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The Narrow Ground: Critical Intellectual Work on South Africa Under Apartheid*

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Introduction

Some would argue that simply to reveal the injustices of apartheid and to morally reject it is to take a critical position. By such criteria many could be defined as having undertaken critical work. The issue however is not just to see what is wrong with apartheid. The issue is to answer the crucial question of how apartheid can be rendered obsolete, of how the liberation movement can concretely advance its cause. To invoke Marx's 11th Thesis on Feuerbach the point is not merely to interpret apartheid but to change it, to this end theory must be connected to practice. Social research must be developed to serve the people as an instrument of social emancipation.¹

Hence critical work must involve grasping the dynamics of social forces affecting South African society and connecting this to a genuine transformation of the existing social order. Properly conceived, theory should not be reduced to, or imposed on, the demands of the liberation movement; rather critical theory-building must develop its own dynamic recognizing that "a radical political posture without reliable facts and analyses is no more than insurrectionary art incapable of predicting its own success or failures".² In the South African context this does not necessarily imply an uncritical Marxist approach; as Mazrui has written "Marxism, though radical, is also a Western

* This article is dedicated to David Webster who fought for the rights of the oppressed and was murdered by apartheid on 1 May 1989. A few months prior to his assassination David Webster offered valuable comments on the final draft of this article. The author is also grateful for the comments of Azhar Bham, Tom Lodge and Njabulo Ndebele on earlier drafts of this article.

tradition and its uncritical invocation by African scholars reflects a form of residual intellectual dependence".³

Taking such a definition of critical work, in which theory is related to practice, it is evident that there is a dearth of such approaches; "little realistic analysis exists concerning appropriate political strategies and tactics".⁴

Why is this? To begin to provide some answers this article shows how the space for critical work has been, and is, narrowed by the force of societal constraints within South Africa. Given the structures of apartheid, critical black and white intellectual work is discussed in turn. In outline, it is argued that as far as blacks are concerned the central problems lie in the structures of educational inequality and the legislative constraints and repressive climate that hinders the development of black political organizations. For most whites the problems lie in a repressive research climate and a failure to see beyond their own circumscribed social milieux to develop an overall new synthesis of knowledge.

Critical Black Intellectual Work: the restricted ground

The lack of critical black intellectual work is primarily related to the fact that blacks in South Africa, due to apartheid, lack adequate access to higher education and institutional bases from which critical work can be developed. Specifically at university level the structures of apartheid restrict, the small number of black students who can benefit from higher education at the black 'universities', the type of education they receive at these institutions and access to the 'open' universities. Socio-economic circumstances also prevent many black students from attending university; lack of scholarships is one problem, another is that black students are often forced to seek employment, at the expense of higher education, to assist in family income. Beneath this level the black education system, which is denied adequate resources and autonomy from State control, serves primarily as a vehicle for the perpetuation of ruling class perspectives. As Mathonsi has shown this is achieved through such strategies as very high teacher-pupil ratios, control of the curriculum and inadequate provision of resources.⁵ Since the Soweto Uprising of 1976 black schooling (now under the Department of Education and Training) has become the target of concerted attack.

Prior to the Extension of University Education Act (1959) higher education for black students was mainly offered at Fort Hare

(originally a mission school) and the medical school at the University of Natal. The University College of Fort Hare produced some of the most prominent black intellectuals with a non-racial outlook. Before 1960, 'The Fort' "was to an extent a microcosm of a non-racial society in the heart of apartheid South Africa" ⁶. An atmosphere of political dissent and student activism did find room for expression. The 1955 *Report of the Fort Hare Commission*, initiated to investigate the roots of the protest that led to the closure of the College for several weeks during 1955, noted the students' "obsession with the struggle for liberation and with politics generally".⁷ However, with the University College of Fort Hare Transfer Act, the State moved to stifle the opposition and secure full control of the institution through the Bantu Education Department, correspondingly in 1960 eight staff members were dismissed and five resigned.

