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Author(s): Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba

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HOW IS HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE RECOGNIZED?

Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba
University of Dar es Salaam

Historical knowledge exists in all human societies. It is the cognitive appropriation of socially-determined material transformations necessary for life process. We must begin with this fact. It is a form of social consciousness, a socially-determined interpretation of the movement of those transformations. But where do we find it and how do we recognize it? Where is the place of historical knowledge? Where and how does it exist? On the printed page, in books, of course, and prior to printing and writing, in oral traditions (all those forms of a human community's collective memory--some names of people or places; songs, stories, poems, legends, tales, cosmogonic myths; drawings, carvings, cave inscriptions, tablets, bone/bamboo inscriptions; languages; old roads; etc.). Historical knowledge exists nowadays as well on tapes, cassettes, computer memory, films, pictures, etc.

Historical knowledge exists in different degrees of elaboration, of truth character, of accuracy, as well as of scope. All human societies have undergone, and continue to undergo, social transformations. Some have experienced or experience more slow processes of movement than rapid ones and thus their social awareness of those processes of transformations has been or is less sharp. That is why the conscious control and social mastering of the social process of transformation has been or is less developed. Other societies at a certain level of world social process experienced or experience more rapid processes of transformations leading to sharper forms of social consciousness of those processes and specific needs of developing ways and tools for handling those processes. From the very beginning of human society, that is why the central concern of 'history doing' has been to educate, through an analysis of historical possibilities of social transformation, the social capacity to control consciously and master the current process of social transformation, i.e., to make or unmake history. Men have history, wrote Engels and Marx, because they must produce their life.¹ Degrees of accuracy of historical knowledge reflect corresponding degrees of social capacity to deal with processes of socially-determined material transformations.

Throughout the history of societies two forms of relation-

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ship of interdependence, shaping the cognitive appropriation of processes of social transformation, can be observed. There has always been a very close interdependent relationship between the social practice of history-elaboration and advocacy (science of history and all forms of teaching history) and the society in which it takes place. Tensions, divisions, conflicts, struggles, movements, problems confronted and to be resolved by the society, etc., are reflected in its 'history producing and reproducing.' Produced knowledge and techniques are always called for by necessities of the whole society and its reproduction. Historical knowledge is a social discourse (of social directives).

A second interdependent relationship brings together face to face, the specific pursuit of historical knowledge ('science of history') and people's representations of their own historical becoming in a specific historical moment (period, conjuncture, epoch, etc.) and in a geographical area or social milieu (class, gender, caste- or 'race'-specific). Conceptions of time, social perceptions of time, how to measure it, how to establish reference points in time, conception of the direction and meaning of temporal movement (continuous, contiguous, or cyclical)--for example, in societies with different fundamental structures and organizations (processes)--are never the same. Degrees of elaboration, of truth character, and of scope do reflect these relationships of interdependence. It is not surprising that state formations, which emerge as social expressions of the social capacity to confront a specific movement of processes of social transformation, are linked with the need for keeping records, the systematic elaboration of historical knowledge. That is why historical knowledge has fundamentally been 'state knowledge.'²

Historical knowledge can be found in museums, libraries, bookshops, village fireplaces, classrooms, archives (and perhaps in elders' minds?), and the like. Modes of existence of historical knowledge vary perhaps with degrees of sharpness and social historical consciousness. Does the type of medium through which historical knowledge exists matter very much. How do we 'read' or 'retrieve' it? Historical knowledge is first of all socially-produced and kept (reproduced, retained, conserved) through a medium. (Are commemorations and festivals media of historical knowledge?) How can we 'retrieve' it? Do we need some historical literacy to be able to 'read' it? Is it true that only historians can identify historical knowledge? Does not the whole human community produce and/or use historical knowledge?

In a university senate meeting, an engineer and a mathematician opposed a research project on nutrition submitted by a historian, on the grounds that it was not a 'history research project.' How did they know that research on nutrition is not part of history and cannot produce historical knowledge? Why is knowledge about nutrition not part of historical knowledge? What is the criterion for determining what historical knowledge is? And why would this criterion be so obvious to the engineer and the mathematician, yet not to the historian? Certainly historical knowledge may not always be what historians produce and claim to be historical knowledge. But how are we to tell the difference?

