Education, radical politics and modernity in Southern Africa: the teaching life of Ali Fataar

Alan Wieder and Aslam Fataar
University of South Carolina and University of the Western Cape

Introduction

Oral history and teacher life stories are seldom simple—people are complex and their stories are not clear chronological journeys. Thus when I. B. Tabata divides Black South African teachers into those who were pawns of apartheid on one side, and 'teachers with the fighting spirit,' on the other, there is neglect of the many shades of individual teacher's stories during colonial and apartheid times (Constas, 1998; Rasool, 1999; Rive, 1964; Rive, 1990). Ali Fataar has spent his entire adult life as a teacher and 'politico' (political activist) fighting for democracy in southern Africa. Yet, like others in the struggle, his story is wide-ranging and there are many uncertainties. Arthur Hendricks was Fataar's student at Livingstone High School in the late 1930s and is currently a retired painter. He refers to himself as a Livingstonian and has fond memories of Ali Fataar. Fataar was Hendricks' teacher in Standard Six, Seven, and Eight and he still views him as a mentor. Zain Ebrahim attended Livingstone in the 1960s and like Fataar he spent many years in exile. He is currently the director of a large community radio station in Cape Town and is involved in alternative radio stations internationally. His memories of Fataar are very different than those of Arthur Hendricks and they include him remarking that he was one of those disaffected students who were treated disdainfully by Ali Fataar and some of his radical colleagues.

There were also varying views of Ali Fataar when he was a teacher in exile. The principal of the secondary school where he taught in Serowe referred to him as an 'old-fashioned teacher'. (Grant, 1991: 57) At the same time he is still in correspondence with his Botswana students and Moses Lekaukau who is presently an advocate and heads an electrification company, speaks of Fataar with great respect and refers to him as 'Father'. So who is Ali Fataar and how can we begin to portray him within the confines of a single article? What we do know is that he made a contribution to the struggle for democracy in southern Africa both as an educationist and 'politico'. We know that his story is unique, if for no other reason than that he taught in four countries and always stressed both educational excellence and political commitment. And finally, we know that his story can stand with the other South African teacher stories that are beginning to be told (Hendricks, 2002; Soudien, 2002; Unterhalter, 2002; Wieder, 2003).

We divide the article into five sections plus a conclusion and we begin with a discussion of our methodology in researching the teaching life of Ali Fataar. Sections on South Africa, Botswana, Zambia, and Zimbabwe during Fataar's life as a teacher are the body

of the article. Each section begins with a discussion of culture and politics and concludes with an oral history of Ali Fataar's life as an educationist stressing themes that are important to his story—teaching and politics, curriculum and language, and his relations with students and colleagues. Finally, in the conclusion we comment on Fataar's work as a political teacher within the context of modernity and post-modern and post-colonial perspectives.

Methodology

We spent six weeks interviewing Ali Fataar between January and March 2003. These interviews are part of Wieder's ongoing oral history project with teachers who fought apartheid. Aslam Fataar joined in these interviews for various reasons. He served as a gatekeeper as Ali Fataar had not been part of Wieder's earlier work. He also wanted to be involved in telling Ali Fataar's story because he is his grandnephew—the grandson of his brother. This of course demands that we provide caveats regarding insider-outsider research. Since our project with Ali Fataar and the writing of this article has a family member as a co-author, it is important to state at the outset that there are questions about Aslam Fataar's participation. Can he be an objective scholar as he asks his granduncle questions and writes part of Ali Fataar's story? Will he avoid complexity and conflict? Can he be a critical researcher?

Interestingly, it is the scholar Fataar who is the more demanding interviewer. Wieder is from the Studs Terkel school of oral history and does not view his role as cross-examining the interviewee. That doesn't mean that Wieder avoids asking critical questions and cannot be analytical as he co-writes this article, but it is Aslam Fataar who challenges his granduncle during the interviews. While Wieder sees his role as an interviewer as gently guiding the interviewee back on task, it is Aslam Fataar who questioned some of Ali Fataar's statements and pushed for greater theoretical and factual clarity during the interviews. The article is a combination of Wieder's belief in storytelling—of telling the story that Ali Fataar wants to tell—with Aslam Fataar's more post-modernist/post-colonialist theoretical perspective of interrogating his granduncle's story. While there has been a great deal written on the possibilities and problems of both insider and outsider research, (Glesne, 1999) there has been much less written on cooperative projects where both insiders and outsiders are the researchers. In this particular study we get the best of both worlds. While Aslam Fataar is the insider, he is much more analytical and critical in his questioning. He understands the nuances but works hard to step outside of his space as family member. Wieder brings an outsider perspective that allows him to be unaffected by the ideological confines of Ali Fataar's recollections and reflections. But most importantly Wieder is adamant about allowing Ali Fataar to tell the story he wants to tell.