Of the four new black 'university' colleges created by the Extension of University Education Act (1959) the University of the North and the University of Zululand offer an extremely poor ground on which independent and critical inquiry can be instilled and encouraged. Due to State fear that higher education might raise the level of political consciousness the number of students at these 'universities' is not large and they are located in remote rural areas. They are subject to sweeping State control, "essentially political institutions, part of the program for harnessing education to apartheid".⁸

These 'universities' may attempt to reproduce the hegemony of the dominant classes and fulfil the function of staffing the administrative apparatus of the 'homelands' but the contradiction between the exclusiveness of apartheid ideology and the universalistic values that infuse learning in the liberal arts, has given black students a clearer insight into the injustices of South African society.⁹

The State's intention was to advance its programme of 'separate development', the reality has been continued student activism and resistance. Despite the controlled academic environment black critical inquiry did, notably with the rise of Black Consciousness, take place. In the 1970s, under Steve Biko, SASO (South African Students Organization) and the Black People's Convention, Black Consciousness was developed as an ideology of resistance that emphasized "liberation from psychological oppression, the building of a new awareness, the establishment of a new basic dignity, the framing of a new attitude of mind, a rediscovery of the history of the people, and a cultural revival".¹⁰

The State reacted to the crisis of legitimacy in the black 'universities' by falling back on the use of physical force to maintain order at these institutions, they came to be closed for weeks and months at a time. Such repression has fed a never ending spiral of protest; in fact since June 1986 the University of the North has been permanently occupied by the police and the military.¹¹

The cases of the University of Durban-Westville (for Indians) and University of the Western Cape (for coloureds) have come to present a different set of problems. In 1983, in the climate of the governments constitutional reforms, UD-W and UWC were granted institutional autonomy. Since this time they have moved away from the other black 'universities'; Jakes Gerwal, rector of UWC since 1987, proclaimed in his inaugural address that UWC should become "the intellectual home of the left".¹² The possibilities for some positive interventions are however constrained by the present climate of State repression. There are limits to how far these 'universities' can go, they have already received threats of closure and of curbs in State funding. Besides, as Neville Alexander has observed, UWC cannot place itself "above and outside the arena of class struggle" whilst itself remaining an apartheid institution.¹³

The 'open' universities (Cape Town, Natal, Rhodes, Witwatersrand) are also part of the problem. They have a poor historical record with regard to admitting black students.¹⁴ This record is in part due to the restrictions of the Extension of University Education Act (1959) which dictated that blacks had to obtain the permission of the responsible Minister to attend. Even in the pre-1959 period "the door opened to blacks was never much more than half open"¹⁵ but after the Act black students found the door all but shut. In comparing the overall student numbers at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) for the years 1959 and 1979, it emerges that there was only an increase of 94 African students - from 113 to 207,¹⁶ access for black students had all the hallmarks of tokenism.

Despite the rise of a more liberal ethos at the 'open' universities, as reflected in the strong opposition to the Extension of University Education Act and in the Vice-Chancellorships of Sir Richard Luyt at UCT and Ian D MacCrone at Wits, it is only since 1980, and especially after 1983 when most of the permit system was abolished, that black students have been admitted on any significant scale to the 'open' universities. By 1988 the black students at UCT and Wits constituted

over 20% of the student body.

It is in this context that the arguments for black advancement programmes at the 'open' universities appear compelling. Such programmes would go some way towards providing a firmer structural basis for the growth of a pool of talented intellectuals (and particular concern could be directed to the postgraduate level in the social sciences). But it is more than just a question of numbers.

