

Science and ‘South Africanism’: White ‘self-identity’ or white class and race domination?

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A Commonwealth of Knowledge: Science, Sensibility and White South Africa, 1820-2000 by SAUL DUBOW. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), xi+296 pp. ISBN 10: 0-1992-9663-4

Science and Society in Southern Africa edited by SAUL DUBOW. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), x + 241 pp. ISBN 10: 0-7190-5812-0

In the past Saul Dubow has done excellent investigation of the basis of segregation policies in South Africa, and on the idea of race.¹ In *A Commonwealth of Knowledge* he turns to an account of white South African political identity by means of an examination of ideas and knowledge-centred institutions. The role of knowledge and knowledge-centred institutions in promoting what he calls ‘South Africanism’ lies, he says, ‘at the core of our investigation’ (p.12). Thus he deals with the physical and institutional complex comprising the Company Gardens, South African Library and South African Museum in the nineteenth century and comments how these buildings, taken together, ‘bear testimony to a set of overlapping, interlinked networks of power and authority that significantly shaped the Cape’s distinct colonial identity’, and exemplify the ‘ethos of progress and improvement’ (p.1). Thus he examines closely writings in the *Cape Monthly Magazine*, founded in 1857.² He explores the early years of the art gallery in the Company Gardens and takes us on excursions into perceptions of landscape, botany, earth history and evolutionism, geology and much, much more. He traces the evolution from the 1870s of the ‘idea of South Africa’ before there was a South African state, as a ‘dialogue between observers writing about the country from within and without’ (p.121), including such historians as Theal, Wilmot and Chase (p.135). He looks at the role of parliament and the law in shaping the idea of South Africa. He revisits the clash between ‘imperialism’ and ‘colonialism’ and suggests, originally, an alternative reading of Cape liberalism. That, in the 1870s at least, its impulses were not humanitarian (as liberals have subsequently portrayed them), but born of colonial patriotism: ‘to defend the constitutional independence of the Cape against unwarranted imperial interference’ (p.129).

‘South Africanism’ Dubow sees as having its proto-forms in the ideology of nineteenth century Cape colonial society. The colonial nationalism of the Cape,

1 S. Dubow, *Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid in South Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1989); *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

2 In this he follows the lead of R. V. Turrell, ‘A Cape periodical: The *Cape Monthly Magazine* 1870-1875’ (Honours dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1974).

however, with its relative Anglo-Afrikaner harmony, was shattered by the Jameson Raid in 1895. The full flourishing of 'South Africanism' was in the wake of the South African War of 1899-1902 when it 'emerged to inhabit a space left by a retreating imperialism and a temporarily broken republicanism'. It was, he writes, 'Geared to the needs of a unified white nation-state ...' (p.5). It 'disavowed "racialism"' (meaning purely that between white English and Afrikaans-speakers); it was 'non-ideological' it 'wrapped itself in the apparently neutral virtues of reason, progress, and civilisation'; it valued scientific and technical knowledge (p.vi and pp.162 ff.) It was the 'glue holding white South Africa together ... a key legitimating ideology for an embryonic and still-fragmented state' (p.200). South Africanism established 'a continuing influence of the Cape experience upon the future South African state', particularly with the 'renewal of the Bondist traditions of compromise and conciliation' (p. 158). At the same time, argues Dubow, the dynamic of unification unleashed forces of regionalism, seen in the history of scientific and other institutions as well as in evocations of nature and locale (p.158).

The full emergence of 'South Africanism' unleashed another wave of knowledge-based institutions - Kirstenbosch enshrining the distinctive floral heritage of the Cape, museums and art galleries, periodicals, scientific societies, national universities, as well as the creation of the Kruger National Park. The formation of the South African Association for the Advancement of Science is paid particular attention (pp.168-178). While Dubow claims that the 'weakness and ultimate political failure [of South Africanism] has more or less been taken as given in many teleological readings of modern South African history', he argues that it was 'a major - even dominant - political force from the moment of Union to the advent of the Nationalists in 1948' (pp.vi-vii). Science was important to South Africanism, Dubow maintains: 'The notion of science as transcendent truth rendered it possible to cast the language of progress and universality within the imperial "chain of civilisation"' (p.6). South Africanism became associated with the state-sponsorship of physical and social science research from the time of the inter-war years (pp.7-8 and p.206).

Ideas were promoted in the nineteenth century Cape by a 'cohort of inquisitive intellectuals' (p.117), who forged the identity of the white middle class. They were succeeded in the twentieth century by others, such as Jan Smuts, Raymond Dart, Jan Hofmeyr, Edgar Brookes, E.G. Malherbe, Basil Schonland, Hendrik van der Bijl, H. J. van Eck, who were all exponents of the objective value of science and its links to 'progress and improvement', all exponents of "South Africanism", complemented by such writers as Dorothea Fairbridge and Sarah Gertrude Millin. Dubow charts 'progressivism' in agriculture, veterinary science and railway policy (pp.178-182) and pays attention to the visits of the British Association for the Advancement of Science to South Africa in 1905 and 1929. He deals with the role of the (American) Carnegie Corporation in promoting social science research in South Africa, a role eventually taken over by the state (pp.221-236), and the technocratic character of Smuts's war-time government. All this provides one with an awesome account of the density of white institutions in South Africa, of the density of white power.

