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"THE TERRIBLE LAUGHTER OF THE AFRIKANER"—TOWARDS A SOCIAL HISTORY OF HUMOR

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A young Boer guerrilla fighter, Deneys Reitz, described the defeated Boer commandos drifting into the camps in May 1902, as a rabble of "starving, ragged men, clad in skins or sacking, their bodies covered with sores, from lack of salt and food . . . their appearance was a great shock to us, who came from the better-conditioned forces in the Cape."[1] In the aftermath of the South African War (1899–1902), the Afrikaner seemed defeated—the rural economy was shattered, family farms were destroyed and more than 25 000 Boer women and children were dead in the concentration camps.[2] Yet in this apocalyptic post-war world, something strange was happening. Afrikaners were laughing.

This phenomenon was observed with wonder by English philanthropist Emily Hobhouse, who had reported on the conditions in the camps and the aftermath of the scorched earth policy. She wrote, for example, of the Van Graan brothers, who had both suffered enormous losses during the war. One "had seven little mouths to feed. He got seed potatoes from Repatriation for a promissory note, but the drought killed them. His brother lent him oxen to plough with, so he put in a little seed, but till it is ripe he has nothing to live upon. His beautiful house is in ruins, his blue gums all but two cut down, his fruit trees chopped." "But", Hobhouse continued, "how he laughed, and how his brother laughed." Hobhouse further observed that "[l]ike all the other burghers [Boer General] De Wet is laughing. If he did not, he says, he should die. It makes him great fun. I do regret not being quick enough to catch all the Dutch proverbs which spice his conversation, nor the humour which runs through all the family talk—they speak so quickly". In a rural hamlet in the Orange Free State, Hobhouse encountered "a poor man", who—when she offered him some meal—said: "I shall be so glad that I shall laugh without feeling any inclination to laugh." In Pretoria, Hobhouse noted, the Boers "say little and only laugh." She concluded: "There is getting to be something quite terrible to me in this laugh of the Boers which meets me everywhere. It is not all humour, nor all bitter, though partly both; it is more like the laughter of despair. We sit in a row by these stable walls and discuss every project possible and impossible, and then we laugh. Now and again the tears come into the men's eyes, but never into the women's except when they speak of children lost in the camps."[3]

This paper offers an interpretation of this "terrible" laughter of the conquered, of why the Boers "said little and only laughe[d]", and how this laughter was interpreted and even mobilized by Afrikaner culture-brokers in the subsequent decades.[4] This paper thus explores, firstly, evidence of Boer/Afrikaner humor during and in the aftermath of the South African War, and secondly, the role of humor in identity construction—both unconsciously and consciously employed

to forge a particular kind of ethnographic *volk* character up until the 1930s.[5] In this way "laughter" is discussed, firstly, as a material dimension of Afrikaner life (in this case, the context of a damaging war and difficult post-war reconstruction) requiring theoretical elucidation and, secondly, as a rhetorical feature strategically mobilized in the construction of an Afrikaner "national culture". The paper concludes by addressing briefly historiographical and methodological issues experienced by social historians in using laughter, considering its possibilities as both a source and subject for historical enquiry. This study is thus situated in the growing international study of affect, and humor in particular, with the intention of initiating other case-studies of humor in order to make the tentative first steps towards a cohesive social history of laughter in southern Africa.[6]

Seriously Funny

It is dangerous to talk about laughter. As Arthur Asa Berger observed "Dissecting humor is an interesting operation in which the patient usually dies."[7] This has not prevented, however, commentators from classical Greece to the modern era from reflecting on laughter and its source.[8] Although systematic studies of laughter *qua* laughter only began in the 1960s, philosophers like Aristotle, Hobbes and Kant have all shaped our understanding of mirth, as have later theorists like Freud. Yet, oddly, as a subject of historiographical analysis, laughter has suffered from the "tenderness taboo" (in Gordon Allport's phrase): human behavior dealing with the visceral such as laughter—or, for example, bliss or sorrow—has been eschewed academically for fear that the researcher be unable to retain objectivity. Looking at laughter requires an understanding of the historiography of emotions. It redirects the attention of the historian back onto the human body (a focus that was arguably distracted from the visceral by the "textual" and "linguistic turns"). Febvre's famous call for a history of emotions has been followed by a growing body of historical enquiry, and the rise of the "affective turn".[9] The focus on emotions stems from social history's longtime concern with understanding socio-cultural experiences from the perspective of those who actually lived them. The culture of emotions, also known as "emotionology", consists of the collective emotional standards of a society.[10] The social history of emotions has revealed how our conceptualization of emotions alters in time (and space) and concomitantly so does the social emotion experience.[11] Certainly, in the study of affect, there is the enduring (and perhaps inevitable) epistemological tension between the universalist, positivist and the relativist, interpretive models.[12] Within the wider context of emotion, the narrower focus on laughter and history also runs the gamut of models between the labile and contingent versus the innate, the social versus the biological.[13] Perhaps a useful formulation is the argument that the physiological capacity to have emotions—or to 'laugh', in this case—is universal, but the ways the emotions—and laughter—are elicited, experienced and expressed vary both at the level of different societies, communities and individuals.

The story told about laughter is usually a happy one. Laughter is celebrated as the "best medicine", as both socially positive and personally liberatory. Yet the laughter sceptics or the "misogelasts" (haters of laughter) contend that there

might be something ugly behind the smile. These theorists are useful to social historians in that they have not sentimentalised humor and allow the possibility of a darker side to laughter. Schools of thought on humor are diverse and overlapping but may be crudely divided into camps. The "Superiority Theory" of humor, epitomized by Thomas Hobbes, argues that the passion of laughter is "[the] sudden glory arising from some conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others".[14] Thus the response to the comic arises from a sense of dominance over others. By extension, laughter is allied to the normative goal of social correction—the need to belittle and thereby control the aberrant.[15] This conception of laughter has been drawn on by ethologist Konrad Lorenz, who argued that laughter promotes both strong intra-group affinity and aggressiveness against outsiders so that "laughter forms a bond and simultaneously draws a line."[16] In contrast, as Billig has shown, the "Incongruity theory" of laughter sees the source of a sense of the comic in the incongruity between the fluidity and plasticity of life and imposed rigidities—a cerebral chortle rather than a belly laugh. As mentioned above, some theorists have considered humor a biological force, contending that laughter is built in to the nervous system because it serves an adaptive evolutionary function. These theorists maintained that the comic trigger was neither superiority nor incongruity, but something closely akin to the former: humor follows an abrupt release from control. Laughter, in this view, is thus a small (somatic) insurgence against social constraint. In this evolutionary contention lie the foundations of the Freudian model.[17]

For Freud a joke was not just a joke. Both he and Henri Bergson, like Hobbes before them, distrusted humor.[18] Freud maintained that laughter is a channel for nervous energy, allowing the individual to touch proscribed areas like sex, violence and bodily functions.[19] He perceived a Hobbesian conflict between an individual's desires (be they disguised as yearnings, dreams or anxieties) and social order. Repression (of sexuality or aggression) was seen as indispensable for social stability: the Ego and the Id wage constant combat and jokes form part of the Id's armoury.[20]

Yet, Bergson complained: "the comic has been looked upon as a mere curiosity . . . and laughter itself as a strange, isolated phenomenon, without any bearing on the rest of human activity".[21] Certainly, this critique rings true in southern African historiography. Internationally, however, social historians have shown that the nonserious is not necessarily insignificant. Such historians have revealed that humor is not a delightful but superfluous adjunct to social life, but rather entirely central to social life.[22] As Bakhtin had it, "Certain essential aspects of the world are accessible only to laughter."[23] There exists internationally a growing academic literature which looks at a range of cultural contexts for humor, from the printed word, to performances, to private jokes in different societies. Topics within this research trajectory have included humor and societal taboos and the relationship of humor to social change.[24]

While the possession of humor is taken to be pan-human, the idiosyncrasies of culture constitute the context of vernacular humor.[25] Interestingly, studies of nature reveal how significant nurture is to humor. Recent twin-studies demonstrate the strongly social influence on specific "senses of humor". The sense of humor shows low heritability: adopted siblings exhibit similar senses of humor, while separated twins display very dissimilar ones.[26] This lends weight to the

idea that the cultural particularity of the laughable makes it a valuable ethnographic lens. "Ethnic humor" in particular offers ethnographic insights into self-representation and the representation of the Other, which will be explored in the context of the Boer commando.[27]

There are material concerns in writing about humor and history, discussed at the end of this essay. Laughter is singularly lacking in an archive. As reflected in the case-study of the South African War below, primary evidence is scarce. Laughter vanishes into the ether. But the things that made people laugh, their observations on their own laughter, and commentary on what was popularly funny may remain, albeit widely scattered and only recorded as an afterthought. Diaries, memoirs and letters have to be scoured to produce even scant evidence and what material they do offer is flat, lacking the viscerality of the real experience of laughing.

