South African Literary Cultural Nationalism—Abalobi beSizwe eMzansi—1918-45

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Returning to the Source

By

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An assessment of African Studies as an interdisciplinary field will reveal that it is by and large reactionary. Reaction, in essence, has been at once the driving force in African Studies and its limitation in all its branches. It does not matter whether any particular scholar is reacting for or against the West; the point is that the West is at the center of African knowledge production. . . .Whether the discussion focuses on history or historylessness, on having a state or being stateless, it is clear that the West is the norm against which Africans continue to be measured by others and often by themselves. The questions that inform research are developed in the West, and the operative theories and concepts are derived from Western experiences. African experiences rarely inform theory in any field of study; at best such experiences are exceptionalized. . . .

Modern African Studies has remained dominated by Western modes of apprehension of reality and knowledge production for a number of reasons. . . .There is, however, another reason that is rarely acknowledged, and even when it is highlighted, its effect is underestimated: that is, the nature of the academy, especially its logic, structure, and practices. At the core of the problem is the way in which business is conducted in the knowledge-producing institutions; the way in which the foundational questions that inform research are generated in the West; the way in which theories and concepts are generated from Western experiences; and the way in which scholars have to work within disciplines, many of which were constituted to establish dominance over Africa and all of which have logics of their own quite distinct from questions about the social identities of scholars. The point is that as long as Africans take Western categories, like universities, bounded disciplines, and theories, for granted and array themselves around them—for or against does not matter—there can be no fundamental difference in scholarship among these practitioners of knowledge, no matter what their points of origin. . . .The point is that the foundations of African thought cannot rest on Western intellectual traditions that have as one of their enduring features the projection of Africans as Other and our consequent domination. . . .

As long as the “ancestor worship” of academic practice is not questioned, scholars in African Studies are bound to produce scholarship that does not focus primarily on Africa—for those “ancestors” not only were non-Africans but were hostile to African interests. The foundational questions of research in many disciplines are generated in the West. A recent anthology entitled *Africa and the Disciplines* asks the very Westocentric and ridiculous question: What has Africa contributed to the disciplines? (Following the logic of the question, consider what Africans contributed to craniometry—our heads; and to French *anthropologie*—our butts!) The more important issue for Africa is what the disciplines and practitioners of disciplines like anthropology have done *to* Africa.

—Oyeronke Oyewumi,
The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses

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GLOSSARY

abalobi beSizwe (sing. umlobi weSizwe)	"literary cultural" nationalists (isiZulu)
African abalobi	African "literary cultural" nationalists
Academic imbongi (pl: izimbongi)	"historian" (isiZulu)
Bakiu	specific zone of expressions of collective human experience
Canarial Disease/canarial	"colonialism," contact w/the so-called "West"
Corporal Expressions of Collective Human Experience:	modes of expression that use the physical human body to engage the oral/aural and visual senses, e.g., music and dance
Expressions of Collective Human Experiences	"culture"
Gomo reMoto (pl.: Makomo eMoto)	Laurentian center, "European metropole" (chiShona)
Gondwana	collectively the geographic regions and indigenous peoples in bakiu and nyika including Africa, the peninsulas and islands of Southwest, South, and Southeast Asia, Australia and Oceana, and the Americas and Caribbean basin south of the Rio Grande
Ibirutsi	post-conquest occupying Laurentian communities, "European settler" communities (Kinyarwanda)
Indaba (pl.: izindaba)	story (isiZulu)
Inkululeko	liberation, freedom (isiZulu)
Inscribed Verbal Expressions of Collective Human Experience	"literature"
Isifundo	lesson (isiZulu)
Izindaba ngezikhati ezidlule	stories of the past (isiZulu)
Laurentia	geographic regions, peoples, and bakiu and nyika of western and northern Eurasia and the so-called settler communities that

	invaded and occupied the northern continent of the western hemisphere
Mzansi/eMzansi	South Africa/South African (isiZulu)
Nyika (sing.: nyika ye-, pl.: nyika dze-)	specific expression of collective human experience within a given bakiu, group (chiShona)
Rosetjau	the entirety of bakiu
Turtle Island(er)	“America(n)”, United States, Canada/Canadian
Turtle Island (Dominion)	Canada
Turtle Island (Federal Republic)	United States
Ukweluka	weaving (n.) (isiZulu)
Umlobi (pl.: abalobi)	writer, “literary cultural” nationalist (isiZulu)
umlobi wendaba	the writer of a story (isiZulu)
umqondo wendaba	the meaning of a story (isiZulu)
Verbal Expressions of Collective Human Experience:	expressions that employ human language

