

### Introduction

In 2019 the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria (UP) and the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), both of them located here in the city of Tshwane, Pretoria, commemorate major anniversaries, the 100<sup>th</sup> for the Faculty of Humanities and the 90<sup>th</sup> for the National Bureau of Education, which I will refer to as the Bureau from this point, and 50<sup>th</sup> for the HSRC. How, with their complicated histories of association with the project of apartheid, we mark and make sense of the anniversaries is what I seek to make sense of here. There is, let me say, a longer version of this talk which I am happy to share with anybody.

I begin then with the position that the institutions, the University of Pretoria and the Bureau and HSRC, have complex histories. They are born as white institutions. Today, of course, they are very different. But Black people did not feature then. In coming to construct a story of the institutions I show, in seeking to hold the complexity of the institutions in sight, that they were messy spaces. They were messy precisely because South Africa was at a point of working out the question of white identity. Framing the question was at one level a struggle about Englishness over a sense of what it meant to be Afrikaans and Afrikaner, and, at another level, about the relationship of white people with black people. Was it to be over, against, or, in the emerging language of the day, separate and apart from black people? It is the fifty year period, from the 1920s to the 1970s that all of this plays out and which I concentrate on here tonight.

There was debate in institutions about these questions. While the debate about black people being included it needs to be said, was not prominent at all, there were people articulating an inclusionary position. White nationalism did, of course, come to prevail in the institutions.

### Intellectual tempers

For the purposes of the Talk, I ask how Pretoria figures in this history. Can we look at the city of Pretoria intellectually as a place with a particular orientation, as Oscar Wilde was to say of Oxford, that it was a place of ideas, as we sometimes do for places like Cape Town, Stellenbosch and Potchefstroom, to which we attach the intellectual identities of

[Click once for](#)

[Slide 2](#)

liberalism, high-brow Afrikanerdom and Christian National Education respectively? Is it appropriate, thinking provocatively, to endow intellectual Tshwane/Pretoria with the mantle of the *Praetorian* – that stance of being on guard for and standing in defence of the political authority of the state?

In taking the discussion forward, we can, with some justification, use the term *Praetorian* to describe certain aspects of Pretoria - its *grand* architecture and, critically, its status as the administrative centre of the country. Four of the seven 'architectural wonders of Pretoria' are *Praetorian* in their physicality: The Union Buildings, the Voortrekker Monument, the Theo van Wyk, Unisa Building, and *Die Skip*, at the University of Pretoria. *Praetorian* as a description also works politically with respect to the place Pretoria *comes* to hold in South Africa. There is the reality of the almost century-long process of constructing Pretoria as a *northern* seat of power in direct opposition to the South as it is represented by Cape Town. When the National Party (NP) came into power it focused its attention on transforming the civil service located here in Pretoria.

Is this material expression of Pretoria embodied in the disciplines of sociology, psychology, history, philosophy and theology? Does this characterisation of *Praetorian* – of being on guard – work for the social science community and specifically for the two organisations?

### **Debate in Afrikaner Political Thought**

It is the fifty-year period from about 1920 to the 1970s - the nation-building phase - that is of most interest in this analysis. I do not, in this presentation, look at what these institutions have become – what they are now – and how different they are. I am focusing on their formative years – the years in which they come to give Pretoria a particular scholarly identity. The question that comes to give the period its character, explains Duvenage (ibid), is that of how Afrikaners continue 'their self-consciousness and collective identity... in the new state?'

Two positions – two responses – took root to these challenges. The first, championed by Boer Generals Louis Botha and Jan Smuts, was for reconciliation between the two white groups. The second came from another general, General JBM (Barry) Hertzog, who founded the National Party in 1914. Behind him was assembling a cultural movement taking shape in a range of powerful established and new cultural, academic and social organisations. In time, Hertzog began, from the early 1930s, to move towards the Botha/Smuts position. He felt that the time had come for Afrikaners and English-speaking people to become a single white nation.

[Click once for](#)

[Slide 3](#)

[Click once for](#)

[Slide 4](#)

[Click once for](#)

[Slide 5](#)

[Click once for  
Generals Botha  
and Smuts to  
appear on slide 5](#)

[Click once for  
General Hertzog  
to appear on  
slide 5](#)

This did not go down well with many from the Hertzog camp who remained suspicious of English-speaking South Africans in the Afrikaner community. This suspicion was taken up politically by DF Malan and the Purified National Party. As Duvenage (2014: 86) said, “(f)or Malan, English-speaking South Africans still considered England as home and, infinitely more importantly, Afrikaners should return the country to their republican roots.”

