
Julie Parle


To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02582473.2012.670956

Published online: 18 Jun 2012.
INTRODUCTION

‘The Past and its Possibilities: Perspectives of Southern Africa’
The Southern African Historical Society’s 23rd Biennial Conference, 27–29 June 2011, University of KwaZulu-Natal (Howard College campus)

JULIE PARLE*
University of KwaZulu-Natal

This special edition brings together selected articles from the 23rd biennial conference of the Southern African Historical Society which was held in Durban in June 2011. The conference – with the broad theme of ‘The Past and its Possibilities: Perspectives of Southern Africa’ – was the Society’s largest and most vibrant yet, drawing delegates from across Southern Africa, as well as from Argentina, Australia, Canada, Finland, Hungary, the United States, the United Kingdom, and several other countries.

Gratifyingly, the calibre of the papers was exceptionally high, and there was a palpable air of excitement about the profession of history both in and about the southern African region. There were many highlights, animated debates, lighter moments, and meaningful meetings, and especially noteworthy was the presentation on the evening of 28 June of the inaugural SAHS/Taylor & Francis Prize for the Best Student Paper. This was awarded to Kylie van Zyl of Rhodes University, whose insightful and highly topical paper ‘Lies, Damned Lies, and Statistics: A Comparison of the Construction of Authority and Responsibility in Two South African Cholera Epidemics, 1980–1983 and 2000–2003’ appears in this special edition along with other featured papers presented at the conference by Bill Freund, Anne Digby, Peter Alegi, Cynthia Kros, Theresa Edlmann, Karthigasen Gopalan, and Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie.

*Email: parlej@ukzn.ac.za

1. Also receiving high praise were Lize Marie van der Watt (Stellenbosch University), former University of Zimbabwe classmates Wesley Mwatwara (Stellenbosch University) and Takunda Sylvester Dombo (UKZN), who received honourable mentions. Their papers were titled ‘“. . .this 90 square miles of weird desolation”: Aspects of Science and the Environment in the History of South Africa’s Prince Edward Islands, 1947–1995”, ‘The tick was not slow to take advantage’: A History of East Coast Fever in Southern Rhodesia, 1901–1920’, and ‘Whose Past, Whose Memory? Competing Perspectives on “Capturing a Fading National Memory” Oral History Project in Zimbabwe’.
In our planning for this conference, the Society’s Executive Committee also intended to open the conference with an Address by myself as the President. By April 2011 however it had become apparent that so overwhelming was the response to the Call for Papers that the programme would overflow and there would simply be no space for another Address. I occupied the podium only briefly on the opening morning of the conference and after welcoming the more than 200 delegates crowded into the Auditorium of the University of KwaZulu-Natal’s Innovation Centre (and alerting them to the environmentally-friendly water coolers, pointing out the slippery slopes to be avoided en route to the bathrooms, and attempting to assuage the fears of the Internet-addicted that the wifi was being attended to), invited the University’s Deputy Vice Chancellor of Research, Professor Nelson Ijumba, to open the conference. I then introduced the first of the conference’s two keynote speakers, internationally acclaimed scholar Antoinette Burton. Our second keynote was given, on the morning of the 28th, by political journalist, columnist, award-winning author of the provocative book *Native Nostalgia*, and PhD student, Jacob Dlamini. Cunningly, I was able to squeeze some of the points I had wanted to make into the marathon Business Meeting of SAHS members on the second evening, and the next day found me in agreement with much of what the wrap-up speaker, Jonathan Hyslop, had to say about the place of professional history in Southern African. His summation and comments are included as a post-conference postscript at the end of this special edition.

What follows are thus fragments of an Address that was never delivered; and some comments on the conceptualisation and organisation of the conference which was characterised by a strong sense of commitment to growing and the safeguarding of academic history and its allied professions, and by further moves towards realising our goals of becoming a Southern African regional body.