Whilst the 'open' universities may proclaim their neutrality they are quite clearly tied to the interests of capital and a specific value system; as Richard Turner wrote in *The Eye of the Needle*: "Their pose of virtuous academic neutrality in fact means that they are efficient servants of the existing interest structure".¹⁷

In 1986 a survey of black community organizations in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging area found that 92% of respondents saw Wits as "an institution that serves the needs of the white community" and almost 90% saw Wits as serving the needs of big business.¹⁸ Views that are not surprising given the links between the 'open' universities and the structures of South African monopoly capitalism. For example, Wits Council, which stands at the top of the University's decision-making structures, is tied to the State and big business - with appointments to Council made by such bodies as the State President and the Chamber of Mines.¹⁹ Until 1989 there were no representatives of the black community on Wits Council. And as Mlueleki George said at the 1986 Richard Feetham Memorial Lecture: "The UDF [United Democratic Front] has over 700 affiliates with a non-racial membership of over 3 million. COSATU [Congress of South African Trade Unions] has more than half a million paid-up worker members. Yet neither of these organizations are represented in any way on the ruling bodies of the major universities of our country".²⁰

The 'open' universities also meet the needs of big business through performing the function of reproducing educated labour to staff the industries and to provide middle-management, furthermore the increased black student representation can be seen as part of a strategy to create a Westernized black middle class that has a stake in the economic system.

The myth of neutrality is further undermined if one considers the nature of 'White' academic culture - for it is a culture dominated by a Eurocentrism, it is a culture that serves to promote and reproduce Western values. The 'open' universities are tied into international networks of knowledge; "The devising of curricula, setting of

examinations, methods of teaching, appointment of staff and the general philosophy of these institutions all bear the hallmark of Universities in Europe".²¹ Black academics and students have to integrate themselves into this value system - if they do not they are unlikely to succeed.

The lack of black perspectives at the 'open' universities is not helped by the number of black academics and the hurdles facing aspiring black academics. There are few black academics; at Wits, for example, amongst the professorate in 1984, there were just two black professors and one black associate professor - in 1988, 93% of Wits academic staff were white. In academic appointments the institutional values of neutrality, objectivity and merit do not compensate for historical disadvantages, in any case most appointments are linked to national and international patronage networks that act to discriminate against 'outsiders'.²² Even if one can break into this network there may be 'post-compliance discrimination'²³ and on at least one occasion the State has intervened to prevent appointments. Often, if appointed, black academics at the 'open' universities are marginalized. It is not unknown for black academics to be severely harassed; in one such case a black lecturer in Linguistics at Wits was subjected to extreme personal harassment, her office was ransacked and her car and home vandalized.²⁴

Altogether the 'open' universities lack full social accountability, they do not fully reflect the interests of the wider society. Such grievances readily fuel demands for a movement away from the Western model of a university. There are demands that the 'open' universities should style themselves more on the African model²⁵ and there have been demands for a 'free Black university' - as proposed by SASO at their 1972 conference.²⁶ Although there is considerable debate over what exactly constitutes an African model, movement towards such a model would at least ensure that the specific needs of the black community were better accommodated and give blacks influence over university policy and student and staff intake.²⁷

Given the way in which the 'open' universities serve the 'existing interest structure' it is clear that their institutional environment is not conducive to critical black academic inquiry, especially if we accept that the dominant mainstream methodologies must be drastically altered to fit the conditions of African societies. The result is that critical black work is far more likely to be advanced outside of these institutions.

The scope for black critical work within South Africa lies within political organizations - AZAPO (Azanian People's Organization), the National Forum, the UDF, the trade union movement (COSATU) and the student movement - or within the Church. Whilst many of those in leadership positions within these organizations are the products of the Black Consciousness movement, events since Soweto (June 1976) moved most of them beyond Black Consciousness.

