

Literacy, Power, and Democracy in Mozambique

The Governance of Learning from
Colonization to the Present

Judith Marshall



Literacy, Power, and Democracy in Mozambique

Conflict and Social Change Series

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First published 1993 by Westview Press

Published 2018 by Routledge
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Marshall, Judith, 1942–

Literacy, power and democracy in Mozambique : the governance of
learning from colonization to the present / by Judith Marshall.

p. cm. — (Conflict and social change series)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-8133-8140-1

1. Literacy—Social aspects—Mozambique—History—20th century.
2. Literacy—Political aspects—Mozambique—History—20th century.
3. Literacy programs—Mozambique—History—20th century.

I. Series.

LC158.M85M37 1993

302.2'244'09679—dc20

92-47018
CIP

ISBN 13: 978-0-367-01608-1 (hbk)

*To the women and men in Mozambique whose lives,
struggles and dreams I shared -- working to
build "people's power" and dismantle apartheid.*



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Acronyms

ABE	Adult Basic Education
AIM	Mozambique Information Agency
CEP	Popular Education Collectives
CFM	Mozambique Railway
CIM	Matola Industrial Company
DNAEA	National Directorate of Literacy and Adult Education
DNEA	National Directorate of Adult Education
DPSEM	Provincial Directorate of Statistical Services for Mozambique (colonial period)
FRELIMO	Mozambique Liberation Front
GD	Dynamizing Group
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INDE	National Institute for the Development of Education
KIEC	Kurasini International Education Centre
MONAP	Mozambique Nordic Agricultural Programme
NES	National Education System
NESAM	Nucleus of Mozambican Secondary Students
OMM	Mozambican Women's Organization
OTM	Mozambican Workers' Organization
OJM	Mozambican Youth Organization
ONP	Mozambican Teachers' Organization
PRE	Economic Recovery Programme
PRES	Social and Economic Recovery Programme
RENAMO	Mozambican National Resistance
SEE	External Education Service
SDA	Social Dimensions of Adjustment
UDRA	Food Branch Management Unit
UNEMO	Union of Mozambican Students
WENELA	Witwatersrand Native Labour Association



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Preface

This study explores the relations between literacy and "people's power" in the context of Mozambique's project of socialist construction. It analyzes the meanings and practices of literacy for women and men in a factory setting through an ethnography of Matola Industrial Company (CIM). Literacy is understood not simply as language skills, but as the complex interplay of language meanings and practices based as much on class, race and gender as on grammar and syntax. Literacy is also understood as integrally related to state formation.

Three historical chapters explore how the CIM workers brought to the classroom social constructions of "schooling," of the power of literacy, and of themselves as "legitimate" -- or "illegitimate" -- users of language(s) and bearers of knowledge. These constructions were shaped under Portuguese colonialism, where schooling was signalled as the way to bridge the distance between "savage" and "civilized" but which worked to create "failure" instead. A radical recasting of what it meant to be "illiterate" emerged in the liberated areas and in the vibrant literacy movement at independence. National literacy campaigns after 1978 further broadened access to schooling but showed a growing tendency to formalization and bureaucratization. The illiterate again became an administrative category whose "deficiencies" needed remedying rather than the fundamental resources for socialist construction.

Chapters 5-8 analyze literacy at CIM, exploring the organization of time and space for particular kinds of social communication in the classroom and on the shop floor and the impact of interlocking factory hierarchies, organized through class, race/ethnicity and gender, on literacy. Chapter 9 reflects on these experiences of literacy as indicative of fundamental problems in the broader process of socialist reconstruction, and points to contemporary signs of a renewed pedagogy of empowerment.

Judith Marshall



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Acknowledgments

This study of the relations between literacy, "people's power" and state formation in Mozambique emerges from an association with the Frelimo Party and the struggle of the Mozambican people over the past two decades. The contrast between the hope and promise of Mozambique during my first visit as Oxfam-Canada representative just after independence in 1976 and the devastation today would be hard to overstate. The apartheid regime has orchestrated a slow destruction extending to every rural district, every point of economic infrastructure, and every basic service. The shallow roots of the socialist culture in the making have not stood up well to the onslaught.

