

Lost and found: an overview of the archival depositories of the Human Science Research Council

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Abstract

In this paper, the author demonstrates that there is a range of primary sources on the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), South Africa's foremost non-teaching social science research body and its predecessor, the South African National Bureau for Educational and Social Research, lodged in the country's conventional and unconventional archives. The Central Records Department at Wits University is an example of the latter. Initially, scholars believed that the bulk of primary sources on the institution were not available. This has greatly affected the writing of the institution's history and as a result it remains largely undocumented. This paper demonstrates that raw material on the institution can be and has been located through systematic research in various depositories around South Africa. The paper gives an overview of materials on the institution lodged in different archives and describes typical examples. Such primary sources can greatly assist scholars with a research interest in the HSRC and its predecessor, the Bureau.

Keywords: archives, depositories, research, records, Human Science Research Council

1. Introduction

The adage 'lost and found' implies a place where lost items are stored to await retrieval by their owners or a lost property. In this paper, the author demonstrates that there is a range of primary sources on the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), South Africa's foremost non-teaching social science research body and its predecessor, the South African National Bureau for Educational and Social Research, lodged in the country's conventional and unconventional archives. In South Africa recently there has been interest in the history of the HSRC. The origins of the HSRC can be traced back to 1929, when the South African National Bureau for Educational and Social Research (BESR), located in the Department of Education, Arts and Science was established under the tutelage of E.G. Malherbe. He succeeded in building the institution from the ground up and in making various international connections. However, the Bureau had its limitations including initially undertaking research projects which focused only on white communities (Chisholm & Morrow 2007).

As research projects were extended to black communities, some of the projects funded by the Bureau left much to be desired including projects geared towards proving white supremacy (Fleisch 1995). The Bureau was not alone in these white supremacist research projects. Historians such as G.M. Theal and F.A. Van Jaarsveld, for instance, were deeply influenced by racial preconceptions and portrayed blacks as uncivilized and uncouth (Smith 1988).

The Bureau's approach to research should be seen in relation to the resurgence of Afrikaner nationalism of its day, typified by J.B. Hertzog, the prime minister. The African National Congress(ANC) was firmly opposed to Hertzog's racial politics including his proposed Native Bills which were geared towards further subjugation of Africans.¹ Afrikaner nationalism was further entrenched when the National Party came into power in 1948.

The National Party introduced additional racially oppressive laws through the policy of apartheid. The HSRC and other Afrikaner institutions such as Stellenbosch University and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) benefited greatly and flourished under the National Party regime. Such institutions were mainly staffed with Afrikaner experts and collaborated unquestioningly with the oppressive regime. In the early 1990s, when apartheid was brought to its knees, some called for the dissolution of the HSRC. It was argued, unrepresentative and beyond saving. However, the organization survived the onslaught, reconfigured itself and remains an important source of South African applied social research to this day.

Intriguing but controversial, the history of the HSRC and that of the Bureau, remains largely unwritten. One reason for this is that it was believed that the bulk of primary sources on the organization were unavailable and perhaps had disappeared completely. For historians, primary sources are of course crucial in producing groundbreaking and original work. However, a thorough search in conventional and unconventional archives in different parts of the country – the Central Records Department of the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), the National Archives of South Africa in Pretoria and others -reveal that there is a sizeable amount of raw material on the HSRC including on its predecessor the Bureau, from which writers can benefit significantly.

The purpose of this paper is to give an overview of and describe the materials on the institution lodged in different archives. This will assist researchers interested in the organization's history to identify the whereabouts of these records and undertake research on them. We should certainly understand history from the side of the oppressed, but need also to broaden our understanding and grasp the functions of the various agencies, of which the HSRC was one, that served the research and intellectual interests of the apartheid state. The method followed in this article is to note the various archives in which relevant material is to be found, giving examples drawn from the papers in the collections. The various archives are identified and discussed in the subsequent sections.

2. University of Witwatersrand

The University of Witwatersrand has two centres that have historical records associated with HSRC, that is, Wits University: Central Records and Wits historical Papers.

