

## Foreword

*Lize Kriel & Karina Sevenhuysen*\*

Johan Bergh turns sixty in 2006. It is also his twentieth year as Head of the History Department at the University of Pretoria<sup>1</sup> and as Chair of the Historical Association of South Africa (HASA). In addition, this year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Historical Association (HASA) in 1956.

For this special occasion of “round numbers” culminating in one career, a call was sent out to colleagues of Johan Bergh, as well as to research associates of his Department, and also to experts with whom he collaborates on a regular basis. They were asked each to contribute an article on a topic of their choice, producing results from any of their recent projects, for inclusion in this *Festschrift*. There was no plan to build the compilation around a specific theme, but rather to present it as a showpiece of the variety of approaches and interests that are being nurtured and facilitated by Johan Bergh in his position as Head of the Department of Historical and Heritage Studies and Chair of the Historical Association.

However, regardless of the different methodologies and the broad scope of topics covered in the contributions received, it was, after all, not so difficult to find cohesion between the articles. A significant number did engage directly with Johan Bergh’s own research interests and all of them somehow conversed with one another in as far as they adopted approaches or took directions that had been encouraged by him. We are proud indeed that a full volume of independently peer-reviewed articles could have been filled with contributions drawn from such an exclusive pool of people – with some more still that will only appear in subsequent issues of *Historia*.

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1. The Department changed its name twice over the past two decades: first when the subject Cultural History, and then later also Heritage and Cultural Tourism, were added to its teaching portfolio. With the recent change from “History and Cultural History” to “Historical and Heritage Studies”, the name now also reflects the Department’s responsibility for Heritage and Museum Studies at the University of Pretoria.

It makes sense that a person, who over the past four decades has been studying the ways people from different backgrounds have been struggling for space on the ever-changing map of what we now call South Africa, should be a creator of academic space in such a way. What we find exemplary (and have had first hand experience of as former students of Johan Bergh) is his mastery of the precarious juggle between research, teaching and administration in a milieu that exacts an exorbitant amount of energy to keep these three (respectively fragile, bouncy and hefty) balls all in the air at the same time. This of course has a lot to do with dedication and patience, but also with vision and careful planning. In the modest way Johan Bergh summarises his “Postgraduate Teaching and Supervision Responsibilities” in his own *curriculum vitae*, one finds a beautiful reflection of what this volume has accomplished. There are contributions in the fields of: “methodology and theory, historiography, and comparative analyses of aspects of South African and American history; as well as the history of inter-group relations in South Africa.”

By providing students and colleagues with freedom *within* structure, Johan Bergh has built an environment in which teaching and research activities inform and reinforce, rather than burden, one another. As should be expected in a compilation of academic articles, the interpretations in the successive contributions do not necessarily support – and might as well contradict or challenge – one another. Also in this regard, the compilation pays tribute to Johan Bergh for his role in guarding a space for “tolerant confrontation” – the kind of space in which academic freedom is fostered and defended.

In the first contribution, Pieter Kapp takes stock of the aims and accomplishments of the Historical Association of South Africa on the occasion of its half-century jubilee. He gives his impression of the relative success of the association at the hand of what he identifies as the four basic functions of history in any society. He thus situates the history of HASA right within the discourse on the responsibilities of historians in their own time – a pertinent question in the philosophy and methodology of History.

The theme of societies and their history (and to an extent also Kapp’s question “meaningful or sinister?”) is carried over into the next contribution by Cobus Ferreira. Although Ferreira focuses mostly on journeys that took place prior to its founding, his reference to the Geographical Association of Lisbon reminds us of what societies and associations are about: they facilitate the production of knowledge. Of course the journeys of exploration preceding and converging in the work

of this and other associations can hardly be configured loosely from the sinister employment of such knowledge in the exploitation of a continent and her people. However, in new contexts and with new expectations, the knowledge produced by these Portuguese travellers on their journeys through the Transvaal can also be engaged with in differently meaningful ways. Ferreira argues for such a reappraisal of their texts, which can lead to a “rediscovery” of the significance of their information from our present position.