I would be the last to argue that the external factors are the definitive ones. Nonetheless, at many points during the study, as I focussed critically on the way internal social relations created or denied a space for "people's power," I felt the need for a more adequate device to signal the constant impact of this all-pervasive war. Certainly during the 1978-84 period when I lived in Mozambique and during the research carried out in 1985 and 1986 for this study, I was intensely aware of how much the systematic destructive power of the apartheid regime on Mozambique's doorstep defined the parameters of the possible in constructing socialism. It is not surprising that Graça Machel, the Minister of Education, could say during the 10th Anniversary celebrations in 1985 that the main thing to celebrate was Mozambique's survival -- as a republic, and as a people's republic. Now, as a result of the 1990 constitutional amendments, it is a "people's" republic no longer.

I am indebted to a great many people for making this study possible. The Mozambican friends and colleagues who contributed to the study are far too many to name individually, but they will recognize themes of our endless discussions woven throughout the chapters. Many of these discussions about what literacy was and could be came together in the Manga project. A special acknowledgment goes to those most closely linked to Manga -- Domingos Chigarire, Helena Francisco, Carlos Fumo,

Antonio Gonçalves, Leonardo Nhantumbo, Aldovanda Martins and Teresa Veloso. The revitalization of literacy emerging from that project, and its very critical assessment of how literacy had come to be done in Mozambique, gave me encouragement not to soften the negative aspects encountered in the CIM literacy center where I did my research.

To the Ministry of Education and to the CIM staff and workers who facilitated that research, I owe a debt of enormous gratitude. Particular thanks go to the CIM literacy students and teachers themselves, the Director of Human Resources and Economy, Abdul Carimo, and the staff of the Training Department, Samuel Zita, Aurélio Tembe and Lopes Chigoiane.

One of the richest aspects of my many years of association with Mozambique and southern Africa was the community of solidarity activists who came and went, carrying on throughout an extended conversation about fundamental questions of socialist transition and people's power. I owe particular debts of gratitude to Angélica Aguilera, Sam Barnes, Julie Cliff, Lucia Echeopar, Polly Gaster, Ole Gjersted, Joe Hanlon, Kenneth Hermele, Anton Johnston, Sheila Katz, Dot Keet, Don Kossick, Denise Kouri, Jo Lee, Agneta Lind, Susan McCord, Barry Pinsky, Otto Roesch, Chris Rosene, Albie Sachs, John Saul, Pat Saul, Teresa Smart, and Stephanie Urdang.

The trip to Nicaragua and Brazil during the course of the research served to draw me once again into the center of debate and discussion about popular education. Of the old and new friends who emerged in the context of the trip and whose influence can be felt on this study, special thanks are due to Carlos Alberto Afonso, Cleyde Fernandes Afonso, Rick Arnold, Marcos Arruda, Eduardo Baez, Bev Burke, Deb Barndt, D'Arcy Martin, Malena de Montis, Maria Nakano, Herbet de Souza, Joao Francisco de Souza and Rosa Maria Torres.

I wish to acknowledge the extraordinary support, encouragement and stimulation from many colleagues, both students and staff, in the Department of Sociology in Education in OISE. Their commitment to critical social science as a useful tool in social change and their own involvement in multiple issues and struggles made it a congenial working environment, encouraging rigorous scholarship and activism simultaneously. Special thanks go to Pramela Aggarwal, Kari Dehli, Jenny Horsman, Nancy Jackson, Linzi Manicom, Judith Millen, and Alice de Wolff, with whom I met on an ongoing basis for mutual sharing of our work.

An enormous debt of gratitude, respect and affection is owed to Philip Corrigan for his extraordinary contribution to my stay at OISE. The reflections on the Mozambican experiences would have been cast in a

much narrower frame without his steady flow of commentary and documentation to push back boundaries and his phenomenal capacity and availability to engage with other people's texts and lives.

Encouragement to make the study more accessible came from many sources, one being educators in South Africa, anxious to learn the lessons of their neighbours. A special thanks is due to Shirley Walters and the staff at CACE at the University of the Western Cape for including the study in their thesis series and for stimulating seminar discussions and links with literacy groups. Another special thanks is due to Naomi Reimer for her work in formatting.