His concluding chapter is concerned with the ‘renationalisation of knowledge’, with the collapse of ‘South Africanism’ consequent on the 1948 electoral victory of Afrikaner nationalism, and the reassertion of African nationalism in the post-1994 ‘new South Africa’ championed particularly by President Mbeki.

The book is written with Dubow’s customary erudition - with sometimes even too much detail provided - but one cannot help feeling also that its conclusions are somewhat bland. From the heady days of revisionist political economy and social history, the era in which Dubow’s career as a historian began and of which he was on the fringes, and then the morphing of history in the 1990s into discourse theory, heritage studies, visual history and the like, Dubow’s book, despite its new focus on ‘science’, returns us, in my view, to the sort of history written in the 1950s and 1960s by Sir Keith Hancock, for example, on Jan Smuts. It is necessary to establish a case for this, and Dubow is sufficient of a scholar to fail to fall into the obvious pitfalls. But what I wish to argue is that Dubow’s method is to state and then dilute and blandify revisionist ideas, re-converting them into pre-revisionist history.

In the early 1980s in a pub in Hackney Dubow in fact asked my advice on whether he should structure his Ph.D thesis around Gramsci’s idea of hegemony. I cannot recall my response: at that time I regarded Gramsci (or, rather, those Eurocommunists who made use of him) as a rather ‘soft’ Marxist. He did not do so, however. His latest book is a further step in this trajectory away from Marxism (now that academic Marxism is no longer ‘fashionable’ for historians, particularly since the collapse of so-called ‘socialism’ in the Soviet Union). It totally abandons any concept of class.

For Gramsci, intellectuals expressed the ideas of different classes in society, and particularly those of the ruling class. As Marx wrote, ‘The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling *material* force of society, is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force’.³ Or again, ‘The bourgeoisie... has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage labourers’.⁴ Dubow is consciously discussing the ‘thinking of influential intellectuals’ (p. vii), yet there is not the remotest hint that these ideas are ideological for the assertion of class as well as race domination. ‘Hegemony’ signifies organising rule by ‘consent’ as well as by ‘force’, and therefore implies the concealment of class differences - precisely what Dubow also does. Hegemony creates a lived culture which hides or disguises exploitation and oppression. Dubow, I shall try to show, writes an apologia for this.

Dubow maintains that the history of South Africanism has been ‘especially neglected’, because white Anglophone identity ‘until the last decade or so has not been seen as a topic worthy of serious discussion’ (p. 11). He notes the exception of Belinda Bozzoli’s *The Political Nature of a Ruling Class*, whose book attempted to employ Gramsci’s ideas of hegemony.⁵ ‘Historical fashions change, and this class-based account of South Africanism now seems overly instrumental’,

3 K. Marx, *The German Ideology*, (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 64.

4 K. Marx, ‘Communist Manifesto’ in K. Marx, *The Revolutions of 1848* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 70.

5 B. Bozzoli, *The Political Nature of a Ruling Class* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981).

comments Dubow (p.201). Is it not possible, however, to have a non-instrumental class-based account? This is what one might have hoped for from Dubow. It is not enough to write that ‘historical fashions change’ - the best historians are not influenced by fashions, as if historiography was no different from the wearing of clothes. Moreover Dubow also writes ‘A vital task [after the South African war 1899-1902] ... was to convert the amalgam of English-speaking workers, artisans and industrialists who subscribed to British South Africanism into a broader South Africanism that was capable of reaching out to leading Afrikaners as well’. A task for whom? Surely for ruling class ideologists? So the idea of ‘hegemony’ slips in through the back door. ‘Bozzoli’ continues Dubow ‘has traced the process of creating a shared South African patriotism in terms of a class alliance between agrarian and industrial interests, led by a rising “national bourgeoisie” with close links to manufacturing’ and, despite her purported instrumentalism, ‘Bozzoli’s underlying insight remains sound’ (p.201). Radicalism diluted by Dubow.