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INTRODUCTION

This book was born of desperation for something to read and procrastination. In the waning months of 1995, I was working as an intern for a U.S. non-governmental organization in central Benguela province in Angola. Living in a house with an international expatriate staff with very high turnover, dinner conversations frequently happened in English, French, Portuguese, a smattering of Umbundu, and amusing mixtures thereof. We had no running water and no electricity except for when we fired up our generator for a few hours in the evenings, which meant that we also had no television or hot water. There were no phone lines in town so there was no internet access. There was no movie theater either. Mail came once a week, sometimes more or less frequently depending on the World Food Programme's flight schedule. That left relatively few options for entertainment during down time. Our CD player had a radio but we could only take so much propaganda from the Angolan government's radio station or, on those few occasions that we could get them, UNITA's radio broadcasts. Although there were two discos in town they became even more unappealing once UN peacekeepers began deploying in the area. Thus, reading featured prominently on our list of things to do when not working or butchering a language that was not one's own while communicating with colleagues and friends.

Not surprisingly, options for reading material were pretty slim. Having arrived in January and even accounting for occasional new infusions of books and magazines as people and mail deliveries came and went, by November I had pretty much read everything there was to be read in the house. Our French logistician, Jean-Philippe, was preparing to spend some hard-earned vacation time in Cabo Verde and one day left his guidebook out in the living room. Seizing upon it immediately, the historical overview, which is a standard formal requisite of the genre, mentioned in passing a small literary movement during the 1930s whose authors' poetry and prose instilled pride in their fellow Cabo Verdeanos. I recall thinking at the time that the movement sounded a lot like the Harlem Renaissance and, since I had recently submitted an application to the doctoral program in African history at Michigan State University, it could be fun to compare the two movements at some point.

Arriving in East Lansing the following year, in an early fit of what I like to call productive procrastination (i.e., doing something useful and/or beneficial while avoiding the more urgent and pressing work at hand), I wandered into the library and borrowed and read Richard Lobban's *Cape Verde: From Crioulo Colony to Independent Nation* when not reading about Jesuit missionaries in colonial Zimbabwe, "traditional" religion among the vaShona, various theories and case studies of European colonization of Africa and African decolonization. Lobban's book, combined with an independent readings course on the Harlem Renaissance, convinced me that I had a sound topic for investigation, and as I explained to fellow graduate students what I saw as commonalities between Harlem and *Claridade* my colleagues suggested further similar literary movements that could be compared. These naturally required further investigation, and so several years and much productive procrastination later I had stumbled across six movements on both sides of the Atlantic that were happening at more or less the same time during the 1920s and 1930s. It finally dawned on me one day that given its historical circumstances there had to be a similar movement happening in South Africa in the early decades of the twentieth century. Because I was still writing my dissertation on the inculturation of the Catholic church in Zimbabwe, I was limited in the time I could productively procrastinate and research South African literary history. I found several authors who fit the developing scheme, but no movement per se.

In 2003, I received a very small internal grant from the College of Arts and Sciences at Marquette University to conduct preliminary research in Cabo Verde. My objective was to assess the amount and availability of sources so that I could apply for larger external funding opportunities. During the subsequent fall semester, after an informational session about the Fulbright programs sponsored by the U.S. State Department a senior colleague who later became department chair remarked that he was surprised to see me at the session as he thought that junior faculty members should not even think about applying for a Fulbright or any similar grant until after they receive tenure. Accordingly, I simultaneously applied for a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) grant to conduct more extensive research in Cabo Verde and a U.S. Department of Education Fulbright-Hays Faculty Research Abroad fellowship to do research in South Africa. Much to my surprise, and to my colleague's consternation, I received the Fulbright-Hays and spent the 2004-2005 academic year studying authors of what Ntongela Masilela dubbed the New African Movement. The fruits of that finally full-time research you hold in your hands.