Finally, I wish to thank my immediate family for their strong support and encouragement for my sustained contact with Africa over the years, and the many ways they have facilitated and shared in my maintaining a life rooted in two realities.

J.M.



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Literacy: People's Power/ Assimilation of a Social Order

When we consider the first use to which writing was put, it would seem quite clear that it was first and foremost connected with power; it was used for inventories, catalogues, censuses and instructions; in all instances, whether the aim was to keep a check on material possessions or human beings, it was the evidence of the power exercised by some men over other men and over worldly possessions.

(Conversations with Levi-Strauss
Quoted in Carbonnier 1969)

Houses are houses and the more of them the better; but education is never just "education" – it is the assimilation of a social order.

(Quentin Hoare: Quoted in Hoyles 1977:35)

... the collective skills and energies of workers and peasants are the major productive forces of socialist construction. What socialist construction should also make possible is the actualization of the dreams . . . the aspirations and hopes of the masses. These too are real resources for socialism.

(Corrigan and Sayer 1984:48)

"Literacy," whether in scholarly texts, policy documents or as "common sense" knowledge, tends often to be taken as an unqualified good, a mark of individual advancement and broader social progress. There are common day-to-day assumptions at work about what it means to be literate -- employable, integrated into society, able to cope with work and family, having access to books and therefore knowledge. There are equally strong assumptions at work about the "pathology" of being illiterate -- marginality, incompetence, deprivation, being a ward of

society. Economic backwardness, unemployment and technological redundancy are laid at the feet of illiteracy. Conversely literacy skills are signalled as the key to higher productivity, stable family life, competence in consumer society and informed political action at the ballot box. Literacy rates are also taken to be meaningful indicators for measuring a Third World nation's readiness for "development."

Built into this conceptualization of literacy is a positivist vision of human evolution, unfolding through the centuries, catching up "backward" nations into an inexorable process of "modernization." There is a "developmentalist" logic built in, an implicit assumption that the growth of mass literacy that took place in the northern hemisphere will now inexorably reach the mainly southern countries making up the "Third World." This concept of literacy has also tended to be adopted uncritically by Third World leaders themselves over the post several decades. Third World policy makers, whatever path for development they have espoused, have placed an exaggerated amount of faith in the power of mass schooling. They have seen in literacy the promise of an end to backwardness and marginalization, a pathway to modernity and economic development.

As Quentin Hoare has pointed out, however, education must be distinguished from other social services, such as housing or health care. While these can be treated as "goods" to be shared more equally and increased in purely quantitative ways, there is a very special ambiguity attached to education:

For on the one hand, it represents a vital human *need* -- common to all societies and all people in some form, and as basic as subsistence or shelter. On the other hand, it is a fundamental component of the power structure in any society -- the means whereby assent is secured to the values and privileges of the dominant class. Education, in fact, is the point at which vital needs and power structure immediately intersect. It is thus never neutral or "innocent," as the other social services can sometimes be.

(Quoted in Hoyles 1977:35)

A more critical investigation of the path of mass literacy in western social development, while it in no way denies the liberating power of literacy, shows literacy also to have been a powerful force for broader processes of social control in the emerging capitalist nation states. Mass literacy, the imposition of a language, a way of speaking it, a privileging of certain kinds of experience into knowledge, a regulation of texts, certification for mastery of those texts and not others within a hierarchical system of state-sponsored schooling -- all these have been integral to new ways of containment and subordination. Behind the social construction

of literacy which posits literacy as an unqualified good, and the more of it the better, lies a history of state-sponsored public schooling that has more to do with large-scale projects of moral regulation and social control than with individual or collective liberation.

