



The resilience and challenge of 120 years

This special issue celebrates 120 years of continuous publishing of our Journal, in changing formats with slightly different names. We are very fortunate indeed not only that Jane Carruthers, the eminent South African historian of science, served as the immediate past Editor-in-Chief of the Journal, but also that we were able to prevail upon her considerable generosity and expertise to publish with us what she terms a 'biography' of our Journal. This long story makes fascinating reading, and also provides an authoritative account of key issues of the history of science in South Africa.

Arranged around this central piece for us are a number of other contributions from key role players, past and present. Wieland Gevers has played and continues to play a key role in the history of science of South Africa, and we are lucky that he agreed to provide us with a set of reflections stretching back a number of decades. Each of the living Editors-in-Chief has provided a Commentary, and we have Perspectives on most areas of research commonly covered in the Journal as it is today, as well as on our mentorship programme, and on the view of our Journal from our Managing Editor and from the broader ASSAf perspective.

Probably not surprisingly, some of those we asked to provide commentaries for us initially answered that they did not feel equal to the task of providing overviews. As we shall discuss later, the problem of accounting for and presenting what readers may view as a fair overview is a daunting task, especially for all of us who are not historians, let alone historians of science. Readers will see some sharp variations in style and in how authors approached their commentaries. We believe this diversity is in itself helpful to see, as we are a journal of many views, debates and approaches. We are also very much aware of how much more there is to be said and argued about regarding the past, present and future of our Journal. As always, we welcome contestation, debates and filling of crucial gaps where this special issue of the Journal is silent. As a journal, we aim to be anything but a remote authority dictating to our readership how to see the world; we are proud of our rigorous editorial policies and practices, but we realise that these are nothing unless we are open to many different ways of seeing the world, science, and the performance of our Journal. In terms of the metrics used these days to assess journals, we are grateful to have the highest impact factor of any multidisciplinary journal in South Africa, but these metrics, as we know, are limited and skewed and a poor proxy for quality. A good quality journal, we believe, is open to debate and contestation from our readers.

This year of our celebration of 120 years of SAJS – a journal older than the declaration of the Union of South Africa – is also, we are very much aware, the year of 30 years of democracy in our country. We are not the only ones pausing for reflection and celebration at this time. My home discipline is that of psychology, and the *South African Journal of Psychology* is due to publish a special issue later in 2024 to coincide with 30 years of the establishment of PsySSA, the Psychological Society of South Africa, established at a critical moment in the divided history of our country, with a view to serving a future democratic country. In a reflective piece on this 30-year history,¹ past PsySSA presidents frankly discuss some of the social and political challenges associated with a professional and scientific practice in our country historically intertwined with histories of colonialism, racism (including scientific racism), sexism, and a number of other challenges. These authors make it clear that the struggles for change and for answering the question of what a psychology appropriate to the needs of our country and continent are far from over. The same, of course, is true for our Journal, although the challenge may be even greater given the diversity of views and approaches in the breadth of work we consider and publish. As Jane Carruthers indicates in her article, our Journal has been nothing if not resilient; what is perhaps more difficult for us to think about collectively is what has been achieved and what has not yet been achieved in service of fundamental questions about equity in South African science – equity in access to science, in setting scientific questions and agendas, and in

benefitting from science. This includes existential questions about our species' future life on this planet, and that of other species. We are very grateful to our authors over the years in helping us address and build equity, in line with both ASSAf and SAJS policy; none of us, we imagine, pretends that we have solved all the challenges.

In this regard, it may be helpful, we believe, for many readers of SAJS to read the discussions in the conversation on post-apartheid South African history convened in *The Journal of African History* by Jacob Dlamini²; many readers of this Journal will also recall Dlamini's important ASSAf Humanities Lecture, appropriately titled 'Crisis and catastrophe: The motor of South African history?'. Most of us at SAJS, as we have mentioned, are not historians, and may struggle with history. As scientists interested in interdisciplinarity, many of us are aware of the unreliability of memory in general, and the importance of a range of neuroscientific and other approaches to understanding memory of various kinds.³ We also know (and this is more clear than ever in the current 'post-truth' era, as some have described it⁴) how politics deeply affects how and what we remember, in the South African context and elsewhere⁵. Taking due account of the vagaries of history and memory, we can easily view the progress of South African science and academic life as a remarkable victory or a great tragedy, even when reading side by side two books written recently by one of South Africa's most important public intellectuals.^{6,7}

Putting together this special issue has reminded us at SAJS, yet again, of the importance of interdisciplinarity and of the necessity to be self-critical and reflective. We are resilient, but we have not yet done enough. For 90 years our Journal flourished under colonial and, subsequently, apartheid regimes (with many scientists resisting oppression); this longevity must be celebrated, but the celebration is also complex and must be intertwined with the knowledge of how power, privilege, and exclusion cannot but be intertwined with our success. We may all in some ways have been breathing a collective sigh of relief for the past 30 years, years of democracy. But this does not put us beyond history. Writing in the Dlamini et al.² discussion, for example, the celebrated South African social scientist and historian Shireen Hassim notes:

I would say we have hardly begun to consider how the decolonisation of South Africa today would differ from its predecessor two generations ago: what it would offer, in other words, beyond calling for centring African experiences, amplifying voices from below, critiquing capitalism, and lionising black popular politics and resistance movements? (p.9)

Hassim and her colleagues note the importance of engaging deeply with history, and with being self-critical about the context of all South African research, our research of the past, present and future. Part of the history of privilege in South Africa is the privilege that we at SAJS have in being the ones to tell the tales of science in South Africa. This is very lucky for us, but also a responsibility of which we are increasingly aware, as we 'reflect on yesterday and embrace tomorrow'.

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