***

In looking for a theme for the 2011 conference we wanted to take up the challenges made in 2009 by the then President of the SAHS, Professor Jane Carruthers, who had revived the practice of a Presidential Address, which had fallen away over the previous few years as well as many that had come out of the animated exchanges in 2009 – over heritage, memory, intellectual property, about the place of technology in archives, about the relationship between the archive and the state; about who and what the Society should represent; and about where and how our intellectual and ideological energies should be channelled.

2. Sincere thanks are due to all the members of the SAHS 2009–2011 EXCO and to my colleagues in History at UKZN for their input and support, especially Thembisa Waetjen, Keith Breckenridge, and the super-hard-working, enthusiastic-and-creative-solutions-in-an-emergency-finding-UKZN Howard College post-graduate students.
3. Antoinette Burton of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has published widely on the histories of gender, empire, political culture, world history, and archives. Professor Burton was, with Jean Allman, co-editor of the *Journal of Women’s History* between 2004 and 2010, and was a Guggenheim Fellow 2010–2011. Her keynote address was titled: ‘Race and the Politics of Position: Above and Below in Frank Morae’s *The Importance of Being Black* (1965)’.
4. *Native Nostalgia* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2009). The title of his keynote address was ‘After the Romance, Tragedy? Rethinking South Africa’s National Liberation Struggle’.
Professor Carruthers’s Address, ‘The Changing Shape and Scope of Southern African Historical Studies’, was an eloquent overview of the major trends of and conflicts within the discipline of history in South Africa: she pointed to the exciting challenges of regional and transnational histories; and she – and many of the debates that followed throughout that conference – also challenged us to take our role as citizens of democratic countries (or for those of us who are citizens of undemocratic regimes) very seriously and to bring the power of the past the bear on the present, the power of the past with all its ability to unsettle, to refuse easy answers or glib generalisations, or to bend to the will of the beholder.

Another significant question we debated had been sparked by a remark made by John Wright in the 2009 wrap-up: were we a Society that facilitated the pursuit of the past from Southern Africa, or, more broadly, with matters about the region? While the reality is that our conferences and the South African Historical Journal usually reflect the latter – and this is in no small part due to the inequalities of economies of knowledge production I shall refer to again – the conference organising committee wanted to be as inclusive as possible and devised a capacious conference title that called for papers, posters, presentations, debates and discussions on the possibilities of the past. As captured in the call for papers:

For from abalone, anger and archives through to xenophobia, zombies and zymurgy, the range of topics being researched by historians of Southern Africa is perhaps wider than ever before; and from the singing of revolutionary songs by politicians in the name of cultural history, to oral histories as an instrument of healing, to local histories in the service of grassroots politics and pay-to-order institutional histories, the utility of the past makes it of interest to many parties. New technologies and globalization are also challenging us to rethink how research and publishing can be enabled. The possibilities of the past are thus being explored in multiple ways in the 21st century, with significant implications for historical perspectives of Southern Africa.

And, thus, our announcement asked for papers about any topic of history, including new perspectives or former topics revisited. The sub-theme ‘Histories to and from’ suggested considerations of inter-generational, cross-regional, trans-national and global histories thought of both about and from the region. We also asked for debate on the purposes – intended, imagined, or instrumental – of history in Southern Africa today, and in the future. Flowing from this we asked in the topic ‘Histories to hurt or to heal’; how can studies of the past speak truth to power, or resist pandering to it? For whom do we write our histories? In what ways is the past being commoditised, ordered, contracted, and deployed for a variety of needs: public, nationalist, institutional, legal and commemorative? Under the rubric ‘Histories and historians lost and found’, it was intended to raise debate about which questions about the past are being asked and, just as importantly, which are not: what are taboo, neglected, unfashionable, and/or downright dangerous historical perspectives and topics; what is current scholarship missing? We also asked for scholars and practitioners – not necessarily historians – for reflections on the ways that the past is mediated through film, documentary, art, exhibitions, poetry, news media, and song. A final suggested area, and one that arose directly from the often animated discussions of the

2009 plenary session hosted by the Archival Platform was what we called ‘History’s know-how’: new information and technological tools; archives in crisis or better opportunities for collaborative projects?