Tracing the path in European and later North American social development from the oral culture of the medieval era to the restricted literacy of the early modern era to the mass literacy that emerged from about 1930 onwards, one finds a gradual, uneven, and at times contradictory process. The shift from oral to literate modes took place over a lengthy period during which the two modes interpenetrated so deeply that any idea of one flourishing, without the other was unthinkable. They were also interconnected² as differentiation. Twelfth century charters were addressed to "all those seeing and hearing these letters" and often ended with "good-bye." By the thirteenth century they were already more impersonally cast with such phrases as "Let all persons present and future know." A similar change took place with regard to wills which, until the thirteenth century, had been basically oral acts, even when recorded, depending on spoken wishes heard by witnesses. By the end of the thirteenth century, the validity of the will depended on its being in the correct documentary form and not on verbal assurances of witnesses. Thus the shift from memory to written records proceeded gradually. (Clanchy 1979)

If in the middle ages in Europe, there was a period when the powers of the oral and the written were intermingled so that the binding power of texts and signatures was doubly guaranteed by the reverence shown to the physical form of the text, this could also be found in early missionary accounts of their activities. Studies of the first contacts between missionaries and Africans in southern Africa by Jean Comaroff point to this appropriation of the power of the word through actions involving the actual texts.

Like the power to transform the world through ritual, literacy seems to have been understood less as an acquired skill than an internal mystical power: the treatment of the body with the written word and newsprint was later to become a regular part of Tswana healing, especially among the illiterate poor.

(Comaroff 1985:203)

There are innumerable problems in giving precise accounts of literacy in the middle ages, as Michael Clanchy's very illuminating work makes clear. One is that the very accounts of the period use the terms of "litteratus-illiteratus" and "clericus-laicus" in very particular ways. These cannot be translated into their modern equivalents as a basis for

determining whether knights listed as "litteratus" or various groupings listed as "clericus" were literate in the twentieth century sense of that word. (Clanchy 1979)

Another difficulty is the imposition of contemporary assumptions about coupling reading and writing, and about a close association between literacy and spoken languages. Writing was a skill quite distinct from reading and reading was more often linked with speaking aloud than with eyeing script. The variety of written and spoken languages added their own complexities.

The variety also obstructed the rapid spread of literacy, in the modern sense of the majority of people acquiring a minimal capacity to read and write the language they spoke. Elementary instruction in reading and writing started in Latin because that was the traditional language of literacy and sacred Scripture. Those who wrote in vernaculars, whether in Middle English or French, were building novel and complex structures on a foundation of Latin. Neither Middle English nor French was sufficiently standardized . . . to become the basis of elementary instruction in reading and writing until well after 1380. If a person in Edward I's reign had learned to read in English or French but not in Latin, he could never become litteratus nor could he have understood the majority of writings circulating in his own life-time because these were in Latin. English and French had to have become common business and literary languages before it was practical or desirable to initiate literate skills with them.

(Clanchy 1979:22,23)

The powerful institutions of the church and the legal professions had tended to maintain literacy as their preserve during the middle ages. During the mercantile era that preceded the emergence of capitalism, however, literacy was already a vital tool for merchants and navigators. (Hoyle 1977:17) The invention of the printing press at the end of the fifteenth century clearly brought about further dramatic changes.

The Printing Press -- and a World Mediated by Texts

The pioneering work of Elizabeth Eisenstein in *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (Eisenstein 1979) begins to document this little acknowledged revolution in communications and the relationships between the communications shift and other developments associated with the transition from medieval to early modern times. While Eisenstein admits readily to printing's role in spurring the spread of literacy, her main project is to trace not the shift from oral to literate culture, but from one kind of literate culture to another. The transition

from scribal culture to print culture created a literate environment of a totally different nature.

Eisenstein makes a set of thought-provoking conjectures on the impact of printing on western society and thought. (Eisenstein 1981) She singles out four major areas: dissemination, standardization, editing and preservation. First, the mere fact of dissemination and access provided by printed texts ended the traditions of wandering scholars travelling to consult texts or commentators spending a life-time on single texts. Suddenly texts were available. The first century of printing was characterized by intellectual ferment as new combinations of old ideas suddenly made accessible resulted in entirely new systems of thought.

The impact of standardization was profound. Textually mediated representations of experience were available for the first time. Some of the most important were the pictorial statements -- maps, charts, diagrams, the uniform reference guides such as calendars, thesauruses, dictionaries, the regular systems of notation -- grammatical, mathematical, musical. All of these prefigured major developments in science and bureaucracy, whole ways of viewing day-to-day experience and mediating that experience through texts.