Is this historian submitting the project to the senate deviating from a "commonly accepted" notion of 'historical knowledge and research?' What is the 'normal paradigm,' if any, of 'history doing?'

If historical knowledge is not what historians produce when they are involved in doing historical research, then what makes them be historians? Is a historian just anybody in a department of history; is it a question of 'institutional membership?' Is any member of a 'historical association' a historian? Is it a question of algebraic (set) membership or topological adherence defining a community of historians? To be a historian, one has to be so recognized socially as such even if historical knowledge is not always produced. But of course the social recognition implies that one has been socialized in assuming, however approximately, socially-organized functions. The process of socialization implies that one fulfills--directly or not systematically or not--the requirements of the initiation into the function of the historian. This also means that one actually produces some amount of historical knowledge.

One has to be "trained" (or self-trained) by going through a program of 'historical scholarship,' a pedagogically- and socially-organized (simulated) practice of producing historical knowledge for the apprentices. Correct historical knowledge comes from practice (primacy of practice) but so does erroneous historical knowledge. Still, only through enlightened practical experimentation of producing historical knowledge are errors increasingly produced. But an enlightened practical experiment is not a question of one isolated individual historian (or for that matter a group of historians), it is that of a theoretically palavering community of historians (palavering among themselves) as well as the latter palavering with non-historians and socially testing the produced historical knowledge.

Yes, the engineer and the mathematician of the university senate, as well as other non-historians, have the right to question the historian's hypotheses as part of the general social testing of historical knowledge. Issues involved here will be deepened when we deal with the problem of how historical knowledge is actually produced. Let us here note that the question of the cognitive subject (as opposed to empirical historians as subjects who sometimes function as elements of the cognitive subject) of historical knowledge is a very delicate and complex one. It is idealistic to think of empirical historians as sources or originators of historical knowledge. If there is such a cognitive subject of historical knowledge, it is the theoretically palavering community of historicans and non-historians over the cognitive appropriation of historical reality. Of course in class societies this process does take the form of class struggles in theory and theories in class struggles. That is why to say that historical knowledge is a knowledge concerning objective social reality in past time produced through the skilled labor process of historical scholarship is too restrictive; unless, of course, historical scholarship is not reduced to activities of historians alone.³

Through those struggles, which conception of the so-called 'normal paradigm' in the production of historical knowledge becomes dominant is also a question of the character of the social forces agitating for it. Historians laboring for that conception are ultimately organic intellectuals of those forces. Their produced historical knowledge actually expresses a social one-sidedness. If taken for granted and not problematized, historical knowledge may prove to be a "ruling illusion."⁴ Activities of historians defending this illusion as the "normal science" may actually be geared towards reproducing the illusion rather than producing significant critical historical knowledge.⁵

What historical knowledge is can be grasped in two ways: from the point of view of its theoretical form and from that of its theoretical content. Historical knowledge is organized and presented in a certain way; it uses certain marks to ascertain its historicity. These characteristic typographical marks are called marks of historicity and these help the reader recognize historical knowledge.⁶

A work of history relies on certain documents to support arguments in the text; it uses maps, graphs, tables, etc., to show that it is not a work of fiction. In its mode of presentation references (quotations, bibliographical and archival references, pictures, etc.) are made to indicate that it is not a work of pure fiction. Those marks are intended to, and do, satisfy the controlling operations (of checking) performed through reading: references to sources (documents, etc.) ultimately to primary sources or data (eyewitness reports, etc.) indicate that there is a correspondence/conformity/reflective relationship between the text and something outside it. By means of references this relationship is specified. The relationship is intentionally and clearly marked in the text itself. While reading the text, one can simultaneously examine, if one so wishes, the sources on which the account is based--and do so through indications provided by marks of historicity included in the text. Although the same sources used by different historians (or by the same historian at different occasions) may give rise to different variants of historical knowledge, historical realism as implied by the use of marks of historicity does help the reader evaluate the basis of the difference.