Commando Humor

The very real experience of combat generated a particular kind of laughter. During the war described by the young Deneys Reitz, the social functions of humor varied. An historian, Pretorius, has argued that the one thing which explained the continued survival of the Boers as a nation was their unfailing sense of humor. Reading through dozens of war chronicles, he was impressed by how the Boers managed to maintain their sense of humor during even the worst of the war. Here we can apply Freud's contention that laughter acts as an outlet for nervous energy, and can offer catharsis, providing a mental release from suffering. Intra-group aggression, engendered by the unwanted intimacy of commando life and the unremitting stress of guerrilla war, was tempered with practical jokes. Horseplay was integral to commando life: like placing the spine from an *olieboom (Datura stramonium)* weed underneath a companion's saddle, which would trigger an amusing detonation of bucking once the horse was mounted.[28] Practical jokes promoted the relief of nervous tension. For example, General Kolbe, a fashionably hirsute Boer, proud of his luxuriant beard, awoke to an amused crowd watching his reaction to the fact that two fellow-officers had shaved it off during the night.[29] Clowning performances by *agterryers,*[30] like that of Ben Viljoen's famous *agterryer,* Mooiroos, and shared *grootliegstories* ("big lie" yarns), akin to the American south west's tradition of "tall tales", offered both social theatre and the concomitant relief afforded by depicting the ridiculous.[31] In an analogous vein, the two Boer brothers Du Plessis, "jovial in a grim sort of manner", captured an old male baboon and—each holding one of his hands—walked him on his hind legs to the President saying that "a new burgher had just joined . . . The baboon was by this time so overcome that he apathetically allowed his hand to be shaken . . . "[32]

This reflects the performance of the Freudian model of laughter as a mechanism which eliminates excess tension. As Arthur Koestler noted "laughter is aggression (or apprehension) robbed of its logical *raison d'être;* the puffing away of emotion discarded by thought."[33] In small-group situations, like those on commando, one could survive unpleasant conditions and the unwelcome proximity of fellow-soldiers with the release valve of laughter. In December 1900, Viljoen's commando celebrated Dingaan's Day in the afternoon after addresses, sports of

races on foot and horseback. The prizes made by means of small contributions from the officers.[34] A year later, his commando celebrated Christmas with an *ad hoc* gymkhana, which included an entertaining mule race. "The spectacle of nine burly, bearded Boers urging their asinine steeds to top speed by shouts and spur provoked quite as much honest laughter as any theatrical farce ever excited."[35] A Boer combatant observed: "I often think how surprised an outsider would be to see bearded and even old men" enjoying themselves in this way, like "overgrown boys".[36]

Moreover, recent studies show that the experience of humor may affect the immune system, therefore perhaps helping to alleviate stress.[37] There is some evidence to suggest that laughter may help stabilize blood pressure, oxygenate the blood, stimulate circulation, and produce a feeling of well being probably related to endorphin release. In Darwinian terms, those "with a sense of humor" cope with the sadness of the world with slightly elevated immune systems. Laughter thus functioned as a valve of both psycho-social and corporeal relief and release. Viljoen noted of the men under him: "The Afrikander character may be called peculiar in many respects. In moments of reverse, when the future seems dark, one can easily trace its pessimistic tendencies. But once his comrades buried, the wounded attended to, and a moment's rest left him by the enemy, the cheerful part of the Boer nature prevails, and he is full of fun and sport."[38]

The jokes were sometimes pure silliness: Once a few English soldiers caught a Boer who spoke no English. They wanted him to hurry but he lagged. The English said: "We shall have to kill you! The Boer answered: "If you tickle [kielie] me, then I'll die laughing."[39] Hilarity (perhaps, at times, literally "hysterical laughter") offered escape: Reitz records that in a particularly heavy assault, he saw his brother "disappear from sight as a shrapnel shell burst on him, but he rode out laughing, he and his horse uninjured."[40] Positive communiqués from despatch riders would find the men "standing around the fires talking and laughing."[41] Reitz records that a much-harried commando made it to the coast, many of the young men never having seen a body of water bigger than "the dam on their parents' farm." They reacted by "riding barebacked into the surf, shouting and laughing whenever a rider and his mount were thrown headlong by the breakers."[42] Similarly, when, during the battle at Rhenosterkop in November 1900, the attack subsided slightly, a Boer combatant noted that he and his companions started exchanging jokes and their laughter competed with the sound of the shelling.[43]

Humor on commando could also offer a form of social control, as Hobbes, Bergson and Freud suggested. Mock courts were held, with intentionally outrageous charges, which were greeted "with laughter and cheering."[44] Humor could thereby act as a way of passing on morality tales, codes of behaviour and in so doing maintain social cohesion.[45] For example, a number of burghers badgered General Viljoen for permission to go home that he was goaded into noting in their passes: "Permit. . . . To go to Johannesburg on account of cowardice, at Government's expense".[46] Laughter could be a useful tool to excoriate a comrade. In a telling vignette, the populist but unpopular Boer prophet, Siener [Seer or Prophet] van Rensburg, had declared of recent sightings of a double-tailed meteor, that the comet's tail depicted a V for "*Vrede*" (peace). One night, however, a "boyish voice from the darkness ahead call[ed] out, 'Mijnheer (Mister) van

Rensburg, that letter V up there does not mean *Vrede*, it means *Vlug* (retreat)'—to the sound of wry laughter in the ranks."[47]

As well as constructing and policing this internal hierarchy, jokes helped define the boundaries of the community and fostered commando solidarity. This reflects the Hobbesian conception of laughter of the dominant discussed earlier, captured by Lorenz in: "laughter forms a bond and simultaneously draws a line." As Apte has shown in his anthropological writings, joking relations exist with "patterned playful behavior that occurs between two individuals who recognize special kinship or other types of social bonds."[48] For the joke to "work" requires both shared knowledge and sentiment. On commando, the jokes called attention to a common identity, to a mutual belonging to a collective community in a Kantian "*sensus communis*."[49] Thus the fraternal laughter of insiders also posted a *no trespassing* sign to outsiders.

Consequently, humor played an important role in distinguishing between "them and us" on commando. Shared jokes like the following offered both in-group validation and out-group triumphalism. For example, a practical joke was played by Viljoen's officers on some would-be *hands-uppers* (those who would surrender to the British). Three Boer officers donned as much khaki as they could gather, asked them if the Steenkamps would like to surrender and fight under the British flag. They managed to collect cattle, sheep, guns and a new pony from the budding deserters. The pseudo-Colonel, mounted his "big clumsy English horses and rode proudly away" but the horse stumbled over barbed wire depositing its rider. He quieted the joshing of his two "fellow-Khakis" by saying that the fall had been most fortunate as the traitors "are now convinced that we are English by the clumsy manner I rode."[50] Similarly, after a successful attack on the 17th Lancers, in fine khaki tunics on good horses, a stock Boer witticism was to dub themselves "English-killing Dragoons".[51] Humor could be defiant, an act of morale boosting chutzpah, ridiculing the enemy. For example, when the British introduced lyddite, a newly invented explosive which had been used with terrible effect on the Dervishes in Omdurman, Reitz records that the Boers "made light of it and dubbed the shells 'little niggers' (*klein kafferkies*)".[52] War jokes lifted the spirits of the men, like their referring to "Martial Law" as a girl called "Martjie Louw". Another example was noting of Lord Roberts of Kandahar: "*Ja, Roberts fan Kan-da'ar/Is ni Roberts fan Kan-hiir!*"—"Yes, Roberts of Can—There/is not Roberts of Can—here!" An injection of brio accompanied the derisory laughter this quip elicited.[53] Satirical verse served a similar purpose, rendering the enemy risible rather than frightening. Deneys's father, the state-secretary F.W. Reitz, wrote a poem while in the field about the Boer capture of a naval gun [nicknamed "Lady Roberts"], which included this representative verse:

> Lord Roberts gave up fighting, he did not care a rap,
> But left his dear old "Lady", who's fond of mealie-pap.
> Of our dear wives and children he burned the happy homes,
> He likes to worry Tantes [Aunts] but fears the sturdy Ooms [Uncles].[54]

There are some experimental data that suggest humor engenders hope.[56] Certainly laughter functioned to boost morale. Reitz records that General De la Rey

Figure 1

"General Buller as a donkey? Or vice versa?" From diary of J.J. Claasse, Boer prisoner of war during the South African War.[56]

would address the men in his "half-humorous, half-serious manner, and soon he had the men laughing and making light of their misfortunes."[57] The Boers vouchsafed a black humor, swinging between uproarious laughter and bitter empathy, at the cusp where farce becomes gallows humor.[58] The death of Queen Victoria in January 1901 offered occasion for this *galgehumor*[59] :

> Nephew, nephew, it is going very badly! My wife is terribly ill in the concentration camp in Klerksdorp, we lost some of our best men on the battlefield, and now we must hear that our beloved Queen Victory is dead.[60]

Reitz offers an anecdote in which humor functions as the resistance against the enemy's stereotype of the Boers, arguably as an act of self-respect. He once stumbled upon "two wounded [British] officers. . . . As [he] came up [he] heard one remark, "Here comes a typical young Boer for you . . . " The officers asked Reitz why the Boers refused to surrender when they are "bound to lose". Reitz answered "Oh, well, you see, we're like Mr Micawber, we are waiting for something to turn up." They burst out laughing and the one said, "Didn't I tell you this is a funny country . . . and now here's your typical young Boer quoting Dickens."[61]

Laughter could thus be a useful tool, used to diffuse tension, to rebuke an unpopular fellow combatant, to reinforce group identity, to appease a threat and to boost one's confidence.[62] Sometimes, on very rare occasions, humor could cut across groups, both on the level of ranks and at the level of officers—and even across enemy lines. For example, out of the simple need for apparel as the war wore on, the Boers took to stripping British prisoners for uniforms, thus compelling the Tommies [British soldiers] to adopt their tattered discards. Louis Slabbert of the [Boer] Heidelberg Commando noted in 1902, that it was "one of

the funniest sights I have ever seen. There stood the khakis, with their sunburnt noses and spotty faces, neatly lined up wearing old ragged clothes. In some cases their toes stuck out of broken velskoene [leather shoes] and in other cases their hair stuck out of the holes in their hats. . . . . One of the more comical Tommies grabbed his friend by the shoulder, pretended that he wanted to kick him, then said: 'Come on, get on, you damn Boer!' Both sides burst out laughing at this."[63] In a parallel vignette, "The Lady Roberts" had been chiselled onto a naval gun (the gun of whom Reitz had written satirical verse) captured by Viljoen's commando. His dispatch to General Smith-Dorrien, adopted a jocular tone: "I have been obliged to expel 'The Lady Roberts' . . . [as] an undesirable inhabitant of that place. I am glad to inform you that she seems quite at home in her new surroundings, and pleased with the change of company." To which the British General responded: "As the lady you refer to is not accustomed to sleep in the open air, I would recommend you to try flannel next to the skin."[64]

Anecdotes like these, historically atypical though they are, reflect the sense of at least some shared humanity in the bantering, of empathy for common suffering during this war. Arguably, social historians could pursue this further, to analyse how shared humour shows up similarities in conceptualisations of gender—one could make an argument that they are connecting on the basis of shared assumptions about masculine/feminine roles. Humour seems to be useful, then, in being predicated on and thus illuminating shared (gendered) cultural values.