Similarly, the printing conventions having to do with editing and reorganizing texts led to procedures of codifying, clarifying, cataloguing. Built-in aids to the reader appeared -- title pages, graduated type, running heads, footnotes, tables of contents -- all of which gave new access and new ways of viewing reality. From this came rational systems, new ways of bureaucratic organization, ranging from law books offering legal precedents and the beginnings of a codified legal system to new views of history, science and literature.

The very fact of preservation had radical implications for patterns of cultural and institutional change. The energies devoted by scribal culture to seeking out and re-copying documents gave way to fixed bodies of literature widely disseminated, a textually mediated sense of self and world beginning to emerge, the beginning of the modern knowledge industry. All of this had huge ramifications for state formation.

Studies of dynastic consolidation and/or of nationalism might well devote more space to the advent of printing. Typography arrested linguistic drift, enriched as well as standardized vernaculars, and paved the way for the more deliberate purification and codification of all European languages. Randomly patterned, sixteenth-century type-casting largely determined the subsequent elaboration of national mythologies on the part of certain separate groups with multilingual dynastic states. The duplication of vernacular primers and translations contributed in other ways to nationalism. A "mother's" tongue learned "naturally" at home would be

reinforced by inculcation of a homogenized print-made language mastered while still young when learning to read. During the most impressionable years of childhood, the eye would first see a more standardized version of what the ear heard. Particularly after grammar schools gave primary instruction on reading by using vernacular instead of Latin readers, linguistic "roots" and rootedness in one's homeland would be entangled.

(Eisenstein 1979:61/62)

Ivan Illich puts forward the same line of argument in the examination of "vernacular values" in his provocative study, *Shadow Work*. (Illich 1981) Illich explores the moment in fifteenth century Europe when women and men were taken from their immediate world which included ready communicative competence in multiple local languages to a standardization of language and text. He argues that whatever power for domination was gained by Queen Isabella of Spain in authorizing the famed voyage of Christopher Columbus in 1492 pales into insignificance against the power for domination gained through another project which gained royal support at the time. This was Elio Antonio de Nibrija's first Spanish grammar.

Literacy and Protestantism

Mass literacy proceeded, then, through a slow process of putting down roots, a trajectory not to be confused with the history of schooling, for in fact the two did not proceed at the same rate nor were they subject to the same gravitational pulls. Of these, there were many -- the printing press, Protestantism and the emergence of capitalism all being fundamental ones.

The restricted literacy of the middle ages religion in which the clergy were sole deposites and interpreters and preached to the ignorant masses gave way to Protestantism. This meant not only mass access to the "book" but differing interpretations of it -- and entry to a whole new age. In some countries state and church combined to regulate literacy. In Sweden, for example, literacy and religion were integrally linked with successful certification in literacy necessary by the local priest as a prerequisite for marriage. Nor was this evangelical zeal nationally bounded. The Protestant missionary societies that formed in the nineteenth century took their preoccupation with individual, direct access to scripture to the far corners of the earth, and encouraged a vast enterprise of codifying local languages and providing translations of scripture into multiple tongues.

The great religions of the Book, Protestantism, soon to be joined by the Counter Reformation, could probably have made do with a modicum of reading ability on the part of the faithful. . . . But the market economy, backed by and relying upon the machinery of the centralized state, expanded the role of writing as a necessary condition of modernization. (Furet & Ozouf 1977 in Graff 1981:216/217)

Literacy and Economic Development: Which Comes First?

The detailed history of literacy in Europe and North America from the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries has only begun to be reconstructed.¹ An important theme of these studies is a re-examination of the link between literacy and economic development. While there is a good deal of debate about ways of measuring literacy and its actual incidence (Stone 1969; Sanderson 1972; Cressy 1980), none of the detailed case studies of literacy bears out the widely held notion of a direct, causal link between literacy and economic growth. Yet this argument continues to be held dear by the human capital school of education (Blaug 1970) and those espousing theories for Third World development based on minimum literacy levels for economic take-off (Anderson and Bowman 1965), "modernization" (Almond 1960; Apter 1965), "stages of economic growth" (Rostow 1960), or the 1990 World Bank rediscovery of the social dimensions of adjustment.

