

(Digital) Retrospectives on Historiography from Africa: Decolonization, the African Press, and the Uses of Knowledge

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Editorial
(Digital) Retrospectives on Historiography from Africa: Decolonization, the African Press, and the Uses of Knowledge

Noemi Alfieri*

L'ancien assis se repose
sous le bougainvilliers tâchant le blanc
et par dessus les bruits de trottinettes, il fume
et me dit
dans un nuage calme
que ma nostalgie de l'ancien garantit la mort à petit feu
de ma capacité de goûter à ma propre humanité
Emma Ben Aziza

The history of knowledge production in Africa is a rising topic in the backdrop of growing awareness of the uneven globalization of intellectual thought. Focusing on the era of decolonization in Africa, a growing number of scholars are especially exploring historiography as read in periodicals such as pamphlets, magazines, journals, or newspapers, providing important

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impetus for understanding the link between media and emancipation, political democracy, freedom of choice, self-awareness, and selective association.

This special issue of *Práticas da História*, focusing on "(Digital) Retrospectives on Historiography from Africa: Decolonization, the African Press, and the Uses of Knowledge", reflects on contemporary epistemological possibilities and constraints in the writing of history. We welcomed both contributions that dwell on African journals (scholarly, literary, artistic and ephemeral periodicals) from the 1950s to 1980s, and on the histories behind said periodicals. Our main objective was to gather contributions exploring different and contested visions of decolonization and future-making for the African continent and its diasporas. For this reason, this volume also includes interviews, artistic contributions, and essays by artists and practitioners. We were moved by several cross-cutting questions, such as: how are online platforms fostering a re-positioning, re-calibrating and re-thinking of bodies of knowledge from Africa? What potentialities lie in the future? How do the processes of digital preservation and recirculation of historiography from Africa – including their implications for Africa-based and African diasporic knowledge production in the arts, literature, and scholarship – impact the expansion of the public arena and community empowerment?

In the 50th year of the PALOP's Independences, these interrogations and debates gain particular significance. Aiming to broaden the discussion about the meaning of political decolonisation in these countries and Portugal, this volume features texts and images authored by scholars, academics and artists of different generations and backgrounds, primarily from various regions of the Continent or its historical diasporas. In our call for papers, we encouraged submissions offering nuanced perspectives on 'nationalist historiography', rather than conceiving it as a monolithic or static concept that dominated historical narratives of the decolonization period for a considerable time. If Pan-Africanism and *Négritude* revolutionized the political assets of the Continent, they remained contested as intellectual projects. For these reasons, we aimed to challenge the current conceptualisations of such historiography as being either 'colonial', 'traditional', 'radical', 'Eurocentric', 'Afrocentric', or

'Africa-centred'. This volume is, therefore, not just marked by interdisciplinarity, but it also features multilingualism and multiple perspectives.

In their paper "Decolonization and Functionality of Knowledge in the *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria (JHSN)*, 1956 to 1980", Olufunke Adeboye and Oladipo Olugbodi reflect on the path of Nigeria's oldest academic historical journal, analysing its contribution to the decolonization of knowledge and in challenging colonial narratives about Africa. The authors highlight the journal's role from 1956 to 1980, highlighting its role as a platform for African historians to assert indigenous perspectives and support nationalist movements, however failing to ensure the practical relevance of historical knowledge to broader society.

Mario Eugenio Evangelista Silva Brito, in "Kenneth Onwuka Dike as an Atlantic Historian: An Alternative History of the Formative Years of African Historiography", revisits some key moments of Anglophone colonial history, its features and main actors in the first half of the 20th Century, starting from Dike's *Trade and Politics on the Nigerian Delta*. He highlights what he considers to be Dike's position within the Black Atlantic intellectual space, as well as his contribution to a transatlantic historical narrative, transcending colonial frameworks. Furthermore, Brito's text approaches the contribution of women scholars to historiography in the English-speaking context of that time.

Some colleagues opted for approaching literature at its intersection with history, gender representation, local culture and teaching contexts, as this was the case for Luiz Augusto Pinheiro Leal, Maianne Caroline da Silva and Carlos Henrique Silva Lobo. In "Contos tradicionais de Angola: cultura e gênero em Óscar Ribas, Luandino Vieira e Alfredo Bobela-Motta", they analyze representations of Angolan realities in colonial times, with special attention to literary narrations, but also gender representations and roles in the colonial society. Their comparison enriches the debate about the tensions between contestation, denunciation and resistance during political decolonization, bringing to the table the issue of representation and its limits. In her text, Carolina Bezerra Machado also reflects on literary representations, understanding literature as a tool for

the historian(s), especially when intended as a "writing of the real", as she intends Pepetela's writing to be deeply related to Angolan history. "A escrita da história de Angola e os desafios da literatura ao campo" therefore establishes a possible path, through the Angolan writer's narrative, from colonial history to the impact of civil war, passing through anticolonial resistance and Independence. Starting from another point of view, José Gueleka Kapetula brings literature to the educational context, approaching, in "'Monangamba' e 'Poema da Alienação' na concretização do ideário da *Mensagem*", the relevance of António Jacinto's literary work within the applied context of Angolan education. Kapetula deepens the discussion about the role of kimbundu in the literary production of the "Geração *Mensagem*" (lit: *Mensagem's* generation).

Emma Ben Aziza, in "Monsieur l'agent, sachez que l'histoire ne se confisque pas aux enfants car elle se niche dans leurs maisons et leurs jeux" navigates issues of representation, western historical distortions and obliterations, calling in vegetal analogies, poetry and personal memories between France and Tunisia. She does so to reflect about History and diasporic experiences.

The "Interviews" section gathers conversations with associations, platforms and journals that have contributed to these discussions and often led to concrete actions. We entered these conversations aware that each one would offer different perspectives, starting from different locations: Portugal, Angola, the US and South Africa. In this section, we discuss the relationship between media and emancipation, political democracy, freedom of choice, collective consciousness, digital preservation processes, and the recirculation of historiography from Africa and its diaspora with *Djass – Associação de Afrodescendentes* (https://djass.pt), *Associação Tchiweka de Documentação* https://www.tchiweka.org), *NGAPA Revista* (https://www.revistangapa.com) and *Africa is a Country* (https://africasacountry.com).

At the end of our discussions, we asked our interviewees to recommend a book, film or record to give readers of these volumes an additional digital itinerary. This includes Ismael Lo's *Africa, Independência* (2015), which is part of the project "Angola – Nos Trilhos da

Independência"; Abderrahmane Sissako's film *Rostov-Luanda* (1997); *A Town* with music by Ohali and lyrics by Toy Boy; *Caricatura* by Gil H. Saurana, and the documentary *Fuckin' Globo* by Kamy Lara. We open and close with Nuno Silas's *Untitled* photography, which, as he explains in the "Testimony" section, uses digital imagery to retell histories in postcolonial times. It is understood as a tool of memory, resistance, and imagination. This photograph echoes the articles, essays, and conversations in this volume, while also opening up space for reflection on "utopian migrations". It invites us to critically engage with contemporaneity, destiny, and movement in an era of historical tensions and political constraints.

Last but not least, this volume brings together contributions from young scholars and artists in the hope that their perspectives will offer new approaches to issues that are highly relevant in contemporary societies.

Thanks to all the authors and colleagues who helped bring this special issue to life. We hope it will be one of the spaces in which we can critically reflect on historical and fictional narratives, their effects on the present(s) and our collective futures.

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