This work is not a literary history of twentieth century South Africa. Nor is it a history of twentieth century Black South African literature. Nor is it a study of twentieth century Black South African literary theories. Nor is it a collection of biographies of significant twentieth century Black South African writers, although it does incorporate elements of the aforementioned topics. This is a work of intellectual history, which has been defined as "the interaction of ideas and concepts with the social environment from which they emerge and which they influence," and the task of the intellectual historian is "to show how the ideas inherent in science, literature, religion, art, philosophy, political theory or a thousand other things interact with social realities, in other words, with real, living and breathing men [sic]."[1] As such, I intend to show the presence and operation of Literary Cultural Nationalist ideology in the texts of three early twentieth century *abalobi eMzansi*, which included the development of one strand of the idea of African equality with Whites in the face of countervailing ideas of White supremacy that were prevalent during the decades following the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910. I also introduce several theoretical models for analyzing African literary texts that are rooted in the natural sciences and that fundamentally recast understanding of the nature of the interactions between African and so-called "Western" cultural groups. Some readers may be wondering why I have recourse to the natural sciences in trying to interpret literature and cultural interactions, and I provide the following answers:

- The natural sciences provide a mode of interdisciplinarity that is undervalued and/or underemployed in the humanities and social sciences. They provide data, methods, and metaphors to reconceptualize how we understand humanity and human activities.
- They provide significant counterdiscourses to European discourses of African bestiality and inferiority: they provide significant correctives to distortions wrought by scientific racism, which was a misinterpretation and misapplication of knowledge of the natural world and human places therein. For example, something as small, simple, and "primitive" as a virus can sicken and destroy a much larger, more complex organism, e.g., a human being; or an aphid can destroy a vineyard; or a change in the configuration of one atom in a molecule can cause the difference between the sugars and scents of an orange and a lemon, or a sedative and a substance that causes major prenatal birth defects.
- Even though these data may be the result of European bio-medical research they still point to greater objective realities that transcend

> a given culture or group of cultures toward something that is truly universal, i.e., human physiology.

Some readers may question whether European bio-medical research on human physiology can be "objective in a truly universal way: Is the cure as bad as the sickness? Is the medicine another form of the same old poison?"[2] Eritrean philosopher Tsenay Serequeberhan, in commenting on the inevitability for "Westernized African[s]" of having to confront "the historical experience of European colonialism," noted confidently that

> We should not try to "hide" from this all pervasive element of our modern [sic] African historicity. Rather, our efforts to surmount it must begin by facing up to and confronting this enigmatic actuality. . . .[For] ultimately the antidote is always located in the poison![3]

I state at the outset that I am well aware that some scholars will see recourse to "the natural sciences" as symptomatic of a so-called "Western" division and reification of knowledges into disciplines that do not address how indigenous African knowledges and knowledge systems understand and make use of nature.

While many scholars have examined the idea of African equality and traced its origins to the "Cape Liberal Tradition,"[4] the idea of equality also has African sources in what Es'kia Mphahlele called "the myth" of African humanism, which is rooted in the people's "strong sense of community even while it accommodated and assimilated other cultures," or *ubuntu* in isiXhosa, and *buthu* in seTswana.[5]

This book will examine the works of three Black South African authors—Sol Plaatje, B.W. Vilakazi, and A.C. Jordan—within the context of broader African cultural nationalisms in the early twentieth century African Atlantic World. These authors were part of a literary movement that Ntongela Masilela has named the New African Movement, which was one of eight literary movements among Africans and peoples of African descent in the Americas that occurred between 1915 and 1945. These movements include:

- the Harlem Renaissance, the literary movement among Americans of African descent in the United States associated with writers such as Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and Claude McKay;
- *Négritude*, the French literary movement identified with the Martinican poets Aimé Césaire and Paulette Nardel, Guyanese poet Léon-Gontran Damas, and the Senegalese poet Léopold Sédar Senghor;

- *Claridade*, the literary movement associated with the review of art and letters of the same name published in Cabo Verde, the principal authors, or *Claridosos*, included Jorge Barbosa, Baltazar Lopes da Silva, and Manuel Lopes;
- *Afro-Cubanismo*, the movement among Cuban writers of African descent such as Nicolás Guillén and Lydia Cabrera;
- the *Engagé* writers of Haiti associated with the periodical, *La Revue Indigène*, such as Jacques Roumain and Jean Price-Mars;
- *Modernismo Afro-Brasileiro*, including writers such as Lino Guedes, Carolina Maria de Jesus, and Solano Trinidade;
- and the Creole Proto-Nationalist Movement in Belize, including poets Samuel A. Haynes and James S. Martinez.