Helpless Laughter, c.1902–1910.

Mirth Control

In the aftermath of war, the defeated Boers were to become familiar with one comic genre in particular: ridicule. Alfred Milner, British proconsul to South Africa from 1897–1905,[65] had a post-war reconstruction administration and Anglicisation policy that seemed to be intent on transforming the republican Afrikaners into English-speaking colonists. There was a general feeling that he wanted to "[w]ipe out the last trace of Africanderism and damn the consequences."[66] Milner had notoriously avowed in December 1900 that he intended to use the conquest of the Republics to expand English culture and restrict Dutch.[67] With the Treaty of Vereeniging (31 May 1902), the Boer republics of the Transvaal and the Orange Free Sate became part of the British imperial dominion. English was made the sole official language after the war and the medium of instruction in schools. The future of Dutch-Afrikaans seemed uncertain—the authorities discouraged the use of Dutch and fresh cohorts of teachers were brought out from England.[68] The teaching of Dutch had been guaranteed in the peace treaty, but the number of hours was restricted to three. The Cape also abandoned speaking-knowledge of Dutch as a prerequisite for entry into the civil service. In the post-war education system, Afrikaans children were widely believed to be threatened with Anglicisation. This lead to the kind of humor embedded in the very mechanics of social power: the derisive laughter at the heart of society that ensures conformity. A common story told by Afrikaners was that those children who spoke more than the three hours of

"Dutch-Afrikaans" permitted at school had to wear a placard that read "I'm a donkey, I spoke Dutch."

This silencing of the defeated Boers through ridicule seems to fit the models delineated by Bergson (to impose discipline) and by Hobbes and Lorenz (to display social aggression). Perhaps this was the humor of the powerful, but not the *all*-powerful. The Milner regime still needed to deride those who broke the rules in order to both patrol and protect those rules. Yet where voices were literally silenced, laughter could still be heard. This was the laughter of the powerless.[69] It was a kind Aesopian criticism, smuggling in social critique in comic disguise. Arguably this black humor was a grim acknowledgement that the gagged could still at least laugh.

The laughter of the survivor

This survivalist strain of dark humor allowed the preservation of some dignity and the weathering of life's vicissitudes in a profoundly damaged society. War left combatants and concentration camp inmates suffering post-traumatic shock, the scorched earth anti-guerrilla policy had left a ruined rural economy, and the social *status quo* in class (and immediately afterwards gendered-) terms was in upheaval. As the war veteran Ben Viljoen observed, "There is scarcely an Afrikander family without an unhealable wound. Everywhere the traces of the bloody struggle . . . "[70] One observer recollected:

> I remember that my grandmother chuckled when she told me how, on returning to the farm, Mooifontein, after the war, she and my grandfather found a donkey in Tabakskloof, at the far reaches of the farm . . . Oupa [grandfather] and the donkey pulled a very primitive, damaged plough and she clung desperately to the plough, laughing at herself the whole time (she said). I often heard her say "What could we do, my child, we could only laugh" ["*wat kon ons doen, my kind; ons kon maar net lag* . . . "], even speaking of tragic happenings (though she never spoke of her dead children). It is she who said: "Oh, the English are not bad people: they just don't know how to run a good concentration camp." ["*Ag, die Engelse is nie slegte mense nie: hulle weet net nie hoe om 'n konsentrasiekamp te bestuur nie*."][71]

Jokes arguably permitted the saying of things that otherwise would be socially threatening. Anything said "humorously" had deniability: It offered the "I was only joking" defence. A helpful comparison is offered by Langston Hughes, for example, who has noted with "black tongue in white cheek or vice versa," African-American slaves used coded humorous language to vent rage and their stoic laughter masked inner pain, allowing the preservation of outward dignity.[72]

Ethnic bonding was reinforced by this shared (albeit often desperate) hilarity. A helpful parallel may be drawn with apparently aberrant comic behaviour such as that of the Ugandan community, the Ik, which attracted attention during devastating famine. It appears from anthropological studies that their truly desperate circumstances facilitated (literally) helpless laughter at the sight or tale of disaster striking the most vulnerable—the elderly dying, for example, or even a toddler burning itself on the camp-fire.[73] This hilarity offers a moment of transcendence, a fleeting escape from a reality too awful to face.

Similarly, political jokes, it is argued, offer their tellers and listeners a brief respite from the realities of everyday life, a moment when they feel that they (rather than the authorities) are in control. The political joke, with its incongruities and its mechanisms for making those incongruities appropriate allows for a momentary revision of reality.[74] The joke is a *reductio ad absurdum* by means of which the regime, the leaders, the hardships, the duplicity, and even the fear and humiliation are domesticated. As E.P. Thompson has argued, elites execute a range of acts of public dominance and that these contrast with the camouflaged forms of protest—including humor—carried out by subordinated social strata.[75] This veiled resistance is the laughter hidden behind the hand to the mouth. In each of these jokes, a space is created (however small) that the regime cannot penetrate. Of course, any triumphs that emerge from such ventures may be transitory and solely psychological. Rather, the jokes are exercises in the maintenance of "self-esteem", which serve to maintain good morale.[76]

This ephemeral escapism coupled to the potentially subversive power of laughter, presents us with a glimpse into what Emily Hobhouse had called the Boers' "terrible" laughter "of despair".[77] Malherbe noted in a representative anecdote that after the war, a Boer was asked by a friend how he was and answered:

> Yes, nephew, my wife and children are all dead in the concentration camps, my livestock succumbed to the drought and the locusts ate my seedlings, but other than that it's going pretty well.[78]

In the post-war world, some jokes may have been little revolutions, private challenges to the *status quo*. Moreover, as discussed, community (in this case, ethnic) bonds are forged by laughing at the Other, in building in-groups and out-groups. There was gentle but challenging humor in a lot of the writings of the *volkskrywers*, like C.J. Langenhoven, which involved implicit political commentary. C. Louis Leipoldt , for example, noted that he wrote many of the poems in his anthology *Oom Gert vertel en ander Gedigte* (1911), in the direct aftermath of the war, with the "thunder of English cannons still in his ears." His bitter irony and lacerating wit were particularly resonant in "Vrede-aand" [Evening of the Peace Treaty]:

> *Dis vrede man : die oorlog is verby!*
> It's peace time, man: the war is over!
> *Hoor jy die mense skreeu die strate vol?*
> Hear how people shout in the streets?
> . . .
> *Kom, hier's "n bottle soetwyn; laat ons drink!*
> Come, here's bottle sweet wine; let us drink!
> *Ons her ons nasie in die see gesink;*
> We let our nation in the sea, sink.
> . . .
> *Van lag? Nou, lag maar, want die storie's uit:*
> Of laughter? Now, laugh, because the story's out
> *Ons nasie's weg, ons kan daarnaar maar fluit!*
> Our nation is gone, we can whistle for it!

Drink, drink jou glas! Die son skyn deur die wyn:
Drink, drink your glass! The sun shines through the wine:
Is dit te soet, of smaak dit soos asyn?
Is it too sweet, or does it taste of vinegar?

Such vinegary humor can be interpreted by social historians in two ways. As noted, the jokes may be seen as akin to resistance posed by the subconscious to restraint and thus act as mini-carnival, allowing social norms to be flouted momentarily. Others have extended this notion. Critchley, for example, has posited that jokes challenge the social order by making the familiar appear unfamiliar.[79] These rebellions may be against the social order or against providence itself. Significantly, joking seems to be more enthusiastic under totalitarianism than under democracy. Correspondingly, jokes may be understood as small acts of sedition, as in George Orwell's "every joke is a tiny revolution."[80] Oriol Pi-Sunyer regarded political jokes told in Spain as "the oral equivalent of guerilla warfare."[81] Anthropologist Mary Douglas believed that a joke works as an "anti-rite", destroying hierarchy and order.[82] She regarded it as a "rite" because it is an expressive, symbolic formation devoid of impact on real world affairs: it does not do anything.

This leads us to a counter-argument to the above hypothesis: that some jokes offer not rebellion but only its illusion, while underneath fostering further resignation and acquiescence. The argument is that in a homeostatic system, humor can release tension and thus actually maintain the *status quo*. Laughter can be a substitute for the political action that could otherwise effect change. As Khalid Kishtainy noted, writing of Arab political humor, "people joke about their oppressors, not to overthrow them but to endure them."[83] Similarly, other scholars have also opposed the view of the real-world efficacy of political joking.[84] Indeed, political jokes may sometimes be accommodations with authoritarianism. Such jokes assuage the guilt of the jokester over his failure to act politically.[85] Thus the jokes are not an instrument of revolution but, quite the reverse, an index of resignation. In this view, the whispered rebellious jokes that attacked the new post-war regime were not really tiny rebellions at all. Instead they were alibis for those who did not (or could not) rebel. These jokes allowed the tellers to live with their browbeaten spirits and troubled consciences. This kind of laughter could thus have been simply a sop for the guilt-ridden non-rebel, which allowed him to exist in society he considered unfair, even allow the martyrdom of fellow ex-combatants (like Hans Lötter and Gideon Scheepers) without precipitating rebellion.[86] Gallows humor thus arguably (quite literally in this case) licensed fatalism and inactivity.

Jokes therefore offer the social historian a source for the possibility of a dialectic of submission and rebellion because in there we have heard a mixture of both quiescent and rebellious laughter. Moreover, whether humor operated as a conservative or a revolutionary force, it is always a form of power and, as such, vital to the investigations of social historians. Thus social historians should explore whether, arguably, for some individuals at least some of the time, a silent shrug or the hopeless shaking of the head may have accompanied laughter of the defeated in Reconstruction South Africa.

The Mirth of a Nation?