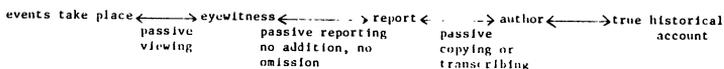
In the practice of historical work these marks of historicity have undergone transformations. As sources in the works of history, for example, photographs are very recent. Graphics have been used since the end of the nineteenth century. Maps appeared in the sixteenth century along with quotations referring to sources (handwritten or printed). Up until the end of the eighteenth century, there were no public archives; documents of administrations were of difficult access or were not well-organized; there were no universal codes allowing one to identify documents referred to; users had to describe only the place where these documents were found and to cite names of people holding those documents or monuments (old money, statues, inscriptions, etc.). Only few 'advanced' historians took the trouble of referring to those not well-organized archives. By

the end of the seventeenth century, for example, Pierre Bayle (1647-1706) was forced to state that quotations from inaccessible sources or sources whose origins were unknown, were without value, as referring to them did not satisfy the controlling operation through checking as it could not be carried out. Theoretically, the very organization of documents (archives) is a function of the current conception of historical work; the more the latter develops, the better the organization (and treatment) of documents. African archivists appealing to African governments to develop archives should probably start by clearly identifying the conception of historical knowledge that dominates in African governmental circles.

Before the invention of printing, marks of historicity were only solemn formulas or statements placed either at the beginning or at the end of the text, formulas which supposedly ensured that the author had seen with his eyes what is being described, or had heard the words which are reported as having actually been spoken. In the case of oral traditions, validity-preserving marks are also used; this could be done through ritual gestures before (or after) giving the account or telling the story or by a solemn reference to the ancestors, who are here like eyewitnesses.

For things of which the author was not an eyewitness, those which took place long ago, similar formulas or statements were written to state that the material of the narrative came from trustworthy people--people in high functions and whose integrity is well known, and these people had affirmed to have witnessed the reported facts. In this case those formulas are accompanied with others asserting the *passivity* of the author: the claim that the author has added (or subtracted) nothing to the report of the said witnesses. The author claims solemnly to have merely copied or transcribed closely, with no addition or omission, what the witness of the events told him/her. Does not this conception already favor empiricism and positivism?

Marks of historicity such as: "I saw or I heard from a credible person" characterized early texts. This general conception seemed to reflect an "epistemological naivety" (or an apychological epistemological position--neopositivism), that is, the ignorance of the subjective process of cognition. The following schema summarizes this conception:



It does seem like people never wondered about the technical/psychological/theoretical conditions for human beings to report on witnessed events with no addition or omission. Are events transparent in their meaning and significance to the eyewitnesses themselves? Is it accidental that this conception of historical work developed with the rise of mechanical or metaphysical materialism?

At any rate the break with that form of historicity marks started occurring during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in the period of transition to capitalism in Europe. Does this break come from a political break, the emergence of the bourgeois class in the Renaissance? Why did this break take place at this particular time? Was it a simple qualitative transformation of historical work owing to its quantitative accumulation? What were, for example, the social conditions of existence of the break? Why did the prevailing marks of historicity have to be transformed? Was it owing to an emergence of historical genius? What exactly led to the changes in the 'traditional view' on how the past, the present, and the future were connected to give rise to changes in the marks of historicity?

These are interesting questions to be examined in the part devoted to a short historical survey of historiography. What is certain is that there exists a direct correlation between changes in socio-economic-political structures in both conceptions of history and changes in marks of historicity. During this period of transition the world became global; scholars and philosophers conjured up new visions of nature and the cosmos; the works of classical antiquity were recovered, critically assessed, and adulated to an unprecedented degree; the state, emerging as the basic framework for people's lives, provoked discussions of statecraft, collective identity, customs, and laws; over a thousand years of a united Latin Christendom ended. These major events, of course, had to have had crucial impact on the conception of historical knowledge and thus on marks of historicity.

It was against this background that the so-called critical method of historical criticism developed. The need to work out "objective rules which permitted the separation of truth from falsehood" gradually emerged. "The most naive policeman," wrote Marc Bloch,

knows that a witness should not always be taken at his word, even if he does not always take full advantage of this theoretical knowledge. Similarly, it has been many a day since men first took it into their heads not to accept all historical evidence blindly. And experience almost as old as mankind has taught us that more than one manuscript has falsified its date or origin, that all the accounts are not true, and that even the physical evidences can be faked.⁷

Marks of historicity had thus to be made more rigorous, taking into account the controlling test of this historical criticism. The historical knowledge is presented in a way allowing it to

pass the test of historical criticism that the author himself/herself must practice in producing such knowledge.