Is science a neutral form of knowledge? This is a second question which runs implicitly through Dubow’s account. In an earlier book edited by him, *Science and Society in Southern Africa* we find the following passages written by himself: ‘Contemporary scholars of southern Africa have taken for granted the view that science is a socially engaged practice rather than a detached mode of pure or objective research’ (p.1); ‘... most of the critical literature on scientific activity in southern Africa has tended to presume that scientific knowledge has served as one more powerful tool in the hands of an already powerful colonial or settler ruling elite’ (p.2); ‘In the case of the [human and social sciences] ... the view that science operated to serve ruling-class interests is a pervasive assumption’ (p.2); ‘Whether considered in instrumental terms as a direct technique of domination, as a tool of Mammon, or in a more refined Foucauldian manner, as an implicit form of ideological mastery and control, the relationship between scientific knowledge and political or economic power has therefore received considerable attention’ (p.2); ‘this volume takes its lead from the proposition that science, considered as an ideological discourse, affected rulers as well as ruled. The role of science in sustaining the ideological authority and legitimacy of the already privileged and powerful may indeed have been as significant as its impact upon those formally excluded from structures of power’ (p.3); it ‘functioned to enhance the self-image of colonial or settler elites’ (p.3).

It is true that in the edited book this is qualified by Dubow: ‘A frequent assumption in critiques of colonial science is that scientific knowledge constituted part of a hegemonic structure of ideological power whose claims to represent progress and enlightenment were primarily a cover for base imperialist motives. It is not necessary to argue the contrary position - that science was value-free and beneficial to all - in order to recognise the limitations of this critique’ (p.6). However in the recent book, the idea that science is part of a hegemonic structure of ideological power has largely been lost or diluted. Just because Shula Marks’s study of George Gale’s advocacy of socialised medicine shows that medical knowledge can serve the interests of ordinary people does not mean that *most* scientific knowledge benefits the rich and ruling elites. Dubow also qualifies his original statements by maintaining that ‘A tentative conclusion would be that the allure of science in the colonial societies

of Southern Africa exceeded its real influence and utility as a technique of domination' (p.9). Allure to whom? Almost exclusively to whites. And subjective 'allure' does not exclude objective utility as a technique of domination.

Several sentences can be quoted from his recent book which - because they express no criticism - could be taken as a retreat to the value-free notion of science. Thus Dubow writes of 'The ideological and practical role of science in promoting reason and rationality in the post-war reconstructionist era' (p.158). He regards Edgar Brookes as a 'modernizer' for saying that, 'democracy must be completed by science' (p.203). What democracy in South Africa in Edgar Brookes time? How is democracy completed by science? In the context, science equals an efficient bureaucracy, not democracy. In regards to 'native administration' he states that 'empirically based science was frequently invoked as the most reasonable and disinterested way in which to approach questions of race' (p.203). Or again, Dubow writes: 'The trend to pronounce on the "native question" with greater technical precision and scientific detachment spurred interest in the newly developing field of social anthropology' (p.177). This could be rephrased: the trend to try to mask the reality of conquest, domination and exploitation through identifying a 'native question' as the 'problem of the other' which could be scientifically investigated spurred the new field of social anthropology.

In fact Dubow disguises the ideological nature of 'knowledge' by separating out its subjugating role from its self-identifying role. Thus,

If the intellectual desire to comprehend South Africa, its land and its peoples helped to generate a sense of collective settler identity and ownership, this was further achieved by increasingly rendering the country's indigenous peoples as appropriate subjects of scientific enquiry. In so doing, settler capacity to subjugate or control indigenous peoples was enlarged. The passages quoted from Bartle Frere are revealing in this regard. Yet, we should be careful not to collapse knowledge into power. The relationship between the two could be instrumental, but often it was not. Much of the material presented in this chapter indicates that colonial knowledge was closely bound up with colonial self-discovery and understanding. The urge to know about others was in the first instance an impulse to understand and constitute a sense of individual or collective self (p.118).

Or, again: 'Colonialism, we should remember, involved rather more than the remorseless process of displacing indigenous peoples from their lands or forcing newly dispossessed people to work as labourers on white-owned farms and mines, A significant minority of settlers who desired to make the Cape their permanent home sought to engage intellectually with the land and its peoples, not only for the purpose of governance and control, but also to lay political and aesthetic claim to the country, to conceive of it as a unity, and to nurture a shared sense of white identity and ownership' (p.118).

Thus linked to his reinterpretation of 'knowledge' is in my view what might be called a 'whitewashing' of whites. Dubow has in the past, as already men-

tioned, explored the role of scientific ideas about race and ideas and policies of segregation in establishing white domination in South Africa. Now he wants to try to distance this science-promoted South Africanism from such endeavours. He writes, for example, that 'the broader domain of what whites - and most observers - would have understood as national politics and culture may be beginning to fade from view ... Important dimensions of South African history risk being occluded or lost if the role of whites is viewed too narrowly in terms of settler colonialism and exploitation' (p.10). He adds that it is only since Soweto that whites felt power slipping away from them and that, 'For most of the twentieth century politics *therefore* meant white politics, and South Africans *were assumed to be white* ... This assumption, however complacent and misguided, is of central importance to an understanding of white hegemony' (p.10). He is looking at matters purely through the eyes of the whites rather than of all South Africa's people, thus accepting the segregationist discourse he has hitherto analysed and criticised. Does he not see that for blacks the 'national politics and culture' of the whites was precisely a form of domination and oppression, of 'othering'. The fact that whites could live in their own narrow and protected world was precisely because of the success of segregation and its successors as forms of othering.