Language and discourse are intimately connected to one's sense of self and, as Anderson has shown, the very palpability of language (in a print culture) generates the idea of a definable shared community.[87] In a similar vein with specific reference to the post-war Afrikaans community, Hofmeyr has shown that the vernacularising thrust of the Afrikaans language associations, established in 1905 and 1906, through the efforts of the *taalstryders*[88] spawned a succession of interconnected organisations which began to link teachers, clerics, small farmers, student organisations, lawyers and journalists into a constituency. From 1916, the magazine, De (later *Die*) *Huisgenoot* [The Home Companion], set out to promote the development the Afrikaner "personality" and was reaching 20% of Afrikaner families by the early 1930s.[89] Culture-brokers fissured over class differences and promoted the entrenchment of a shared cultural identity with a common ethnic "character". The construction of the (ethnic) nation required the articulation of a shared culture, history, language, religion, ancestors, through a subjective homogenization of the (ethnic) citizenry, realized through an essentialization of the nation.[90] Hofmeyr's study has skilfully revealed the self-conscious attempts of the men (and some women) to construct, through the writings and cultural practices, an "Afrikaner identity", as she puts it "building a nation from words."[91]

Building a nation . . . from laughter

As an Afrikaans intellectual argued, the mission of the post-war writers was the "spiritual transfiguration of the war so that it would become meaningful and not remain a brute material happening . . . so that [we] could again become men, with human values. . . . "[92] Historical studies of writers like Jan Celliers, Totius and Louis Leipoldt have discussed their focus on grief and pain, (the war, post-war poverty, struggle, concentration camps)[93] and as Moodie has shown, by expressing and generalizing a shared "Afrikaner past" the new post-war literature formulated a consciousness of national (ethnic) identity.[94] What has been omitted is a study of the humorous side in their construction of a post-war pan-Afrikaner identity.

Two figures in particular offer the social historian examples of the roles played by culture-brokers in the self-conscious construction and mobilization of a sense of distinctively "Afrikaner humor".[95] The first was Theodorus Johannes Haarhoff (1892–1971), an academic of the generation after the post-war generation, a Rhodes scholar who studied further in Berlin, London and Amsterdam. He lectured in classics at a number of South African universities, an honorary professor at the Universities of Cape Town and Natal, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and Science and of the Royal Society of Antiquaries, publishing widely in classics and educational theory. A powerful theme in his writings was the parallel between the growth of Afrikaans from seventeenth century Dutch and the development of Latin into the Romance languages. In 1935, he delivered a series of lectures at Oxford University on "Afrikaans: its origin and development."[96] He was deeply opposed to the divide between Afrikaans- and English-speakers,

arguing that the other language and culture should be regarded as an augmentation, not as a threat. His suggestion was that humor was an intimate tracer of identity and offered the possibility of reconciliation between English- and Afrikaans-speakers: "When we really understand each other's jokes, we shall really begin to co-operate."[97]

He made a conscious comparison between Romans and Afrikaners: contending, for example, that the genial parodying of A.G. Visser (1878–1929) showed that "Epigram is somehow natural to Afrikaans, as it was to Latin. It seems to rise from the soil; the vivid word and the vivid phrase of popular speech."[98] In Haarhoff's view Afrikaans language of the hearth or of the "volksmond" (mother tongue), might arguably lend itself to humor. He spoke of the description of the plump farm-wife: "*sy wou nog sit, toe sit sy al.*"[She wanted to sit and then she was already sitting], arguing "[y]ou could do it in Latin, but not English (*sessura iam sedebat*)".[99] Afrikaans had an established tradition of being used to convey satire as an apparently debased "kitchen-language".[100] Joke books were rare but some were published, and there was also an idea that "Boeregrappe" (Boer jokes) could be used to preserve folk memory, like the amber encircling a fossil.[101] Arguably, as self-consciously the language of the kitchen, of the hearth, it perhaps leant itself to everyday humor, embodying the popular culture, that might have been uncomfortably expressed in high Dutch. Equally, it was wrapped up in the project to "Afrikanerise" daily existence. This was in line with the trend, which Hofmeyr has dubbed the "redefinition of everyday life": the pages of Afrikaans magazines featured articles and advertisements that used every available aspect of people's lives and repackaged these as "Afrikaans". What had previously been "furniture" became "Afrikaans furniture" and what had previously been the natural world became the "Afrikaner's natural world". And the joke became the "Afrikaner joke", humor an "Afrikaner sense of humor" and laughter "Afrikaner laughter."[102]

This strategic focus on the articulation of the ethnic nature of humor is illustrated in the example offered in 1924, by F.E.J. "Fransie" Malherbe (1894–1979), Professor at the Department of Nederlands-Afrikaans (Dutch-Afrikaans) at Stellenbosch University, from 1930 to 1959, who did much to shape Afrikaans as a written language and promote its cultural side.[103] His doctoral dissertation (1924) was titled *Humor in die algemeen en sy uiting in die Afrikaanse letterkunde* (Humor in general and its expression in Afrikaans literature). This dissertation reflected[104] the trend that "the sense of humor" (unknown before the second half of the nineteenth century) emerged by early twentieth century as an apparently essential component of a complete person. Similarly, on a larger scale, young nations and nations struggling with identity issues focused on "personality traits" like a national "sense of humor".[105] For Malherbe, in seeking a modern national "character", Afrikanerdom had to define its sense of humor located in the *volkstaal* (mother tongue), that which C.J. Langenhoven had called "the expressed soul of our people." In so doing, he argued, "[i]t has joined the ranks of the most evolved of modern languages."[106] Malherbe believed that, in order to be legitimated, the nation needed a "sense of humor" as a signature attribute, to indicate that the nation was both singular and mature. Equally, if a "national sense of humor" existed, individuals could be persuaded to consume rather than

to produce laughter, (which might offer a challenge to norms, authority, rituals that the culture-brokers were working to inculcate). Just as *Die Huisgenoot* tried to give the Afrikaner a particular "personality", Malherbe tried writing a biography for the nation, giving it a character of its own.

Malherbe published a series of articles in the *Huisgenoot* in 1934, the year before Haaroff's Oxford lectures, under the title "Does the Afrikaner have a sense of humour?." His central argument was predicated on a distinctive, historically unique Afrikaner "national character", infused with an organic humor that was both unique and autochthonous. He imagined a wit that was, in other words, both native and nativist, born out of shared historical struggles. He affirmed that "Our literature is the most national thing in our land. Thus we expect in it the national characteristic of a sense of humor. Afrikaans literature comes out of and for the nation and reflects the nature of the national soul."[107] He conceived of this humor quite literally as "the birthright of our *volk*."[108] Humor, for Malherbe, was an organic Afrikaner trait, a biological essence coupled to historical experience:

> The racially pure Boer is characterised by resignation in times of adversity and disaster, illness and death; but also by the clear sense of the comical in daily life, and the loving and humorous consideration of values in the great reality that surrounds us. . . . But the great humor also liberated us from idle wishes and fear and opened further horizons. Thus a trait of our race developed further.[109]

His model explicitly contrasted the humor of the (Dutch) metropole with the laughter of the periphery, to emphasize the distinction:

> We have more humor than the Dutch! Because we live . . . closer to nature. The best of us are still children of the earth . . . And humor wants nature, open-mindedness, direct warm humanity. In our essential *volk*soul (soul of the nation), even temporarily cluttered by dogmatic doctrine, there is the nurturing ground for humor—humor that is so close to the tragic emotion, casting light on dark water.[110]

A key tenet to Malherbe's central argument was that the South African War had given "birth" to this form of humor.[111] He linked this intimate reflection to the stimulation of national (and by "national" he meant ethnically Afrikaans) "sympathy, melancholy and nostalgia [which appeared] tremulously through the words. Sadness for what might have been, longing for what must come, give many light stories a deeper tone."[112] He declared that the

> highest humor in Afrikaans also arises from sorrow. Yes, where is the secret of our people (volk) . . . in particular of our farming class, that they do not become despondent over the most dreadful succession of disasters? They always find a joke somewhere in their misery. "Isn't it droll", they say, "that things can go wrong in such a funny fashion?"[113]

Using examples from the war (that we have seen are universal human responses to the combat context) and perceiving them as distinctively Afrikaans, Malherbe put forward the notion that the volk's (nation's) "suffering, our uplifting, glorious grief! . . . [moved through] grief to glory, through irony to hu-

mor!"[114] His argument was that in such dire straits if one small thing went right that was seized upon as reason to smile:

> Finding worth amidst destruction . . . was the bitter-sweet necessity to survive complete ruin. And whether "seeing the whole picture" made one aware of the ideal of liberty or courage on the battle-field or the comic floundering of the Englishman or the woman as heroine or one's own health or a nest of eggs or a present of fresh meat donated out of a black [servant's] loyalty at one's own destroyed farm house—there was always something to make it "go well".[115]

He argued that even ritual commonplaces embedded in everyday language reflected complex ethnic personality traits. The shared greeting formulae like *"Hoe gaan dit?"/"Nee goed, dankie!"* ["How is it going?"/"No, well thank you."] was, in his model, an unconscious reflection of humor in a pessimistic-optimistic dyad.[116] Malherbe extends this dyad by linking it to nature's role in creating a national personality:

> Taken in all, nature was therefore a mighty influence on the shaping of the characteristic pessimism-optimism. Which is so necessary for humor. Such a racial characteristic is strengthened by the influence of the Afrikaner's nature.[117]

Malherbe's model of autochthonous humor rested against the backdrop of the landscape's influence on the "*volk*" (people/nation) character). He declared that both the Afrikaner's closeness to nature and the vastness of the South African landscape lent a "greatness of spirit" so necessary for humor.