With a final programme of nearly 180 papers (the previous largest number had been around 90), many by distinguished stalwarts of the profession and allies in education or the heritage, museum, or archival sectors – and with papers from around 70 first time or young career academics – not every paper presented at this conference directly addressed these questions, but every question was raised, and all of them were up for debate. Indeed, in addition to the paper sessions, and the two keynote addresses, there were three panel discussions: the first, ‘Rethinking Feminist Contributions to African Social Sciences’, was chaired by Natasha Erlank (UJ) with Thenjiwe Meyiwa (Walter Sisulu University), Catherine Burns (WITS), and Cynthia Kros (WITS); and two organised by the Archival Platform, ‘Ancestral Stories’, was anchored by Mbongiseni Buthelezi (UCT), with discussants Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie (UWC), Jacob Dlamini (Yale), and Carolyn Hamilton (UCT); and Dolly Khumalo, Manager of Museum Services in the Office of the Premier, KwaZulu-Natal, chaired the important and sometimes heated session on ‘The State of the Archives’ that featured Verne Harris from the Nelson Mandela Foundation, Catherine Kennedy from the South African History Archive and author-columnist Xolela Mangcu, who is the convener of UJ’s Platform for Public Deliberation.

The larger number of studies of the more recent past (especially the 1970s) and of regional politics across Mozambique, Angola, Zimbabwe, Botswana and South Africa mark a welcome expansion of the scholarship. Nonetheless, the majority of papers focused on South African nineteenth- and twentieth-century history, and the challenge to think and write regionally was taken up by only a few. Importantly, the next SAHS biennial conference, to be hosted by President Ackson Kanduza and the History Department of the University of Botswana 27–29 June 2013 is titled ‘All for One, One for All?: Leveraging National Interests with Regional Visions in Southern Africa’.

The full programme, spirited debate and tangible enthusiasm throughout the conference, and the sheer number of thematic specialties that are often to be found in separate conferences – those of environmental, business, medical, or military history to name just a few – as well as the important linkages with such ventures as the Archival Platform and the Archive and Public Culture Research Initiative were heartening. In a sense, they show that we do not have to worry about that old chestnut, the ‘‘crisis’’ in history’. Nor need we be pessimistic about the courage and intellectual rigour being shown by the upcoming generations of historians. It isn’t possible to mention all of these exciting emerging scholars here, but up for scrutiny and revision were not only the old shibboleths of the past centuries, but also the new, with ruling elites’ power to parse the past highlighted as an especially important concern. Jacob Dlamini’s invitation to think of

6. In 2008–2009, the SAHS and the Association of African Historians explored the possibility of a joint conference/congress in Durban 2011. Unfortunately, the AAH would have been almost completely dependent on the SAHS to raise the joint funding necessary to host what would have been a deeply historically significant meeting. It was decided therefore that the SAHS should prioritise the building of a Southern African regional network, a difficult task in itself given that the SAHS is entirely funded by members and (coming on-stream from 2011 only) subscriptions to the South African Historical Journal, and from recent modest income from conferences, all of which is ploughed back into the Society.
South Africa’s liberation struggle in terms of tragedy rather than romance was only one of these bold and probing re-interrogations of power, past and present. What soon became apparent is that many Southern Africanists have moved into post-post-apartheid paradigms way ahead of our politicians and policymakers. These possibilities for destabilising the past have been hard won, and if some are nostalgic for a time when the ideological battles were more straightforward they can perhaps draw inspiration from the certainty that there will be new struggles for the place of the academic profession of historical research in the future. Indeed, that future is already here, and it operates on a terrain with some familiar constraints as well as new ones.

