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Thank you very much for accepting our invitation to talk about *Africa is a Country*, on the occasion of the Special Issue of *Práticas da História*, "(Digital) Retrospectives on African Historiography: Decolonization, African Press, and the Uses of Knowledge."

We are particularly concerned with the history(ies) of knowledge production in Africa, and with the discourses that have been constructed about these histories, especially in the context of the uneven globalization of intellectual thought.

This volume focuses on the period of decolonization in Africa, exploring the relationship between media and emancipation, political democracy, freedom of choice, and collective consciousness. At the same time, we remain attentive to contemporary epistemological possibilities and constraints in writing history.

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One of our key interests relates to digital preservation processes and the recirculation of historiography from Africa and its diasporas. We aim to foster critical reflections on their impact in expanding the public sphere and empowering communities. For this reason, our proposal includes academic articles, contributions, and essays written by artists. It now seeks to gather input from associations and relevant projects concerned with historical, epistemological, and social justice and accessibility issues related to Africa and its diasporas.

Thank you for your participation and testimony!

We would like to start by asking you to introduce yourselves and briefly present your project (its objectives and target audience)

My name is Marissa Moorman and I am a Professor of African Cultural Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where I am also currently the Faculty Director of the African Studies Program. While I work and teach in an interdisciplinary department, my PhD is in African History, and I am a specialist in contemporary Angolan history. For a decade, 2014-2024, I was an editor on the blog *Africa is a Country* and I have also served as one of the editors of *The Journal of African History* for five years, from 2020-2024.

In 2009, Sean Jacobs (Professor of International Affairs at The New School) founded *Africa is a Country*. While it started as a personal blog, he quickly expanded within a few years to bring on an editorial team and set of writers. *Africa is a Country* started out with a tongue-in-cheek adoption of Sarah Palin's gaff during her vice-presidential campaign when she referred to the African continent as a country. This was – is – a common mistake. And it is a telling one. AIAC used incisive writing, sometimes with a good dose of sarcasm, to call out such nonsense. But the project is bigger than naming Western stereotypes. Sean wanted to create a site that offered discussions and critique from and of the Left in thinking about issues – cultural, social, economic, and political – on the African continent. Since 2024, William

Shoki, based in Cape Town, is the editor, Boima Tucker the Director of Operations, and Sean is now the publisher.

In which ways does your project contribute to the construction and dissemination of historical narratives about the peoples of the African continent and its diasporas?

Africa is a Country is not first and foremost a site of historical writing. But several of the writers have been or are historians and the editorial team aims to identify and critique the legacies of colonialism and other forms of exploitation on the continent, as well as the complicities of postcolonial actors. The work of producing analysis of the current global and continental situation demands historical thinking. This means critically engaging not just ongoing colonial and imperial tendencies in historiographies but, perhaps most importantly, in official histories, whether in Europe or on the continent. You are as likely to find a piece criticizing ZANU-PF official histories as one pushing back against ongoing glorification of "The Discoveries" in Portugal. The *Africa is a Country* tagline on "X" reads "Left politics and culture, usable pasts." That's an apt description of a throughline in the work.

How does your work challenge or transform the ways in which the African and diasporic past is represented and remembered in the public sphere, including the digital space? What is the urgency of this work in contemporary society, and what are its impacts on the social fabric and the development of historical consciousness?

Taken as a whole, *Africa is a Country* showcases critical writing and thinking from and about the continent. Because stereotypes about Africa and Africans have a trenchant durability in the West and around the world and even on the continent, the material AIAC produces – whether

writing, short films, explainers, the podcast, or radio – always addresses those shorthand ways of representing the African continent and Africans. By and large, stereotypes deny peoples and places their historical dynamism and complexity. Even when writers don't address those images directly, and we made a very conscious decision to move away from so much direct engagement of such depictions, the fact of the work presses back. The digital space matters in this ongoing struggle. But it is not just a struggle around representation. It is a struggle over and about politics and power – who speaks, what ideas circulate, and how we might create a more just and equitable world.

What challenges have you encountered in this process of collective reconstruction and narration of the past, as well as in the digitalization, preservation, and accessibility of historical and cultural materials? What strategies do you employ to ensure that your content reaches the general public while staying true to your mission?

We are not an archive or site that digitizes historical and cultural sources and materials. And AIAC is not an academic endeavor. It is public-facing work. What *Africa is a Country* offers is critical, Left, thinking and analysis. The idea of useable pasts – those that engage the complex relationship between past and present, that don't just look to the past as prologue but see it as a resource to analyze the present and intervene in it – is what the site contributes. That said, we are a resource and an archive of new left thinking from and about the continent. Many historians, myself included, use work from the site in our teaching precisely because it offers new voices and sharp analysis of current issues.

Your work seeks to challenge established historical imaginaries. How can the digital sphere contribute to the reconfiguration of collective memories of Africa's past? What still needs to be done beyond the digital realm – in the streets, schools, and homes?

Africa is a Country was born digital. The idea was to create a space that existed neither on the continent nor elsewhere to bring writers and thinkers together. Much of what the site publishes could not easily find other outlets on the continent or outside it. Our chosen ancestors are Rajat Neogy and his magazine *Transition* and Ntone Edjabe and the publishing venture *Chimurenga*, both of which criticize local forms of exploitation, postcolonial politics, and historical misrepresentation. Both center culture as a key site and set of practices to understand and engage the workings of power. Posts on *Africa is a Country* often circulate widely, and they have been reproduced in South Asian, African, and European blogs and news sites. Beyond the digital realm, much work remains. Part of that work is to make history and historical thinking matter to our current world and our capacity to engage it. AIAC does this by sketching and populating alternative historical imaginaries. It creates a Panafrican sensibility that advocates for thinking across borders, beyond the nation-state, and through diaspora.

How do you envision the evolution of the project in the coming years? What impact would you like it to have on society and historiography in the broadest sense?

Since 2024, *Africa is a Country* has its editorial home in Cape Town, South Africa and acquires work through three regional editors: Wangui Kimari, Sa'eed Husaini, and Shamira Ibrahim. AIAC is deepening its digital forms and moving out in various directions – with podcasts, in person events, films and more. In 2024, the editors and some writers attended the Africa Cup of Nations in the Ivory Coast allowing for live-broadcasting and a more direct participation. This emerged in part from contributing editor Mehar Mezahi's African football podcast, "African Five-a-Side." In 2025, *Africa is a Country* will host an in person gathering in Nairobi in June. This festival will hold three public events: a literary reading, a film screening of AIAC's first documentary, *After Oil*, and a launch of an inaugural physical edition, *Revolution*

Deferred?: 15 Years of Mass Protest in Africa. With Nairobi LitFest, AIAC will present several other events and workshops. And Sean Jacobs and I are writing a book that emerges from the blog: *A People's History of Contemporary Africa* (under contract with Columbia University Press).

To conclude: would you like to suggest a book, a film, or a piece of music?

I recommend Abderrahmane Sissako's film *Rostov-Luanda* (1997). Sissako is a filmmaker from Mauritania who has made several important films. But I still love this earlier documentary of his. It casually blurs the boundaries of documentary and feature filmmaking and is based on the search for an old friend, Baribanga, who was from Angola but whom Sissako met in film school in the Soviet Union. Sissako brilliantly captures aspects of Angola's history, the missed encounters with the promises of independence, and how people still dream and persevere in a world rattled by civil war. And of course the film's conceit – the search for a friend from the continent triangulated through the USSR – reminds us that the Cold War created connections whose affective lives outlived the fall of the Soviet Union and even the institutions that initially put them in contact.

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