> But nature is more than a symbol of our nation's humor. The road of South Africa runs through nature. And the road of nature runs through the soul of a nation. It . . . certainly its influence contributed to shaping a mentality fit for humor.[118]

Malherbe coupled this to an indigenised Calvinism, finding a way to reconcile humor with the dour reputation of Dutch Reformed Church Calvinism, by contending that it was not a dour, dry belief because it had become entwined with the very landscape and Afrikaner indigenous experiences, which had created the belief in a loving paternal god that encouraged humor in his "children".[119]

There was a further gendered component to Malherbe's notion of ethnic humor. His theory was that women were less humorous than men because of a lack of intellectual and physical freedom—their work "is never done".[120] Malherbe maintained that instead, the Afrikaner woman allowed herself only small ironies. He coupled this to their purported ability to stomach great hardship during the war, which was a popular leitmotif among culture-brokers. He linked their lack of humor to their remaining mental *bittereinders*[120]

> A greater gift of nature to our Afrikaans women was the unparalled physical and psychological ability to endure, in contrast to which in history her man cuts a sorry figure.[122]

Clearly, Malherbe had a sense of a hierarchy of humor predicated on gender. Similarly, he suggested that humor acted as a key to understanding other ethnicities. The English were not the only butt of laughter. He maintained, for example,

that the "bushmen" [San] had no humor of their own.[123] Malherbe also discussed the comic stereotype of the trusty black servant or rural "Hotnot" (derogatory term for coloured), often portrayed as comically animated. The naked racism is jarring under the affectionate laughter of the reader at recognising the leitmotif, as in, for example, the demeaning "Vaalpenskaffer"[124] and "Koelie-meid"[125] from J. Van Bruggen's *Ampie, Die Natuurkind* (1924).[126] Malherbe added that it is not good comedy when the "kaffir" speaks first-rate Afrikaans.[127] Here humor operates to patrol social hierarchies, and entrench stereotypes that, in a Gramscian sense, helped to create and police hegemony.

Certainly, this laughter of control warrants closer attention by social historians and offers further avenues for research into particular contexts of human (rather than the more universal types explored in the first half of the paper). It may have been accompanied by a slightly different but equally hegemonic kind of laughter. With the post-war escalation of urbanization (with many young white Afrikaans women drifting to the cities), the social *cordon sanitaire* seemed threatened. There was a great deal of social anxiety over Black peril panics and the growing "Poor White Problem". Concurrently, as should be further investigated, there was an abundance of writings which contained the stereotypes of jovial but asexual rural blacks as harmless but amusingly backward and Poor Whites, depicted as stock characters. The narratives of Léon Maré, for example, in *Die Nuwejaarfees op Palmietfontein* (1918) arguably offered a simultaneously soothing and demeaning stereotype of the asexual, comforting, faithful (but often drunken and dissolute) black labouring force. Similarly, for example, the writings of Jochem van Bruggen in, for example, *Op Veld en Rande* (1920), depicted white *bywoners* (share-croppers) as the salt-of-the-earth but backward yokels. A comic depiction perhaps rendered both sectors a less terrifying social threat.[128]

Of course, Afrikaners did not just laugh—they were also laughed *at*. The laughter was not solely intra-group but also extra-group, which presents other research trajectories: laughter *at,* rather than *by,* a group. We have discussed how ridicule was a powerful medium of control in the immediate aftermath of war. A fundamental strategy by non-Afrikaners remained to ridicule and render risible key traits dear to Afrikaner self-image, like farming ability.[129] For example, in an English-speaker's mocking "Beards are the only crop the Boers have ever grown without a government subsidy". Such jokes were designed to stereotype Afrikaners as dominant yet uncivilized, hegemonic yet uncouth.[130] Just as Paddy developed into a stock character in Irish jokes, Van der Merwe became the stereotype: a bigoted, dim-witted, rural, and naive stock character.[131] Already by the South African War, Van der Merwe had come to signify a typical Boer name.[132] As Posel has shown, by the 1970s, with increasing Afrikaner political hegemony, "Van der Merwe jokes"—with Van der Merwe depicted as Apartheid apparatchik—became in vogue, as a stereotype against whom white English-speaking South Africans (and possibly some middle class Afrikaans groups too) could underline their more liberal and cosmopolitan identities.[133] The social history of the Van der Merwe joke still needs to be written, with particular focus on the vigour of this stock figure under a range of social conditions and historical moments.

Humor and the Social Historian

Such possible future research opportunities require reflection on methodological issues confronting the historian. As the preceding discussion has tried to illustrate, humor is clearly a useful way into an understanding of social relations. Humor functions as an expression and deployment of (class, racial, ethnic, gendered, generational and so on) power, and offers a lens into the friable interface between the private and the collective, the personal and the state. Fine has suggested the importance of an "idioculture" of knowledge, habits and so on among emerging groups to increase cohesion.[134] Used as "in-group" indicators, jokes can offer the historian some cultural traces to sketch the transition in group consciousness in the southern African case-study from, for example, the pre-war Kruger's old-style Northern Republicanism (which excluded Cape Afrikaners) to a broader post-war pan-Afrikanerdom. Although historians can find mention of this in the official speeches of leaders,[135] the evidence for a shift of feeling amongst ordinary folk is both elusive and ephemeral, so jokes offer at least some suggestion as to a change in what was popularly regarded as the idiocultural possession of a nascent group in the process of developing. Certainly, periodization would be challenging, encountering the difficulties faced by historians of emotions, for example.[136]

Similarly, in throwing light on the individual-state interface humor has been used constructively to prevent stereotyped thinking about, for example, damaged societies. As Thurston has shown, a study of jokes can curb an historian from making banal assumptions about a person's relationship with the polity in a wounded society.[137] As Thurston has revealed of the Stalinist Terror and Levine has shown of African-American oppression, jokes may show a counter-conventional response to traumatic events. Moreover, as, for example, Thurston has argued of Levine's work, jokes can be particularly useful contradict the picture of Pavlovian passivity of historical subjects.[138]

"Laughter" as a source is challenging. Historians suffer the typical difficulties endured in oral history and *mentalité* analyses.[139] This is a chronic problem for social historians (in other contexts too) who are faced with a dearth of original documents written by the people themselves. There is the everyday problem of the inability to quantify the prevalence of jokes.[140] Moreover, there is a particular danger in assuming ethnographic uniqueness. Comparative studies help reduce the error that contemporaneous commentators like Boer General Viljoen and subsequent culture-brokers made, in seeing the universal as particular and unique.

Moreover, there is the danger of simply not getting the joke. If we accept the premise that what we find amusing changes over time, there is the probability that historians will simply miss jokes and humour in the written sources. The equivocation of such fugitive forms of everyday interaction evade easy classification. As Gay has noted, the multiplicities of laughter are so vast that "they all but frustrate mapping" and "are exceedingly ambiguous in their intentions and their effects".[141] Perhaps there is some intellectual comfort in arguing that not getting the joke might actually be useful methodologically. For social historians, it might arguably be a way in to understanding what still needs to be understood,

as it were. As Darnton observed, realizing that you are not getting jokes is one of the ways "you can see where to grasp a foreign system of meaning in order to unravel it".[142]

In writing histories of humor, historians may explore how people use humor strategically in diverse contexts as, for example, socially as protest against the conventions of society or individually for self-definition. Besides this, historians may analyze where humor has been instrumental in mobilizing sympathizers and support and helped to release tension during prolonged struggle. Humor can cement groups in a closed community of laughter. It has worked to regulate identity and control behaviour. Humor thus may serve the historian as an index of social change. There is, of course, a distinction between a "history of humor" and a "history of laughter." The latter would require not only an analysis of cultural residue (like jokes, humorous anecdotes and so on) and how culture-brokers contemporaneously understood humor (or how it was mobilised in the rhetorical machinery of identity construction) but also the affective or emotional in an historical sense. Thus humor is perhaps the mind's construction and laughter the gut's reaction, and both have a social history.

Conclusions

This paper has thus firstly explored an historical phenomenon that at first glance appears bizarre: the laughter of a particular group of men in a traumatic war and a ensuing deeply damaged post-war social *milieu*. The purpose of this section of the paper was simply initially to provide evidence of this social history phenomenon and then to try to explain it (because at first it appears anomalous) using various theories, which concomitantly also show that there were different reasons and roles for the various shades of laughter of the combatants. While this is certainly deeply rooted in an historical moment, the evidence offered of the "laughter of the Boers" from these primary sources, this part of the paper is perhaps more useful in showcasing the general socio-psychological functions of humor in groups, particularly in traumatic situations. Here universal human responses may be studied by social historians.[143]

However, the paper then moved into the more (ethnographically) particular. It was the South African War and its immediate aftermath that saw the founding and entrenching of a rhetorical tradition by the historical subjects themselves. Thus, for example, the Boer General Viljoen observed that the men under him reacted to combat with humor (which, as we have seen, is a universal human tendency) but he assumed it to be idiosyncratic of the "The Afrikander character".[144] This, in effect, offers a bridge to the second part of the paper: the exploration of how a particular understanding of "Afrikaner humor" was used in the efforts by culture-brokers to articulate a group identity. Here the paper has focused on "meta-laughter", the construction of a particular sense of humor that accompanied the articulation of Afrikaner identity in the first decades of the twentieth century. The paper concluded by offering some further research possibilities and exploring the challenges of using humor as theme and resource in social history.

We return to our opening vignette: Deneys Reitz's experience of commando laughter resembled guerrilla warfare itself. Success in both arenas depended on

travelling lightly over heavy ground, knowing the territory, being able to escape and knowing who your friends were. Laughter served as a useful weapon deployed for both defence and attack. As the war shifted into a bitter peace, the *bittereinders* carried on fighting the war—with bitter laughter. After the war, humor was a grim acknowledgement that the silenced could still at least laugh. A funny thing happened on the way to nationhood. With (mother) tongue in cheek, some *taalstryders* focused on humor as integral to Afrikaner ethnic national identity. Culture-brokers like Malherbe articulated a humor of autochthony, investing it with the dyadic "laugh with a tear".[145] From the bitter laughter of the under-dog to the mocking laughter of the over-lord, to once more the bitter laughter of some sectors in post-Apartheid South Africa. The echoes of a century of social history are still to be heard in the different kinds of laughter of the Afrikaners and the way they were interpreted. Historians have to learn how to listen. Where there are silences the sources are still to be found. Historians could take to heart that which Malherbe noted of the Afrikaner:

> You have to learn to detect humour in the light trembling of a corner of a mouth, or the nervous recourse to the bag of tobacco, in the sudden flickering of a dull gaze, in the muttering of thanks after some disaster and set-back, in the resignation when the shadows fall . . . [146]

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ENDNOTES

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1. Deneys Reitz, *Commando—A Boer journal of the Boer War* (Johannesburg, 1929, 1990), 309. Francis Reitz, Deneys's father, was State Secretary of the Transvaal Republic and had handed the British Agent in Pretoria the Boer Ultimatum in October 1899, precipitating war and was also a signatory at the peace of Vereeniging.