So marks of historicity indicate how the historian has converted the scattered primary sources into a coherent and intelligible secondary source; how he/she has recreated the significant features of the past with the help of numerous fragmentary data; and how the authenticity of the evidence and the credibility of the testimonies have been (and could be) established. Marks of historicity thus help to distinguish a work of history from a work of fiction.

Although a work of fiction can imitate the use of documentary references, its story usually is not closely dependent on those marks, which could in fact be ignored without altering the plausibility of the imaginatively created story. What is aimed at in discussions about realism in works of literature is their possible social relevance more than their historical accuracy. Social relevance is not the same thing as historical factuality aimed at by historical realism, which is a case of scientific realism. Some novels, such as Sembéné's *God's Bits of Wood*, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, or Michener's *The Covenant*, based on historical events or situations, do provide some historical information. However, they do so indirectly from a historical realist point of view, they can at most be treated as fragmentary evidence for properly historical works. Historically-based novels are, of course, closer to historical works proper than other types of novels.

Marks of historicity help specify what kind of theoretical discourse historical knowledge is. As a theoretical discourse historical knowledge is a set of articulated theories constructing a story of how particular socially-determined material transformations actually took place. In a generalized form, this story is an answer to the questions: 'where did we come from? who are we? where are we going?' But, is this enough to distinguish a historical theoretical discourse from other historical theoretical discourses? Obviously not.

In general, how do we distinguish correctly one theoretical discourse from another and, within the same type, one variant from another? And how do we conceptualize the basis of this differentiation? Theoretical discourses have commonly been differentiated on methodological grounds, on epistemological grounds, on the basis of straightforward dating, on the basis of the mode of organization of the activities of scientific communities (disciplines), and on sociological grounds. These bases of differentiation are not the same: to say that two theoretical discourses are epistemologically distinct is not the same thing as saying that they are methodologically distinct, or that the 'scientific communities' which produced them are sociologically distinct. On the other hand, methodologically distinct theoretical discourses cannot be assumed to be *ipso facto* epistemologically distinct, nor can the 'scientific communities' associated with these theoretical discourses be assumed to be *ipso facto* sociologically distinct. Sociologically speaking, a 'bourgeois theory' may be produced by a member of the working, petty bourgeois, or

bourgeois classes. This is a difficult problem, especially when it comes to issues such as women's studies: it is not enough to be a woman (physiologically speaking) or even a feminist woman to produce a theory upholding interests related to the radical needs of women's emancipation.

Bernstein and Depelchin--and to some extent Henry Slater--have attempted to distinguish varieties of historical knowledge about Africa on the basis of distinction of materialist problematic and idealist problematic (or "proletarian and nationalist or bourgeois problematics") through which they were produced. They have also tended to equate materialist problematic with scientific problematic and idealist problematic with ideological problematic, following Althusser's early philosophical perspective based on the radical opposition of science to ideology.⁸ They have, however, been unable theoretically to differentiate variants of either materialist or idealist problematics. They have, indeed, found it difficult to recognize scientific elements in bourgeois theories; they had to use the so-called "bourgeois penetration" to explain 'ideological' elements inside marxist theories. This theoretical differentiation, in terms of different problematics, is not fundamentally different from the one made by Kuhn, characterizing scientific revolutions in terms of transformations of paradigms. This perspective is correct when dealing with the diachronic aspects of the development of knowledge, but not with the synchronic models of the epistemic analysis of various theoretical discourses.⁹

Bernstein/Depelchin defined their concept of problematic as being a series of theoretical and methodological assumptions which may or may not be explicitly stated. In relation to histories about Africa, those written from an empiricist problematic were said to give primary importance to data or the so-called 'facts.' The claim is made in those histories that 'facts' are self-explanatory and thus the collection of data/'facts' is given an explanatory power. Historical reality is here reduced to neutral 'facts,' thereby overlooking that what are called 'facts' are an interpretation of reality and that therefore facts, or data, can never be neutral but are always theory-laden. The empiricist claim that the object of historical knowledge contains its own knowledge, that the historian must only notice, collect, or passively record is epistemologically mistaken. Variants of empiricist histories differ on the basis of different degrees or types of empiricism.