In England in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, schools were specialized institutions for instruction in literacy skills. Few attended regularly or stayed longer than a year or two. Practical skills were learned through households and work groups as part of a broad pattern of socialization of which apprenticeship is a well-known but formalized example.

Thus insofar as economic growth in this period entailed the acquisition of a large number of practical skills by a growing proportion of the population, developments in literacy and education were probably irrelevant to it. And, insofar as economic growth resulted from the increased productivity of labor brought about by the shift from domestic to factory production, literacy and education were also probably irrelevant, for many of the new industrial occupations recruited a largely illiterate work force, so much so that many industrial communities were markedly more illiterate than their neighbours.

(Schofield 1973:213)

There is little basis historically, then, for positing universal relationships between literacy and economic growth. In fact, for England, at least, the usual causal relationships between literacy and economic

growth might profitably be reversed. The reduction in illiteracy in nineteenth century England would appear more as a cultural change brought about by economic growth than as one of the causes of growth. (Graff 1981:213)

What is clear from these studies of literacy in western social development is the multiplicity of experiences of mass literacy and the complexity of the inter-relationships between literacy and other social processes. These include language codification, the printing press, the Protestant reformation, industrialization and urbanization, to name but a few. We can anticipate equally complex and inter-related factors shaping the process of literacy for the societies of Africa, Asia and Latin America, drawn into the vortex of western social development in subordinate roles through colonialism and expansion of the capitalist system.

Literacy as State Formation

Current debates on the conceptualization of "state" and "state formation" are highly suggestive for new ways to think about mass literacy. Current conceptualizations of the state move away from seeing the state as the long arm of the ruling class, a straightforward reflex of whatever social class holds economic power. They also reject the crude base-superstructure interpretation of society so prevalent within the Marxist tradition, with a neat division into an "economic base," with its reality derived from the material, over against another order of reality or "superstructure," the realm of the state, along with religion, education, the media and culture.²

The state can perhaps better be understood as neither instrumental nor superstructural but as relational. State formation understood in this way becomes the shifting constellation of forms and institutions and practices that work together to organize a particular social order. While instruments of naked control and coercion form part of that repertoire, the more interesting state forms are those less often identified. Production in a given society is organized through a set of economic *and social* relations. The social relations of production are formed by the seemingly neutral sets of institutions for ordering the day to day running of society, shaping subjectivities and constructing a social and moral order such as bureaucracies, legislation, the media and education systems. They include the "official" accounts of events and history, the working up of representations of past experience in ways that organize time and space, creating political subjects with a particular sense of identity as community or nation.³

The state, then, is best understood as an ideological project. (Abrams 1988) Its extensive bases of power are located not just in the organization of production but in the richly variegated texture of moral, cultural and habitual forms and institutions. There is an ongoing process of structuring at any given historical moment to legitimize, de-legitimize and re-legitimize a given social order.

In tracing out the development of state forms under capitalism, the questions of language, literacy and textually mediated forms of governance are fundamental. From a social world characterized by face to face contact with oral accounts of direct experience in multiple mother tongues came a movement towards forms of textually mediated experience in standardized language forms. The role of printing was central to this process of creating or breaking down a sense of "national" consciousness.

Printing "preserved and codified, sometimes even created" certain vernaculars. Its absence during the sixteenth century among small linguistic groups "demonstrably led" to the disappearance or exclusion of their vernaculars from the realm of literature. Its presence among similar groups in the same century ensured the possibility of intermittent revivals or continued expansion. Having fortified language walls between one group and another, printers homogenized what was within them, breaking down minor differences, standardizing idioms for millions of writers and readers, assigning a peripheral role to provincial dialects. The preservation of a given literary language often depended on whether or not a few vernacular primers, catechisms or Bibles happened to get printed (under foreign as well as domestic auspices) in the sixteenth century. When this was the case, the subsequent expansion of a separate "national" literary culture ensued. When this did not happen, a prerequisite for budding "national" consciousness disappeared; a spoken provincial dialect was left instead.