2. The South African War (1899–1902), was waged by the British to establish their hegemony in South Africa and by the Boers/Afrikaners to defend theirs. The British succeeded in breaking Boer guerrilla resistance by adopting a scorched-earth policy. In 1901 and 1902, the British torched Boer farms in the South African Republic and the Orange Free State and placed Afrikaner women and children in concentration camps, where, because of excess numbers and unhygienic conditions, more than 25,000 died. There is a vast literature on the South African war; for a good general description of the war's effects on white Afrikaans-speakers, see F. Pretorius, *The Anglo-Boer War, 1899–1902* (Cape Town, 1985), for black involvement, see Bill Nasson, *Uyadela Wen'osulapho. Black participation in the Anglo-Boer War* (Randburg, 1999) and for a discussion on historiographical themes see G. Cuthbertson, A. Grundlingh and M. Suttie, eds, *Writing a Wider War: Rethinking Gender, Race and Identity in the South African War, 1899–1902* (Athens, OH, and Cape Town, 2002). A useful comprehensive analysis, which takes recent scholarship into account, is Bill Nasson, *The South African War, 1899–1902* (London, 1999).

3. See Rykie Van Reenen (ed.), *Emily Hobhouse—Boer War Letters* (Cape Town, 1984, 1999), 210; 216–7; 258; 266.

4. "Laughter" and "humor" are used interchangeably throughout, although the paper offers a suggestion of refinement to these categories in the final section.

5. The nomenclature of war is drenched in partisanship. The 1899–1902 war has been called Die Tweede Vryheids Oorlog (the Second War of Independence); Die Engelse Oorlog (the English War); the Boer War; the Anglo-Boer War and the South African War. Nonetheless, the term "South African War", which is recent convention, while helpful in not omitting the war-time contribution of blacks, still has obvious problems in being imposed from the metropole.

6. For tentative initial interventions, see, for example, Melvin E. Page, "With Jannie in the Jungle: European Humor in an East African Campaign, 1914–1918," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 14:3 (1981) and Hester Wortley, Die Grap in Afrikaans, MA, University of Stellenbosch, 1992, an attempt to collect and categorise Afrikaans jokes.

7. A.A. Berger, "Anatomy of a Joke," *Journal of Communication*, 26 (1976): 113.

8. Jessica Milner Davis, "Taking Humour and Laughter Seriously," *Austrailian Journal of Comedy* 2, no. 1 (1996).

9. Translated, Lucien Febvre, "Sensibility and History: How to reconstitute the emotional life of the past," in P. Burke (ed.), *A New kind of History: from the writings of Febvre*, (London, 1973), 12–26.

10. Peter Stearns and Carol Stearns, "Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards," *American Historical Review* 90 (1985): 813–836.

11. Patricia Clough, "The Affective Turn: political economy, biomedia and bodies," *Theory Culture & Society*, 25, no. 1 (2008): 1–22; Christina Kotchemidova, "From good cheer to' 'Drive-By Smiling': a social history of cheerfulness," *Journal of Social History* 39, no. 1, (2005), Peter Stearns and Jan Lewis (eds), *An Emotional History of the United States* (New York, 1998); Peter Stearns, *American Cool* (New York, 1994); Stuart Walton, *Humanity: An Emotional History* (London, 2004); K. Woodward, "Global Cooling and Academic Warming: long-term shifts in emotional weather," *American Literary History*, 8, no. 4 (1996): 759–79.

12. C. Lutz and G.M. White, "The Anthropology of Emotions," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 15 (1986): 405–436, 406.

13. Between the emotion which refers to socio-cultural expression and affect, which are of a "biological and physiological nature." Elspeth Probyn, *Blush: Faces of Shame* (Minneapolis, 2005), 11.

14. Hobbes, 1968, 125

15. See Simon Critchley, *On Humour* (London, 2002), 3.

16. Konrad Lorenz, *On aggression* (London, 2002), 284.

17. Michael Billig. *Laughter and ridicule: towards a social critique of humour* (London, 2005), 65, 96.

18. Bergson's notion in *Laughter* was that laughter may only be understood as a social phenomenon, it is "always the laughter of a group," and based this on the premise that the core function of humor was a social corrective. Billig, *Laughter and ridicule*, 128.

19. G. Meredith, "An Essay on Comedy" in W. Sypher (ed.), *Comedy* (New York, 1956) and I. Donaldson, *The World Upside Down*, (Oxford, UK, 1970).

20. Parallels may be drawn with the role of *carnivalia*, which provide a licence to transgress on specific occasions in order to police behaviour all the more closely at other times. Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo* (New York, 1913, 1990), 201.

21. Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (Dover, 2005).

22. Specifically on humor and history see, for example, Barry Sanders, *Sudden Glory: Laughter as Subversive History* (Boston, 1995); Mary Lee Townsend, *Forbidden Laughter: Popular Humor and the Limits of Repression in Nineteenth Century Prussia* (Ann Arbor, 1992); Daniel Wickberg, *The Senses of Humor: Self and Laughter in Modern America* (Ithaca, 1998).

23. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*. Trans. H. Iswolsky. (Bloomington, 1984), 66. Bakhtin contended that within the scatological prose of Rabelais is the required evidence on the history of folk humor.

24. For recent trends see *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research* and for an assessment of the research agenda of what could loosely be called "humour studies" see A.J. Chapman, and H. C. Foot, eds. *Humor and Laughter: Theory, Research and Applications*. (New York, 1976); John Durant, and Jonathan Miller, eds. *Laughing Matters: A Serious Look at Humour* (London, 1988); Lawrence Mintz, ed. *Humor in America: A Research Guide to Genres and Topics* (New York, 1988).

25. Mahadev Apte, *Humor and laughter. An anthropological approach* (Ithaca, 1985) 263. Strong social constructionists would challenge this contention, arguing against the existence of basic emotions (including a sense of humor), focusing instead on how cultures provide for the representation of feelings. Emotions would be theorised thus as culturally constructed and comprised of shared social meanings, rather than automatic somatic responses. For discussion see Rom Harré, *The Social Construction of Emotions* (Oxford, UK, 1986).

26. Matt Ridley, *Nature Via Nurture* (New York, 2004) 88.

27. On specifically ethnic humour see, for example, Christie Davies, *Ethnic Humor Around the World: A Comparative Analysis* (Bloomington, 1990).

28. F.J. Pretorius, "Humour on commando during the South African War, 1899–1902," International Society for Humour Studies. Birmingham, United Kingdom, 1 August 1995.

29. Pretorius, "Humour on Commando during the South African War, 1899–1902," and Pretorius, *Life on Commando*, 120.

30. Literally "after riders"—black African or so-called "colored" attendants on horseback for Boer fighters.

31. Pretorius, *Life on Commando,* 286.

32. P.J. Le Riche, ed, *Memoirs of General Ben Bouwer* (Pretoria, 1980), 75, 76–77.

33. H. Mindess, *Laughter and Liberation* (Los Angeles, 1971); Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation* (London, 1964), 54.

34. Dingaan's Day (or the Day of the Covenant/Vow) was an annual ceremonial remembrance on 16 December to commemorate a Voortrekker (Boer pioneer) victory over Zulus at the Battle of Blood River in 1838. Ben Viljoen, *My Reminiscences of the Anglo-Boer War* (London, 1902), 279.

35. Viljoen, *My Reminiscences of the Anglo-Boer War,* 436.

36. Pretorius, *Life on Commando,* 125. Historians could perhaps fruitfully explore how the age demographic of the commandos contributed to different kinds of laughter—age cohorts of young men perhaps engaged in different forms of joking to an older generation.

37. K.M. Dillon et al, "Positive emotional states and enhancement of the immune system," *International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine,* 15, 1985, 13–15. R.A. Martin and J.P. Dobbin "Sense of humor, hassles and immunoglobulin," *International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine* 18 (1988): 93–105; N. Cousins, "Why laughter is good medicine," in H. Mindess and J. Turek, eds, *The Study of Humor* (Los Angeles, 1979).

38. Ben Viljoen, *My Reminiscences of the Anglo-Boer War,* 281.

39. " *'n Paar Engelse vang eendag 'n Boer wat geen Engels ken nie. Hulle wil hom aanjaag, maar hy wil nie loop nie. Engelse:* "We shall have to kill you!" *Boer: "As julle my kielie, dan lag ek my dood."* From *Huisgenoot,* December 1921, 350.

40. Reitz, *Commando,* 154.

41. Reitz, *Commando,* 116

42. Reitz, *Commando,* 282.

43. Pretorius, *Life on Commando,* 144.

44. Pretorius, *Life on Commando,* 121.

45. Similarly, for example, Corbeill has shown that in Roman society, abusive humour (for example, jeering at physical disability) reflected ideas central to the way a Roman citizen of the Late Republic defined himself in relation to his community, and this abuse enforced society's norms. Anthony Anthony Corbeill *Controlling Laughter: Political Humor in the Late Roman Republic* (Princeton, 1996).

46. Viljoen, *My Reminiscences of the Anglo-Boer War,* 61.

47. Reitz, *Commando,* 173.

48. Apte, *Humor and Laughter,* 30–31

49. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans J.H. Bernard (New York, 1951), 74–75.

50. Viljoen, *My Reminiscences of the Anglo-Boer War*, 399.

51. Reitz, *Commando*, 229.

52. Reitz, *Commando*, 64.

53. From Malherbe, *Humor in die Algemeen en sy uitsetting in die Afrikaanse Letterkunde*, 176.

54. Viljoen, *My Reminiscences of the Anglo-Boer War*, 300. See also selected verse in Melt J. Brink, *Grappige Stories en andere Versies* vol. IV (Pretoria, 1921), for example, 51–52.

