
JOURNAL PREFACE

Recently the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) produced a consensus report on the standing, and the editorial policies and practices of historical journals published in South Africa, including our predecessor, the *Journal for Contemporary History*. The findings and recommendations of this report, to be published soon on the ASSAf website, vindicate the decision that we took last year to introduce our editorial changes at one go, rather than making piecemeal changes.

Our “new broom” approach meant that we did struggle to assemble an issue in December 2019 with a sufficient number of good quality historical pieces. However, the success of our first issue, founded -we believe – on a clear editorial vision and some very good articles which showcased a diversity of historical scholarship drawn from across the continent, meant that we have received far more submissions for this issue.

Then in March, as the covid-19 pandemic arrived, South Africa entered a hard lockdown and universities closed. I must thank our authors and reviewers, and also the editorial collective and production staff for their role in putting together this issue under the most trying circumstances.

The pandemic also poses questions of history, in its disciplinary sense: what do we do, why do we do it and how? Or more specifically, what does Southern history look like at this moment, under these conditions? These questions inform the first essay in the issue, a historiographical prospectus written by the *Southern Journal for Contemporary History's* editorial collective. In line with our commitment to the idea of Southern histories and the historiographic avenues and byways that these entail, the lead, research essay in this issue focuses on biography and modern African history. Olutayo Adesina writes how, as a historical genre, biography developed out from the storied Ibadan school of history. In his account of history-writing in Nigeria, where he connects biography to historiographic trends and particular historical times, he renders strange those traditions of history elsewhere that have assumed the status of common sense.

This issue also carries a profile of Lazlo Passemiers, a young historian who works on histories of decolonisation in the Congo. These profiles of early-career scholars undertaking innovative research that advances the conceptual or methodological cause of Southern history will be a regular, ongoing feature in the *Southern Journal for Contemporary History*.

Reading John Kelly's *The Great Mortality: An Intimate History of the Black Death*, I am reminded that pandemics, like history itself, seldom respect the niceties of time and planning. As part of our hope to understand some of the grains of southern historical writing, we planned to visit several major seminars and conferences, this year, in southern and west Africa. The advance of the pandemic temporarily put paid to this ambition. Like our colleagues everywhere, we have become increasingly exposed to teaching and engaging with colleagues online. We propose to exploit this growing familiarity with online platforms to convene a monthly seminar on Southern history. Of course, this will not be a substitute for face-to-face seminars and lectures, but it might help to layout for debate some of the features of and currents in a self-consciously Southern version of African history. Details will follow, and we invite you to join, either as a presenter or a seminar participant.

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