Firstly, the number of professional historians, including those in the allied disciplines, and of undergraduate and (especially) graduate students in History within the region remains small; the possibilities for employment in tertiary level institutions even smaller, and further shrinking as we watch. Of course, this trend has been underway for some decades, and is not at all unique to the region, but, and this brings us to a second point: this situation continues to have obvious implications for the location – spatially and epistemologically – of the production and dissemination of the academic study of Southern Africa. Figures relating to the African Studies Association (of the USA) vividly demonstrate the imbalances, with the ASA itself having over 1,700 members and the annual conferences drawing around 2,000 participants, only a handful of whom are affiliated to African institutions. I do not mean to suggest that scholarship based outside of the region is necessarily circumspect or ideologically compromised, but for those of us researching, teaching, and living here, there are somewhat different material, institutional, political, and pedagogic, factors at play. For instance, as Thembisa Waetjen and I have argued elsewhere, teaching in South African lecture rooms about human evolution on the continent elicits very different responses from students from those that we or the Africa-centric curriculum designers had expected, and the reasons for this lie in specific local, regional and continental histories of education and of religion. Similarly, clearly, teaching and researching HIV/AIDS, or witchcraft, or land rights, or even the history of the African National Congress, are also freighted very differently in Durban than in Dallas, Durham,

7. The material, institutional and political conditions that saw larger numbers of students of History in the 1980s and 1990s no longer exist. Instead, not only are there the pressures to choose a more ‘vocational’ (and better-paying) career, but also too close a scrutiny of the past has, in the lecture halls in South Africa, the potential to threaten the fragile sense of new post-apartheid identity. This raises questions about what History should be taught at what tertiary level. Pressures to teach African histories at entry level are understandable, and indeed have long been the staple of access and introductory programmes, but anecdotal reports from some departments show that this is now leading to fewer, not greater, numbers of students choosing to study History.


Delhi, or Darwin. To the extent that there are commonalities with or differences to the study and discussion of these issues in Gaborone, or Kitwe, or Lusaka, or Maputo is important for us to discuss for ourselves in fora such as the SAHS.

For, the fact remains that Africa is, to follow Jan Vansina and Shamil Jeppie, the one continent where ‘the professional or academic writing of its history is still dominated by outsiders’. As Jeppie goes on to say:

Writing of ‘outsiders’ is not an expression of some kind of scholarly xenophobia. [But i]t is a genuine problem when the only academically credible discourses on a country or historical problem are those emanating from scholars based thousands of kilometres away and without local responsibilities or commitments, either intellectual or political.¹¹

Indeed, South African History departments face a painful dilemma: do we encourage our best and brightest to pursue PhDs at the world’s top-resourced institutions (while our own expertise and deep archival knowledge is often freely shared with visiting students on an informal basis – and it is important to emphasise that this is a structural rather than a personal point); or do we work to retain our upcoming academics, produce PhDs in what are relatively small institutional surroundings, and contribute to the building up ‘a cadre of Africa centred researchers and scholars based in Africa’?¹²

In an ideal world, we would do both, and self-identified First World institutions would reciprocate by giving equal accreditation to the courses their students undertake at Southern African universities. On the other hand, the current structure (purely research) of the South African PhD means that History departments do not have proficiency in an indigenous language as a requirement, and it is surely hoped that both institutional support (from primary school through to university degrees) will prioritise the making up of this significant deficiency.

There is obviously far more to be discussed concerning the place of Africanist scholarship (including History) in Africa;¹³ I have however space here to make only two further observations on this issue. The first is by analogy: Africanist historian John Edward Philips who teaches in Japan has shown how when the profession of history is moulded by state imperatives and university conventions that ensure the retention of graduate students within single institutions, the result can be a deep conservatism that does little to encourage or permit innovative or challenging theoretical analysis, methodological originality, or fresh perspectives.¹⁴ And, as Esperanza Brizuela-García demonstrates in her 2006 article ‘The History of Africanization and the Africanization of History’,¹⁵ debates about the whys and the hows of the Africanisation of historiography have been revisited within the continent frequently since the immediate post-independence period: most notable amongst the early congresses was perhaps that at Dar es Salaam in 1965. Her piece offers us an