Considering Wieder's view of oral history it is important that we acknowledge questions of history and memory and the veracity of the stories people tell. Although we will discuss this further in the conclusion, it is important to cite the compelling work of Michael Frisch (1990) and Peter Friedlander (1998), who both address questions of the personal story and the interviewer-interviewee relationship. Frisch studies what happens to memory as it becomes history and addresses the effects of class, race, ethnicity, gender, politics, and culture as they impact on the way we recall our past. Friedlander is more of a cross examining oral historian and he writes about the difficulty of communication. At times during our interviews with Ali Fataar, Aslam Fataar contested issues of substance in his granduncle's recollections just as Friedlander did in his work. The larger issue in this particular oral history is the place of Ali Fataar in the story he tells. This will be addressed as we tell the story he told us, but we should note be-

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fore we continue that this issue is magnified in telling Fataar's story. The authors of this article are well aware that the complexities of telling teacher stories includes how the teacher wants to be remembered, the questions we ask, how we edit the transcripts, and finally how we write the article. This is always true but we think it is more the case with Ali Fataar. So the final caveat has to do with oral history methodology in general and Ali Fataar in particular. Fataar is very proactive in recording his place in history. He knows how he wants to be remembered and that is the story he tells. We have presented that story, but we have also interrogated it.

South Africa

Ali Fataar's recollections and reflections of his life in South Africa stress politics and education. Although he worked on curriculum at Livingstone High School and has had lasting relationships with his South African students, he did not discuss either theme in his South African memories. In 2002 Julia Grey wrote a *Mail and Guardian* article on Ali Fataar. In the first paragraph she quotes Fataar, 'I was one of the young Turks who started the political struggle against apartheid education'. Fataar was born in 1917, long before the National Party instituted formal apartheid in 1948. He attended Livingstone High School, the school where he taught from 1938 until he went into exile in 1964. Prior to and throughout the apartheid years Livingstone was known for both its academic excellence and progressive politics. Fataar was nurtured by this environment, but credits his mother for his academic quests and his father for his 'radical' politics. He was also greatly affected by his parents' hard work during the depression when he and his siblings were obliged to work to help the family. His mother had six years of schooling, a major accomplishment for a woman of her generation and she facilitated his attending Livingstone because it was the only high school for Coloureds in their area: 'I don't know what was in my mother's mind, but it must have been her because she was literate'. Fataar recalls both good and bad teachers at Livingstone and his personal memories are of being top of his class and earning first class passes throughout high school. His early school memories reveal his confidence: 'I was such a brainy bastard they made me skip grade two and go to standard one (that is grade three)'.

Fataar's memories of his father provide the foundation for his 'radical' politics. Although he credits some of his Livingstone teachers for nurturing political consciousness, it is his memories of his father and the mosque that are most powerful: 'My father would come home and say the most radical things. I learned as a teenager not to just accept because the Imam says so. He would come home and say you mustn't follow people just because they say so. So that stuck in me till today'. This statement leads to interesting hypothetical questions that were not part of our discussions. For instance, there are scholars that view the Teachers' League of South Africa and the Non-European Unity Movement, the two organizations in which Ali Fataar was actively involved, as ideological rather then critical or radical (see Alexander, 1989).

Ali Fataar hoped to attend the University of Cape Town when he completed his studies at Livingstone but the only bursary went to another student, Ben Kies. So he enrolled in Zonnebloem, an Anglican teacher training institution for coloured South Africans. After completing that level of schooling he taught in Salt River in 1937 for a term and then moved to Livingstone in 1938 where he taught for twenty-six years. He completed his university degree by correspondence in 1943 through the University of South Africa, and focused his life on teaching and fighting against the colour bar and for democracy.