As a critical approach Black Consciousness has played a positive role, particularly given the overall context of its emergence, but it had its limits. In the Soweto Uprising, Black Consciousness was weak and proved an ineffectual mobilizing force; "the Black Consciousness movement faced formidable obstacles in reaching for a mass audience directly or through workers' organizations".²⁸ With its middle class origins and lack of class based analysis Black Consciousness came to play only a 'supportive role' to the leading body - the Soweto Students' Representative Council. A body which itself took nearly two months to come together and "never constituted itself as a formal organization with decision-making structures, rules of procedure for the selection of membership, leadership, and so on".²⁹ Hence the Soweto Uprising was marked by spontaneity and a lack of leadership. Students lacked firm ties with the working class; for example, the SSRC called a five day workers stoppage in November 1976, it was not supported and collapsed; "The lack of unity and coordination between the youth and the workers repressed the radical potential of the Soweto rebellion which turned into a failed revolution".³⁰

As Black Consciousness waned there was a need to "rise to the intellectual task of ideological innovation" to create "a new social order worthy of everything sacrificed and suffered for its attainment".³¹ For some the development of black liberation theology was the way forward, for others the experience of Soweto raised important issues for critical analysis around the question of developing a class based analysis and forging broad alliances amongst community organizations. Out of these debates one witnessed the emergence in 1979 of AZAPO and in 1983 of the National Forum and the UDF.

AZAPO, the National Forum and the UDF and its affiliates have played an important role in political mobilization and organization but the problem of how to develop and translate critical analysis into practice still remains; there is a need to develop analyses around revealing the State's contradictions and how to exploit the new openings, as well as clarifying the relationship between the national

struggle and the socialist struggle.³² This task is not helped by the fact that the structures of apartheid - especially with regard to higher education - have acted to deny sufficient room for the growth of critical work, but more than this the space for advances has been narrow - under the Emergency Regulations, community leaders were detained and many organizations 'restricted'. In particular, the State is concerned to drive a wedge between the black working class and critical intellectuals. In the wake of the 1973 Durban strikes the State banned Biko, Pityana and other Black Consciousness leaders; in the last few years a similar fate has befallen AZAPO/National Forum and UDF leaders. Of the UDF's 21 national executive committee members, over half have been detained or restricted.

The death of Steve Biko in security police custody in September 1977 acted as an effective deterrent to others and in such a climate many critical black intellectuals have been forced to locate themselves outside the country. Those openly allied to the African National Congress (ANC), Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) or South African Communist Party (SACP) have faced major problems inside the country; effectively such intellectuals have had to articulate, consolidate and propagate their views in exile. Thus the ANC has worked to consolidate its intellectual base by sending members to American and European universities.³³ The recent unbanning of the ANC, PAC and SACP and release of Nelson Mandela has, however, created significant new spaces for critical work within South Africa.

Critical white intellectual work: the empty ground

The early 1960s saw the start of the exodus of many politically disaffected academics from the 'open' universities,³⁴ many other critical intellectuals left South Africa (some of course had no choice). This was the time of Sharpeville, of the banning of the ANC and PAC, and of the implementation of the Extension of University Education Act. The political exiles, which included a small number of black academics, turned foremost to Britain, America and Canada. In these countries they made homes amongst the anti-apartheid support movements and within universities.

The exiles were attracted to the more politically sympathetic environments. Britain was particularly attractive for another reason - the 1960s were a time of major expansion within higher education and it proved relatively easy to fill a post within social science faculties at the newer universities (and for some, the polytechnics). Given the

impact of this exodus - and also the always present brain drain and since 1965 the effects of academic boycott³⁵ - the potential for critical work, especially from within the 'open' universities, all but disappeared.