(Eisenstein 1969 quoted in Graff 1981:178)

Furet and Ozouf make the point that it is writing that truly marks the break with orality and the power of oral tradition. A new way of relating to the social and natural world is created, through an individualized, silent, internal exercise. Oral culture was public and collective; written culture was private, and personal. Such a transformation of the dominant mode of communication modified the whole social fabric, individualizing its members.

Face to face discussions presupposes close neighbourliness, whereas the written word multiplies and standardizes information, for an intellectually individualized, geographically scattered, world. . . . What now

underwrites inter-individual relations is no longer the immemorial utterances of old men, acting as guardians of local jurisprudence, but the dual authority of the market and the state, sealed in writing and embodied in contract and law.

(Furet & Ozouf. Quoted in Graff 1981:223)

Fears of Mass Literacy

Within the emergence of capitalist society and the forms of state that create a sense of identity within it, mass literacy was clearly an important dimension. This is by no means to suggest that there were not voices pressing for a continued restriction of access to literacy to an elite. The fears against extending literacy to the masses are clearly articulated. Voices raised loudly for and against literacy raged loudly, in fact, until the first third of the nineteenth century.

There were many conservatives who feared education for the masses. Their assumption -- never actually put to the test -- was that education would make the masses resistant to back-breaking manual labour. There was fear that education would create expectations for people of going "beyond their stations," that they would come to lack respect for their betters. An end to the kind of deference reinforced by ignorance of print and communication could result in indiscipline, and even social protest along with an unwillingness to labour at subsistence levels and to remain powerless. Literacy was seen as a force that could heighten the dangers of civil strife, and even revolution, which so many feared in that Age of Revolution. Indeed in many places, literacy continued to be restricted and even systematically denied to certain sectors of the population such as slaves in the southern states of the U.S.

This reactionary tendency, which feared schooling for the poor and working class, succumbed to the triumph of liberal progressive school promotion in the first half of the nineteenth century. Conservatives were out-argued and beaten down by sheer numbers, as well as by the facts and forces of rapid social change, the accompanying problems, and the urgent need for solutions. . . . As we can see now, the systematic and institutional provision of literacy and education for the masses formed a central element in strategies for establishing control in society. As control by traditional rank deference and the 'moral economy' were replaced by emergent class divisions, education was seen as the new social cement.

(Graff 1978/9:2)

Literacy and Public Schooling

The centrality of mass literacy disseminated through state-sponsored schooling systems for creating social order and a social identity of "citizenship" is clear. Literacy seen in this way is integral to the whole process of state formation. Certainly the history of the rise of public schooling through which mass literacy became established shows clearly that literacy and increasing integration and social control have gone hand in hand, all in the context of a larger moral project.

At the point in the nineteenth century when mass education was introduced through public schooling systems, this ideological project of building a political subject was paramount in many countries of North America and Europe. Corrigan, Curtis and Lanning make this point forcefully in their article "The Political Space of Schooling:"

Schooling was never intended to educate -- in the sense of skilling and making more knowledgeable -- more than a tiny proportion of the schooled population. The mass of the schooled population was rather to be *informed* and *transformed*. Public schooling in particular, in North America as in Europe, established itself only at the expense of well-established popular educational institutions. These "inadequate," "wretched," "miserable," "imitation," "sham" schools and the community controlled learning that went on in them were marginalized, stigmatized and destroyed by state schools. In their place states and governments sought to install "humanizing," "moralizing," and "civilizing" schools, where the "lower orders" and the "poorer sections" of the population could be "elevated." Seen more generally, schooling was situated in a far more extensive project of *civilizing* which was oriented towards "education in general" rather than to schooling as we commonly understand the latter term. "Education" and "civilization" involved, in the famous phrase, catching up and regulating "the hearts and minds" of all the lower orders (children and adults, men and women) through the ensemble of *provided* institutions which constitute modern state formation. The school, the prison, the park, the playground, the settlement house, the asylum, and other institutions were conceived by the ruling class as having an "educative tendency" for the population. They were also forms of *police*.
(Corrigan, Curtis, Lanning 1987)