Of course, formally, he links South Africanism to ideas and policies of segregation: that its 'insistence on then unbridgeable difference between whites and blacks helped to rationalize the need for systematic racial segregation' (p.6). But when he writes that South Africanism merely had 'moral equivocation on questions of race' (p.12), or merely 'marginalised or denied the rights of indigenous African people' (p.vi), one recalls Tim Keegan's critique of such ideas as mere liberalism: that what was involved in racial domination was not just exclusion, but the recurrent dispossession and destruction of emergent social classes.⁶

Together with this Dubow dismisses Edward Said's critique of Orientalism because, he says, it doesn't distinguish settlers from imperialism. The claim that knowledge about 'others' is intrinsic to imperialism he regards as 'vastly oversimplified' (p.14). 'In the case of this study, it risks overlooking the ways in which the urge to know about others was closely bound up with the process of identity formation. Colonial local knowledge was not only an instrumental resource directed at wielding power over others; it was also bound up with conceptions of self-empowerment and in demonstrating one's worth to one's peers and betters. Colonists and settlers were more than ciphers in the arithmetic of imperialism'. Of course settlers were different from imperialists, but at the same time they were utterly culturally dependent on them, and their 'process of identity-formation' was bound up with asserting their fitness for carrying out the imperial so-called 'civilising mission'. The differences between 'imperialism' and 'colonialism' (white desire for self-rule), insisted on from the latter part of the nineteenth century and re-emphasised by Dubow, were irrelevant in the construction of white hegemonic power over the black majority.

6 T. Keegan, *Facing the Storm: Portraits of Black Lives in Rural South Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1988), 132.

Let us take some examples to illustrate these points in greater detail from the text of the book. In the 1990s Clifton Crais and Timothy Keegan did pioneering work challenging the concept of 'Cape liberalism', showing the predominant racist attitudes of British settlers, and exploring the contradictions and two-faced character of the humanitarian wing. Dubow, while aware of this work, seeks to revert to a pre-Crais and pre-Keegan world. 'Strains of radicalism and demands for legal and political rights came to the Cape with the 1820 settlers', Dubow tells us, and spends nine pages on the merits of John Fairbairn and Thomas Pringle, whose struggle for freedom of the press 'mark the beginnings of the colonial desire to win and protect political liberties' (pp.1-2 and p.27). However he devotes merely two sentences to the other (majority) racist wing of British settlerdom, that spearheaded by Robert Godlonton. 'Others, especially eastern Cape frontiersmen based in Grahamstown, combined an explicitly anti-humanitarian platform with a strong assertion of British settler identity. As Alan Lester shows, this mindset of fear was steeped in the anxieties of domination' (p.27 and see also p.139 where Dubow again eschews the word racist in describing the identity of the Eastern Cape 'settlers').

Moreover Dubow fails to present the complexity of Keegan's argument on Fairbairn's changes of position on a legislative assembly - from being against it at first since it would not include voting for people of colour, to favouring it despite this in the 1840s because of the 'increasing profitability of a racially defined colonial capitalism'.⁷ Dubow presents Fairbairn as a forebear of the ideology of (white) 'South Africanism' - 'a proto-colonial nationalist who, in the name of civilization and progress, consistently promoted the economic, social, and political interests of the Cape's aspiring middle classes, while seeking, wherever possible, to establish common ground between English- and Dutch-speakers' (p.28).

Dubow quotes Fairbairn's *Commercial Advertiser's* welcome of the South African College as a 'popular institution altogether formed by the People' and then, in a footnote, quotes Keegan's remark that the SA College was 'a monument to the humanitarian-mercantile alliance that dominated Cape Town politics at the time - although it is indicative of the fundamentally conservative nature of that alliance that people of colour were not regarded as yet ready for admission'. In the footnote Dubow continues; 'This point is taken but, *considered from the point of view of the aspirant white colonial citizens fighting to secure their own civil rights*, the term "the people" was not entirely misplaced'. Surely it is going backwards for the historian to take as her or his standpoint that of the 'white colonial citizens' rather than the whole population of South Africa?

At every point, Dubow's book smooths over and dissolves radical approaches into a sort of bland benevolent liberal soup. 'The achievement of self-government in 1853 was a crowning event in a narrative of colonial self-government that began with the challenge to Somerset's autocratic rule' (p.61), he writes, with teleological implications. He underplays the differences on the franchise between conservative and liberal factions to assert 'a collective determination to represent the Cape as a respectable colony of settlement' (p.63) and fails to mention the reality that colo-

7 T. Keegan, *Colonial South Africa and the Origins of the Racial Order* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1996), 246

nial self-government brought harsher treatment for black and coloured indigenous inhabitants.

