

Editors' Introduction

Issue 65(1) offers five research articles and two History Matters pieces that underscore the vitality of this feature we launched one year ago.

Each of this issue's pieces rely on the authors' resourceful use of archives. The authors ask readers to reconsider cherished narratives and their studies reveal unexpected actors or bring what historian Susan Geiger called the "culture of politics" into focus. Even in the midst of the renewed and necessary scrutiny of "the archive," often far beyond the historical discipline, these articles remind us that archives and pasts are unstable and that archives can be diverse and their contents surprising. Newly found and available archival materials allow historians to revise and challenge previous historiographies and ideas. Official documents interpreted in conjunction with oral histories reveal ideology refigured and in action. Postcolonial archives offer nuance to top-down narratives of authoritarian control and add perspective to representing the hegemony of the Global North. Metropolitan archives can sometimes reveal African leaders driving international processes, while local archives provide a door to granularity.

The newly discovered "Florentine Relation" and its description of the Kongo Kingdom in the sixteenth century spurred **John Thornton** to reopen discussion about Mwene Muji. A West Central African polity recognized by Jan Vansina and others, Mwene Muji has been relegated to a minor position. Using the new material from the Relation, Thornton moves through the extant literature and oral tradition to argue that Mwene Muji was likely a kingdom of significance. Located along the Kwa River, at the junction of tributaries of the Congo, and in the midst of the textile belt, this was at least a sizable and important kingdom, if not an empire (a designation pending new, more detailed archaeological and/or documentary findings). But imperial status matters less than knowing that the lineaments of the past are almost never settled.

Thornton studies the sixteenth century and among other sources, he reads the twentieth century colonial archive. He parses oral traditions collected in the 1920s, disentangling the pressures of imperial interests that West Central Africans navigated as they recounted founding histories and lines of descent to colonial officials. **Anjuli Webster's** History Matters piece likewise reads colonial archival materials with and against oral traditions and epic poetry to write environmental histories that center water. She suggests that imperial conceptions and infrastructures continue to shape current waterscapes but that isiNguni ideas and practices related to rivers and rain and their political and cosmological significance may yet help residents of this region face environmental crises that transgress the very boundaries that colonial administrators made of regional rivers. **Jacob Dlamini, Shireen Hassim, Laura Phillips, Chris Saunders, Thula Simpson, and Janeke Thumbran**, the six South African historians in conversation in the 1994+30 piece in History Matters, likewise raise questions about the archives: imperial, colonial, apartheid, and postapartheid. These archives are critical to understanding the historical discipline and history-writing thirty years after the end of apartheid. Even though compromised by purges and redactions, these archives still offer answers to questions that state forces cannot anticipate.

The thirty year archival rule is standard, if not universal, practice among historical archives. Now, thirty years on from apartheid, all African nations once under colonial rule, theoretically, have entered the period of postcolonial archiving. The four other research articles demonstrate the wealth, and sometimes the limitations, of what these archives offer for writing histories of independent African nations, societies, and politics.

The 1967–70 Biafra secession was a key moment of disenchantment with independence on the continent. **Marco Wyss** turns to an unexpected set of sources to understand regional and international intervention in the war: the French diplomatic archives. He explores what he calls the Franco-African arms triangle to support the Biafran secession against the Nigerian Federal government. Like many civil wars, this one attracted the interest and intervention of neighboring countries and European ones, not limited to the former colonial ruler. Working from postcolonial French sources, Wyss argues that Ivorian President Félix Houphouët-Boigny and Gabonese President Omar Bongo were the prime movers galvanizing and directing French support and, later, procuring arms and assistance for Biafran leader Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu from Rhodesia and South Africa.

Peter Vale's article likewise locates and explores how economic policy in independent Congo/Zaire was not simply dictated from the Global North. Using public bulletins, government correspondence, and local political commentary about the Congolese economy during the, roughly, first decade of Mobutu's rule (1965–74), he argues that Mobutu and many in his government worked to attract foreign finance and put it to work to create economic sovereignty. On the heels of his accession to power accomplished with foreign meddling, Mobutu prioritized nationalism to appeal to local and regional audiences. But he also needed foreign finance to continue developing mining and industry. New legislation and policy statements operationalized economic nationalism while the Kinshasa International Fair (FIKIN), from 1969, staged encounters with local industry to attract foreign investment. Vale thus traces lines of neoliberal economic policy before the conditionalities imposed by multilateral institutions beginning in the 1980s. We feature Vale's article in this issue's podcast.