¹ For more on this, see for instance, Wits University, Cullen Library, *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 20 February 1926, *Umteteli Wa Bantu*, 22 May 1926.

2.1 Wits University: Central Records

Archival material lodged at the Central Records Department at Wits University gives insight into the development of social sciences in South Africa including through the Bureau. This collection is in English. The Central Records Department at Wits is not a conventional archive, but a records management division, dealing with records pertaining to the university. However, access to archival records for research purposes is allowed on arrangement.

Important in this collection, is, for instance, a bulky report by P.J. Olckers from the Bureau after a study tour to the US, Canada, Great Britain and Holland. During these visits, he observed educational and research practices in these countries. In the case of the US, for example, he noticed that research was backed by federal states and local authorities as well as the federal government. During his research tour, he also came to appreciate the range of educated individuals, voluntary organizations, philanthropic organizations and private firms that financially supported the research initiatives in their respective countries.²

Also important in this collection is a circular from the National Council for Social Research, the advisory body to the Bureau. The circular explains that the Minister of Education, Arts and Science had decided, following recommendations from the Council, to appoint an *ad hoc* committee comprised of experts from the humanities. These were expected to investigate and submit recommendations with regard “to the planning, coordination and direction of all future regional and other surveys, on a national scale”.³ Another significant document is a circular of September 27, 1947 proposing that a register of the country’s current research in the humanities be compiled and made available to all universities and research workers in the country.⁴

2.2 Wits Historical Papers

There is archival material relating to the institution in the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) collection housed in the Wits Historical Papers, Wits University. This material, mostly in English, stretches from 1929, when the SAIRR was formed, to 1969. It covers a range of issues including politics, socio-economic issues and education. Of interest for this paper is correspondence related to the Bureau and the South African Council for Social and Educational Research.

Of interest in some of this correspondence is the involvement of two female researchers in the work of the Bureau, Ellen Hellman and ‘Miss Pauline’. Pauline was probably a research assistant to Hellman. Their research focus was on ‘Native juveniles’. Hellman said she would be delighted

² Wits University, Wits Central Records, Report by P.J. Olckers on Some Observations on Education and Research in the Social Sciences in the United States of America, Canada, Great Britain and Holland. Henceforth, W/ WCR

³ W/WCR, circular entitled “To All Government Departments, Universities and other interested bodies”, 30 June, 1950.

⁴ W/ WCR, circular entitled “Register of current Research in the Humanities”, from A. de V. Herholdt, 27 September, 1947.

if Rheinallt Jones, the first secretary and director of the SAIRR, could give her a letter of introduction to take with her as she conducted her field research.⁵ Hellman became a renowned sociologist well known for her innovative sociological study of African urban living, *Rooiyard: A Sociological Survey of an Urban African Slum*.⁶

There is also some correspondence between Malherbe and Rheinallt Jones regarding matters related to the Bureau. In a letter from Malherbe to Jones on August 8, 1938, he informed him that the meeting of the Council for Educational and Social Research was to be held in early September in Cape Town.⁷ Included in this is some correspondence between the SAIRR and the Bureau.⁸ Even though Malherbe had left the Bureau in 1939, he was kept informed on developments there and in fact still influenced decision making at the institution. On August 2, 1940, he informed Rheinallt Jones on the latest developments about the Bureau in the context of the World War: Thanks for your letter of the 18th July. While the National Bureau of Educational and Social Research has been practically closed down, with the exception of the library, owing to the fact that its staff has been drafted to other State departments connected more or less directly with defence, there is somebody in charge who deals with written correspondence and passes on to me all matters requiring a decision.⁹

Malherbe was convinced that the decision to close down the Bureau was a temporary measure by government. He assured Jones that, “this state of dormancy of the Bureau is to be temporary only for the duration of the war. I cannot for a moment think that the Government will be short-sighted as to close it down permanently”.¹⁰

3. The E.G Malherbe Collection at Killie Campbell Library - University of KwaZulu-Natal

The Malherbe Collection housed at the Killie Campbell Library at the University of KwaZulu-Natal is substantial, with detailed archival material on the Bureau, and is essential for any study of the institution. As the first director of the Bureau from 1929-1939 and later vice-chancellor of the University of Natal, Malherbe kept systematic records relating to his life and career. The Malherbe Collection is mostly in English but some items are in Afrikaans. Malherbe wrote to academics, researchers and intellectuals in South Africa and other parts of the world on numerous research matters. He also communicated with institutions such as the Carnegie Corporation in New York and the International Missionary Council. There is also some correspondence between him and government officials.