With this contribution then, Cobus Ferreira – and his Portuguese travellers – lead us into the area which, for at least some time in the nineteenth and the twentieth century, had been marked on maps as the “Transvaal”. In 1996 Johan Bergh wrote an article on this very issue of the changing boundaries<sup>2</sup> of an area which had acquired a shared history among those who had lived in it, passed through it, settled in it, fought over it, lost it, governed it, defined it, demarcated it and named it in various ways over various periods. At the University of Pretoria, situated literally and figuratively in the centre of this area, the history of the “Transvaal” has for a long time been an obvious topic for investigation. Over the past twenty years, however, Johan Bergh has built inter-group relations in the “Transvaal” into a major *research* focus area in which the Department of Historical and Heritage Studies collaborates with scholars from various other institutions (locally and abroad) who share this interest.

Inherent in an awareness of the historical fluidity of the “Transvaal’s” boundaries, is its interconnectedness with the greater Southern African region. In fact, speaking of areas, boundaries, territories and regions, we are lead to the central theme at the basis of so much of Johan Bergh’s work: land. As Kapp has indicated in his opening essay, conflict over land was one of the very first incentives for the writing of historical contributions in early South African publications. It thus makes sense that a significant portion of this *Festschrift* engages with issues pertaining to the occupation, ownership and usage of land. In the next three contributions, the authors link up with, challenge, and push further into directions previously identified in Bergh’s work.

In their article, Wassermann and Pretorius investigate the case of Afrikaner farmers in the Klip River County in the former Natal Colony during the Anglo-Boer War. Penalized twice over because they were

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2. J.S. Bergh, “Die Veranderende Grense van “Transvaal””, *Historia*, 41, 2, November 1996, pp 11-17.

Afrikaners – first by the invading fellow-Afrikaners from the Transvaal who coerced them to fight the British and then by their own British Government who wanted to punish their treason – the story of these Natal Afrikaner farmers adds a further dimension to the historical un-homogeneity of Afrikanerdom. The game of chess between these men and women, the Natal Government, the British military, Natal colonists and African farm workers, provide significant context for the ongoing contention over the utilization and the of ownership of land.

As with the previous contribution, Fred Morton's study deals with a particular community, or more specifically, particular leaders in that community, and their approach to land in the context of the Anglo-Boer War, but in this case rather, its aftermath. Morton too points out some of the ways people can be affected by – but can also manoeuvre to their advantage – the boundaries set up by different authorities between their supposed subjects. Morton tells a fascinating story of entrepreneurship among the BaKgatla baga Kgafela that cannot be encompassed only in either "Botswana" or "South African" history. The men whose initiatives he investigates, were successful for the exact reason that they "played" in both systems. This article convincingly sketches African characters in their complexity and ingenuity, vividly illustrates that economic behaviour *is* social behaviour, subtly dismisses every stereotype about "tribalist" Africans, and aptly concludes with a postscript on women's agency through their customary roles as wives but also *via* selectively appropriated modern practices.

In Harvey Feinberg's article, we remain with the theme of African access to land, but we return to the core of South African political history: the Land Act of 1913 and its impact up until 1936. With his clear exposition of South African land legislation in the background section of his article, he pulls together all the contributions on land in this compilation. At the heart of his own investigation, is the articulate "African voice" in the debate about land traced through newspapers, pamphlets, speeches, testimonies and conference papers of the 1910s, 1920s and early 1930s. He carefully analyses and explains the silence among what he refers to as "educated Africans", about the opportunities that did exist for black people to acquire land in South Africa until 1936. Among the "thousands (more likely tens of thousands) of men and women" that must have been involved, were, of course, also Linchwe and Isang Pilane from Fred Morton's article. These two studies invite conversation about intellectual and opportunistic, academic and entrepreneurial, elite and ordinary, responses and challenges to white

supremacy – with, of course, scope for far more nuances between these binary opposites we have dared to suggest here.

Ferreira and Morton's articles remind us of what has also been prominent in Bergh's own research: that boundaries have histories, that they change all the time and that historians must work with a continual awareness thereof: focus on the area under study must be balanced with the shifting and re-fixing of borders by authorities and the extent to which people contribute to, accept, ignore or exploit these imposed structures. The political changes in South Africa during the two decades of Johan Bergh's chairmanship of a history department and a historical association, also enabled a shift in boundaries within academia. Bergh identified and embraced new possibilities for interaction and exchange. As Head of Department, he appealed for the appointment of black colleagues well before the University of Pretoria had structurally arrived at that point. Realising that no single person can be an expert on everything, he affords colleagues and senior students to dedicate part of their time to extra-departmental research centres like the University's Institute for Women's and Gender Studies and the Centre for the Study of Aids (to mention but only two). He initiated the building of many bridges over racial, gender, linguistic, national, institutional and methodological boundaries. The next article in this issue, by Alois Mlambo and Ian Phimister, on a topic of economic exchange between South Africa and one of her northern neighbours, represents this process, and the fruits thereof, in many ways.