The authors of each movement turned to the experiences of the poverty-stricken, predominantly Black masses as the sources of their art, eschewing the elite culture—and frequently the language—of the dominant power. Each resulted in heightened consciousness of cultural identity on the part of Black intellectuals, often resulting in a contemporary movement for political or social liberation.

In all of these societies, Europeans established colonial domination over African peoples as well as peoples of African descent and replaced systems of slavery with forms of racialized oppression involving varying forms of peonage for people of African descent during the industrialization of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[6] Writers in the United States, the French colonies, Cabo Verde, and South Africa lived under regimes that practiced legalized segregation (so-called "Jim Crow" legislation; *les lois Indigènes*; the *Indigenato* system; and the 1913 Natives Land Act and 1936 "Hertzog Bills" respectively). Cuban and Haitian authors experienced the invasion and occupation of their homelands by the United States (1898-1910 and 1915-1934 respectively). Brazilian writers worked against a planter aristocracy that disfranchised all illiterates, including the majority of the descendants of Black slaves freed in 1888. In Belize, slavery was replaced with debt peonage for former slaves and their descendents through cash and commissary advances and a restrictive land tenure system. Creole Belizeans who fought in the British army during World War I rioted in Belize City in 1919 to protest the colonial government's racism, established a branch of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in 1920, and led anti-colonial labor protests in 1934 and 1935.

Black intellectuals became frustrated with their inability to assimilate fully and equally into the dominant colonial culture and developed a

variety of pre-independence movements that asserted positive collective identities of the oppressed Black masses. These intellectuals laid the foundation for the radicalization of parts of the African petty bourgeoisie by identifying more with the culture of the dominated than that of the colonial oppressor and facilitating contact between the Black elites and the masses. These intellectuals were ***literary cultural nationalists*** because they used their prose and poetry as vehicles for the social liberation of Black people.[7]

Several movements had links to contemporary, or would spawn later, Black social movements for liberation and for positive cultural identities, developed and accepted on their own terms, not the negative stereotypes of their constituents that prevailed in the dominant White society. In the U.S., the Harlem literati's ideology diffused through the next generation of Black American writers, such as Ralph Ellison and Richard Wright, and the generation of Black Americans who would lead the Civil Rights Movement. Similarly, *Négritude* paved the way for intellectuals such as Keita Fodéba and Alioune Diop to found respectively *Les Ballets Guinéens* in 1948 and the journal *Présence Africaine* in 1949. In Cabo Verde, Amílcar Cabral and the founders of the liberation movement studied directly under the *Claridosos* at the only secondary school in the islands. Afro-Brazilian writers Lino Guedes and José Correia Leite gained popular support for the *Frente Negra Brasileira*, the first Afro-Brazilian political party, in 1931.

Most scholars who have studied these movements have done so principally within the context of a given "national" history. Although some authors have compared writers of the Harlem Renaissance and Négritude; Harlem, Haiti, and Afro-Cubanismo; and Claridade and Brazil respectively,[8] they have studied these movements as contemporaneous cultural expressions of Black authors speaking to one another across the Atlantic or the Caribbean. My studies of all of these movements, however, suggest that taken collectively these movements comprise an early Black intellectual response to the effects of racialized forms of twentieth century industrial capitalism, and an effort to develop and practice freely their own cultural identities. While Janken and Cobb have shown direct links between Harlem, Négritude, Haiti, and Cuba, and Araújo a direct influence of Brazil on Cabo Verde, my research indicates that the Claridosos knew of and read the Négritude authors, which suggests a possible indirect influence of Harlem on Claridade. Similarly, Tim Couzens has shown the influence of Alain Locke's seminal essay, "The New Negro," on Herbert Dhlomo's thought, as well as Dhlomo's awareness of and probable reading of the *Négritude* poets. Brian Willan highlighted Sol Plaatje's

address to the 1921 Pan-African Congress in Paris and his interactions with W.E.B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey. And Bhekizizwe Peterson has demonstrated the influence of Langston Hughes' poetry on several of B.W. Vilakazi's works. Thus, there were definite links between Black Southern African literary cultural nationalists and the other movements.[9]