Duvenage describes Malan’s position as resting on an ‘ethnic-communitarian’ argument. It resonated with a “younger brand of modernising nationalist politicians .... Strong support was also forthcoming from Afrikaans civil society..., the three Dutch reformed Churches”, and this is of most significance for thinking about the research community, “academics at the increasingly confident universities in Stellenbosch, Bloemfontein, Potchefstroom and Pretoria, writers and poets whose work was well-known, as well as the business community” (ibid).

Duvenage’s description of these developments is useful in terms of understanding the political mission of the Afrikaner elite. Its project was essentially the establishment of the apartheid order. Taking control of the state in 1948 was critical.

But what was happening in the research institutions?

### **The Intellectual Landscape**

Allsobrook’s answer is that the scientific methodology of positivism was coming to prevail in the research community at the time. Critical about this positivism is that it hid within itself the ideology of race.

What is positivism? Positivism is an intellectual movement that was growing in Europe in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Its point of departure was, and remains, that it is possible to approach and make sense of society – the social world – on the same principles and procedures that are used in the natural sciences, that, in other words the behaviour of human beings is governed by invariable causes and effects – ‘facts’.

Strikingly, positivism arrived in South Africa as it was grappling with the question of building the nation after Union. As Norval (i1996:27) makes clear, it is important to understand that the imagination of the ‘nation’ was in crisis after the 1920s: “(it) is therefore important ... to show how it is that a certain imaginary, at a specific point in time, enters into crisis and consequently no longer can fulfil its function of interpellating subjects into stable, ‘normalized’ forms of identification.” Ethno-communitarianism is developed to resolve this crisis.

[Click once for](#)

[Slide 6](#)

[Click once for](#)

[Slide 7](#)

[Click once for  
Positivism on  
slide 7](#)

[Click once for  
Ethno-  
communitarianism  
on slide 7](#)

Holding ethno-communitarianism together were two concerns: the 'native' question and the 'poor white problem'.

The point I am wishing to leave here tonight is that the two institutions we are commemorating tonight, the Bureau which becomes the HSRC, and the University of Pretoria, play critical roles in, very different kinds of ways, in giving content and direction to the way in which South Africa comes to deal with these questions. They do so over the period of the late 1920s to the late 1970s – fifty years. The first 25 years of this period belong to the Bureau. Leading them is Ernst Malherbe. The second 25 are those of the University dominated by a professor of sociology, Geoff Cronje.

[Click once for Ernest Malherbe and Geoff Cronje to appear on slide 7](#)

### **The Carnegie Commission: Phase One**

Malherbe's contribution to the development of positivism is large. In the late 1920s, as a young social scientist trained at Teachers' College, Columbia University in the United States, he made the argument that the policy-making process in South Africa was deeply flawed. What was needed, he argued in an unpublished letter, was 'genuine science': "what we want is *action*, not mere sporadic outbursts... sustained action based on scientific methods and principles... finding out the best possible way of doing a thing and then doing it that way". To realise this 'best way', he urged, South Africa needed to establish national research institutes. He was heard and in 1929 the Minister of Education, Dr DF Malan, established the Bureau, the forerunner organisation to the HSRC. His most important contribution was, as the first director of the Bureau, helping to set the agenda for social policy-making in South Africa and the social sciences. He did so through his leading role in the Carnegie Commission.

[Click once for](#)

[Slide 8](#)

The Carnegie Commission of Inquiry into 'Poor whites' had as its main focus the economic, psychological, sociological, educational and health factors which influenced the situation in which 'poor whites' found themselves. It had direct consequences for the social sciences. Two are of critical significance. The first was methodological and had deep implications for what we might think of as 'the politics of knowledge' and particularly the importance of 'good knowledge' for policy formation. Central here was positivism - the idea of science, Malherbe's concern with the 'best possible way' of coming to understand a problem. Malherbe affirmed for the social sciences in South Africa the significance and pre-eminence of 'experts' and 'expert-driven' knowledge. He introduced for the first time in South Africa intelligence tests – IQ tests. All that mattered to him were 'facts', 'facts'.

The second was that the 'unit of analysis' in the Carnegie Commission was 'race' and how to account for it – in this case that segment of the population thought of as 'poor' and 'white'. In taking this direction, reflecting the 'moral panic' about the 'degeneration' of the white working-class that was brewing in elite Afrikaner circles, Malherbe was, implicitly, aligning the social sciences in the country with the dominant political direction being crafted in the Afrikaans community. In motivating the idea of a commission of inquiry to Dr Frederick Paul Keppel, the president of the Carnegie Corporation, Malherbe shared with him an article he had written many years earlier in which he explained that "(t)oday we have over 100,000 so-called 'Poor Whites'. They are becoming a menace to the self-preservation and prestige of our White people, living as we do in the midst of the native population which outnumber us 5 to 1. We shall never solve the Poor White problem adequately until we get thorough and first-hand knowledge of the causes underlying this malady – the cumulative result of some maladjustment in our society in the past."