Elsewhere Dubow writes as follows:

Marxist critics of the Cape liberal tradition have made much of its inadequacies and internal contradictions, while highlighting the instrumental mercantile and political interests involved in the incorporation of a rising and aspirant black middle class. By contrast, defenders of the tradition have tended to be protective about the sterling qualities and heroic actions of its principal protagonists. Both sides of the argument have overlooked the local character and tone of Cape liberalism: if this analysis is correct, it follows that more emphasis should be laid on the *Capeness* of the tradition than the limits of its liberalism (p.154).

Dubow wants to straddle the fence by evading the argument: was Cape liberalism heroic or inadequate. This is not answered by appealing to its *Capeness*. Once again, a dilution of the arguments of the revisionists (see also p.143).

Racism really only gets introduced by Dubow through governor Frere, and the British visitors to South Africa Froude and Anthony Trollope (pp.4-5, p.112, pp.125-8 and pp.131-4) - and in the cases of Froude and Trollope one wonders whether Dubow's characterisation of them would have been as harsh without recent British studies of their racist thought.⁸ Both the latter were very pro-Boer and supported the use of apprenticeship and forced labour to 'civilise' blacks. Even in categorising late nineteenth century racists Dubow shows incredible caution: Cecil Rhodes is described merely as having a 'firm' approach to native policy (p.144) and of the racist historian and newspaper editor F. R. Statham's 'treatment of black society', Dubow states only that it was 'notably less original and incisive than his reflections on the Boer and British dimensions' (p.138). The Noble brothers, editors of the *Cape Monthly Magazine*, are commended for the 'consistently inclusive view they adopted towards anglicized and educated Afrikaners' (p.76). Those who would like to read a critical account, based on race and class analysis, of this period of South African history, should rather read Bernard Makhosezwe Magubane's *The Making of a Racist State: British Imperialism and the Union of South Africa, 1875-1910*.⁹

Trollope was one of those to draw attention to the overwhelming and resilient black majority in South Africa, which was one impetus, of course, towards the elaboration of the idea of segregation to secure white ascendancy. The idea of segregation emerged in South Africa after the 1899-1902 war as Dubow has previously argued (following Cell and myself).¹⁰ I placed particular stress on the

8 Thomas W. Thompson, *James Anthony Froude on Nation and Empire: a Study in Victorian Racism* (New York and London: Taylor and Francis, 1987); N.J. Hall, *Trollope: A Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991)

9 Bernard Makhosezwe Magubane, *The Making of a Racist State: British Imperialism and the Union of South Africa, 1875-1910* (Trenton New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1996).

10 Dubow, *Racial Segregation*; J. Cell, *The Highest Stage of White Supremacy: The Origins of Segregation in South Africa and the American South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982); M. Legassick, 'The making of South African native policy, 1903-1923: the origins of 'segregation'', (Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London, 1973); M. Legassick, 'British hegemony and the origins of segregation in South Africa, 1901-1914' in William Beinart and Saul Dubow, (eds), *Segregation and Apartheid in Twentieth Century South Africa*, (London: Routledge, [1974] 1995).

role of Milner's Kindergarten in developing the idea - and Dubow's conclusion that the Kindergarten held the view that 'imperialism could be most effectively advanced through the agency of [white] colonial sentiment' (p.153 and p.163) explains why.¹¹ Segregation was 'internal colonialism', the counterpart of Milner's vision of South Africa, of a 'self-governing white Community, supported by well-treated and justly-governed black labour' (p.159). It became after Milner's time associated with a Froude-like and Trollope-like reassessment of Boers as no longer degenerate but of Teutonic origin like the British, as in the Selborne Memorandum of 1907 (p.176). As Lionel Curtis wrote to Patrick Duncan in 1907 'The fact is that we have all been moving from steadily from the Cape idea of mixing up white brown and black and developing the different grades of colour strictly on the lines of European civilisation, to the very opposite conception of encouraging as far as possible the black man to separate from the white and to develop a civilisation, as he is beginning to do in Basutoland, on his own lines' (p.177).¹²

The example of Basutoland was no accident. Chair of the segregationist South African Native Affairs Commission (1903-5) was Sir Godfrey Lagden, former governor of Basutoland. Basutoland was not only 'developing along its own lines', but also sending a stream of migrant labour to the gold mines. The aim at the time was that Basutoland, Swaziland and Bechuanaland should become incorporated into the Union of South Africa - as models of segregationism.