> *We were always fighting the colour bar system. Whether in education, schooling, health, training, govern-*

ment appointments, or politics. The young people, the young Turks, almost naturally rejected this whole question of we are different and therefore lower, we are inferior. We are not even human the way we are treated. Then the whole question politically we called ourselves the non-citizens, not citizens in the land of our birth. So that basically brought us into groups. We said we want the whole loaf of bread, why must we just have the bloody crumbs. So we could fight on political and educational issues.

Fataar joined the Teachers' League of South Africa (TLSA) and the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) and was actively involved when the younger more progressive members of the TLSA took power from their elders who they viewed as reactionary. He served as secretary at both the branch and national level and became involved in the political struggle at Livingstone as well as in the community. At Livingstone the issues included challenging the government syllabus and racial divisions. For example, Fataar was involved in bringing in non-traditional texts for students and fighting the Education Department when they attempted to remove black students from Livingstone High School.

In the community he belonged to the New Era Fellowship, National Anti-CAD (anti-Coloured Affairs Department) as well as the Teachers' League of South Africa and he emphasized the importance of class, not just race, throughout our discussions: 'It's a national liberation struggle against what you call apartheid. All the discrimination and oppression, we were one of the few organizations that linked oppression with class exploitation in the sense that the employing and farming class was exploiting for labour'. Fataar was influenced by Goolam Gool, Cissie Gool, I. B. Tabata and Ben Kies. He credits Dr Goolam Gool, a medical doctor and noted political activist, as his political mentor. Additionally, Fataar certainly does not dismiss the importance of the colour bar in South Africa. He speaks at length of the different types of oppression depending on one's shade and lauds TLSA stalwart, and Livingstone principal, E. C. Roberts, for his work in addressing racial discrimination. In addition to Roberts, his colleagues at Livingstone and the Teachers' League, Frank Grammar and Victor Wessels, are both praised by Fataar.

At Livingstone, Fataar and his colleagues set a tone that stressed both academic achievement and politics. They pushed students' formal studies—Fataar stressing the importance of literature, and organized the Livingstone Past Students Union (LPSU), which was a political group of Livingstonians that Fataar represented at National Anti-CAD meetings. While they pushed students towards a more relevant education, they introduced books that were often purchased at Paul Kosten's socialist bookstore, to provide counterpoints to the slanted historical and literary perspectives stressed in the segregated state curriculum. Fataar introduced students to the New Era Fellowship as well as, to student membership in the TLSA.

As senior teachers, Fataar and Grammar served as virtual assistant principals through the first decade of apartheid. They organized student schedules and led assemblies with Roberts that often consisted of political education. They stressed the rights of students as human beings, and taught non-racialism as a foundational principle. Fataar worked hard setting up the school library, which included books that weren't government approved. Outside the school he was active in the TLSA giving speeches locally and throughout the country. He also wrote articles on education and politics in the Non-European Unity Movement paper, *The Torch*, and the *Educational Journal*, which was published by the Teachers' League. Fataar spoke of a typical day:

Now when we were in the Teachers' League and anti-CAD Unity movement I was telling you that all of us worked 24 hours a day. I am studying through UNISA six subjects. So early in the morning you get up and make notes, you study and then have a meal and off down the road to Livingstone and teach till 3 or 4 and then come home

and there are political meetings, branch meetings right into the night and there is writing to be done, then preparation for tomorrow's lessons and books to be marked. Weekends and all, you never have a minute. Weekends you are out to conferences and holidays out to regional conferences. There was no time for cinema, fun or games. This was done all the time. The teachers had education so it's correct that they should play the role they have been playing and still playing. They are part of the oppressed anyway. Anyhow I think the role is played by the teachers correctly. Look we had to be in town at Abraham's school where he has the duplicating machine and we produced two or three bulletins a week. Now it's probably two a clock and there are no more trains or buses and so he takes his car and drops us in Claremont and by the time he gets home its probably five o clock in the morning. So that's the life we lived. So we had to raise funds. So at least once a month there is a big party in the house. So actually we were active all the time.