¹². Ibid., 22.
¹³. The debate about African Studies as a separate stream of study saw renewed airing in the debate over the Centre for African Studies at the University of Cape Town during 2011.
object lesson in how we need to pay attention to the history of our own profession, for the
issues of authenticity, agency, indigeneity, and the locale and foundations of knowledge
remain as vital today as they did nearly a half a century ago. To lose our history of History
is to weaken our ability to engage with these debates in the present.

More felicitously, it is by no means the case that the ‘only academically credible
discourses’ about Southern Africa are generated from elsewhere and, as the conference
showed, excellent historians continue to graduate from Southern African universities. That
they do so however is increasingly in spite of public sector academic paradigms of funding
or scholarly orientation rather than through them, and they do so, I would argue, in many
instances because of the personal and professional commitment of scholars whose sense of
the possibilities of an ongoing contribution of a rigorous and politically and socially
engaged profession to democracy and social justice was forged after the 1960s.

This moves us to a third set of questions: how do we understand and respond to the
shifting context of international, regional, national and local re-workings of the relation-
ship between the state and tertiary and professional education, and in the consequent
reconfigurations of the political economy of knowledge? After all, to produce more History
PhDs is indeed an important political task, but this has to be seen within the context of
ever-mounting pressures to meet management’s graduation quotas, often motivated as they
increasingly appear to be by state education funding policies rather than by concern with
professional rigour. Of course, no professional or educational milieu or structure has ever
been politically, ideologically, or materially neutral. But, what does this mean, at a time
when scholars’ responsibilities and priorities are again being driven from above; now within
a paradigm of productivity, out- and through-puts; of units and managed performance; of
discipline and punish?

How do we guard – or change, or reshape – the currency of our scholarship? After all,
every one has a past. And that is precisely what makes History so vulnerable to the claims
of the very many who seek to harness its ‘common sense’ use-value to praise, or blame, or
to commemorate, celebrate or validate. These matters are far from merely abstract and the
intellectual integrity and the careers of individuals, as well as the profile of the profession,
are increasingly being determined by administrators and structures that have little expert
knowledge of the demands of scholarly historical enquiry. I will mention just some of the
most obvious examples.16

Firstly, new degree rules that determine the criteria for the award of qualifications and
the ways in which we teach. These include reduced requirements for admission to higher
degrees; lower numbers of modules and programmes required for postgraduate degrees;
wildly unrealistic formulae that dictate the number of hours spent on preparation and
marking, regardless of the abilities of the students; and the recent requirement at some
universities that in order to be granted a PhD, candidates must have already published a

---

16. I am of course fully aware of the ways in which these points could be construed as ‘reactionary’ and of
wishing to preserve colonially-or racially-sanctioned ‘standards’ and how those with conservative agendas
have made indeed made such arguments. On the contrary, however, it can be argued that any dilution of
the full force of intellectual endeavour is to accept an internalised inferiority: what the ‘full force’ amounts
to, or what is an acceptable threshold, is what must be debated. If indeed our degree requirements are out
of kilter with elsewhere, let us revisit them, but this needs to be done in good faith between bureaucrats and
professional historians.
journal article in a SAPSE-approved journal. Moreover, co-publications by supervisor and students are being strongly encouraged. This latter is potentially especially worrisome for teaching historians, for if it is not the task of the supervisor to enable their students to publish independently, where does individual responsibility for research, interpretation, analysis, and even style rest?