⁵ W/WHP, SAIRR-C, Box AD 843/RJ/A3.1.7, file 1, unidentified person to J.D. Rheinallt Jones, 11 January 1938.

⁶ <https://www.sahistory.org.za>, accessed on March 27, 2020.

⁷ W/WHP, SAIRR-C, Box AD 843/RJ/A3.1.7, file 4.

⁸ See for example, W/WHP, SAIRR-C, Box AD 843/RJ/A3.1.7, file 4, B. Newsfeed to the Secretary of S.A. Institute of Race Relations, 9 June 1938.

⁹ W/WHP, SAIRR-C, Box AD 843/RJ/Aa3.1.9, file 3.

¹⁰ W/WHP, SAIRR-C, Box AD 843/RJ/Aa3.1.9, file 3.

Malherbe was very informed on world developments. He studied in the US and travelled to many parts of the world even when he was the head of the Bureau in the 1930s. Clearly, he earned the respect of his peers and contemporaries as demonstrated through the letter from the prominent educationist C.T. Loram to J.H. Hofmeyr, Minister of Education at the time:

Even if Malherbe's important services to education in South Africa were unknown to some of the members of the conference [1934 Conference on Educational Adaptations], his wisdom, and understanding and clearly of mind were apparent throughout and it was certainly due to him and to some others that our work was so successful. My suggestion, and I make it with some diffidence... is that when Native Education comes under the Union control you consider the possibility of putting Malherbe in charge as Union Director of Native Education or preferably as Director of Native Development.¹¹

There is some correspondence in this collection between Malherbe and German academic Dr Gertrude Bäumer. Malherbe hoped to invite Bäumer from Germany to be part of the international Conference on Education and Social Work scheduled for July 1934 in South Africa.¹² The situation was ominous however. On February 21, 1934, Malherbe wrote anxiously to Bäumer that:

I had hoped to visit you in Hamburg while I was over in Europe, but as I did not hear anything from you, I did not make the trip. I hope nothing serious has occurred which might prevent you from visiting us at our Conference, and particularly the women's organizations, are banking on your being present. The topics concerning the organization of social work are probably the most important of all subjects dealt with at the Conference, and we are relying very much on your contribution to that aspect of our programme.¹³

However, the Nazis were now in power in Germany and this affected Bäumer's envisaged trip to South Africa. They blocked her and other German academics such as Dr Friedrich Schneider from attending the conference. Long after the conference Malherbe managed to reconnect with Bäumer. On September 1, 1947, he wrote to her that:

Ever since our correspondence was abruptly terminated early in 1934 when we had invited you to attend the South African conference of the New Education Fellowship, I have been making enquiries after you. Through a friend I managed to get your address, and I am writing to you to enquire how you are and whether you would be interested to receive from me a copy of the report of that conference which you were prevented from attending by Nazi intervention.¹⁴

There is also a long letter, written in 1936, from Malherbe to F. Clarke, Professor at the University of London Institute of Education. Malherbe informed Clarke about the article he had sent for publication in the Education Yearbook scheduled for 1937. He acknowledged that the piece was hastily written and that he was not really impressed by its quality. Perhaps of importance in this letter is Malherbe's position about his future as the head of the Bureau. He explained to Clarke that he was not leaving the Bureau as was rumored. Instead, he made it clear that he had turned down the offer he had received to become Managing Director of the Afrikaans Press. This, as he

¹¹UKZN University: KillieCampbell,E.G. Malherbe collection, file 507/1, C.T. Loram to J.H. Hofmeyr, 22 June, 1936. Henceforth, UKZN/KC, EGM-C.

¹²UKZN/KC, EGM-C, file 505/12, Malherbe to Gertrude Bäumer, 2 August 1934.