Fataar and his comrades were pushing issues of non-racialism, non-cooperation with the apartheid regime and its sympathizers, compulsory education for all children, equal funding of schools, and of course ultimately the vote. Ali Fataar and many of his TLSA colleagues paid dearly for their political work. Fataar, Grammar, Wessels, and also R.O. Dudley, all teachers at Livingstone, and many of their colleagues at other schools, were continually passed over for deserved promotions and were often visited at home and school by the government authorities. In the early 1960s they were banned, and although they were allowed to continue as teachers, there was continual harassment and threats of incarceration. The threats were not idle as their young Livingstone colleague, Neville Alexander, was arrested and ended up serving 12 years on Robben Island.

As general secretary of the TLSA, Fataar's life was dominated from the 1940s to the early 1960s by his activism and organizing among teachers and communities. He regularly attended meetings throughout the Western Cape, made fiery anti-government speeches, helped organize TLSA branches, and wrote articles for *The Torch*, the NEUM's newspaper. As a teacher Fataar continued in the tradition of many political activists teachers at the limited number of high schools for Coloureds, who wedded their pedagogy with anti-racist politics. Livingstone High School became a 'site of political struggle' for Fataar and his colleagues such as Richard Dudley and Victor Wessels. They exposed their students to a radical politicized curriculum and pedagogical repertoire, which produced large numbers of young people who would later take leading positions in the anti apartheid struggle and indeed the new post apartheid government.

Political developments in the 1960s however changed the political terrain entirely. Fataar was served with two banning orders during the early 1960s. This affected the nature of his political conduct generally, his movements, and associations with other comrades and political structures. The apartheid regime embarked on a vicious political clampdown on political activists during this period. The ANC Rivonia treason trial and subsequent life sentences of Nelson Mandela and his fellow treason trialists was the most visible manifestation of a state desperate to quell threats to its grand apartheid project. Having broken his banning orders on a number of occasions, and refusing to stop his political activism, the state turned the screws on Fataar when he was called in and interrogated for six hours by the Security Branch in December 1964. It dawned on him, as it did on his fellow activists in the Unity Movement, that their continued existence as a viable political movement was under threat by a repressive state intent on rooting out all black opposition. Exile became an option when Fataar experienced increased surveillance and intimidation by the police. His organization also adopted a position of persuading members to leave South Africa to set up new po-

litical structures in neighbouring countries. Fataar explains, 'at that point in 1964 I just had a feeling it was going to happen so when the word came, I thought, well, before they take me I'd better get out ... I can't stay. I must get out and thought if they have a big case against me, its Robben Island for me. Eventually I organised a run to the border by car and to Lobatse in Bostwana. That's where I joined with the others in exile'.

Botswana

Fataar went to Lobatse, about 75 kilometres from Gaborone, the capital of Botswana. Lobatse then was a small industrial town. Here Fataar met up with other exiles who also fled South Africa. He worked during most of 1965 in a shop in Lobatse, while renovating a house for his wife and small baby who joined him six months later. Botswana had at that time gained independence from Britain, first shedding its protectorate status in 1965, and then becoming an autonomous country on 30 September 1966. The moderate Bechuanaland Democratic Party became the ruling party with Seretse Khama, the country's first Prime Minister. Botswana was a small, sparsely populated rural country beset with many development challenges. Far from urban Cape Town and cut loose from long established political networks, Fataar had to adapt to an unfamiliar environment and create a viable existence for his family. While committed to building the organizational structures of a Unity Movement, his involvement in political activities had subsided. The ruling party in Botswana was not particularly welcoming of political exiles upsetting delicate political and economic relations with South Africa (Sillery, 1974: 155-181). The exiled movements thus never viewed Botswana as a place where they could rebuild their organizations. Fataar had thus intended Botswana as a temporary holding place on his way to Lusaka in Zambia where the Unity Movement had established a political presence.

