved lament about the

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Traditions and the Struggle for Power in the Early Zulu Kingdom" (M.A. thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1985). These master's theses, and hundreds like them, are eloquent testimony to the Golden Age at Wits.

[53] Cornelius C. Thomas, "Disaffection, Identity, Black Consciousness and a New Rector: An Exploratory Take on Student Activism at the University of the Western Cape, 1966–1976," *South African Historical Journal* 54, no. 1 (2005): 72–90; Premesh Lalu and Noëleen Murray, *Becoming UWC: Reflections, Pathways and Unmaking Apartheid's Legacy* (Bellville, South Africa, 2012), including Ciraj Rassool, "Full Circle: Concerning UWC's Academic Value," 90–99; Colin Bundy, "Action, Comrades, Action! The Politics of Youth-Student Resistance in the Western Cape, 1985," in James and Simons, *The Angry Divide*, 206–217. On the Revisionists' delayed arrival at UDW (and Natal), see Dhupelia-Mesthrie, "'A Blast from the Past.'"

[54] Bozzoli and Delius, *History from South Africa*.

[55] Bozzoli and Delius, "Editors' Introduction"; Paul la Hausse, "Oral History and South African Historians," *Radical History Review*, no. 46–47 (Winter 1990): 346–356.

[56] Carolyn Hamilton, ed., *The Mfecane Aftermath: Reconstructive Debates in Southern African History* (Johannesburg, 1995); Norman Etherington, *The Great Treks: The Transformation of Southern Africa, 1815–1854* (London, 2001); Martin Legassick, "The Great Treks: The Evidence," *South African Historical Journal* 46, no. 1 (2002): 283–299; Jeff Peires, "Norman Etherington, *The Great Treks: The Transformation of South Africa, 1815–1854*," *Journal of Natal and Zulu History* 20 (2002): 65–71.

[57] Leslie Witz, *Apartheid's Festival: Contesting South Africa's National Pasts* (Bloomington, Ind., 2003); Annie E. Coombes, *Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa* (Johannesburg, 2003). See Ciraj Rassool, "Power, Knowledge and the Politics of Public Pasts," *African Studies* 69, no. 1 (2010): 79–101; Lalu and Murray, *Becoming UWC*.

neglect of black scholarship and of Africa, and the absence of transformation in the universities.[58] But it also had powerful destructive effects, involving highly influential humanists in public denunciations of the universities and individual researchers, and institutional wars of attrition that have wrecked one major institution, the University of KwaZulu-Natal.[59]

An old, still unresolved, recrimination lies just below the surface of all humanist writing in South Africa. Dating back for almost a century in the writings of black scholars, there is consistent anger about the fact that so much of the humanist canon has come from white writers based at the universities. This was Sol Plaatje's original complaint, it is a bitter lament in the last years of Z. K. Matthews's historical writing, it runs through A. C. Jordan's history of isiXhosa literary forms, and it provides the spine of Bernard Magubane's intellectual biography and the core of Steve Biko's and Mamphela Ramphele's critiques of white liberalism.[60] In the early 1970s, these criticisms were often presented from a Marxist and anti-imperialist perspective, stressing the bourgeois or colonial purposes and assumptions of anthropology, sociology, and history. By the 1970s, in the aftermath of black consciousness's critiques of the white left, they had become more direct accusations of racial privilege.[61] White writers, these critics suggest, have busily produced accounts of African history or social life, using that familiarity and expertise to bolster positions of privilege in a racially ordered society.[62] But it is important to note that this discontent is complex, aimed almost as much at the diffidence of black writers as it is at the arrogance of white scholars.

Viewed from this vantage, the world of South African humanism is irredeemably fragmented, tragically undermined by affiliations of race and class. Even the most liberal of the universities effectively excluded black humanists well into the late 1970s. The important exceptions to this rule—B. W. Vilakazi in the 1930s and Robert Sobukwe in the 1950s at Wits, A. C. Jordan in the 1950s and Archie Mafeje in the 1960s at UCT—were all treated badly to avoid offending racists on campus and in the state, amply demonstrating the tentative and adulterated commitment to both liberalism and the ideal of the university.[63] And they were embattled exceptions to the general rule of a whites-only academy. As the biographies of the writers E'skia Mphahlele and Mamphela Ramphele show, the liberal universities began to change in the 1980s, but not so quickly that the problem of the segregated humanities is anywhere near to being resolved.[64]

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[58] See the essays in Jonathan D. Jansen, ed., *Knowledge and Power in South Africa: Critical Perspectives across the Disciplines* (Johannesburg, 1991).