Secondly, policies that seek to impose research models, and especially ethics guidelines, largely derived from the biomedical sciences that at best bear little resemblance to those that are useful or appropriate for our purposes, and at worst violate these (my own institution for instance asks researchers how they will dispose of or destroy their research findings and makes no suggestion of provision for their preservation or archiving, and attempts to have the ethics clearance forms revised have until recently been met with indifference). Related to these are judgements made about the value of published work, and the criteria for promotion that conflate quantity with value. Charlotte Mbali’s recent comments here are apposite. She argues that

Outputs are different in different disciplines. A historian might spend 10 years producing one book, whereas a social scientist might be able to recycle survey facts rapidly in several short publications and so play to the reward system. Types of output being disincentivised are textbooks, public reports, fiction, newspaper articles, how-to manuals, and magazines for teachers or other practitioners.

It is important to note that although more Africa-based journals have been accepted on the SAPSE-approved list, there is no simple correlation with their impact or academic reception: ‘According to the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) (2006), many of these journals do not have any international visibility as the articles in these journals are not cited outside of South Africa . . .’ . Happily, from the perspective of the SAHS and our sister organisation, the Historical Association of South Africa (HASA), this is not the case however, and our journals are now having a wider international – and continental –


18. Co-publications, whether with students or colleagues, are also less favoured by South African national funding agencies such as the National Research Foundation and are internationally regarded in a lesser light than individual publications.

19. For the limitations of biomedical and even social science models for historical research and of the problems of University Ethics clearance procedures as they pertain to humanities research, see R. Cribb, ‘Ethical Regulation and Humanities Research in Australia: Problems And Consequences’, Monash Bioethical Review, 23, 3 (2004), 39–57. Thanks to Philippe Denis of UKZN for this reference.


readership than has been the case because of being brought into the Taylor & Francis publishing stable. Not without controversy – some would prefer to retain the open source, volunteer professional production of journals and I have a great deal of sympathy for this – nonetheless, the move to association with the international publishing house has meant that hard-worked editors are now freed from the demanding tasks of copy-editing, formatting and distribution. (SAHS members also receive both print copies and full electronic access to the back copies.) For it is a rare administration that recognises the time and intellectual labours taken up by editing, coordinating and managing a journal – or running a conference or professional Society for that matter, or peer reviewing articles, or writing book reviews – and the SAPSE system simply excludes these from consideration.

Perhaps the most troubling of all for historians is the devaluation by the state-determined funding and academic promotion criteria of the publication of book-length manuscripts, both the academic monographs and those intended to reach a wider audiences. This is not the same concern as the shift from print to electronic publishing as many historians have been quick to see the bennfici of the latter. Nor is this the result – as it in the USA – of the large-scale production of monograph manuscripts from dissertations, nor necessarily from the narrowness of the subject matter of many dissertations. Moreover, nor is the humanities paradigm of knowledge creation fundamentally different to that of the sciences, though its scale and scope are not the same. Indeed, as Gordon Wood has pointed out, the origins of the historical monograph lie in nineteenth-century positivism

of the noble dream that history might become an objective science – a science that would resemble if not the natural sciences of physics or chemistry, then at least the social sciences … Monographic history therefore assumes that history is a kind of science; that is, that historical knowledge is accumulative and that the steady accretion of specialised monographs will eventually deepen and broaden our understanding of the past.22

Wood goes on to say that:

Although recent critics have mocked the “noble dream” that history resembles a science, the monographs written over the past century have gradually built one upon another to the point where we now know more, and more accurately, about more aspects of past human behavior than ever before.

Moreover,

[all] those scholarly monographs … have advanced the discipline in extraordinary ways over the past century. Each of them may not have sold more than a few thousand copies at best, but … they were “valuable.” In their multiplicity they are the reason we know much more about the histories of slavery, women, and hosts of other subjects than we ever knew before. They have opened up new

areas of research and have penetrated into the most private, subjective, and least accessible characteristics of past life, including marriage, sexual relations, and child rearing. They have exploited demographic data and all sorts of popular nonverbal behavior to reconstruct the lives of masses of ordinary men and women who left no written record. Of course, all these gains have often come at the expense of traditional political or narrative history. 23