Botswana however provided him with an opportunity to recreate his identity as a productive teacher during 1966 and 1967. Patrick van Rensburg offered him a job as an English teacher and Head of Department at Swaneng Hill School, the remarkable school he started in Serowe. Fataar was impressed with van Rensburg's vision of providing a school that discouraged any notion that education is just a ladder for personal ambition. As Bessie Head describes, 'Swaneng Hill School became a joint enterprise of academic and technical training known as "the Brigades"' (Head, 1981: 137). As one of very few high schools in the region, it attracted students from all over Botswana. Fataar recollects that, 'all the students had to pay was R70 a year towards tuition. They got a meal a day, weekends they had to form their own club where they had to put their coins in and cook something for the weekends'. He described life at the school: 'we had to build a hostel for the kids, showers, everything. They had to find water, water was scarce that year so we had to get pipes down there and pump it up and used a concrete mixer with a motor, and adapted it to pump water'. Fataar suggests that his experience with the kids taught him the importance of frugality in motivating children to learn:

> *I learnt here that when the stomach is not too full the head is clearer, they have little to eat in the morning they have something, porridge and may drink something warm and may have some sugar or something, but very frugal ... you got the idea that they were better students because of the ways they weren't being pampered with all the good things in life.*

Fataar helped prepare the students for the British O'level examinations. Many of them did well, given their poor backgrounds and lack of adequate prior schooling. The school attracted committed teachers, mostly volunteer expatriates from the UK, USA, Canada and South Africa. He found that he had to adapt his English teaching methodology to

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teach children with English as a third language. Fataar recalls that he had to be 'a performer on a stage and do the characters while they followed in their books, and the sonnets I made them learn by heart'. Nonetheless, his image as an old-fashioned teacher is borne out by his insistence on the explicit teaching of grammar. He resisted the newer approach of the younger teachers embedding grammar in the teaching of literature and creative writing, arguing that his approach was more suited to third language learners who had never been exposed to English books, newspapers and other media. In an argument about the use of a verb with an American teacher, 'I said to her, Joyce, this is English English, I know you are from America but Cambridge wants English English'. Fataar was credited with setting up and stocking the library with books solicited from Britain and Canada.

Politics and teaching non-racialism were linked for Ali Fataar. He taught his students in Botswana the same lesson that he taught at Livingstone.

> *I used to teach my students this concept of race and colour and say open your hands and show your hand to each other. Inside your hands is all the same colour. Soles of your feet too. The day you were born the skin was that colour. I'd say open your mouth, you all have white teeth. There will also be no one with 40 teeth, all have 32 teeth, all humans across the world. Therefore there are characteristics; 10 fingers, you can go through the whole lot, all humans are the same. That's how I used to teach right through to Botswana and Zambia.*

From his recollections of and reflections on his Serowe teaching experience, it is clear that Ali Fataar thought a great deal about reaching his students.

> *You had these youngsters who never speak English amongst themselves. They have very little to read—no newspapers. You had to find how to teach, the whole presentation and methodology was different to Cape Town. Fortunately, we had some books. They had to study literature as a subject as well. So I was amazed at the way they took to literature. They loved Shakespeare. I had to be a performer on a stage and they followed in the book. They also did Bernard Shaw. There was one African writer in six.*

Ali Fataar lights up when he speaks of the successes of his students from Serowe. He speaks of the student who studied law in Canada, and about someone who is high up in a prominent ministry in Botswana. He fondly recalls the woman who became the state meteorologist, the man who was later his physician in Zambia, as well as others.

Like his departure from South Africa, Ali Fataar left Botswana for Zambia very quickly. The dangerous arm of apartheid reached into Botswana, and there was a political call to Zambia. His sojourn at Serowe came to an end in 1967, after two years, when he and his family made their way to Zambia, lured by the promise of work as a teacher, and the opportunity to continue his political work for the Unity Movement at its newly established office in Lusaka.

Zambia

When Ali Fataar reached Zambia in 1968 the country was still in the early post-independence years. Great enthusiasm permeated the new state's attempts at modernizing its social and educational infrastructure. Schooling was expanded rapidly all over the country, funded by the lucrative copper mining industry. Zambia addressed the shortages in skilled human resources by establishing technical and vocational schools. Ali Fataar became part of the energy that had permeated Zambia's *modernization and development efforts.*

Fataar was lured to Zambia because I. B. Tabata had set-up political contacts and there was a teaching job waiting. His eleven years in the country included political activity, teaching at three different schools, national committee work on language and curriculum, and curriculum planning in the national minis-

try. Fataar began his work in Zambia as a teacher in Ndola, a mining town which was a three to four hour drive from Lusaka. During his two years in Ndola, Ali Fataar often spent weekends in Lusaka doing political organizing. This work included arranging training for Unity Movement activists and work attempting to arrange alliances and help from international comrades. Although political work became somewhat moribund from the early seventies until 1976, Fataar has some interesting political memories. For example, letters to Muslim countries were always sent under the name of Fataar or another Muslim, not under the name of the president, I. B. Tabata, which was usual procedure. Fataar became politically disillusioned in the 1970s, as he found himself at a political dead-end—the OAU did not support the Unity Movement in exile.