Materialist histories were said to be characterized by object independence (independence of historical reality from thought). They put emphasis on the primacy of material culture and economic structures in historical knowledge and a class analysis. Of course, so characterized, even some bourgeois histories will also pass as materialist histories.

Difficulties involved in Kuhn's differentiation of theoretical discourses in terms of paradigms also confront our materialist historians. Let me mention some of those difficulties. The term 'paradigm' is too inclusive; its elements come from too many different realms--epistemology, law, psychology, optics, ideology,

etc. For example, Savary showed that Kuhn's use of "paradigm" is closely simulated to the use of "ideology." As is well known, for Kuhn a paradigm represents a whole set of beliefs, recognized values, and techniques which are common to a given group ("scientific community"). But it also represents an isolated element of that set, specific solutions to paradoxes that, used as models or examples, can replace explicit rules as bases for solutions of paradoxes prevailing in normal science.

To get around some of those difficulties Gaukroger introduced three general considerations to help deal with the question of the differentiation of theoretical discourses. Firstly, theoretical discourses are differentiated on the basis of some theoretical classification. It is true that there are some very prevalent classifications--such as that of the 'sciences' into the natural, social, and mathematical sciences--(viz. Althusser's three autonomous "scientific continents," that of mathematics opened up by Thales, that of physics opened up by Galileo, and that of history opened up by Marx)--which it may seem very difficult to do without. But different classifications, which may cut across these, are possible, and the classification mentioned is implicitly theoretical.¹⁰

Secondly, theoretical discourses cannot be differentiated as such; they can only be differentiated by virtue of their having distinct epistemological structures or explanatory structures, or research programmes or whatever.

Thirdly, different characterizations of theoretical discourses may include very different kinds, depending on the questions we want answers to. Some questions, for example, will not require reference to the social conditions under which a discourse is produced and developed, whereas others will not require reference to the epistemological structure of the discourse. Slater specified the following questions as distinguishing the so-called proletarian historical knowledge: questions about nature, questions about demography, questions about the mode of production for the production of the knowledge of the structure of history; questions about trajectories for the knowledge of the overall trajectory of history; and questions about the dynamic of history for the knowledge of contradictions and how they were resolved. A synthesized combination of the answers to these questions constitutes for Slater a proletarian historical knowledge.

A theory could be analyzed in purely methodological terms to determine whether its methodology is coherent and viable. A specific range of questions could be posed which require the introduction of specific kinds of factors. The same theory could be analyzed in terms of its epistemological structure--in terms of its account of reality and of what access we have to reality, different questions will be posed and a different range of factors taken into consideration. We cannot simply expect sociological accounts of theoretical discourses to illuminate questions which are more properly of an epistemological nature and vice versa. Nor can we expect purely methodological accounts of discourses to illuminate questions of a more 'metaphysical'

nature. The question of whether or not ideological, political, or class positions have specific methodological, epistemological or metaphysical impacts (or effects or representations) on theoretical discourses is very difficult and clearly not yet settled.¹¹

What are the elements of an explanatory structure? Although difficult to specify, they include an ontology, a domain of evidence, a system of concepts relating these two, and a proof structure which specifies the valid relations which can hold between the concepts of this system. An explanatory structure operates with a set of entities in terms of which explanations are given. The ultimate irreducible set of such entities is the ontology of the discourse. There are, for example, an atomistic ontology (ontology of simples) and an ontology of complexes. Whereas the former claims that simples of themselves have certain connections among themselves, the latter asserts that of themselves simples have no connections to one another, but are connected in determinate ways only relative to the complexes of which they are the parts. Dependence on a complex is a condition for there being a connection at all. Dialectical theories are founded on an ontology of complexes.¹²

In explanations an ontology is linked to a domain of evidence, inasmuch as it is a necessary condition of a statement's being a candidate for an explanation that there be specifiable circumstances in which the claims of that statement would be unsound. The domain of evidence of a theoretical discourse is thus the set of those phenomena which could confirm, establish, or refute purported explanations in a particular discourse. Insofar as it operates with criteria for what does and what does not count as evidence in a particular discourse. These criteria are criteria for what could count as evidence, *not* for what the evidence is. What the evidence is can be established only by the procedures of investigation with which the discourse operates.