¹³UKZN/KC, EGM-C, file 505/12, Malherbe to Gertrude Bäumer, 21 February 1934

¹⁴UKZN/KC, EGM-C, file 505/ 12, Malherbe to Gertrude Bäumer, 1 September 1947.

put it, was not really his line. Though he turned down this offer, overtures were still made to him. He informed Clarke that:

Afterwards, however, General Hertzog and Minister Havenga saw me and expressed the wish that I should undertake this job because it would mean a great deal in building up Die Vaderland, a well-balanced Afrikaans newspaper which can serve as a cultural guide of the increasing Afrikaans population in the Rand and in the northern provinces. I told them frankly that I was never much of a politician and that if I were to undertake this job, I would not feel myself bound to any one party.¹⁵

4. University of Cape Town, Special Collections, Jagger Library Building

There is some material relating to the HSRC, including the Bureau, housed at the Jagger Library in the University of Cape Town's Special Collections. Though there is a handful of documents, they make a meaningful contribution to the history of the HSRC. Included is correspondence between the HSRC and the Community Arts Project (CAP) based in Cape Town. This is mostly in English with a few letters in Afrikaans. In a letter from Eunice Malan from the HSRC, to Mike van Graan from CAP, dated August 24, 1990, Malan congratulated the organization on its journal. She told van Graan that she also wished to subscribe to the journal in her personal capacity. Malan would like to interview van Graan for a project on popular theatre in South Africa and asked if van Graan could give her names of other potential interviewees for the project.¹⁶ There is also correspondence between Malherbe and Leo Marquard, an Afrikaner who broke with his background and who was one of the founders of the Liberal Party in 1953. This correspondence dates from the 1950s when Malherbe was at the University of Natal, long after he had left the Bureau. This is mostly in Afrikaans and may be relevant to researchers with a desire to trace Malherbe's movements after he had left the Bureau or to those who want to research Marquard.¹⁷

In the Monica and Godfrey Wilson papers, there is some material that relates to the National Council for Social Research. This includes some brochures entitled, *Research Needs in Social Anthropology* which was printed in 1948 and another entitled *Suggested Programme of Future Archaeological Research* printed in the same year. There are also some minutes of the National Council for Social Research as well as some correspondence in the collection. A letter from H.S. vd. Walt, the Secretary for Education, Arts and Science, informed Monica Wilson, then Professor of Social Anthropology at UCT that:

I have to advise you that the Honourable the Minister of Education, Arts and Science has appointed you a member of the committee for African Studies for a further period of two years with effect from 1st June, 1956. It would be appreciated if you advise me at your earliest convenience whether you are prepared to accept the appointment.¹⁸

¹⁵UKZN/KC, EGM-C, file 606/1, Malherbe to F. Clarke, 13 October, 1936.

¹⁶University of Cape Town, Special Collections, Jagger Library Building, File BC1195, Community Arts Project, R104 Human Sciences Research Council, from Eunice Malan to Mike van Graan, 24 August 1990. Henceforth, UCT/SPC/JLB.

¹⁷For more on these letters, see, for instance, UCT/SPC/JLB, BC 587, Leo Marquard Papers, E.G. Malherbe to Leo Marquard, 5 May, 1953, letter from E.G. Malherbe to Leo Marquard, 13 June, 1953.

¹⁸UCT/SPC/JLB, H.S. vd. Walt to Monica Wilson, 6 May, 1956.

Monica Wilson was a liberal critic of the National Party regime, and her relations with the Council and later the HSRC became increasingly frosty.

5. The State Archives in Pretoria

The State Archives in Pretoria is an obvious place to look for material relating to the HSRC and the Bureau since government related documents are often archived by the State Archives. Indeed, there is material in these archives pertaining to the organization, mostly correspondence from the time of the Bureau in the 1930s to the late 1960s. Some of this material is in English with correspondence from the 1940s and thereafter largely in Afrikaans. From that period onwards, the Bureau used the Afrikaans title *Nasionale Buro vir Opvoedkundige en Maatskaplike Navorsing*. When the National Party took power in 1948, Afrikaans became entrenched in government institutions as is reflected in the correspondence on the Bureau.