Cape liberals, too, bought into the discourse of segregation, for example J. Meiring Beck in a 1905 lecture on 'South Africanism.' Dubow comments that Beck emphasised 'the creation of a hybrid South Africanism born out [of] its fundamental European racial stocks', but claims also that he 'allowed that Africans and coloureds were inevitably part of the evolving South African nation'. To illustrate this he quotes the conclusion of the lecture: 'Let us recognise our responsibilities to our Native population. Let us never forget that they are Afrikaners; that they are the oldest Afrikaners in the land; and that we have great duties towards them. So shall we be able to make good our own title to our national birthright'. Dubow adds the comment that, 'the suggestion that South Africanism might embrace people of different colour ... was sacrificed to the greater cause of white solidarity and the growing clamour for racial segregation' (pp.162-3). But the quotation from Beck's lecture does *not* embrace 'people of different colour' in South Africanism. It specifically 'others' people of colour. 'We', the whites, are the South African nation and 'they' are those to whom 'we' have 'responsibilities' and 'duties'. Rather than this discourse being 'sacrificed' on the altar of segregationist discourse, it is quite compatible with it. Once again Dubow falls into the trap of traditional white liberal historiography and of whitewashing.

It is a pity that Dubow did not accord the magazines *The State* (1908-1912), the *South African Friend* (1913) and the *South African Quarterly* (1915, 1919-) - the same treatment that he accords the earlier *Cape Monthly Magazine*. All are

11 S. Dubow, 'Colonial nationalism, the Milner kindergarten and the rise of South Africanism, 1902-1910' *History Workshop Journal*, Vol. 43, 1997.

12 My 1974 paper, published by Beinart and Dubow in 1995, was the first to draw attention to this quotation.

treated very thinly. Fred Bell's segregationist articles in *The State*, for example, are very illuminating.

In slight contrast to his earlier *Racial Segregation*, Dubow concedes in his recent book that there were no basic disagreements between the wars on segregation between the Prime Ministers Hertzog and Smuts. In *Racial Segregation* he distinguishes between 'Hertzogite segregation' and the milder 'Smutsian segregation' and creates the impression that Smuts' real conversion to segregationism was only in 1929.¹³ These distinctions disappear in his recent book, though he still, however, makes no reference to Smuts' seminal lecture on segregation in Britain in 1917, reprinted in the *Journal of the Royal African Society*.¹⁴

However it is instructive to compare Dubow's treatment of certain issues regarding segregation in his recent book with his treatment of them in a chapter he published in 2000 in the book which he edited. Take his treatment of Smuts's 1925 presidential address to the South African Association for the Advancement of Science. Several of Smuts' statements, Dubow noted in 2000, were 'reflective of racial attitudes during the segregationist era. In this light, it is a matter of considerable irony - though by no means a contradiction - that Smuts prefaced his 1925 presidential address by affirming the ethnically inclusive spirit of the S2A3'. Dubow then quoted Smuts: 'In the Association both official languages of the Union enjoy equal privileges, and papers and addresses in either language are treated alike for purposes of publication or otherwise. It is the aim and object of this Association to bring together and unite all South Africans, irrespective of race and language, who are interested in the general scientific culture of South Africa'. In 2000 Dubow commented on this quotation as follows: 'By "irrespective of race and language" Smuts was obviously referring to English- and Afrikaans-speakers - not necessarily through a conscious act of excluding blacks, but simply because they would not have figured in this definition of "South African". Put more sharply, and considered in the light of the political prominence of segregationist legislation at this time, Smuts's appeal for unity amongst white South Africans reflected his unquestioning assumption of the need to maintain white supremacy and to deny African claims to common citizenship' (p.82).

In the 2006 version this has been considerably softened. He begins, in the same way, by mentioning that some of the ideas put forward by Smuts were 'commensurate with broader racial attitudes during the segregationist era. In this connection, it is as revealing as it is paradoxical that Smuts prefaced his 1925 presidential address by affirming the ethnically inclusive spirit of the S2A3, in which "both official languages of the Union enjoy equal privileges" and whose purpose was to "bring together and unite all South Africans" with an interest in South Africa's scientific culture, "irrespective of race or language"'. His further comment is, 'At a time when problems of "race" customarily referred to Anglo-Afrikaner relations (in contradistinction to the "colour problem")', and at the very moment when segregationist legislation threatened to deny Africans the right of citizenship, this

13 Dubow, *Racial Segregation*, 35-6, 39-40, 43-4

14 J.C. Smuts, 'Problems in South Africa', *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 16 (64), 1917, 273-82.

message of differential inclusiveness made perfect sense to his white audience. In political as well as scientific terms, this too was the “Great Divide” (p.210).

What in 2000 was ‘by no means a contradiction’ has now become ‘paradoxical’, and what in 2000 was Smuts’s ‘unquestioning assumption of the need to maintain white supremacy’ is now dissolved into ‘differential inclusiveness’ and the onus shifted from opinion-former Smuts to ‘the white audience’.