The link between the ontology of a discourse and its evidential domain consists of a system of concepts peculiar to the discourse, and a proof structure which circumscribes the class of valid and invalid consequences and derivation relations which may hold between statements in the discourse. In determining what counts as a proof in that discourse, it also determines whether concepts, techniques, and the like which are products of different discourses need to be introduced in order that explanations might be generated.

From the point of view of inquiry, ontology is the determining factor. For example, how historical materialism specifies historical forces serving as the set of entities through which historical explanation is given, makes marxist historiography specific. From the point of view of presentation, the proof structure is the determining factor. In *Capital* Marx does not differ from other scientists' method of presentation.¹³ These are serious and difficult questions whose detailed account I cannot go into here.

As far as historical knowledge as a theoretical discourse

is concerned, some attempts have been made to explicate what can be called historical explanatory structures: Croce (1923), Collingwood (1956), Fischer (1970), White (1973), Harnecker (1974), Topolski (1976), Martin (1977), Deleplace (1979), McLennan (1981), Raymond (1982), Brenner (1983), and Hubner (1983), to mention but a few important examples. Fischer and McLennan, for example, concentrated to the logic of historical work, trying to expose historians' fallacies. Croce, Collingwood, Martin, and Brenner emphasized questions related to historical ontologies and domains of evidence, including specifications and assumptions about 'human nature.'

Against the philosophers of understanding (and historians who follow them), Heller (1982) and Hubner (1983) have argued that interpretation is a form of explanation proper. As testimonies are not usually self-explanatory, they cannot, as such, have for their only adequate explanation interpretation. The claim that historical knowledge is *not* explanatory but only interpretive, that is, that historical knowledge is a simple reading of testimonies and not their arrangement as well is groundless. Althusser and associates argued that even reading is not innocent, but a theoretical or conceptual reconstruction. The two basic methods of understanding: interpretation (*Verstehen*) and explanation in a narrower sense of the word (*Erklären*) are not necessarily opposed to each other. As an explanation or an interpretation of changes in social life, historical knowledge is constructed around an explanatory structure. This could have the following form of explanation:

1. Someone was in a certain situation.
2. At this time he believed in the validity of a certain rule, governing the way one must act in such a situation.
3. Someone who satisfies premises no. 1 and no. 2 will act/will not act according to the specified rule because of psychological, biological, physical, etc., laws.
4. Consequently he acted/did not act in accordance with the rule.¹⁴

By its theoretical content, historical knowledge is a story with social, political, and ideological relevance. It could be part of social forms of self-representation, how people in society as a whole represent historical reality to themselves. As such, a particular historical knowledge could just be a theoretical expression of the "stage of historical consciousness" of a given society.¹⁵ The message is such a knowledge could thus be in line with the dominant ideology in that society. Nationalist historical accounts tend to substantiate the ideological notion that 'fathers of the nations' were the historical forces that brought about national independence. Depending on how readers are affected by this ideology, they may or may not readily 'see' the pertinence of that nationalist 'historical knowledge.'

In a class-divided society, historical knowledge will thus be class-determined, that is, it will be an account favorable to interests of specific classes in the conjuncture of class struggles in which it is produced. As such it can offer itself to be incorporated as part of the dominant ideology in society, expressing the material conditions of domination of the dominant class or part of the dominated ideologies justifying the interests of the dominated classes. To the extent that the dominant class defends the *status quo* against the social transformation of the current social order, it is in principle opposed to any knowledge that exposes the real laws of motion of the current society, unless such a knowledge strengthens, or is relatively indifferent to, the *status quo*. This is not a voluntaristic thing; the historian does not necessarily decide consciously to be in line with the dominant ideology; where this is done, the result, as in art forms, is a superficial work.

The dominant ideology affects historical studies through the dominant paradigm, which, according to Kuhn is composed of 'exemplars' and values. To the extent that dominated classes' political and ideological rebellion exposes social processes favoring the *status quo*, it reveals the limitations of the dominant paradigm. And the cognitive appropriation of social processes of domination/exploitation/oppression is thus made possible. This is not automatic, thought--scientific experimentation makes its own demands that have to be tackled. However, mastering the demands of scientific experimentation from the point of view of defending the *status quo* may not guarantee the production of true knowledge of the real laws of motion of society, since the basic paradigmatic perception of social phenomena, affected by the dominant ideology, becomes an epistemological obstacle. This is the epistemic basis of difference between Ricardo's and Marx's theories of capitalist society. Voluntaristic alignment to oppressed classes per se does not make one produce revolutionary historical knowledge.