55. From J. Celestine Pretorius, "Pikturale Humor," *Tydskrif vir Volkskunde en Volkstaal*, 51, no. 1 (1995): 38.

56. Vilaythong, Alexander P., Randolph C. Arnua, David H. Rosen, and Nathan Mascaro, "Humor and Hope: Can Humor Increase Hope?" *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research* 16 (2003): 79–89. In his classic study, among the earliest to investigate the social use of humor by probing the cultural context, Obrdlik observed that jokes told about the regime in Czechoslovakia after the Nazi takeover had the effect of lifting the mood of their listeners. Antonin Obrdlik, "Gallows Humor—A Sociological Phenomenon," *American Journal of Sociology*, 47, no. 5 (1941): 709–716, 712.

57. Reitz, *Commando*, 173.

58. J.M. Davis, *Farce*, (London, 1978).

59. Literally "gallows humour".

60. *"Neef, neef, dit gaan ellendig. My vrou is skandelike siek in die konsentrasiekamp op Klerksdorp, ons het' 'n paar van ons beste manne op die slagveld verloor, en nou moet ons nog verneem dat ons geliefde Koningin Viktorie oorlede is."* Cited in Hester Wortley, "Die Grap in Afrikaans", 32. This joke is, of course, deeply ironic, which is useful in war: irony requires the speaker to step outside of a situation and view it as an outsider (thus effectively distancing the speaker from his/her subject).

61. Reitz, *Commando*, 143.

62. J. M. Davis, "Taking Humour and Laughter Seriously," *Australian Journal of Comedy*, 2, no. 1 (1996).

63. Pretorius, *Life on Commando*, 72–73. This was later immortalised as a joke, ending in "Toe die Kakie so wegstap met die flenterpak, gee die Boer hom' 'n skoppie agter op sij broek en sê": "Go, you dirty Boor!" *Huisgenoot*, April, 1919, 710.

64. Viljoen, *My Reminiscences of the Anglo-Boer War*, 297.

65. J.H Wrench, *Alfred Lord Milner: the man of no illusions*. (London, 1958), 166.

66. M.A. Basson, *Die voertaalvraagstuk in die Transvaalse skoolwese* (Pretoria, 1944) 46.

67. The policy was not necessarily as chauvinistically pro-English as was believed. D. Denoon, *A Grand Illusion* (London, 1973) 76.

68. There was opposition not just from English but from those promoting Dutch, and Dutch was still regarded by the majority as the national language of Afrikaners.

69. The satire of Afrikaner authors Langenhoven and O' Kulis, for example, reflected fears surrounding the denationalisation of the Afrikaner child.

70. Viljoen, *My Reminiscences of the Anglo-Boer War,* 27.

71. Hendrika Cornelia Scott Swart (1939–), pers. comm.

72. For discussion see D.B. Gordon, "Humor in African American discourse—Speaking of oppression," *Journal of Black Studies,* 29, no. 2 (1998): 254–276.

73. Colin Turnbull, *The Mountain People* (New York, 1972).

74. Elliott Oring, *Engaging Humor* (Urbana, 2003).13–26.

75. E.P. Thompson, "Patrician Society, Plebeian Culture," *Journal of Social History,* 7, 4, 1974, 382–405; for more, see James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, 1990), xiii.

76. Obrdlik, "Gallows Humor—A Sociological Phenomenon," 712.

77. See Van Reenen, *Emily Hobhouse,* 210.

78. Malherbe, *Humor in die Algemeen en sy uitsetting in die Afrikaanse Letterkunde,* 157. *"Ja, neef, my vrou en kinders is almaal in die koncentrasiekamp dood, my ou veetjies is van die droogte gevrek en die sprikane het al die gesaaidetjies opgevreet, maar verder gaan dit baie goed."* Another interpretation could be that the sarcastic response is in order to remind the questioner that his initial question was insensitive.

79. Critchley, *On Humour,* 10.

80. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, eds. *The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters of George Orwell, vol. 3. As I Please, 1943–1945.* (New York, 1969), 184. Similarly, George Mikes observed: "Every joke whispered against a regime, every laughter at the expense of the Hitlers and the Stalin of this world is a nail in their coffin." George Mikes, *Laughing Matter: Towards a Personal Philosophy of Wit and Humor.* (New York, 1971); Steven Lukes and Itzhak Galnoor. *No Laughing Matter: A Collection of Political Jokes* (New York, 1985) vii.

81. Oriol Pi-Sunyer, "Political Humor in a Dictatorial State: The Case of Spain," *Ethnohistory,* 24 (1977): 179–190. Kundera in his novel *The Joke* had one of his characters opine that "No great movement designed to change the world can bear to be laughed at or belittled, because laughter is a rust that corrodes everything." Milan Kundera, *The Joke.* David Hamblyn and Oliver Stallybrass (trans) (New York, 1969), 226.

82. Mary Douglas, "The Social Role of Cognition: Some Factors in Joke Perception," *Man* 3 (1968): 369.

83. Boer commandants Hans Lötter and Gideon Scheepers were regarded as criminals by the British military authorities as commanding units of Cape rebels for the Republics. Both were executed towards the end of the war. Lötter and especially Scheepers became martyrs of the Boer cause. See also, Bill Nasson, "The War of Abraham Esau 1899–1901:

Martyrdom, Myth and Folk Memory in Calvinia, South Africa," *African Affairs*, Vol. 87, No. 347 (1988): 239–265.

84. In essence: people who have guns, have no need of jokes. Khalid Kishtainy, *Arab Political Humour* (London, 1985), 7, 179.

85. For example, Robert Cochran, "'What Courage!' Romanian 'Our Leader' Jokes," *Journal of American Folklore* 102 (1989): 259–274.

86. H. Speier, "Wit and Politics: An Essay on Laughter and Power," *American Journal of Sociology*, 103 (1998): 1352–1401, 1395–1396, 30.

87. B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, 1983, 1991).

88. Literally "Afrikaans language fighters."

89. Hermann Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: The Biography of a People* (Cape Town, 2003), 375.

90. See J. Breuilly,. *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester, 1982); E. Gellner, "Nationalism and modernization." In J. Hutchinson and A. S. Smith, eds, *Nationalism* (Oxford, 1994), 55–63.; E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, eds, *The Invention of Tradition*. (Cambridge, 1983), 1–14.

91. Isabel Hofmeyr, "Building a Nation from Words: Afrikaans Language, Literature and 'Ethnic Identity', 1902–1924." In Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido, eds, *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa* (London and New York, 1987).

92. N.P. Van Wyk Louw, *Berigte te Velde* (Cape Town, 1959), 10.

93. The theme of a people in righteous suffering couched in biblical terms was a well-worn socio-political *leitmotif*, evident, for example, in President Kruger's pre-war, and exile discourse. See, for example, T. Dunbar Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom* (Berkeley, 1975), 36.

94. Moodie, *Rise of Afrikanerdom*, 42–43.

95. Despite the fact that Afrikaner nationalism was less consistent and unified as often depicted, it is still helpful to regard it as a programme of action with certain goals. As Dan O'Meara noted in *Volkskapitalisme: Class, Capital and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism* (Cambridge, 1983), 74.

96. T.J. Haarhoff, *Afrikaans—its origin and development* (Oxford, UK, 1936), 47.

97. Haarhoff, *Afrikaans*, 49.

98. Haarhoff, *Afrikaans*, 50.

99. Haarhoff, *Afrikaans*, 50

100. Afrikaans was often used as a tool of ridicule mainly by "outsiders" for yokelish comic effect. See P.J. Nienaber, "The Evolution of Afrikaans as a Literary Language," *Lantern*, 8, 8, 4, April–June 1959. *Ons Klyntji* (1896 onwards) the first Afrikaans magazine offered

many articles predicated on humour. See also Boerhumour, 78 and C.L. Grimbeek, Die wederydse beoordeling van Boer en Uitlander, 1886–1899, MA , RAU, 1969.

101. Melt J. Brink published seven anthologies of anecdotes, jokes and little verses between 1893 and 1909. See also S.J. Du Toit *De Gezellige* (c.1906), S.J. Van der Spuy's *Het Debatsboek* (1910) and *Jong Suid-Afrika* (1913); J.H.H. de Waal's Stompies (1911); C.J. Langenhoven's *Ons weg deur die wêreld* (1914); D.P. du Toit's *Treinnonsens* (1922) and M.F.O Toerien's *Eerste Afrikaanse grappebundel* (1925).

102. Just as Malan had contended in 1908: "A healthy national feeling can only be rooted in ethnic art and science, ethnic customs and character, ethnic language and ethnic religion and . . . in ethnic literature." Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom,* 42–47.

103. Malherbe studied Afrikaans and Dutch Literature at the Victoria College, now University of Stellenbosch, and at the University of Amsterdam. He was an influential literary critic, whose reviews appeared regularly in *Die Burger, Die Huisgenoot, Tydsskrif vir Wetenskap en Kuns,* and *Koers*. He was editor of *Ons Eie Boek* from 1935 to 1955 and the *Woordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal*.

104. Recent international social histories of the concept of a sense of humour show that the idea of a sense of humour only started in the 1840s and only three decades later was used in the modern sense. Wickberg, *The Senses of Humor,* 18. The emergence of this trend trailed changes in how the "personality" was understood—of individuals (and, concomitantly, of nations). People were increasingly seen as more than merely a signifier of their social class.

105. See, for contemporaneous example, Joseph Remenyi, "Hungarian Humor," *Slavonic and East European Review, American Series,* 2, no. 1 (1943): 194–210, especially the discussion of "racial validity," 195.

106. P.J. Nienaber, "The Evolution of Afrikaans as a Literary Language," *Lantern,* 8, 8, 4, 1959.

107. *"Ons letterkunde is die mees nasionale ding in ons land. So sal ons daarin die nasionale eienskap van die humor-sin verwag." Afrikaans literature "uit en vir die volk kom en die wese van die volksiel weerspieël."* F.E.J. Malherbe, "Die Afrikaner en Humor," *Die Huisgenoot* 29 (June 1934): 29.