Again, on related matters, in 2000 Dubow wrote:

The idea that science knows no politics was of course a convenient fiction. Aside from Malherbe’s intervention into the causes of poor whiteism, one of the striking features of the 1929 programme [of the combined British-South African Association for the Advancement of Science] was the number of papers dealing directly or indirectly with racial science and eugenics. Amongst these, one might mention the contributions of visitors like R. Ruggles Gates on “racial crossing” and H. J. Fleure on “racial drifts”. Even more directly pertinent to South African conditions were the raft of papers on physical anthropology and human origins, the heated public debate on the origins of Great Zimbabwe, as well as papers dealing with comparative racial intelligence quotients and the purpose of native education. I have argued elsewhere that the dispassionate qualities of science were frequently invoked at this time in regard to the desire to find a “solution” to the “native question”. In Hofmeyr’s 1929 address, for example, he maintained that science had an important role in “determining the lines along which white and coloured races can best live together in harmony and to their common advantage”. The appeal to - and appeal of - scientific objectivity can also be seen as a counterpart to the (disingenuous) wish of leading politicians to prevent the “native question” becoming an issue in party politics. If blacks were in the process of being excluded from common citizenship via the landmark segregation bills then under parliamentary consideration, justification for their exclusion was in part founded on the idea that African culture was incompatible with the values of Western rationality and natural progress. Science could therefore be used both to evaluate Africans’ rights as citizens, and also to constitute white citizenship and nationality (p. 90).

In 2006 this has become reduced to the following:

The idea that science “knows no politics” was, needless to say, a fiction, as Malherbe’s intervention into the causes of poor-whiteism and other spats so clearly showed. Racial politics were also conspicuously featured in a number of papers dealing directly or indirectly with eugenics. The interest in physical anthropology and human origins, the heated public debate on the origins of Great Zimbabwe, as well as papers dealing with comparative intelligence quotients and the purpose of native education, all indicated the extent to which questions of race

were actively being debated at the 1929 meeting. Moreover, science was frequently invoked as a means of finding an objective “solution” to the “native question”. As Hofmeyr pointed out it had an important role in “determining the lines along which white and coloured races can best live together in harmony and to their common advantage” (p.220).

Thus Dubow’s earlier important observations on the relation between appeals to science and the desire to keep the so-called ‘native question’ out of party politics have been omitted. Moreover Hofmeyr is no longer said to have ‘*maintained*’ that science had an important role in addressing the so-called ‘native question’ - where the word ‘maintained’ implies the author distancing himself from Hofmeyr’s remarks. Hofmeyr is now said to have ‘*pointed out*’ the role of science, a word which implies the author’s identification with what is ‘pointed out’. In short, one ‘maintains’ an argument, but ‘points out’ a truth.

However it is not only between 2000 and 2006 that Dubow has softened the ideas of revisionism. Even in his *Racial Segregation* he softened the central thrust of the revisionism of the 1970s, which was to attribute economic motives to segregation (in addition to political ones - in that sense segregationism was an over-determined ‘solution’ to the problems of ruling South Africa).

In his recent book Dubow refers to Howard Pim who, at the urging of Sir Godfrey Lagden, delivered to the 1905 joint meeting of the British and South African Associations for the Advancement of Science a paper on ‘Some aspects of the Native Question’. It outlined a scheme for racial segregation (pp.175-6). In his 2000 paper in the book edited by him Dubow adds, ‘The importance of this paper in defining and outlining the concept of racial segregation in South Africa is now well established and it attracted considerable attention in the press at the time’ - his footnote refers to coverage in *The Times* and *The Star* (p.73). Dubow had also dealt with Pim in his *Racial Segregation* - and I had mentioned him already in the 1970s.

In *Racial Segregation* Dubow quotes from this paper of Pim’s: ‘For a time the location consists of able-bodied people, but they grow older, they become ill, they become disabled - who is to support them? They commit offences - who is to control them? The reserve is a sanatorium where they recruit; if they are disabled they remain there. Their own tribal system keeps them under discipline, and if they become criminals there is not the slightest difficulty in bringing them to justice. All this absolutely without cost to the white community’ (p.23).¹⁵

Dubow adds, ‘It has been suggested that this quotation furnishes evidence for the validity of the reserve-subsidy theory of segregation as advanced by Harold Wolpe’, and refers to papers by Paul Rich, and by Duncan Innes and myself.¹⁶ Dubow continues,

15 From Pim papers A881 Hb8. 16, ‘The native problem in South Africa’, 1905. It is also published in *South African Journal of Science*, Vol. 4, 1905 and as an appendix to Cd 7707 *Dominions Royal Commission, Minutes of Evidence taken in the Union of South Africa*, Part II, 111.

16 Paul Rich, ‘The agrarian counter-revolution in the Transvaal and the origins of segregation’ (African Studies Seminar, Wits, 1975); M. Legassick and D. Innes, ‘Capital restructuring and apartheid: a critique of constructive engagement’, *African Affairs*, Vol. 76 (305), 1977, 465-6.