By its content, nevertheless, historical knowledge represents an intervention in the current social reality as part of theories used as weapons in current social struggles. Providing an account of analyzed possibilities of social transformations in the past, historical knowledge helps present social actors to conceptualize possible theoretical weapons for the transformation of the *status quo* or for its forced maintenance. In that sense historical knowledge is involved in the conceptualization of the possible future to struggle for or against. Some historians are very conscious about this aspect of their work and set out to write history with a clear 'message.' More often than not, before the bourgeois epoch the function of the historian was tied up to producing 'clear messages' for the state or the church. Some other historians, especially since the bourgeois epoch, pretend that there is no prescriptive elements in their works, that they are producing 'objective' knowledge ('knowledge about society'). "But," as Slater wrote,

even though the prescriptive element may be unconscious

or well hidden, it is nevertheless always present and later generations of historians can detect it only too easily. The prescription can be of 3 main kinds: for fundamental change, i.e., to advance the tide of history; for reform; and for continuity, i.e., to stem the tide of history.¹⁶

In fact, the denial of prescriptive elements is a form of existence in historical studies, of bourgeois ideology that denies exploitation, as the latter becomes integrated in the production process and requires no systematic ideological justification.

There is thus a politics involved in the very content of historical knowledge. This can only be grasped after a thorough understanding of the current social struggles (and their ideological expressions) which determine the questions historians set for themselves to answer as well as any socially produced knowledge. This is also facilitated by grasping the content of historical knowledge as it is specifically organized through its marks of historicity. Rarely, if ever, does historical knowledge leave the reader with no suggestion for action.

NOTES

1. Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx, *Collected Works* (Moscow, 1976), 5: 41-42.
2. Fredy Perlman, *Against His-story* (Detroit, 1983). The main thesis of this book is that history started with states.
3. Henry Slater, "Notes on the Production of Historical Knowledge," *Utafiti*, 6 (1984), 159-66.
4. I am referring to Anthony Skillen, *Ruling Illusions* (Hassocks, 1977), 21, 23, where it is shown that political "theorists write as if the state is that-which-keeps-order-in-the-world" that is, "a statist demand is posed as a requirement of logic."
5. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, 1962).
6. Krzysztof Pomian, "Le passé: de la foi à la connaissance," *Débat*, no. 24 (March 1983). I refer particularly to the discussion of marks of historicity in this article.
7. Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft* (New York, 1953), 79.
8. Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London, 1971); idem., *For Marx* (London, 1969); idem. and E. Balibar, *Reading Capital* (London, 1970).
9. Serge Robert, *Les révolutions du savoir: théorie générale des ruptures épistémologiques* (Longueville, Quebec, 1978), ch. 4.
10. In his *Problems in class analysis* (Boston, 1983), 71, G. Carchedi has proposed another classification of the sciences into the 'natural' and the 'social.' "Neither the social nor the natural scientist is free from social conditioning

in the very act of producing knowledge. The difference resides in the nature of the phenomena studied. Natural science is socially determined analysis of natural (i.e. non-socially determined) phenomena; social science is socially determined analysis of social (i.e., socially determined) phenomena. A further difference follows, i.e. that the social sciences become, the moment they become social phenomena, part of the real concrete which they study. Both social and natural sciences are social phenomena, . . . but only the former becomes part of the real concrete which it studies, through its action upon other social phenomena."

11. Ibid.
12. For further discussion of this important issue see Milton Fisk, "Dialectic and Ontology" in J. Mepham and D.H. Ruben, eds., *Issues in Marxist Philosophy* (Hassocks, 1979), 1: 117-43.
13. J. Witt-Hansen, "Marx's Method in Social Science and Its Relationship to Classical and Modern Physics and Mathematics," *Poznan Studies in the Philosophy of the Sciences and the Humanities*, 3 (1977), 1-41.
14. Kurt Hubner, *Critique of Scientific Reason* (Chicago, 1983), 177.
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