There is a letter from a psychologist, A. Lazarus of the Mental Health Society of the Witwatersrand, on two siblings, Allan and Harold Gordon. It reads, “The Individual Scale of the National Bureau of Educational Research was administered to both children. In addition, an attempt to administer a non-verbal scale was unsuccessful, since neither child could cope with test requirements”. Lazarus concluded that the 13-year-old Harold had a mental age of a 6-year-old and his intelligence quotient (IQ) was 46%. His 11-year-old brother, Allan, also did not perform well. Lazarus reported that Allan had a mental age of a four-year-old with an IQ of 39%. Lazarus’ conclusion was that the lads urgently need formal education as well as what he referred to as specialized training. He goes on to say that “they can both be taught sufficient skills to enable them to become reasonably productive and useful members of society”.¹⁹ Malherbe himself was fascinated by the controversial idea of IQ testing and by the middle of the 1930s, he had ensured that the Bureau gave considerable support for research geared towards “policy-oriented intelligence”: in this way his unit could influence the country’s education policy.²⁰ The role of psychology and psychological testing in a racially divided society is noteworthy and equivocal and is an area in which the Bureau and the HSRC were active.

Some correspondence between Malherbe and the structures of the New Education Fellowship in different parts of South Africa and the world is also lodged in the State Archives. The fellowship focused on children’s needs and educational development, working closely with teachers and schools in different parts of the world. There are also some minutes and brief reports pertaining to the New Education Fellowship. This correspondence covers issues ranging from funding, to children’s needs and N.E.F. conferences. In China for example it was reported in 1938 that:

The National Child Association, in Shanghai, (a Service Member of the N.E.F), which embraced nearly all the primary school teachers in China, is working desperately to cope with some part of the situation. There are now 30, 000 homeless children in Shanghai alone. The association is trying to provide them with free schooling so that, when peace returns,

¹⁹ NARSS, TOD, Box 22, from A. Lazarus to Scott-Millar, D.G, Thompson, I. Marincowits, nd.

²⁰Fleisch, “Social Scientists as Policy Maker”, pp 358-360.

they may not be utter misfits. Its finances are quite inadequate and it appeals to us to keep the work going.²¹

Malherbe was the president of the N.E.F in South Africa and the Bureau acted as the organization's secretariat.²² It would appear that at times the lines between the Bureau and N.E.F were blurred, bringing about tension. This issue was raised in 1938:

It is not clear to me to what extent the Education Bureau is acting officially as secretariat of the N.E.F. It is difficult to gauge the time devoted by the members of the Bureau staff to the publication in question [N.E.F. Quarterly News Sheet], but I would be surprised if the time is fairly considerable. The question also arises to what extent the typing work in connection with the N.E.F Conference should continue to be done by the Head Office staff... If the Secretary decides that work is official, then we could undertake to do all the work. If, however, the work is private, I would like to know exactly where we stand with regard to the N.E.F. work.²³

Perhaps this is one of the reasons why J.C. Smuts, Minister of Justice at the time, supported the idea of the establishment of a separate N.E.F. headquarters, avoiding confusion between the work of the Bureau and that of the N.E.F. On November 18, 1937, he congratulated Malherbe on the good work of the N.E.F. on educational development and wished him success in securing funds for the envisaged headquarters.²⁴

There is also correspondence between South African government officials regarding the work of the Bureau including issues on the appointment of staff in the organization. In a note from one official to another, one supports Malherbe's idea that the Bureau undertake research on educational problems as this would benefit the state including the Education Department and the country's educational institutions.²⁵

There is also some correspondence between the Bureau and the editor of the *Journal of Education* based in London. In one letter, B.J. Versfeld explains to Salter Davies, the editor of the journal, that Malherbe had left the Bureau and joined the Census and Statistics division. He explained to Davies that Malherbe did not think that he would have time to contribute to the journal since he had left the Bureau.²⁶

But even though from September 15, 1939 Malherbe occupied the post of Director of Census and Statistics, effectively he continued to serve the organization in an advisory capacity at a non-pensionable fee of £150 per annum. The intention was clear, "... not to fill the post of Director of the National Bureau of Educational and Social Research while Dr. MALHERBE'S services are

²¹ National Archives & Records Service of South Africa, OUD, Box E1/3/1/2, from (p.p) E.G. Malherbe to The Four Education Departments, 3 May 1938. Henceforth, NARSS.