But when viewed in the context of Pim's paper and his other writings, the emphasis of such an interpretation appears to be misplaced. Pim's advocacy of the reserves occurs as an attempt to refute two prevailing arguments: the first claimed that Africans were occupying land which could be better utilised by whites; while the second contended that the reserves would deprive whites of labour by offering Africans an alternative form of subsistence. Both views therefore implied that Africans should be moved to locations close to large industrial centres where they would be compelled to enter into wage labour. Pim rejected this analysis (partly on moral grounds) but chiefly because he felt that "location" Africans would in time constitute an intolerable economic and administrative burden upon white society. The Basutoland precedent apparently demonstrated that, even under "tribal" conditions, Africans would be compelled - on economic grounds - to enter the labour market. Moreover experience of the American South in the post-emancipation era supposedly proved that "the tendency of race feeling is towards segregation" and that "the greatest benefit each race can confer upon the other is to cease to form part of the other's system. On this reading Pim's advocacy of reserve segregation was not in the first instance a manifesto for cheap labour. His primary concern was with the maintenance of social discipline and control, which he considered, would be most effectively sustained, under conditions of rapid industrialisation, through the existing "tribal" system of the reserves. Thus it was Pim's intention to demonstrate that territorial segregation was *compatible* with (rather than *necessary* to) the development of industry, and that such a strategy would help to ensure the preservation of social order (pp.23-24).

Dubow added that 'This interpretation of Pim's reserve policy is consistent with other writings in his private papers'. He concludes that, 'In sum, during the period when Pim was an advocate of segregation, he conceived of it as a creative and prudent solution within the art of the politically possible. Given the reality of capitalism's labour requirements, he regarded segregation as a compromise between total separation on the one hand and the danger of unrestrained urbanisation on the other. This prudence was also informed by a moral position which led Pim to criticise segregation if it was intended for the sole benefit of whites' (p.24).

What Dubow failed to notice in Pim's 1905 paper were some additional points he made: 'As time goes on these location burdens will increase, and the proportion of persons in the location really able to work will still further diminish. The number of actual workers, taking the less healthy location conditions into account, will therefore be absolutely less than in a population of equal numbers in a reserve, and this difference in the number of workers will in itself also go some distance to make up for the smaller accessibility of the reserve native ... it is a fair assumption that at the outside one-fifth of the location population (I take it that the location consists of families) is able to work. *This means that the wages paid by the employers will have to be sufficient to support four other persons besides the work-*

man. Can it be supposed that this will lead to a reduction in native wages?’ (my emphasis)¹⁷

Surely this is a fairly explicit confirmation of the Wolpe thesis - that among the aims of the policies of segregation, enforcing migrant labour, was *reducing the reproduction costs of black labour*, through keeping families, children, old people in the reserves so they should not be a ‘cost to the white community’, more specifically, a cost to the mine-owners? Even Dubow is confused by this, recognising that Pim is saying that urban blacks will become an ‘intolerable burden’, precisely the thrust of the Wolpe argument. Yes, segregation was *compatible* with rather than *necessary* to capitalism in South Africa, yet it was very conveniently compatible. Yet Dubow rejects the Wolpe argument as ‘misplaced’ in favour of vague generalisations about ‘social control’. And, moreover, he claims an element of morality in Pim’s arguments. Surely, if Dubow has the slightest awareness of Gramsci, he would understand how moral argumentation is necessary to secure the hegemony of consent. He would look a bit more below the surface rather than accepting every word that he reads.

Two final points, on the wartime 1940s Dubow maintains that, ‘The need to take account of their [ANC, labour movement, and SACP’s] radical demands was another important reason why state intervention, collectivism, and planning became integral to government thinking’ (p.9). He presents no evidence for this, and in a book on the 1940s which he co-edited there is no indication I can find that this was the case.¹⁸ On the face of it, it seems implausible that the Smuts government took any account whatsoever of the ANC, labour movement, or Communist Party’s demands. In her afterword to the 1940s volume Shula Marks in fact stresses Smuts’s imperviousness to the labour movement and hostility to the Communist Party.¹⁹

Finally, in his treatment of the post-1994 democratic regime his abandonment of class analysis means that he fails to make any mention whatsoever of the class tensions between the ANC on the one hand and COSATU and the SACP on the other. Hence much of the politics of South Africa at the present day is made incomprehensible. This is what comes of following ‘fashions’ in history - one’s interpretation ceases to provide an understanding of the present, let alone of the future.

Saul Dubow, as always, is clever and erudite but at the same time in my estimation superficial - in the literal sense of skating on the surface of events and ideas rather than examining their deeper meaning and context.

17 Quoted in Legassick and Innes, ‘Capital Restructuring’, 466.

18 S. Dubow and A. Jeeves (eds), *South Africa’s 1940s: Worlds of Possibilities* (Cape Town: Double Storey, 2005).

19 Dubow and Jeeves, *South Africa’s 1940s*, 273-7 and also the letter from Smuts to M. C. Gillett cited by Marks, to be found in J van der Poel (ed) *Selections from the Smuts Papers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), Vol. 6, 298.