Instead he focused intensely on education. In January 1968 Ali Fataar went to teach in Ndola. His school was located about 12km outside of town and was a free boarding school that served the copper mining area. He found run down facilities and the house he was given on campus was mosquito infested and in poor shape as were all of the staff houses. The school had African administrators but the staff was mostly English and Indian expatriates while the students were African. He mentions racism on the staff when he first arrived: 'When I first moved into one house it was derelict and it took time to get all the fleas out. There was a bigger house and the white teachers said don't live there—the Africans lived there. So I said but I am an African. So we cleaned it out and lived there'.

Fataar became the head of English at this school and two issues became missions of a sort. While Fataar worked with students and provided books and started academic clubs, he also challenged excessive course offerings, an issue that he finally had succeeded in changing during his time in Lusaka, and involved himself in debates about the language of instruction, an issue that he remains passionate about in the new South Africa. Ali Fataar could not understand the logic of students taking and being tested in eight or nine subjects. He knew that it was too much for students' comprehension, and he also argued that it drained staff resources. His lifelong passion for English took on an added dimension in the context of what he thought was a pragmatic stance towards English as a medium of instruction in the absence of a technically developed common indigenous language. There were many languages among the students and although Fataar was and is sensitive to the importance of indigenous languages, he was convinced that in Zambia, and remains convinced today, that for there to be education for the 21st century, English must be the medium of instruction. In contrast to the findings of numerous research studies in similar situations, Fataar decried the importance of the mother tongue for cognitive and affective development in the first years of schooling. He makes two practical arguments—the first:

> *It became ingrained in me in Zambia. When I went to Lusaka it got really bad in the sense that they wanted a 20th century education system in the language used three centuries before with a very limited application to technology and modern methods'. The second example was personal and societal: 'So I said you know my son did medicine and I had to pay every year for a textbook and it's one of the most expensive books and that book has to be updated every year because the developments move so fast. So I said now you want it in an African language. You want that textbook that has to be updated in Bemba every year?*

> *Although Ali Fataar was comfortable in Ndola, he was transferred to the Munali School in Lusaka in 1970, much to the disappointment of the local chief who had valued the educational role Fataar had played in the village. The move to the city was probably so that he could be more involved in political activities although he says that political action went dead until 1976. Munali was the only secondary school for*

Africans and Fataar compared it to Trafalgar High School in Cape Town. He became the head of the English department but left for a four month trip to England and the European continent at the end of 1971 when he was awarded a British Council study fellowship in English linguistics at Cambridge. On this and a subsequent study trip to England in 1977 Fataar was exposed to new English language methodologies, which were aimed at second and third language English acquisition. His studies strengthened his view of the importance of English as medium of instruction. The Fataar family traveled throughout Europe and he met ex-students and was enthralled by Sweden.

For the first time we discovered what social democracy meant in action. Because here they had their own underground train/tube and then you stop and go up and land-up at flats all cheap rentals and fitted with fridge and so on in the kitchen and you lock-up and go to work. So we stayed in this flat enjoying social democracy. I thought I would mention that because it's the first time from the backdrop of Africa to see this affluence of a working-class society.

Ali Fataar studied for a month at Cambridge and was also offered a teaching position at an English secondary school. He declined the position to return to Africa and was given an appointment at a technical college, the Evelyn Hone College of Applied Arts and Commerce, when he returned to Lusaka. He spent a great deal of his time on curriculum development. At the college he was forced to deal with daily institutional problems, but he also became intensely involved in developing curricula across disciplines for industry and commerce, a great need in a fledgling society. He worked with a group of Canadian educators developing syllabi for technical education. He left the college to replace Morris Hommel at the ministry after he had previously aided Hommel by translating some of President Kenneth Kuanda's education speeches into Afrikaans for propaganda purposes. 'I became the head of a ten man group that was involved in developing for the technical side especially syllabuses for anything from carpenters to pilots to paramedics. Must have been 50 to 70 areas that we had to develop'.