[59] Mahmood Mamdani, "Makgoba: Victim of the 'Racialised Power' Entrenched at Wits," *Social Dynamics* 23, no. 2 (1997): 1–5; Mamdani, "Is African Studies to Be Turned into a New Home for Bantu Education at UCT?," *Social Dynamics* 24, no. 2 (1998): 63–75; Craig McKune, "Management Shows Contempt for Academic Freedom at UKZN," *South African Journal of Science* 105, no. 1–2 (January/February 2009): 5–6.

[60] Solomon T. Plaatje, *Native Life in South Africa: Before and after the European War and the Boer Rebellion* (Johannesburg, 1982), 407; Z. K. Matthews, *Freedom for My People: The Autobiography of Z. K. Matthews—Southern Africa, 1901–1968* (Cape Town, 1981); A. C. Jordan, *Towards an African Literature: The Emergence of Literary Form in Xhosa* (Berkeley, Calif., 1973); Magubane, *Bernard Magubane*; Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like* (Oxford, 1978), 40; Mamphela Ramphele, *A Passion for Freedom* (Cape Town, 2013), 94–96.

[61] Archie Mafeje, "The Problem of Anthropology in Historical Perspective: An Inquiry into the Growth of the Social Sciences," *Canadian Journal of African Studies/Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines* 10, no. 2 (1976): 307–333; Magubane, *Bernard Magubane*, 251–252; Ndebele and Oliphant, "The Writer as Critic and Interventionist"; Shireen Ally, "Oppositional Intellectualism as Reflection, Not Rejection, of Power: Wits Sociology, 1975–1989," *Transformation* 59, no. 1 (2005): 66–97; Sakhela Buhlungu, "Rebels without a Cause of Their Own? The Contradictory Location of White Officials in Black Unions in South Africa, 1973–94," *Current Sociology* 54, no. 3 (May 2006): 427–451; Isabel Hofmeyr, "South African Remains: E. P. Thompson, Biko, and the Limits of *The Making of the English Working Class*," *Historical Reflections* 41, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 99–110.

[62] The problems of racism and social distance in the universities are eloquently explored in Shula Marks, ed., *Not Either an Experimental Doll: The Separate Worlds of Three South African Women* (Bloomington, Ind., 1987).

Yet, when the intellectual biographies of almost all of the major black humanists are examined closely, there is continuous and constant evidence of protracted relationships with scholars based at the liberal universities.[65] This entanglement is true even of the most angry critics of white liberalism, including Biko and Magubane.[66] Some of it is a bitter and distressing complicity, the unavoidable dependence of the weak and the poor on the rich and the powerful.[67] But there is also abundant evidence of a mutually beneficial intergenerational intellectual engagement, one that binds the histories of the liberal institutions and the African intelligentsia together. This unhappy, fractured conversation is—as Olive Schreiner observed as it was beginning—distinctively South African, and constitutive of the humanities as a field.[68] In the midst of this difficult discussion, it is probably worth keeping in mind that the forms of privilege that race makes so obvious in South Africa are typical (and entrenched) in many societies.

The awkward argument that is the South African humanities invariably resolves itself into a trite discussion of what the philosophy of humanism ought to be here. These prescriptions are thinly developed, but they almost all share an enthusiastic repudiation of post-Enlightenment liberal humanism.[69] "Ours is a true man-centred society whose sacred tradition is that of sharing," as Biko rather hopefully put it. "We must reject, as we have been doing, the individualistic cold approach to life that is the cornerstone of the Anglo-Boer culture."[70] What this African humanism—often

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[63] For an insightful discussion of Vilakazi's predicament, see Peterson, *Monarchs, Missionaries and African Intellectuals*, 87–112; Murray, *Wits, the "Open" Years*, 239–241 on Vilakazi and Sobukwe. On the Jordans at UCT, see Phyllis Ntantala, *A Life's Mosaic* (Berkeley, Calif., 1992), 128, 133–134, 185–187; Fred Hendricks, "The Mafeje Affair: The University of Cape Town and Apartheid," *African Studies* 67, no. 3 (December 2008): 423–451.

[64] Mphahlele began work at Wits in 1979, accepting a professorship while still subject to the most invasive forms of urban apartheid. Es'kia Mphahlele, *Afrika, My Music: An Autobiography, 1957–1983* (Johannesburg, 1984), 225–338; Ramphele, *A Passion for Freedom*, chap. 20; Sam Raditlhalo, "Talent, the Staying Power of Racism, and Transformation: Trans-Atlantic Observations," *Social Dynamics* 33, no. 1 (2007): 3–30.