108. *"ons ken die humor as volksbesit."* F.E.J. Malherbe, "Het die Afrikaner' 'n sin vir Humor," *Die Huisgenoot* 22 (June 1934): 25.

109. *"Die ras-egte Boer kenmerk die berusting in teenspoed en rampe, siekte en dood; maar ook die heldere sin vir die koddige in die daelikse lewe en die liefdevolle en humoristiese betragting van waardes in die groot werklikheid wat ons omring." "Maar die grote humor het ook van leë wense en ydele hoop en angs bevry en verdere horisonte opgeklaar. So het' 'n ras-eienskap verder ontwikkel."* Malherbe, *Humor in die Algemeen,* 159 –160.

110. *"Ons het méér humor as die Hollanders! Want ons leef . . . nader aan die natuur. Die beste onder ons is nog kinders van die aarde. . . . En humor wil natuur, onbevangenheid, direkte, warme menslikheid. In ons wesenlike volksiel, hoe ook tydelik toegepak onder dogmatiese leerstelligheid, is daar die kiemgrond van die humor—die humor wat so na verwant is aan die tragiese gevoel, met sy ligspeling oor donker waters."* F.E.J. Malherbe, "Het die Afrikaner' 'n sin vir Humor," *Die Huisgenoot* 22 (June 1934): 25.

111. *"Die voor oorlog-spot is gedoop in namelose smart, en die humor kon gebore word. Die siel is na binne gekeer".* F.E.J. Malherbe, "Die Afrikaner en Humor," *Die Huisgenoot* 29 (June 1934): 29.

112. *"Ja, simpatie, weemoed en verlange kom huiwer deaur die woorde. Weemoed om wat kon wees, verlange om wat moet kom, gee aan menige lugtige vertelling sy dieper toon."* F.E.J. Malherbe, "Het die Afrikaner' 'n sin vir Humor," *Die Huisgenoot* 22 (June 1934): 25.

113. *"Die hoogste humor in Afrikaans kom ook uit weedom op. Ja, waar is die geheim van ons volk—vra Langenhoven—veral van ons boerestand, dat hulle onder die haglikste voortduring van ramp op ramp nie moedeloos word nie? Daar is vir hulle altyd nog' 'n grap uit die ellende te haal. "Is dit nie koodig nie", sê hulle, "dat dit op so' 'n snaakse manier kan sleg gaan?"* F.E.J. Malherbe, "Die Afrikaner en Humor," *Die Huisgenoot* 15 (June 1934): 79. Also quoted (in slightly altered form) in F.E.J. Malherbe, *Humor in die Algemeen en sy uitsetting in die Afrikaanse Letterkunde* (Amsterdam, 1932), 153.

114. *"Ons lye, ons verheffende, glorieuse smart! . . . die wegsinking in 'n inferno van trane, om só te mag staar op' 'n monument van onsself . . . die visioene van heerlike herrysenis! . . . Deur smart tot heerlikheid, deur ironie tot hoë humor!"* Malherbe, *Humor in die Algemeen en sy uitsetting in die Afrikaanse Letterkunde,* 156.

115. *"Ontdekking van waarde te midde van verwoesting . . . was die bitter-soete lewens-eis by die dreiging van algehele ondergang. En of hierdie "siening van die geheel" in die bewusyn geplaas het die vryheidsideaal of dapperheid op die slagveld of die komiese gespartel van die Engelsman of die vrou as heldin of eie gesondheid of 'n nes met hoendereiers of' 'n karmenaadjie deur Kaffergetrouheid besorg bij eie verwoeste opstal—altyd was daar tog nog iets wat dit "goed" laat "gaan".* Malherbe, *Humor in die Algemeen en sy uitsetting in die Afrikaanse Letterkunde,* 157.

116. Malherbe, *Humor in die Algemeen en sy uitsetting in die Afrikaanse Letterkunde,* 157.

117. *"Alles tesaam, was die natuur aldus 'n magtige invloed tot die vorming van die ken merkende, en vir humor so nodig, pessimistiese optimisme. So is' 'n ras-eienskap versterk onder invloed van die Afrikaanse natuur."* Malherbe, *Humor in die Algemeen,* 161–162.

118. *"Maar die natuur is méér as 'n symbool van ons volkshumor. Deur die natuur loop die pad van Suid-Afrika. En deur deur die volksiel loop die pad van die natuur! Seker is sy invloed op' 'n Trekkersvolk, vóór alles kinders van die natuur, geweldig groot gewees; seker het sy invloed ook begedra tot die vorming van' 'n mentaliteit wat geskik is vir humor."* Malherbe, *Humor in die Algemeen,* 161.

119. Malherbe, *Humor in die Algemeen,* 158.

120. There is a robust body of writing that analyzes the late-eighteenth-century notion that women were humor deficient. Some propose that joking acts as one of the strategies women use to subvert patriarchy. R. Barreca, *They Used to Call Me Snow White—but I Drifted: Women's Strategic Use of Humor* (New York, 1991).

121. Literally "die hards".

122. *" 'n Groter gawe van die natuur aan onse Afrikaanse vroue was die ongehoorde fysiese en psychiese uithou-vermoë, waarby haar man in die geskiedenis weleens 'n jammerlike figuur slaan."* Malherbe, *Humor in die Algemeen,* 165.

123. Malherbe, *Humor in die Algemeen,* 189.

124. An offensive description meaning "pale-stomached black man."

125. A disparaging term for an Indian girl/domestic worker.

126. Cited in Malherbe, *Humor in die Algemeen,* 230; Malherbe noted "You can take as an example a Kaffir in Johannesburg who, despite his affectations remains an ignorant black from the location." *"U sou ook as voorbeeld kan neem' 'n Kaffer in Johannesburg, wat met al sy aanstellerigheid tog 'n dom lokasieswarte bly." Humor in die Algemeen,* 41.

127. Malherbe, 1932, 250.

128. To pursue this latter point further: theorists have contended that laughter reduces ambiguities in delineating the social boundaries of a nation/ethnic group. But arguably could it simply hide ambiguities? As we have discussed, Malherbe narrated a "national character" that allowed only a trifling (gendered) fissure, for the rest he insisted on ethnic homogeneity, a single "national character" of Afrikaners, which ignored class differences.

129. For a further illuminating example, Charles van Onselen has discussed satirical African mock "praise poetry" ridiculing the death a (locally venerated) Boer rebel leader, with teasing hints of miscegenation and having "a black horse [jump] over [his] head." C. Van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine—the life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper, 1894–1985* (Cape Town, 1996) 55.

130. In a typical story, Van der Merwe is planning a visit to America. He practices driving on the right hand side of the road on a trip from Johannesburg to Durban but decides to abandon his trip to America because clearly "it's just too bloody dangerous."

131. Van der Merwe is an old family in South Africa: the original Van der Merwe arrived in 1660 among the first of the white settlers and most Afrikaners from old Cape families are linked either by blood or marriage to a Van der Merwe. Wortley, "Die Grap in Afrikaans," 45.

132. Viljoen, *My Reminiscences of the Anglo-Boer War,* 521. By the beginning of the 1960s, Fanus Rautenbach (1928–) told "Van der Merwe" jokes on his early morning radio show. The stock figure also appeared in AD. Keet: 1932:37 "Muskietjeag", A.G. Visser "Lotosland" from *Gedigte* (1925). Koenderman, F. Rautenbach *Fanus se grapboek* (Pretoria, 1968); T. Koenderman, J. Langen and A. Viljoen, *Van der Merwe: 100 grappe* (Hillbrow, 1975); T. Koenderman, J. Langen and A. Viljoen, *Not Again Van der Merwe* (Hillbrow: 1976); Victor and Beulah van Wyk, *Koos van der Merwe* (Turffontein, 1976) and Len Celliers, *The Van der Merwes as seen by Lencel.* (1978).

133. Deborah Posel, "Whiteness and Power in the South African Civil Service: Paradoxes of the Apartheid State," *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 25, no. 1 (March 1999): 99–119.

134. Gary Fine, "Humor in Situ: the role of humor in small group culture" in Anthony Chapman and Hugh Foot, *It's a Funny Thing, Humour* (New York, 1977), 315.

135. See, for example, Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom,* 39.

136. Stearns and Stearns, "Emotionology," 830.

137. Robert Thurston, "Social Dimensions of Stalinist Rule: Humor and Terror in the USSR, 1935–1941," *Journal of Social History* 24, no. 3, (1991): 541–562.

138. Thurston, "Social Dimensions of Stalinist Rule: Humor and Terror in the USSR, 1935–1941," 541. See Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (New York, 1977), 338.

139. Most historians do not have access, for example, to the rich archive analysed adroitly by Thurston in his study of jokes under the Stalinist regime. He had access to thousands of questionnaires and hundreds of interviews of former Soviet citizens from the Project on the Soviet Social System, conducted in 1950–1951 at Harvard. Thurston, "Social Dimensions of Stalinist Rule."

140. Indeed Apte suggests that statistical investigations of humour are impracticable. Apte, *Humor and Laughter,* 25.

141. Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud. Vol. 3, The Cultivation. of Hatred* (New York, 1993) 369, 373.

142. Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York, 1985) 78.

143. Useful in the evolutionary history turn with its focus on "history and human nature." See, for example, *History and Theory* 38, no. 4 (Dec. 1999), Theme Issue: The Return of Science: Evolutionary Ideas and History.

144. Viljoen, My *Reminiscences of the Anglo-Boer War,* 281.

145. "lag met die traan," Malherbe, *Humor in die Algemeen,* 165.

146. *"Die humor moet u leer gewaar in die ligte bewe van 'n mondhoek, of die nerveuse aanpak van die sakkie tabak, in die flonkering van 'n dowwe blik, in die preweling van dankbaarheid na ramp en teëslag, in die berusting as die skaduwees val . . . "* Malherbe, *Humor in die Algemeen,* 165.