I recast nationalism as a specific form of collective identity associated with a particular geographic area and the nationalist struggle as one for the social liberation of Black people. I argue that African nationalism in the twentieth century was a specifically anti-colonial phenomenon. These literary cultural nationalist writers were more concerned with developing positive collective identities of their people and liberating them from the political and socioeconomic depredations of racism and colonialism. They used local or folk cultures as sources for the content of their work, including vernacular languages. They used modern literary forms to depict the cultural groups they represented and realist portraits of folk culture to build positive group identities that could challenge stereotypical images in the dominant culture as well as critique the domination of the oppressors. Each movement resulted in Black intellectuals' greater awareness of cultural identity and a movement for political or social liberation.

Additionally, unlike several members of the other movements,[10] the South African literary cultural nationalists were also political activists who participated in the various struggles for the political, economic, and cultural liberation of Black South Africans throughout the twentieth century: Plaatje was the first secretary-general of the African National Congress (ANC); Jordan was active in the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM), the Orange Free State and Cape African Teachers Associations; and Vilakazi was an active member of the ANC who collaborated with John L. Dube and Albert Lithuli, the first and eighth presidents of the ANC respectively, as well as with A.W.G. Champion, the leader of the Natal branch of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU).

Although there is extensive critical literature concerning Plaatje's *Mhudi*, Jordan's *The Wrath of the Ancestors*, and Vilakazi's poetry, most of it considers these works as significant milestones in South African literature or places them in comparison with the works of other South African authors. *South African Literary Cultural Nationalism—Abalobi be Sizwe eMzansi, 1918-1945: Returning to the Source* highlights the rhetorical strategies that Plaatje, Jordan, and Vilakazi developed and employed in their works in tandem with their political activities and will consider them within a transnational Pan-African or African Atlantic framework. Significantly, I argue that the South African struggle for racial

equality predated the anti-apartheid struggle and that the literary cultural nationalists developed and espoused many of the ideologies that later generations of South African freedom fighters would espouse.

This book will establish a framework based on Amílcar Cabral's theory of the "return to the source," posit criteria for literary cultural nationalism and then examine Plaatje's *Mhudi*, Vilakazi's poetry, and Jordan's *The Wrath of the Ancestors* to demonstrate the operation of this intellectual process. Simultaneously, it will also present new models for interpreting African literature produced in South Africa during the first half of the twentieth century and understanding the nature of the relationship of the interactions between Africans and Europeans. These models include Western Syphilization, Chiral Interdiscursivity, and the relationship between history and memory as informed by a neurobiological analysis of memory, respectively.

The context from which the New African Movement sprang is marked by Western patterns of slavery at the Cape colony, first under the Dutch from the 1650s and then continued under the British from 1806 to 1838; and the imperial conquest and spoliation of African land, labor, and goods—particularly cattle. The closing of independent African states in the 1870s coincided roughly with the opening of the mineral revolution in the late 1860s and 1880s. Ntongela Masilela claimed that the small but significant Westernizing African elite looked to the example of Americans of African descent recently emancipated from slavery in 1865 as models to emulate for strategies in coping with the imposition of racialized Western modernity upon the recently conquered African masses.[11]

Masilela's New African Movement paradigm is extremely useful for bringing together into a single analytical framework six generations of Black South Africans whose primary struggle was ostensibly to modernize their African constituencies prior to the formation and during the existence of the Union of South Africa. For the purpose of an intellectual history it is also useful as he identified the idea of modernity and the debates surrounding it, e.g., whether it was possible to develop African forms of modernity or "Africanize" modernity, as the central link between and among South African intellectuals from the late nineteenth century up to and including the writers of the Sophiatown Renaissance associated with *Drum* magazine into the early 1960s.[12] This framework, though useful, is also problematic as it is difficult to conceive of a single movement spanning and maintaining cohesion for six generations. While it could be argued that the African National Congress (ANC) and its precursors can be seen as unifying threads throughout the span of six generations, they experienced significant changes in organizational structures, strategies,

alliances, and methods to achieve the liberation of South Africa from racial oppression. Additionally, as Laura Chrisman has noted, Masilela focused too much on South Africans emulating Americans of African descent rather than their critically appraising and dialoguing with their American confreres.[13] This lack of analytical complexity, according to Chrisman, perpetuates an American exceptionalism in the arena of "Critical Black Atlanticism" and shows influence as monodirectionally flowing from the Americas to the African continent.