Ali Fataar became t disaffected in Zambia in the late 1970s because he believed that his work may have been undermined because of an unstated policy of injudiciously privileging black Zambians in appointments in his unit. But more objectively, Fataar's disaffection should be understood in the context of Zambia entering a period of rapid economic decline in the mid 1970s caused by falling copper prices. Educational achievements of the late 1960s were rapidly reversed and enthusiasm for the country's development began to wane (see Kelly, 1991) Although he was still valued and supported by people in leadership roles, he came to see his ideas discounted by people on the ground as he was forced to employ people in his department. Fortunately, he saw great possibilities as Zimbabwe was close to independence.

Zimbabwe

It was 1947 when Fataar visited the old Rhodesia representing the Unity Movement. At that time he met a young Rhodesian student, Stan Culverwell, who subsequently visited Unity Movement people in Cape Town. Culverwell invited Fataar and his wife, Ursula, to the Zimbabwe independence celebration in 1980. It is quite remarkable that Ali Fataar was part of three Independence Day celebrations in Southern Africa. Besides Zimbabwe, Fataar was in Botswana in 1966 and of course in South Africa in 1994. In 1981 Culverwell brought the Fataars to Zimbabwe to work as educators in the newly independent state. Being the political animal that he was, Fataar found Zimbabwe an exciting place. At independence the ZANU (PF) ruling party and government's ideology was based on scientific socialism founded on Marxist Leninist principles, with the objective of establishing

an egalitarian and democratic society and thus redressing the injustices of the colonial past (Zvobgo, 1986: 30). While there may have been political incongruence between this radical transformation rhetoric and the practical realities which the Lancaster House bequeathed the new state, a number of creative spaces and opportunities did exist in education and other social spheres for political educators like Ali Fataar to experiment with radical educational models.

Initially the Fataars both taught about 20 km outside of Harare, but Ali Fataar was quickly brought into the Ministry of Education. His work included writing speeches for the minister and other officials, observing teachers, teacher training, and of course curriculum development. He did this from 1981 until 1987, when he again became a teacher, this time at a private college, when he was asked to retire from the ministry because of his age. It should be noted at this point that when Ali Fataar began his work in Zimbabwe he was 64 years old. He was respected by Culverwell and others and he was called upon to write speeches that connected education and politics. Ironically, he was largely inactive in relation to South African politics because the Unity Movement was mostly on the sidelines—the African National Congress and Pan African Congress received prominence from Zimbabwean officialdom. Fataar spoke at length about two of the speeches he wrote:

Now every week I have two speeches to write. We had this big conference on curriculum in 1982 and you had people from Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Europe, Britain, Australia, Canada. So this chap I now see is a judge, Edmond Gwawe, was my head and he had to present a paper at the conference and said to me. 'Ali, can you prepare the paper for me?' He said, 'It must be on education for socialism'. I said, 'Why do you ask me?' He said, 'Because you are from South Africa'. I said, 'I will try, but I'm not hot on socialism. I'm more on education and independence'.

When he was heavily involved in language issues and curriculum (again) he was asked by Culverwell to prepare a speech for the minister: 'The minister wants a speech on the question of English so I bump out a speech and said the university has said English must become a compulsory subject for those doing science and technology'. The minister did not like the speech and he summoned Fataar who spoke of his recollections: 'So the minister is fuming and says I am the one who lays down policy, not that committee of yours. So I'm not a damn concerned. He looks at me like I should quiver in my boots'.

As we have already noted, Ali Fataar in his role as an inspector observed teachers in the field. From this work he learned that many teachers needed a great deal of teacher training. He worked very closely with Fay Chung, who was a socialist freedom fighter in both Mozambique and Zimbabwe, in both teacher training and curriculum development.

What I discovered at this period in Zimbabwe is that we had to get the teachers out the classroom because about 50% in the primary area were completely unqualified. They merely walked into teaching jobs if they had std. 6 and some even teaching std. 6. That was the situation with regard to education there. It was really pathetic. So Fay Chung and others became aware of this so they started a system whereby they would give the unqualified teachers 12 months of teacher training and then they would put them into colleges and lecturers to teach them to teach. And then put young people with O levels into the schools in the meantime and they got the full salary and the government...then there was a lot of money and we had to in-service them on English. Every so often we would go right around the country to have these conferences. That meant they were getting more trained teachers in the classrooms.

