

## EDITORIAL

In preparing for this Special 63<sup>rd</sup> Edition of *New Contree* to commemorate the Journal's 35<sup>th</sup> birthday (January 1977 - January 2012), we came to the conclusion that a “down memory lane journey” also serves purposes other than just do it for the sake of remembering. Milestone memories in the past (especially the years where the Journal was known as *Contree*) served the purpose of remembering the bulk of production days regarding “how much” and “how many”. Academics from various disciplines and amateur writers made contributions. The inputs of these enthusiastic writers in the pioneering years of the *Contree/New Contree* were no “weaker” than their counterpart historical journals nationally.<sup>1</sup> In 1987, after ten years of publishing, André Wessels (then an employee at the Human Science and Research Council [HSRC]) reminded readers that *Contree* received accreditation in 1985 (which also meant that an editorial advisory committee was appointed for the first time and that a peer reviewing process was introduced). Over many years, interesting information on *Contree* was shared with readers: Amongst others that the initial circulation (1977) was 1000 per edition, which increased to 1500 in 1987; that the readership was wide and the cost per edition paid by the buyer/subscription member R1.50 and that 95 articles were published in the first 10 years. Both English and Afrikaans were used. This arrangement has not changed, but more English written articles are included and writers have to present abstracts in English regardless of the language used.

After 15 years of existence and 30 editions later, articles were produced with a local history focus that covered the many facets of communities (health, environment, economy, politics, local government and township developments, military activities, education etcetera). The “scientific” phase of the journal formally started when historians of the University of Johannesburg took over responsibility for *Contree* in 1992 from the HSRC. The late John Bottomley of the North-West University's Mafikeng Campus became the new editor in 1996 – which was a time that also marked the name changed to *New Contree*. The *New Contree* Editorial

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<sup>1</sup> Compare B le Cordeur, “*The South African Historical Journal* and periodical literature on South African History”, *South African Historical Journal*, 20(1), pp. 1-16. Its interesting to know that the HSRC also financially supported the SAHJ in its pioneering years since 1967's.

Board salutes his passionate contributions as Editor up to 2005.

Times have changed since the first years of *Contree*. Editors of historical journals in South Africa today (which number about 15) know that it is even more expensive to publish one edition of a journal. It is equally true that peer-reviewing scientific articles have become more professional to ensure high-quality contributions. This often results in a dearth search for suitable articles. On top of this, writers are exposed to more finicky journal requirements. Changing times and obstacles have therefore led to a situation where *New Contree* only publishes an average of 7-8 articles per issue. The future ideal is four issues per annum with an even broader international exposure. However, present finances do not allow for this possibility yet. Since 2006, *New Contree* progressed to a new phase in its professional approach (which included an addition to its name as: “A journal of historical and human sciences for Southern Africa”). Book reviews, emphasised as an important part of journals, have been picking up in the two regular annual issues of *New Contree*. Although this section is not comparable to the number of book reviews in the HSRC-years, other obstacles make comparisons difficult.

Though historical journals do not have to function in historical societies or to be supported by such societies, those housed in historical societies<sup>2</sup> certainly have the advantage above the “society-less” journals of having a platform for person-to-person-communication during conferences. Also, historical societies are provided with opportunities to be informed of recent research and to inspire its authors to progress to a publishing phase. No editorial team has the time to act as a marketing agent to remind historians and academics to subscribe to a “society-less” journal. Societies and the intellectuals they serve should therefore become more involved in the discipline they represent by familiarising with its journal base and focus and supporting it from that angle with research contributions and other means, before totally losing it as platform.

Despite these challenges, *New Contree* has made it to 2012 and will continue for the next 35 years if properly managed. This will be possible if its members and the rest of the academic community support its vision

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<sup>2</sup> Based on statistics by Johan Bergh’s research, it appears as if seven academic-related historical societies exist in South Africa. See JS Bergh, *Historiese verenigings en tydskrifte in Suid-Afrika: Verlede, hede en toekoms, Historia*, 38(2), November 1993, pp. 33-49.

as a multidisciplinary journal with national, regional and local research foci. Perhaps the time has come that *New Contree* should develop into a scientific e-journal for easy dissemination to the general public and learners in schools. In many ways, the Journal lost the support of a wide range of people interested in regional/local history as it drifted towards a more professional and scientific outlook. Ironically, a key aspect of the regional/local history methodology is the community's involvement. Therefore reconsidering how *New Contree* can present research contributions to "ordinary people" in especially Southern Africa, should be part of its future thinking.

*Contree's*/*New Contree's* vision was significant for South African historical scholarship. Apart from being the first to provide a formal platform for everyday histories – an assignment *Historia* took on in its pioneering years (also with *Historia* Jr) – *New Contree* has always been open to multidisciplinary contributions and the newer trends in Historical research. While *New Contree's* contributions to the regional and local historiography of South Africa are interesting to some, its contributions to the methodology of such historical studies are interesting to others. In this regard the first contribution to this special edition discusses these matters and opens a historiographical and methodological debate about doing regional/local history, and integrative history and/or multidisciplinary research in regional/local areas.

The rest of this special edition features a variety of regional research, covering micro histories on personalities in Graaff Reinet (on education related to race and class), the Cape (on diaries as source related to gender and class) and Potchefstroom (politics and economy in reporting on everyday life). The article on Pep Stores in the Cape Peninsula provides fascinating information on, amongst others, this local retailer industry's efforts to improve the skills of its labour force (for example "black economic empowerment" in the early seventies).

In many ways the contributions in the special edition of *New Contree* (and since at least 2007) have accommodated research disseminations in many spaces or/and places in Southern Africa's history. Requests for a revisitation of the local/regional past<sup>3</sup> spontaneously surface in most of the

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<sup>3</sup> To refer to Freund. See the first article in this edition.