Whilst this continued for many years,³⁶ there has however, since the early 1970s been a rise in work that has drawn on historical materialism and class analysis. The body of liberal historiography and liberal research on race and ethnic attitudes has come to be supplanted by this rival school of studies which has primarily shown how apartheid is a function of capitalism.³⁷ Until this time, as Frederick Johnstone has written,

"it did not seem to have dawned on anyone that perhaps the massive fact of South African history, the massive experience of the mass of the people in modern South Africa, was the super-exploitation of black labour by a racially structured capitalism, and that this, rather than ethnic groups, political parties, constitutions and so on, should be a starting point of analysis".³⁸

The transformation has been assisted by the recent growth of the social sciences within these universities. The rise of, and exposure to, Marxism has played an integral part in this - particularly through South African academics having spent several years of study at overseas universities and returning with critical theoretical baggage and insight. This was especially the case for those who attended the new universities in Britain (such as Sussex and Warwick). The growth of publishing outlets offered through Ravan Press and David Philip, in South Africa, has played its part. It is also very much a generational phenomenon - being linked to such period effects as the overall expansion of South African universities in the late 1960s and 1970s and the radicalization of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS).

The debate concerning the competing merits of Marxism and liberalism is one of whether or not apartheid is a problem of prejudice or capitalism, is the problem in South Africa one of race or class? Whilst the Marxian approaches are not themselves without problems in explaining the linkages between capitalism and racial domination the main criticism of the liberal studies is that through their emphasis on subjective factors insufficient attention is given to the significance of structural factors. To date this debate has tended towards

reductionism and each side has often presented a caricature of the other.³⁹ It can be argued that instead of looking at the issue in either/or terms the debate should now give way to conceptualizing a clearer relationship between race and class. A conceptualization that needs to clarify the dynamic interplay between subjective and objective factors and that can be concretely connected to the pressing problems facing contemporary South Africa.

The growth and contribution of the new school is important, but it needs to be much more firmly connected to present questions of strategy and tactics.⁴⁰ "There is, as yet", John Rex has written, "little in the way of social science which begins from the goals of the African liberation movement and treats the distinction between Marxist and liberal as of secondary significance only".⁴¹

Beyond this debate, the restraints on doing critical work presents serious problems. The Suppression of Communism Act (1950), the Internal Security Act (1976) and recent Emergency Regulations have imposed severe limits on criticism of the State and there is the political censorship of the Publications Control Board. There is also a large degree of press censorship, many security trials and incidents are not reported in the South African press. Journalists are barred from the townships and 'unrest' situations. Every year foreign correspondents are forced to leave South Africa and many journalists have been detained.

Under South African law, an individual may be subject to banning orders or detention. The banning of Richard Turner, a political science lecturer at Natal who played an important role in the black trade union movement in Durban and was a friend of Steve Biko, proved fatal - making him a target for right-wing forces. In 1978, he was shot dead through a side window of his house on going to answer the door in the middle of the night. Other academics who have been restricted include Raymond Hoffenberg of the University of Cape Town (whose banning led to a student protest march) and H J Simons - also of UCT (who left the country). At least two critical academics have been sentenced to long prison terms under the Suppression of Communism Act.

A number of social scientists and others with an essentially social science perspective have been arrested and banned in connection with their ties to the black trade union movement. In 1982 Neil Aggett, a medical doctor known in trade union circles and arrested "for furthering the aims of the ANC", died while in custody of the

Johannesburg security police after a 62 hour interrogation session. Police stated he was found hanged in his cell. An inquest held in the wake of international protests recorded his death as a result of suicide.

The assassination of Wits anthropologist David Webster in May 1989 dramatically highlighted the dangers of critical engagement. Shot dead in the road outside his Johannesburg home, David Webster was involved in organizing support for many of those detained under the State of Emergency and in documenting State violation of human rights.⁴² It is suspected that the killing was the work of a secret death squad.

Among the political books that are listed or banned those by ANC and SACP sympathizers and activists are prominent, as are many of the works of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky.⁴³ Most of the South African authors whose books are banned are in exile. Very few intellectuals within South Africa presently have had a critical work banned - an important exception being prominent UDF member Raymond Suttner (who was recently released from two years in detention without trial, mostly spent in solitary confinement). The works of Ruth First, who was killed in Mozambique by a South African assassin's bomb in 1982, have been banned.