The extension of mass literacy in western societies, then, must be seen in the broad sweep of historical transformation that created the capitalist system. The movement from social control through monarchies, the church and ascriptive social positions gradually shifted to social control through the functions of a seemingly neutral, impersonal state. What needs to be investigated more deeply is whether and how mass literacy was essential to the exercising of power of that state, and what role

literacy plays in the type of social integration established under capitalism. How did -- and does -- the constellation of institutions, forms and practices by which the ruling apparatus carries out functions of organization, regulation, administration, coordination and communication use mass literacy? The question is posed in its full complexity by the practices of the ruling apparatus of contemporary capitalist societies in the west, based as they are on textually mediated forms of social organization. Rule mediated through textual discourse is inconceivable without mass literacy. (Smith 1975, 1984, 1987)

Our knowledge of contemporary society is to a large extent mediated to us by documents of various kinds. Very little of our knowledge of people, events, social relations and powers arises directly in our immediate experience. Factual statements in documentary form, whether as news, data, information or the like, stand in for an actuality which is not accessible. Socially organized practices of reporting and recording work upon what actually happens or has happened to create a reality in documentary form, and though they are decisive to its characters, their traces are not visible in it. . . . The construction of social phenomena in their familiar and recognizable forms as they appear to us, is in large part a product of the reporting and accounting procedures of formal organizations which in various ways provide for how the society is governed.

(Smith 1973:1)

Textually mediated discourse, then, is a contemporary form of rule under capitalism.

Literacy and "Civil Society"

With the reconstruction of the history of literacy in western social formation comes a much clearer understanding of the contradictory tendencies within literacy. There is always a tension between the emancipating power of literacy and literacy as an instrument for greater social control, between literacy as a liberating tool of the popular classes and literacy as a control mechanism for preservation by an elite.

An important theme emerging from the detailed studies of the history of mass literacy is how often the forms of literacy and schooling that were established were, in fact, imposed to suppress already existing forms. At popular level there was a recognition of the power of literacy and a desire amongst the working class to become literate as a way of having a voice and greater control over their own lives.

Popular histories of England after the 1790s show ordinary people struggling to maintain grassroots organizations and desiring information, news, knowledge. There were efforts to put out working class publications. The pubs served as centres for literacy; newspapers, magazines and books were available not only for individual perusal but for public reading and discussion. Working men paid subscriptions to literary organizations and created libraries for themselves. References to discussion groups, reading groups, libraries, reading rooms and public halls abound. Reading circles were prominent aspects, then, of nineteenth century taverns, pubs and ports of call -- all part of collective forms organized by workers in a movement of "social literacy."⁴ The establishment of public libraries in Britain in the middle of the nineteenth century is best understood precisely as a means of suppressing pre-existing alternatives devised by workers themselves as a means of self-education in their efforts for "social literacy." (Corrigan & Gillespie 1978; Thompson 1963, 1968; Graff 1979)

Central to the traditions of socialist construction is a vision of this kind of "social literacy," of "people's power" in a new society where women and men regain the local control and decision-making power about their own lives and communities which has been systematically taken away from them within capitalist society as it has evolved. Tracing the development of the capitalist state, it is possible to identify the moment in the eighteenth century when property relations in ancient and medieval forms were transformed and when the "state" began to appear as a distinct polity, apparently separated from the realm of the private and personal, distanced from "civil society." "Civil society," collectivities of women and men interacting directly to reproduce the things and ideas and people that made up their social world, was at this point dissolved. These face-to-face groupings of producers were individualized, their relatedness to one another now expressed as political and legal relations through "the state."⁵

State and Civil Society

This seeming distance between "state" and "civil society" is both distinctive of and crucial to the functioning of capitalism. The modern state emerged in struggles first against feudalism and later against the working class and constitutes a distinctive form of organization of class power. Its historical specificity lies precisely in its separation from "civil society." What is new is the exercise of the collective class power of the emerging bourgeoisie through a distinct policy or public arena of general interests over against which is posed a depoliticized "civil society," realm of the personal and the individual. It is these boundaries between the