Mlambo and Phimister's contribution establishes a link with the previous papers on land by acknowledging the importance of agricultural (and mining) land for the pre-Second World War economy of Southern Rhodesia, but then they follow the economic turn towards a greater emphasis on manufacturing – the government's initiation of a cotton-spinning and clothing manufacturing industry. The article explains, amongst other things, how a prohibition on the import of second-hand clothing from Britain to Southern Rhodesia contributed to the flourishing of the local clothing industry and why such large numbers of black South Africans in the 1950s were wearing garments made in Southern Rhodesia. The article comments on the protection of local industries, not only from the "conspicuous assumptions" of local consumers about the higher status of imported wares, but also against cross-border competition. The conflicting interests of manufacturers and traders in South Africa and Rhodesia are vividly explained within the bigger framework of trade arrangements between the Union and the Federation. The debate in the late 1950s, of whether the spinning mills

ought to remain government-run or whether a hand-over to private enterprise should take place, is also traced, with the conclusion that the most appropriate opportunity for such a transfer had been passed by – partially as a result of the growing political uncertainty in the region at the time.

From a study of economic interaction between two neighbouring states, we move on to the last two contributions, which expand the boundaries of investigation onto a global canvas by drawing comparisons between aspects of the history of the United States and South Africa. That two articles of this nature could be included in a *Festschrift* for Johan Bergh, is special indeed. Academic bridges across the Atlantic have been initiated by Johan Bergh since his first visit to the United States as member of a USSALEP team in the early 1980s. Pieter Kapp referred in his contribution to the way such links have enriched the work of the Historical Association. As Head of the Department of Historical and Heritage Studies in Pretoria, Bergh introduced American History to the teaching curriculum, facilitated exchange opportunities for students and researchers and also encouraged comparative research through his own writing, as could recently be seen in his review essay on the work of George M. Fredrickson in an issue of *Historia* of 2003.<sup>3</sup>

In her article, Karen Harris juxtaposes colonial employers' attitudes towards Chinese labourers in the United States and South Africa in the era of industrial capitalism. The striking similarities in their global representation as "other" is illustrated at the hand of cartoons from different sides of the Atlantic. Jackie Grobler compares processes of memorializing defeat and commemorating a bygone way of life among American Southerners and Afrikaners along the themes of the American Civil War and the Anglo-Boer War respectively. In both of these articles, caution is taken not to underestimate the intricate idiosyncrasies that render human experiences within a particular time and place with a uniqueness which is always, in a sense, incomparable. However, the pervasiveness of certain ways of thinking and particular forms of discrimination (the inevitable result of the mobility of people and ideas in the "age of empire"), invite for these processes to be juxtaposed. These two articles prove that a hard look at both situations simultaneously, indeed encourages questions that would otherwise not have been asked

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3. J.S. Bergh, "White Supremacy Twenty One Years on: Opportunities for Comparative Research", *Historia*, 48, 1, May 2003, pp 355-372.

and results in deeper insight into the particular case studies, as well as the phenomenon that had initially triggered the urge to compare.

Many people contributed to the making of this *Festschrift*. The Executive Board of the Historical Association of South Africa, the Editorial Board of *Historia* and the members and associates of the Department of Historical and Heritage Studies need to be thanked up front. Japie Brits, Kobus du Pisani, Georgi Verbeeck and Marie van Heerden deserve special thanks for their ever-present support in an advisory capacity. Peer reviewers were most generous with their recommendations and their time. Alana Bailey deserves special mention for her dedication and energy that goes far beyond the job description of copy editor. Thariza van Rensburg and Birgit Brammer facilitated and each assisted in their remarkable ways.

What remains, is to dedicate this volume to Johan Bergh and to wish him a very happy birthday!