One of the readers of the penultimate draft of this manuscript suggested that, "the history of colonization needs to be written for the students born in independence." While I agree that such a narrative needs to be written, I would argue that such a project lies beyond the scope of this project, whose much more modest objective only purports to show the operation of Literary Cultural Nationalist ideology in Union-era Mzansi. Furthermore, following Norman Etherington's model of Truth and Reconciliation history,[14] and the arguments that I make in Chapter 2, I would suggest that the proposed project needs to be reframed: a history of "colonization in South Africa" continues to privilege and center the extended European military conquest and canarialization of Mzansi, which needs to be placed within the broader context of an African past. Such an enterprise would require beginning with the presence of the autochthonous peoples, the ancestors of the Khoe and San (so-called "Twa" or "Bushmen" and "Hottentots" [sic]), in the region for tens of thousands of years. It would have to include the arrival of Bantu-language speaking peoples, the ancestors of the Nguni- and Sotho-Tswana-speaking peoples during the early centuries of the Common Era, and their interactions with the autochthons for thousands of years.

Within this context, 1652—the beginning of the so-called "colonial period"—"brought dramatic discontinuity," and can be seen as a disruption in the processes of interaction and relations between different African groups.[15] It represents the initial infection of the region with Canarial Disease, the implantation of a European ibirutsi community that began exploitation of Africans and the spoliation of their resources, including the land. Relative to the rest of the Continent where European efforts at conquest were held at bay until the nineteenth century, conquest and canarialization in Mzansi occurred much more rapidly: conquest of the autochthons and expropriation of their land and cattle within a little more than a century (c.1657-1770), followed by a century of wars of conquest with different Bantu-language speaking groups (so-called "Frontier Wars", c.1779-1879). The putative "history of colonization" would have to address the development and implementation of a systematic use of slave

labor, and concomitant racial relations between Europeans and their darker chattel, as well as the reduction of autochthonous communities to the status of "servants." It would have to address the expanding eastern frontier, i.e., the military conquest and dispossession of African polities, and its contribution to the Nongqawuse tragedy of 1856-1857 which significantly undermined amaXhosa resistance and facilitated their proletarianization in the Cape economy.[16]

The proposed "history of colonization" would have to address the "mineral revolution" that began with the discovery of diamonds near Kimberley in 1867 and gold in Boer-occupied baTswana and baSotho territories in 1886, and the development of industrial capitalist relations of exploitation between the ibirutsi occupiers and the occupied indigenous populations. It would have to address African participation in and aspirations for the Anglo-Boer War and the formation of the Union, in which the Boers lost the war but won the peace.

The "history of colonization" would have to address the implementation of a systematic regime of legalized racial segregation founded on legislation such as the 1913 Natives Land Act that arrogated 93% of the land for Whites and effectively transformed the African majority population into squatters and migrant laborers; the 1911 Mines and Works Act that reserved skilled and semi-skilled labor for Whites only and the 1923 Industrial Conciliation Act that excluded migrant laborers from representation in trade unions; the 1923 Natives (Urban Areas) Act that provided for segregation in urban areas and African "influx control" [sic]; and culminated in the 1936 Representation of Natives Act [sic] that dispossessed Africans in the Cape of their right to vote.[17] It would have to address the relations of exploitation that were established, and African efforts to resist them. This was the context in which abalobi had to work and which they fought to change.

History and Historical Knowledge

Insofar as people and situations existed in time, this is historical truth or reality. History is that part of time—i.e., the systematic record of an irreversible succession of passing events—which constitutes events that have passed. The academic discipline of History is the study of the human past in relation to the present and future. Historiography is the writing of history, or specifically how historians have conceived of and presented the human past. The relation between historiography and history is akin to the relationship between thought and reality in Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: it is a representation of a separate,

independent, objective reality.[18] Although historians endeavor to do more than merely represent the facts of history—they boldly attempt to explain them—the nature of historical knowledge emanates from this relationship.