[65] I. B. Tabata and Alex La Guma may be exceptions here. Ciraj Rassool, "Writing, Authorship and I. B. Tabata's Biography: From Collective Leadership to Presidentialism," *Kronos* 34, no. 1 (November 2008): 181–214; Roger Field, *Alex La Guma: A Literary and Political Biography* (Auckland Park, South Africa, 2010). Even the Drum writers like Lewis Nkosi and Bloke Modisane (who steered clear of the universities) were caught up in the patronage of the white (indeed, Afrikaans) publishing houses. See Manoim, "The Black Press"; Mark Sanders, *Complicities: The Intellectual and Apartheid* (Durham, N.C., 2002), 98–103.

[66] Mangcu, *Biko*, chap. 5; Ramphele, *A Passion for Freedom*, chap. 9; Magubane, *Bernard Magubane*. Magubane's life was a long, fraught mix of dependence on and conflict with his liberal patrons at the University of Natal and UCLA. On the politics of entanglement, see Sarah Nuttall, *Entanglement: Literary and Cultural Reflections on Post Apartheid* (Johannesburg, 2009).

[67] Peterson, *Monarchs, Missionaries and African Intellectuals*, 133; Sanders, *Complicities*, 99–101.

[68] Olive Schreiner, *Thoughts on South Africa* (London, 1923), 61, as cited in Dubow, *A Commonwealth of Knowledge*, 157.

[69] Murray, *Wits, the "Open" Years*, 158–159.

[70] Steve Biko, "Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity," in Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 87–98, here 96.

called *ubuntu*—actually was, and how it might be substantiated philosophically, has long been a source of difficulty.[71] The young white Marxist scholars who captured the universities in the 1970s invoked a similar break with liberalism, a radical humanism that rejected the structures of the South African status quo and, simultaneously, the authoritarian ethics of Leninism. Some—but certainly not the majority—followed Rick Turner's prescriptions for a Christian socialism, a model of humanism that came closest to overlapping with Biko's prescriptions.[72] Others, including most obviously the historian Charles van Onselen, have gone in search of a demotic ethics, meticulously reconstructing the moral convictions of the ordinary victims of brutal forms of social and economic change.[73] Yet it is hard to avoid the impression that this is a debate about an ethical dilemma that has been irretrievably, indeed repeatedly, lost.[74] Confronted with vigorous forms of consumer capitalism, a rights-based political order, entrenched racialized inequality, high levels of personal violence, and conspicuous patrimonialism in the state, South Africans have opted for the most unconstrained forms of individualism, much to the bitter disappointment of the leading humanist writers, black and white.[75] The crisis in the humanities is a forlorn, and hopeless, effort to reverse that process.[76]

[71] Magubane, *Bernard Magubane*, 186; Es'kia Mphahlele, *Es'kia: Es'kia Mphahlele on Education, African Humanism and Culture, Social Consciousness, Literary Appreciation* (Cape Town, 2002), 135–138. That it is now an internationally significant field of philosophy championed by an American philosopher in Johannesburg is yet another bitter irony; Thaddeus Metz, "Toward an African Moral Theory," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 15, no. 3 (2007): 321–341.

[72] Ian Macqueen, "Resonances of Youth and Tensions of Race: Liberal Student Politics, White Radicals and Black Consciousness, 1968–1973," *South African Historical Journal* 65, no. 3 (2013): 365–382; Mangcu, *Biko*, 172.

[73] Charles van Onselen, "Crime and Total Institutions in the Making of Modern South Africa: The Life of 'Nongoloza' Mathebula, 1867–1948," *History Workshop Journal* 19 (Spring 1985): 62–81; van Onselen, *The Seed Is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper, 1894–1985* (Cape Town, 1996); van Onselen, *Showdown at the Red Lion: The Life and Time of Jack McLoughlin* (Cape Town, 2014).

[74] Sanders, *Complicities*, 124–129.

[75] Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Fine Lines from the Box: Further Thoughts about Our Country* (Roggebaai, 2007); J. M. Coetzee, *Disgrace: A Novel* (1999; repr., New York, 2008). Note the special place of dogs—as symbols of lost human innocence and sympathy—in both of these books.

[76] Ari Sitas, "The Human, Humanism and the Human Condition," *Social Dynamics* 38, no. 1 (2012): 40–47.

Keith Breckenridge is a Professor and the Deputy Director at WISER, the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. Before 2012 he taught at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban. He is the author of *Biometric State: The Global Politics of Identification and Surveillance in South Africa, 1850 to the Present* (Cambridge University Press, 2014) and co-editor with Simon Szreter of *Registration and Recognition: Documenting the Person in World History* (British Academy and Oxford University Press, 2012). He is currently writing about biometrics, mining, and South African intellectual history.