AAli Fataar worked as both a curriculum developer and lecturer in this unique teacher-training program. He also worked directly with Fay Chung and professors at the university in

developing English language curricula from primary level through the university. Many of his ideas came from his years of educational experience including both the Cambridge and other experiences. What is interesting is that even though independence had come through an armed struggle that forced old Rhodesia to the negotiating table, and even though an additional aspect of Fataar's work was teaching English to socialist Cuban medical doctors, the English curriculum that was promoted, in correspondence with the Cambridge examinations, was highly traditional. When we asked if they changed anything he responded:

> *No. The only thing is we added African writers. And even the recent ones like Bessie Head and one or two Indian writers. We felt that it would appeal more to the African student and there were some good titles that worked very well. You still had Shakespeare, Shaw, English novels.*

Ali Fataar worked with Fay Chung and other educators to accomplish a great deal in the young Zimbabwe. In 1987 he was retired because of his age but he immediately began teaching English at a private college in Harare. The school was completely integrated in terms of race, and Fataar taught there for two years and again retired, only teaching occasional classes at the polytechnic in Harare thereafter. When the South African government removed some restrictions for political exiles in 1990, Ali Fataar traveled home to Cape Town, ending 26 years as an educator and political activist in exile.

Coming home: comments and considerations

Ali Fataar tells a fascinating story. He has a remarkable memory. Personal narratives, as with all forms of testimony, are selective, vivid in certain parts, clouded in others, even distorted. The oral historian has to be aware of overstatement and understatement, of selective accounts, and even conscious omissions. But, the authenticity of the story is not at issue. Our methodology has been to let Fataar tell his own story as a political activist and teacher because we think it is a fascinating example of one person's life unfolding in four different countries. While Fataar is keen on shaping the way he should be remembered, and while emphasis on the personal featured throughout the interviews, a picture emerged of a man who lived a full life in service of his community, nation and continent. Committed as he was to a radical humanist political vision, it is his activism as a teacher and activist, his ability to go beyond the call of duty that punctuates his story. What is remarkable is that his strong and vibrant politicised comportment is marked throughout his teaching life by a strong will, pride and stability. He never gives the impression that he wavered in his political and educational commitments. Once cast in the formative years of his life, heavily socialised within an anti imperialist, radical tradition, we get the impression that he carried his political views and attitudes with confidence throughout his life. And, while others may see this as similarly doctrinaire to the political tradition he subscribes to, it enabled Fataar to reproduce in each new context a creative, hardworking, and progressive attitude to the task at hand. He made a productive contribution, in spite of he and his family having to adapt to new and unfamiliar surroundings.

A very powerful teleological commitment to education runs through Ali Fataar's story. He believes strongly in the emancipatory quality of education, on the basis of which all people, especially the black downtrodden, would be set free. We suggest that this has to do with the traditional Anglican education that he was exposed to in his schooling years. Young competent white, British teachers seemed to have made a great impression on him, as did the need to recite English poetry, the reading of classical English literary texts and the speaking of proper English. His politicisation also took place on the basis of read-

John van der Vyver was the National Secretary for the Southern African Society for Education from 1989 until his death in January 2002. John was, in all respects, a dedicated and committed member of the Society and a National Secretary who managed more aspects of the society than would have been generally expected. In fact, he acted as the National Secretary, Treasurer and annual conference organizer all in one. John would contact the region which was to host the conference early on in the year and then work with the organizing committee from the start, identifying the theme of the conference and sending out notices by postal and electronic mail to all the members of the society and delegates of previous conferences, of whom he kept an up-to-date record. John would then receive the abstracts and arrange them according to the sub-themes of the conference, in preparing the conference programmed. After each conference he would make arrangements for conference papers to be bound into copies of conference proceedings of one or two volumes. John continued to involve himself in the affairs of the society in this dedicated way even during the period which witnessed to the deterioration of his health. And so it can be truly said that John was the central pillar of the Southern African Society of Education, and it might well be that the organization may never successfully fill the vacuum that was created by his untimely death. John will be deeply missed by all loyal "Sasenites". John's contribution can never really be captured in words.

Professor Philip Higgs
University of South Africa
Department of Educational Studies