History is akin to a jig-saw puzzle in a box without the picture on the box top as a guide and several of the pieces missing. The task of the historian is to put the puzzle together, and the end product is historiography, which will be partial, incomplete, and flawed. This is a useful model to represent the nature of historical knowledge, because negative knowledge is not the absence of knowledge, and historical knowledge of this type is positive, though partial, knowledge of the past. If each piece of the puzzle represents one perspective of the case study recaptured by a historian, then the whole picture—which can never be completed—is the sum-total of the reality being studied, and as with any puzzle the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The historian is able to recapture at least partially the ideas, beliefs, and actions of real people of a different time and present them in her/his own. It is the evaluation of historical sources that enables a historian to identify and explain change over time in human societies.[19]

Philip Gleason posited that there was no real technical historical method, rather that historical reasoning is a sophisticated extension of common sense reasoning. In his "methodological confession of faith" he argued that the historian's task is to explicate the past, that there is truth in the past, and that it is possible for historians to "attain a faithful likeness to certain aspects of what actually was the case in the past."[20]

Gleason's call to historians to return to a practical logic is a call to return to common sense, or the idea that a concept, theory, premise, proposition, or action accords with the collective experience of a given community and demonstrates good judgment based on the cultural beliefs and values of that community. This presumes a standard of good and bad determined by a community with the result that thoughts, words, and actions derive evaluative meaning from that standard, and also emphasizes that scholars must be aware of the operative cultural norms of right and wrong and the assumptions that underlie them. Scholars should also bear in mind that cultural norms, like languages, are constructed arbitrarily and are subject to change over time, and that the awareness of cultural norms and their simultaneously arbitrary and dynamic nature should inform and influence the development of theory and its application. In other words, theoretical knowledge should be commonsensical in that it should accord with the practical lived experience of the group(s) from which the theory is developed and to whom it is applied and addressed. It should follow, accordingly, that theories applied to African societies, cultures, and

cultural products ought to derive from and accord with the practical lived experiences of African groups.

Significantly, Gleason also noted that historians "attain a faithful likeness to certain aspects of what actually was the case in the past." In other words, historians are not recapturing the past in its entirety, nor are they re-creating it. Rather, they are generating an image—or a *representation* to use Wittgenstein's idea—that is reasonably similar to "certain aspects" of the past, and the image (or representation) of the past that is constructed is partial and incomplete.

With regard to what historians can know about the past, Gleason identified three levels of historical inquiry: the factual level (i.e., what happened?); the explanatory level (i.e., why did it happen?); and the evaluative level (i.e., was what happened good or bad?). What a historian can know with certainty decreases with each level of inquiry. There is a high degree of certitude at the factual level which is limited by the nature of the events in question and the sources of information available. At the explanatory level, certitude is limited by the historian's inferences about the relationship between events and the influences thereupon. The evaluative level contains the least certainty because the historian's value system and beliefs influence any judgments that the historian makes.[21]

Gleason noted that while separating the three levels of inquiry was useful for analyzing the historian's craft, in the practice of writing about history they are inextricably intertwined. The historian sees facts in relation to one another, and thus historical interpretations combine explanations and evaluations of those facts either implicitly or explicitly.[22] And like historical knowledge itself, historiographical interpretations are limited by the incompleteness and subjectivity of their perspectives. Thus, there is objective history but no objective historiography or historian, except as the individual who exists or existed in objective reality as a distinct individual being separate and apart from other beings. Historiography cannot be accepted as historical truth but only as one perspective on, interpretation of, or (re)construction thereof.

