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**EDITORIAL**

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Starting with this issue, I assume the editorship of the *Southern Journal for Contemporary History*, known until 2019 as the *Journal for Contemporary History*. This is a great honour for me. First, this is a historical journal that, since 1975, has been an essential instrument for academic debate in South Africa and beyond. Second, my tenure follows a few years of intense and exciting changes in the structure and purpose of the journal. I followed these changes with much interest, and I wish to build on the foundations laid by my predecessor, Professor Neil Roos, who re-imagined this publication.

Roos' first clear-cut decision was to change the journal's name in 2019. This was not simply a cosmetic operation but a much more profound rethinking of the journal and its scientific scope. Roos introduced a new focus on the concept of the Global South, hence the addition of "Southern" in the title of this publication to distinguish it from the almost identical *Journal of Contemporary History*. Concretely, this new emphasis meant that the journal would consider papers, "with a geographical or comparative focus beyond sub-Saharan Africa" with a view to enabling, "theoretical and comparative engagement beyond the Southern African region, and potentially enrich[ing] current debates around decolonisation."<sup>1</sup> This was a significant change for a journal which, for most of its existence, had published contributions relating only to the Southern African region, in general, and South Africa, in particular. In 2016, André Wessels, another of my predecessors, had hailed the journal for making "a notable and worthwhile

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1 N Roos, "Turns, trends and new directions: The Southern Journal for Contemporary History", *Southern Journal for Contemporary History* 44 (2), 2019, p. 2.

contribution to the historical discourse in South Africa". Wessels, however, did not shy away from recognising that the *Journal of Contemporary History* had, for the most part, remained a, "national academic journal", which, in the future, would need to attract more articles from, "academics (and others) working at other African and overseas universities"<sup>2</sup> If the process of opening up the journal to a broader geographical and theoretical scope had begun under Wessels' editorship and then continued under his successor, Pieter Duvenage, it was only with Roos that this process came to fruition.

During my tenure, I wish to continue along the route undertaken by Roos and incorporate the theoretical and geographical framework of the Global South in the journal's scope. This said, some clarification is necessary. We at the journal seek primarily contributions pertaining to the African continent, and the journal's focus will remain on contemporary African history. However, we also encourage submissions of papers that address theoretical debates relating to the Global South as a whole and others that examine the relationship between Africa and different geographical areas outside the continent. During my mandate as Editor-in-Chief, I also want to promote the submission of papers relating to networks, connections, and "circulations" of people and ideas within Africa, across narrow confines of national or regional boundaries, and those connecting the continent with the rest of the world. I see this journal as the perfect stage to discuss issues related to World History, Global History, International History and Africa's positioning within these frameworks.

My ambition is for the journal to become increasingly relevant internationally. This means attracting more authors from countries outside the Southern African region - which historically have made up most authors since 1975 - and having an ever-growing international readership. The journal will not abandon the focus on Southern Africa in general and South Africa in particular. Instead, they will be considered alongside other areas of the continent.

Roos' second significant change for the journal was its general re-focusing on the discipline of history. Before Roos' tenure, the journal had seen the term "contemporary history" being interpreted in the, "broadest sense of the word".<sup>3</sup> This meant that any discipline which had a relationship with the "contemporary" would be welcome, including articles of political science (which made up about 34 per cent of all articles published between 1975 and 2016),<sup>4</sup> international relations, economics, law, and anthropology. Roos did

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2 A Wessels, "40: The Journal for Contemporary History, 1975 To 2015", *Journal for Contemporary History* 41 (2), 2016, p. 18.

3 Wessels, "40: The Journal for Contemporary History", p. 13.

4 Wessels, "40: The Journal for Contemporary History", p. 13.

not break from this tradition. However, he placed history at the centre of the journal's scope. He still welcomed submissions from outside the discipline of history but introduced the important proviso that such submissions should be, "grounded in the unique disciplinary feature of history, namely, the study of change over time."<sup>5</sup> During my tenure, I wish to follow this guideline.

A journal such as ours must confront a pressing problem. How are we to define "contemporary history", in general, and "contemporary African history", in particular? Strangely enough, as noted again by André Wessels, the question of what constitutes "contemporary history" was seldom discussed in the journal's pages, and the rule of thumb adopted by all the editors-in-chief so far has been to interpret "contemporary" as meaning post- World War 2. Is this convincing? Is this divide between "modern" and "contemporary" applicable to African history? To what extent do events that occurred before 1945 have a repercussion on the contemporary and are therefore worth examining in the pages of this journal? These are thorny questions, which will be progressively addressed in the following issues. *The Southern Journal for Contemporary History*, we hope, will become a platform for scholars to discuss these themes and a laboratory to test theories and interpretations surrounding the notion of contemporary African history. For the time being, the journal will maintain the traditional definition of African contemporary history as post-1945 history and it will consider submissions relating to pre-1945 African history only if the authors show that the events and dynamics taken into consideration have had a clear impact on the more contemporary period, that is, post-1945. However, the journal will be open to articles that challenge this definition of contemporary African history and that offer a different interpretation.

The first issue of my editorship already shows the potential of this journal in terms of geographical and thematic scopes. We have authors from different universities, in Africa (Zambia, Nigeria, South Africa) and outside Africa (United States), dealing with histories of different areas of the continent: South Africa, Nigeria, Zambia, Lesotho and Kenya.

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5 Roos, "Turns, trends and new directions", p. 2.