In specifying this focus on 'poor whites in the midst of the native population', Malherbe, helped to set the discursive agenda for sociology, psychology, philosophy, criminology, anthropology and a whole range of disciplines and fields of study. At the core of this discursive drift was what Shireen Ally, Katie Mooney and Paul Stewart (2003: describe as a sociological imagination – 'a preoccupation with prejudice and social "pathology"'. This was the first phase of agenda-setting.

### **The Second Phase: Filling in the Content of Positivism**

Noteworthy also about the second 25 years was that Afrikaner intellectuals were becoming increasingly influential and conspicuous. They were cohering as a group and becoming better-organised and well connected to dominant political structures. The AB, secret as it was in its operations, was, of course, a powerful hub for these developments. Quoting Sparks Mooney (2006: 250) says that "(f)or more than half a century no major new idea in Afrikaner politics was expressed in public without first being pondered, analysed, and intensely debated by this dedicated 'band of brothers'.

Politically, figures such as DF Malan were in the forefront of developments within the broader Afrikaner community. At that time, the late 1940s, the University of Pretoria was going through an intense phase of consolidation. Leading that process was Professor AE du Toit, the first rector of the institution when it became a university in 1930, and a leading figure in the institution becoming a primarily Afrikaans-medium one, and Professor CH

[Click once for](#)

[Slide 9](#)

[Click once for](#)

[Slide 10](#)

[Click once for](#)

[Slide 11](#)

Rautenbach, the longest serving rector, who was at the helm of the institution from 1948 to 1970. Van der Merwe (2008: 152) said of this period of Rautenbach's leadership that

Afrikaans institutions such as the university enjoyed tremendous support from the state. Rautenbach was proud to stand at the helm of what he affectionately called the *Volksuniversiteit*.

Important and more visible as these other people were, the leading player in the shaping of the links between academy and state, however, was Cronjé. In the Humanities' faculty's commemorative book he is described as 'a controversial figure', but he was significantly, during his time, widely, regularly and repeatedly drawn on for leadership. As an interlocutor he was formidable. He represents in important ways for the Afrikaner community what Gramsci would have called the *organic intellectual*.

From 1936, when Cronjé assumed the Chair of Sociology at UP, he was instrumental, as a positivist, in giving content – 'facts' – to the thinking that was evolving within the Afrikaans community. He took the detached 'facts' of Malherbe and vested them with the soul that his political peers were yearning for. Wilkinson and Strydom (1978: 196), in their key text on the Broederbond, *The Super Afrikaners*, suggested that "(n)othing so stirringly spoken by Diederichs, Meyer and Cronjé could find public utterance before it had been the subject of intense pondering and discussion by this 'Band of brothers' so completely devoted to the cause of alienated Afrikanerdom."

The thread that Cronjé picked up from the Carnegie Commission was essentially to explain, ideologically, what the significance of the race and class questions were. He made the 'moral panic' that accompanied the onset of the Carnegie Commission something that could be worked with practically.

Cronjé did so by linking white poverty and crime with the 'Native question' and to a very specific sort of deviancy: *rasvermenging* (miscegenation) (ibid). He brought several strands of thinking together in this explanation, those of "degeneration; of a loss of moral values in the cities; of fears of 'blood mixing'; of crime and social class." From 1945 Cronjé was responsible for the first systematic elaboration of apartheid theory by means of a series of influential books which were widely read and commented on." Raising the temperature around the question of miscegenation, he concluded 'that poor whites ... (were) particularly vulnerable to (this problem' (ibid)... (It)... *produces inferior human material in*

[Click once for](#)

Slide 12

*biological terms (physically and mentally)*. The solution to this, he insisted, was ‘total apartheid.’

Here then stood the quintessential *Praetorian*. Cronjé took it upon himself, significantly, not only to write as a *Praetorian*, his manifesto-type text of 1948 was entitled, *Voogdyskap en Apartheid* (Guardianship and Apartheid), but to comport himself in *Praetorian* kinds of ways. He taught, for the whole period of his time at UP, Educational Sociology in the Faculty of Education, had started the Department of Social Work in 1934, succeeded in making the Department of Sociology the largest department in the entire University, was founder of the field of Criminology in South Africa in 1949 and the ‘founding head of the Department of Dramatology in 1965’ (Strydom, 2019: 57).