Many critical scholars have found that it is difficult to do in depth on-the-ground research in South Africa. Researchers may be denied the necessary permits to undertake work in the African 'homelands' and black urban areas; there is the reality of police and South African Defence Force harassment, in some cases research notes have been seized.⁴⁴

Such problems as these are not insurmountable, but in a repressive climate there has been a notable tendency to play safe; either through grappling with grand theory, dabbling with abstracted empiricism or juggling with future scenarios for a post-apartheid South Africa. There are also those who use the difficulties as an excuse for not doing, or even attempting, critical research. Although there are societal constraints the silence of most white intellectuals is to some extent of their own choosing. Outwardly State censorship might present difficulties, but access to Marxist texts, for example, is relatively easy and there are loopholes. The constraints on research in the 'homelands' are not that difficult to get around; the major constraint is the reluctance of individuals to attempt such research.

Nonetheless the general institutional research climate is not one

that is conducive to critical work. Most significantly the research climate is constrained by the conservative bias of South African universities.⁴⁵ In this setting there has emerged a bias towards researching safe topics and academics have moved towards adopting an apolitical technocratic managerial role in serving the interests of the top levels of society. Research is undertaken to meet the demands of important clients such as State departments and business corporations.

The State, through such bodies as the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), which is one of the most important sources of funding for academics in the social sciences, tends to channel its funds into technocratic research. Controversial issues are avoided, most HSRC research reports in the field of sociology

"are pedestrian documents concerned with such topics as the adaptation of Czechoslovakian immigrants into Pretoria, family planning practices, and the use of tobacco and alcohol in the South African population".⁴⁶

Over the years the HSRC has faced a number of charges of bias. There is a clear over-representation of Afrikaners on the Council and in 1979, as a result of a cabinet decision, a national plan for research undertaken through the HSRC was established; under this plan funding for research into "areas of national concern" in line with P W Botha's 'total strategy' was given priority. At a more direct level, following the Department of Information scandal in 1978-79, secret funding of three university research institutes was revealed.

In these respects it is clear that established academic institutions do not encourage critical work. It is not perhaps surprising then that most academics are silent on the pressing problems facing the black community; studies which employ an empirical analysis of such issues as social class, poverty, income and wealth distribution, race relations, educational opportunity and social mobility have been few, the attention given to progressive black social movements since the Soweto uprising slight. Hence some of the most insightful works on South Africa under apartheid have been written by those outside this climate, notably journalists and those in exile.

In the wake of the impact of the 1973 Durban strikes there have however been notable developments with industrial sociology. Progressive industrial issues have been the concern of the Centre of Applied Social Studies (Natal) and the Institute of Industrial

Education (Natal) which played a central role in the democratization of independent trade unions and initiated the *South African Labour Bulletin* - a number of social scientists have been arrested and banned in connection with such research. Also a growing body of progressive work is reflected in; the contents of recent Association for Sociology in South Africa (ASSA) workshops and conference papers, articles being published in *Social Dynamics*, *South African Review*, *South African Sociological Review* and *Transformation*, the activities of the South African Institute of Race Relations and the work of the Education Policy Unit (Wits), Centre for Policy Studies (Wits) and Centre for Social and Development Studies (Natal). But such trends as these are not yet ground breaking, the potential role of critical analysis in South Africa has yet to be fully realized. In fact such academics are in a small minority and in general, outside the social sciences and humanities, even critical moral reasoning finds little place.

Most white academics have no meaningful contact with critical black intellectuals or with insurgent sections of the black community. Even if white academics have contact, involvement or affiliation with the liberation movement this does not necessarily guarantee that critical work will be advanced. They may come to provide a merely ideological function, but more than this there is the important question of whether progressive white academics can have sufficient empathy for the oppressed communities; for their aspirations, priorities and their culture of resistance. This may be particularly difficult to achieve given the conservative influence of conventional research methods and techniques.⁴⁷

Conclusion

What emerges is that given the constraints, both overt and subtle, that pervade South African society, the space for critical intellectual work is narrow. As a result certain questions rarely get asked - such important questions as "what are the structural limits of reforms? What are the transformations in ideological and political structures? What are the factors generating new definitions of interests and what are the sources of opposition to these? etc."⁴⁸ More importantly the existing strategies employed by the liberation movement are not subjected to critical analysis and viable alternative strategies are not advanced. Consequently the challenge remains; to develop and build a body of meaningful critical analysis that captures the crisis in South Africa and can be linked to strategies of social change.