Eric Allina explores the fractures, nuances, and breakdowns of Frelimo's nationalism in independent Mozambique. Based in oral historical work and in state documents produced at the national and district level, Allina traces Frelimo's *palavras de ordem*, or watchwords, from the official speeches of party leadership — especially President Samora Machel — through state produced magazines and graphics to the ways that cadres and district officials communicated these ideas. Watchwords emerged in the context of the anticolonial war and then developed in the independence-era political milieu. They permeated everyday life and public space. They were meant to function as a shared vocabulary that defined the national community, orienting its labors and ways of being. But Allina argues that, for many, they had the opposite effect. Frelimo's invitations and, sometimes demands, that Mozambicans actualize a future that abandoned the historical touchpoints of identity, did not offer a vision of the nation in which most Mozambicans could see themselves.

District level documents and oral historical work are also at the center of the history that **Alexander Keese** builds. Focused on a local archive on the small island of Santa Antão in the Cape Verde archipelago, he explores how social issues motivated opposition against the movement turned political party that claimed independence for Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau, the PAIGC (later the PAICV, after the islands split). By sketching the problems generated by policing, resettlement policies, and the failures of agrarian reform, Keese offers a detailed analysis of how the ruling party failed to meet the needs of the local population from as early as 1975. He shows how this remote island, not usually associated with political dynamism, became a stronghold of opposition and helped deliver defeat to the PAICV in the country's first elections in 1991.

The HM forum on South Africa after apartheid reminds us that the country's historiography continues to evolve, thirty years into the country's democracy. Our first issue of 2024 demonstrates this well: it features nine reviews, four of which consider recently published monographs on a range of South African histories. During the past decade, the country's armed struggle has seen recurring scholarly attention. This issue features **Toivo Asheeke**'s review of **Siphokazi Magadla**'s recently published monograph, which uses oral and archival sources to reconstruct the understudied history of women's service in MK. Which South African stories are remembered, and which forgotten, is a

central theme in the country's post-apartheid museums. **Leslie Witz's** book relates its author's experiences as both a participant in, and historian of, South African public memory; museum (and South Africa) scholar **Robyn Autry** has our review.

While memory and forgetting continues to animate new South African histories, scholarship in and about the country also revises classic themes. In this issue, **Selina Makana** shows how **Natasha Erlank's** work subjects the history of Christian mission to renewed scrutiny, revealing how African families renegotiated and generated intimacy through Christian marital practices. The fourth and final South Africa related review looks at antecedents to the issues raised in the 1994 + 30 forum. **Bronwyn Strydom** assesses **Teresa Barnes's** recent book on "university apartheid;" the inglorious story of South African university segregation is relatively well known; but as Strydom shows, Barnes's work demonstrates how even supposedly liberal academics (and the universities that employed them) helped to develop apartheid's pernicious philosophies.

In both the HM forum and Asheeke's review, we see how many of the most exciting South African histories necessarily go beyond the Limpopo, and so does our issue. Indeed, it even goes beyond the continent. Other reviews remind us that exciting new postcolonial histories emerge from dynamic colonial era and deeper historical studies. How African praxis articulated with exogenous concepts is a unifying theme. **Waseem-Ahmed Bin-Kasim** reviews **Jonathan Roberts's** centuries' long history of health and healing in Accra, considering how patients and healers employed a diverse array of techniques and practices. Accra residents' pursuit of health transgressed the divide between local and foreign healing techniques, just as Roberts's study rejects the common classification of the pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial eras. It is revealing to see how **Jennifer Lofkrantz's** examination of the politics and economics of pawning in nineteenth century West Africa reflects similar themes; as our reviewer **Olatunji Ojo** demonstrates, Islamic discourses about slavery and freedom were similarly multiple and cosmopolitan. **Joseph Hodge** gives us an extended assessment of **Corrie Decker** and **Elisabeth McMahon's** comprehensive history of the "idea" of development in Africa, from the nineteenth through the twenty-first centuries. Rather than merely a product of the Euro-American imagination, Decker and McMahon contend that the concept has always been multiply authored, including by those supposedly on the receiving end of both discourse and practice.

The issue's final three reviews study how people of African descent have maintained and innovated social forms, in variable and frequently challenging material and political conditions. **Mélanie Lamotte's** review of **Jennifer Marie Johnson's** *Wicked Flesh* echoes Erlank's focus on intimacy, albeit in the dramatically different context of enslavement in the Caribbean. Also located in the diaspora, but rooted in Atlantic Africa, art historian **Mathew Rarey** shows how seemingly "insignificant things" — like small, modest amulets — and other media helped enslaved people to maintain coherent senses of self and community in dire circumstances. **Herman Von Hesse** is our reviewer. And finally, **Kefas Lamak** draws our attention to the power of contemporary media, via a review of **Abimbola Adedokun's** study of performance and public piety by Nigeria's late twentieth and early twenty-first century clerical elite.