Of interest for the social sciences and humanities, demonstrating his role as, in a sense, the *Chief Praetorian*, he was able to mobilise people around him in defence of the authority of apartheid. Controversially, seen from the present, he could lay claim to being the HSRC’s progenitor. Astrid Schwenke’s (2019) recent working through the HSRC’s archives describes him as being at the forefront of the establishment of the HSRC as early as 1962 already. He campaigned for 5 years for this and was finally successful in 1967. In terms of the 1968 Act of Parliament which brought it into being, it was not to be simply a research structure. It could dispense money to researchers in the universities. The criteria for allocating these monies stressed that the research had to be ‘in the national interest’ (White, 1992: 24). Cronjé was central. In these roles he saw and carried himself as a guardian. He had the ear of the major intellectual figures in the country. The President of the HSRC in 1990 said in a speech to the organisation that the organisation that had come from Cronje’s efforts was ‘almost an extension of the state’ (White, 1992: 26).

### **And Yet: A Conclusion**

And yet, ubiquitous and influential as Cronjé was, the University, and the HSRC it needs to be said, were not monolithic institutions. As a *Praetorian* inflection was beginning to dominate in the 1950s, there were individuals who understood their responsibilities very differently. A commitment to academic rigour held the growing nationalistic mood in check.

In the Faculty of Theology Professors SP Engelbrecht and AS Geyser objected strenuously to National Party proposals to enlarge the national Senate for the purpose of securing a

[Click once for](#)

Slide 13

majority to expedite the passage of a law to remove Coloured people from the voters' roll (Ungerer, 2017: 5). They came under heavy attack in the institution.

Even more public was the second instance of 'tarring and feathering' at Unisa in March of 1979. Strydom (2019: 100) described the incident in the following terms:

Almost fifty years after the first victim of tarring and feathering at UP suffered due to offending Afrikaner sensibilities, a second such incident occurred. The victim was again a member of the Faculty of Humanities, but this time from the Department of History. Professor FA (Floors) van Jaarsveld was arguably the most influential Afrikaner historian of his time. He was also at the time a controversial figure in Afrikaner historical circles both due to his approach to research which embraced new interdisciplinary methods, and to his later disillusionment with Afrikaner historiography.

Even those who were clearly members of the *Praetorian Order* at the University, such as Professor Nic Rhodie, head of the Department of Sociology could no longer count on the University to back them up. He produced in 1977 an academic series 'which was viewed as a work of propaganda on behalf of the South African government' (Strydom, 2019: 83). After questions started appearing in the public about the series and its purpose, the University launched an investigation which led to his resignation.

The HSRC itself, even at its most intermeshed and entwined days with the *Praetorian Order*, had within it individuals who resisted being hand-maidens to the apartheid state. The most significant instance of this was when, as Professor Hendrik (Bok) Marais, then a Deputy President of the HSRC, explained, the organisation undertook a series of studies about the key social issues of the country in the late 1970s. One of the studies was on intergroup relations 'the findings of which could be used to improve relations and reduce conflict in South Africa' ((Marais, 2019: 8). The main report of this exercise, *The South African Society: Realities and Future Prospects* was released in 1985 and concluded that "... the political ordering of intergroup relations according to the original apartheid model has reached an impasse and that constructive relations cannot be developed further along these lines.... Delays in addressing the issue could have catastrophic consequences" (ibid). The opposition to apartheid in the HSRC reflected in this development may have been, speaking critically, slight. But it did signal a shift away from the *Praetorian*. Along with what was happening at the University of Pretoria, most notably with the position taken by Van

[Click once for](#)

Slide 14

Jaarsveld, the sensibility that had been installed by people such as Cronjé had been if not broken then certainly disrupted.

The question with which we began was whether the social sciences and the humanities here in Pretoria – the institutions and the people - can be described as *Praetorian* in their character. It clearly, one must acknowledge, was so for a significant period of time. Today, of course, the social sciences and the people mediating them can no longer carry that label. During the late 1940s and into the early 1970s, a period of almost thirty years, it would not be inappropriate to say, that leading members of the social sciences and humanities and leading members of the ruling party were in a powerful alliance. Significantly, unlike Schleisinger's Washington bureaucrats, these intellectuals were not sycophantic. They were confident in themselves. For the period of 25 years they held the social sciences and humanities research community in the country in check. They could not, however, sustain this order going into the turbulent late seventies and eighties. They were forced to engage with the changing balance of forces. Inside their institutions individuals and groups which had been relatively quiet began to express themselves and take position. Their positions were instinctively in opposition. They were not organised, however. They did not form new schools of thought. They began to move into wider and different networks of intellectuals, inside and outside the country. Black academics came into the institutions and brought with them different and alternative views of the world. The *Praetorian* was decidedly no more. But an agenda needed to be established. Moving into the late eighties and into the nineties, buoyed by the shifting tide of change in the country, the institutions moved, cautiously, towards new understandings of themselves.

[Click once for](#)

Slide 15