Surely, this is exactly the depth and breadth of historical scholarship that Southern Africa needs? Perhaps the hostility to books rests in part in the limited publication and readership in indigenous languages? Perhaps it lies in the nationalist impulse for ‘traditional political or narrative history”? Nonetheless, it is both contradictory (specialist journals are available to and read by a tiny minority) and an assault on the intellectual enterprise of the conceptualisation, substantiation and skilful synthesis and elaboration of a complex skein that amounts to a sustained and cumulative exploration of a historical subject, moment, or process. In this, the ‘research problem’ cannot be broken down into individual components and the ‘data’ served out in instalments. Rather, the whole amounts to far more than the sum of the parts.

***

How might an association of historians such as the SAHS contribute constructively to some of the challenges outlined above? Perhaps the times are apt for a respectful but spirited and sustained dialogue between historians and those who draw on models of research that are derived from the imperatives of the market, from the sciences, and from political and ideological concerns to decolonise academia. (And historians, it must be insisted, have been amongst the front ranks of the latter.) In this, and whilst fully recognising the benefits to be gained from working across and alongside other disciplines, I would urge a reconsideration of the need for a strong guild of historians in and of Southern Africa, for the practice of academic history cannot be rewritten for the purposes of nation-building or even redress: rather, the demands of our methodology and our analytics require nothing less than the recognition of the full register of the nuances, complications, contradictions, and at times absurdities of the past. Indeed, as Fred Cooper puts it:

> History does not offer lessons. But it does suggest possibilities – and apart from the specific possibilities that a rich and complex story of the past establishes – the telling at least establishes that alternatives have existed in the past, that choices have been made, that choices have consequences.24

We also need to become better at articulating and defending our theoretical imperatives and our professional ethics.25 One such recent instance of this, from the USA, came in October 2011 when, amongst other bodies representing thousands of academics and practitioners, the American Historical Association (15,000 members) and the Oral History Association (900 members) registered their objections to proposed changes in ethics review procedures mandated by US laws, insisting that they would, if implemented, be disastrous

for humanities and social sciences research, and, ultimately, for democracy.\textsuperscript{26} Similarly, over 2009 to 2011 the SAHS and HASA joined in backing the Archival Platform’s ‘Letters for Lulu’ campaign to bring the parlous state of South Africa’s archives service on to the state’s agenda\textsuperscript{27} and in statements on the South African Protection of Information Bill, which has been described by some as ‘the single biggest threat to academic freedom since 1994’.\textsuperscript{28} In part, these were energised by the sharing of experiences with our Botswana colleagues, and at the June 2011 conference, incoming President Ackson Kanduza added his voice to the many who urged an activist role for historians, not least through joining the SAHS and making it a meaningful regional body. With more members more can also be done by way of materially assisting (as was done in 2009 and 2011) upcoming scholars from across the region to attend meetings and conferences. In pursuing the awarding of a prestigious book prize for historical works published within the region (an initiative between the SAHS and HASA that is underway) we can provide our own criteria of excellence. Such a body will be neither formed in a vacuum or without its own ideological differences,\textsuperscript{29} but it could strongly represent and lobby for the interests of those concerned to keep open as many perspectives on the Southern African past as possible.


\textsuperscript{27} For more about the Archival Platform’s ‘Letters for Lulu/Postcards for Paul’ campaign to pressure the Minister of Arts and Culture on the national archives and policy, see http://www.archivalplatform.org/news/entry/letters_for_lulu, accessed 28 December 2011.


\textsuperscript{29} See Larry Grubbs’s recent book \textit{Secular Missionaries: Americans and African Development in the 1960s} (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009) for the Cold War context of the influential and financially well-supported African Studies Association, for instance. The ASA is a non-profit organisation, with five full time staff members and considerable financial reserves. Its annual membership fees in 2010 ranged from: income above $35,000: $180 (R1260) income below $34,000: $115 (R805) Students: $70 (R490). Those for the SAHS, for two years are R450: and all SAHS EXCO members work voluntarily.