Historiography is intrinsically different from literature (i.e., literary art). Unlike fiction, historiography points to an objective referent beyond its text, albeit a referent that existed in the past. Even within historical fiction, i.e., a form of literature that deals with historical subject matter, the limits of literary license are the limits of the author's imagination. A literary artist is free to create fictitious characters along side actual historical agents and/or place historical figures in fictitious settings, as, for example, Sol Plaatje did in *Mhudi*. Historians, however, are bound by the limits of historical reality. They must address real situations faced by real

people in real time. Historiography, therefore, must be considered as a class of writing distinct from literature—i.e., literary art, journalism, legal writing, and other classes of writing. Accordingly, historical content must take precedence over its linguistic form. If one accepts Wittgenstein's definition of meaning as usage, i.e., it is collectively derived, the content of what is communicated takes priority over the vehicle used to communicate it.[23]

The acts of human agents that happened in the past and their circumstances constitute the domain of history. The historian, therefore, need only bring historical imagination, or the cognitive ability to reconstruct past events in such a way as to abstract concrete relationships between them, to the field of inquiry and, based on the available evidence and reasonable plausibility, construct an interpretation of the historical domain.

Historians do not (or should not) tell stories. I would venture that most historians are actually bad story tellers. The historian tells a story insofar as s/he recounts a series of events. The real work of the historian is not to narrate historical events, but rather to *explain* them, that is, to invest them with meaning. Historians already possess language, i.e., a tool that helps to appropriate an understanding of the world and experiences thereof, and through language a set of cognitive categories in which to order those experiences. Accordingly, historians need to be cognizant of and sensitive to cultural differences and thus differences in language leading to different concepts and thus different ways of conceptualizing and experiencing the world without necessarily privileging their own or any other cultural system over another.

Whereas fictional works are complete within themselves (i.e., contain resolutions in either romantic, tragic, comic, satirical, or ironic modes[24]), owing to the partial nature of historical knowledge (i.e., the historian will never have access to all perspectives on a given set of historical facts, or all the facts pertaining to a given field of inquiry), historical works can never be complete in and of themselves, and consequently must be seen and evaluated within the context of the broader literature on a given subject of historical inquiry.[25]

Historiography, therefore, is not another form of literature, i.e., literary art. Historiography is literary insofar as it is a form of writing with different genres (e.g., analytical monograph, expository article, introduction to a collection of analytical articles—cf. the relationship between novel and short story). Just as in literature each genre has its respective structures and conventions, so too does historiography. In this sense, perhaps, historical narrative can be considered another historiographical genre.

As such, I would take issue with J.M. Coetzee's claim that

> history is not reality; that history is a kind of discourse; that the novel is a kind of discourse, too, but a different kind of discourse; that. . .history will, with varying degrees of forcefulness, try to claim primacy, claim to be a master-form of discourse, just as inevitably, people like myself will defend themselves by saying that history is nothing but a certain kind of story that people agree to tell each other—that. . .the authority of history lies simply in the consensus it commands.[26]

Given the significance of multiple discourses or different perspectives about an objective historical reality—"what happened?" in Gleason's parlance—the alleged "tyranny of history" comes from the appropriation and legitimization of a particular historiographical narrative from stakeholders or powerbrokers who impose their discourse/view on others, and thus becomes a trope of domination more broadly. The "authority of history" lies in the ability of a given group to impose its historiographical interpretation on groups with different perspectives, e.g., quasi-official discourses of the U.S. Civil War that celebrate Abraham Lincoln as the liberator of slaves versus Southern discourses of "the War of Northern Aggression" versus African American discourses of emancipation that hold Lincoln responsible for not applying the so-called "Emancipation Proclamation" in six slave states (New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, West Virginia, Kentucky, and Missouri) thus allowing human bondage to continue in the Union until the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1865. This latter discourse provides a counter-narrative to the to hegemonic interpretation that Lincoln was at least as interested in abolishing slavery as preserving the Union which still dominates in U.S. history textbooks. Consensus, then, does not authorize historiography, rather it is the by-product of a dominant group's appropriation of its particular historiography as "the national history."

Curiously, historiography has an uncanny ability to deconstruct national and other historiographies/mythologies. Historian Norman Etherington, in writing a "Truth and Reconciliation History" for a newly democratic South Africa, suggested that

> We need histories which are less determined, more aware of multiple possibilities, histories which suggest life beyond the struggle against apartheid.
>
> Some of the worst old histories tell the best stories and have reached a mass audience that academic historians can only dream about. In addition, I believe that history offers insights that other disciplines cannot deliver. We do not have many special tools of our own, but those we do have are