How then should the relationship between academics and the liberation movement correctly be seen? As Wolpe has argued "to arrive at an adequate approach the simple opposition between the autonomy of social research and its reduction to an ideological function must be abandoned"⁴⁹ - but even if, following Wolpe, an academic rejects value-free analysis and moves towards a collectively organized conception of social research in which the aims of the liberation movement provide the impetus for analysis, there is still the question of how exactly critical work should proceed.

Here, properly conceived, critical theory-building must endeavour to clarify the relationship between theory and practice; to test the validity of existing strategies and tactics and to advance possible strategies and tactics which lead to meaningful social transformation. It dictates a sociological intervention that is capable of disclosing and furthering the protest potential of the liberation movement.⁵⁰ In this the "theoretician and his [*her*] specific object are seen as forming a dynamic unity with the oppressed class, so that his [*her*] presentation of societal contradictions is not merely an expression of the concrete historical situation but also a force within it to stimulate change".⁵¹

In advancing such critical work one source would be to draw on the contribution of cultural Marxism - in particular the work of Touraine and Castells - to help uncover viable courses of action.⁵² Another source would be to look at the way in which connections between political priorities and social research have been made elsewhere in Africa. Such as the work of academics at the University of Dar-es-Salaam in Tanzania who have been concerned to give such concepts as self-reliance and socialism concrete meaning. Or the work that has been encouraged by Frelimo at the Centro des Estudos Africanos, Universidade Eduardo Mondlane in Mozambique, a collective to advance socialist revolution in Mozambique and the liberation of Southern Africa.

Further, there is a need to explore possibilities, to exploit the space, for critical work. Strategies for broadening the narrow ground need to be advanced. One possibility would be to promote greater inter-university contact between critical scholars, to build on the work of the Black Universities Working Group set up by ASSA in 1986 to investigate strategies for broadening the space for progressive work at the black 'universities'. Another possibility would be to more firmly facilitate a flow of critical scholars from the international academic community.

This is one area which makes the case for a total academic boycott appear questionable, a position recognized by the ANC and UDF in recent policy decisions which accept that an individual is not affected by the boycott if he or she is supported by the democratic movement in South Africa, is approved by overseas solidarity groups, and contributes to the advancement of the national democratic struggle and the building of a future South Africa.⁵³

This position though is not without its problems; one problem is that to be given the appropriate approval may single an individual out as a target for attacks from right-wing forces, other problems exist around what criteria are deemed appropriate to vet someone and over who decides? However, it does seem that the way forward lies through the Union of Democratic University Staff Associations (UDUSA). Formed in July 1988 and formally aligned with the Mass Democratic Movement, UDUSA is committed to the democratization of the universities and promoting critical work. At present UDUSA has over 4 000 members with branches at all the 'open' universities, a majority of the black campuses and a number of the Afrikaans universities.

In the South African context whether or not a new synthesis of knowledge to hasten a non-racial democratic future can effectively and fruitfully proceed remains to be seen - but one thing is evident, the narrow ground must be broadened for the task of critical theory-building has barely begun. Recent developments within the country give this need a new sense of urgency.

Notes and References

'Blacks' in this article refers to Africans, Indians and coloureds.

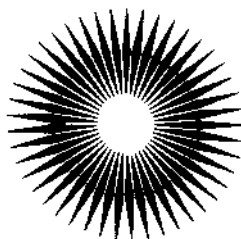
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