²² NARSS, OUD, Box E1/3/1/2, E.G. Malherbe to D.M. Luckin, 6 April 1939.

²³ NARSS, OUD, Box E1/3/1/2, Z.M.[Chief Secretary] to J.J. Op't Hof, 1 December 1938.

²⁴ NARSS, OUD, Box E1/3/1/2, J.C. Smuts to Malherbe, 18 November 1937.

²⁵ NARSS, OUD, Box E1/3/1/2, Z.M. [Chief Clerk] to U.S, 21 December 1938.

²⁶ NARSS, OUD, Box E1/3/1/2, B.J. Versfeld to Salter Davies, 16 August 1939.

available to the Bureau”.²⁷ This demonstrates that in many ways Malherbe was the Bureau and the Bureau was Malherbe.

6. The National Library of South Africa

The National Library of South Africa (NLSA) in Cape Town also houses documents on the organisation, some in English and some in Afrikaans. There are for instance some reports on studies funded by the National Council for Social Research such as a report by W. Terrell-Glynn following his study tour of national and reference libraries in Europe, Great Britain and Ireland from the 7th of April to the 3rd of August 1967. This study was aimed at investigating “... all aspects of non-governmental manuscript material (e.g. private letters, diaries, account books etc), to view rariora, and generally to observe National and Reference library practises”.²⁸

Drawing lessons from this trip, Terrell-Glynn recommended that steps be immediately taken to put an end to the destruction of non-governmental manuscripts which were valuable primary sources and that the establishment of a Repair and Restoration Department should be urgently considered by the South African Library. He added that for the country’s National Library to achieve its full potential, priority be given to building it on a suitable and extensive site, enabling it to meet research demands.²⁹

Malherbe’s lectures on issues such as academic freedom, education and race in South Africa as well as on the country’s changing educational landscape are also in this collection. There is also material on the poor white problem: Malherbe was central to the researching of this subject in the early 1930s. In addition, there is material on HSRC research activities relating to different issues such as languages, literature, the arts and education, for instance studies such as that of Francois Alwyn Janse on *Graduation trends for Non-Whites at South African Universities 1960-1975*.

7. Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that archival records on the HSRC and its predecessor, the Bureau, exist in various depositories. The records described in this article are important for researchers with an interest in the history of the institution. They have a particular significance in that they often throw light on the Bureau and HSRC as seen from the perspective of other institutions. However, the archival records are not the complete picture. Probably, there are other potential archival sources on the HSRC which by its nature interacted with researchers and research bodies all over the country and even abroad. It is up to other researchers to discover such collections. At times, these could be unconventional archives, as is the case with the Central Records Department at Wits and the university records at Fort Hare located at the basement of the university administration building.³⁰ This requires researchers to enquire about the availability of such

²⁷NARSS, OUD, Box E1/3/1/2, G. Leighton to the Secretary for Education (Union), 18 December 1939.

²⁸The National Library of South Africa(NLSA), Report by W. Tyrrel-Glynn on a study tour of National and Reference Libraries in Europe, Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland, 7 April to 3 August 1967.

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰For more on Fort Hare’s university records see, Morrow and K. Gxabalashe, “The Records of the University of Fort Hare”, *History in Africa*, 27, 2000, pp481-97.

records, following the necessary official protocols that would enable them to gain access. Pertinent questions that researchers need to ask themselves as they seek to locate more material on the institution could include: who is likely to have corresponded with it and why? Which of the country's archives are likely to have shown interest in preserving material on the organization? Answers to such questions may point researchers in the right direction. Furthermore, it is important that the HSRC catalogues all the records that is aware of their existence in different repositories and create registers for researchers. This way it will ensure that researchers have a comprehensive idea of where the records are lodged.

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