

INTRODUCTION

Editors' Introduction

In this issue, contributors take on a wide range of familiar and unfamiliar historical topics that criss-cross temporal and geographical boundaries. Additionally, we find a mutually complementary mix of research insights and historiographical commentary. Essays in this issue speak to the full range of concerns and debates in the field of African history, including methodological ones.

On methodology, historians of Africa know that oral traditions change over time. They also know that the instrumental function of oral tradition in African societies can shift. However, the reasons for such a change and the process by which it happens has been poorly understood in part because the transformation often occurs over centuries. **Zebulon Dingley's** article focuses on the sixteenth-century *mung'aro* tradition among the Singwaya, one of the Mijikenda-speaking peoples of the Kenyan Coast. Rather than relitigate the various debates on the tradition and its interpretations, Dingley answers the question of why the tradition's essential motif of ritual violence has persisted even while the tradition itself underwent a radical change in the nineteenth and twentieth century under the weight of encounters with and inquiries by explorers, missionaries, colonizers, local intellectuals, and foreign scholars. Originally elaborated in the nineteenth century as an elder-initiation ritual, *mung'aro* was transformed into a central element in Mijikenda traditions of origin in the twentieth century, but with an instructive twist: the constitutive ritual violence was strategically redirected even as different actors reimagined and rearranged the relationship between the ritual and the narrative elements that purportedly represent it. Dingley offers readers a sophisticated and illuminating reading of a much-debated East African oral tradition. His intervention instantiates both "the invention of tradition" and the limits of it. By showing how received motifs endure even while their meanings and uses change over time and in different circumstances, Dingley's article has profound implications for how Africanist historians use and engage with oral traditions. It models a refreshingly productive engagement with oral tradition that is not wholly inflected by either the frame of "invention" or its antipode, the "limits of invention."

If oral traditions are, in part, moral narrative artifacts, then the moral as a lens can perform analytic work in multiple historiographical arenas. **Holly Hanson's** essay, aptly titled "The Moral Economy of the Ugandan Crowd in 1945," invokes the analytical framework of E. P. Thompson's similarly titled classic article to challenge the conventional interpretation of the 1945 labor strikes in the Uganda Protectorate as a traditional workers strike. The original Thompsonian analytic privileges the existence, instrumentality, and persistence of a moral ethos as a driving force in the so-called "food riots" of eighteenth-century England. Hanson deepens and extends this powerful thesis in regard to the Uganda strike. She argues that the 1945 event was not a typical labor strike motivated exclusively by workplace issues and demands. Rather, the mobilization of workers and their allies to protest in the streets and elsewhere was rooted in a long-nurtured notion of the moral responsibility of leaders to see, hear, and respond to the grievances of the crowd. In expressing this robust ethic of protest, Ugandans of various ethnicities and social statuses confronted not just the colonial state but also the palace of the Buganda king, the second most visible symbol of authority and power in Uganda. In this way, they rejected and transcended the traditional dichotomy between economic and political grievances. They "spoke to authority with an expectation that they would be heard," and drew upon and adapted an eclectic array of ideational resources to confront the challenge at hand.

Colonial tensions involving new ideas of disciplining labor and production generated dynamics that neither colonial authorities nor African stakeholders could fully grasp or control. In Mozambique, as elsewhere on the continent, colonization introduced new modalities and complications into Africans' time-honored management of natural resources, including livestock. **Bárbara Direito** explores these changing dynamics in the early twentieth century, tracking how the commodification of cattle not only altered longstanding meanings and roles associated with pastoralism but also fundamentally reshaped the interaction between the colonial capital of Lorenço Marques and the cattle-producing regions surrounding it. Direito analyzes the processes by which actors in the cattle and beef industry navigated war, livestock disease outbreak, and the Great Depression as local control over the cattle economy became brittle and as external factors loomed over the industry. Local cattle producers, she argues, resisted changes that threatened to overdetermine the process of cattle and beef production as they "tried to engage with markets on their own terms."

Southern Africa was a complex colonial terrain in part because colonization was not simply about a single external oppressor pitted against a homogenized colonized group. In apartheid South Africa, there were multiple internal and external adversaries and interests in the colonial equation, and one article in this issue demonstrates that clearly. What is the relationship between a failed apartheid government ski resort project begun in 1975 in the QwaQwa Bantustan on the border with Lesotho, and the apartheid regime's scorched earth massacres and violent clampdowns in the 1980s? **John Aerni-Flessner** and **Chitja Twala** tell the little-known but riveting story of how Lesotho, the small, landlocked Southern African nation hemmed in by South Africa, leaned on its border dispute with the South African apartheid state around the site of the proposed Khoptjoane resort to vigorously and successfully resist the project. In so doing, the authors contend, Lesotho thwarted an initiative that would have helped the apartheid state to communicate a distorted image of its racist segregationist state-making, which resulted in the establishment of Bantustan homelands or nations. Lesotho, the authors further argue, took on the apartheid behemoth in the international arena and caused the regime to be further isolated. The defeat of the QwaQwa resort initiative was not, however, without repercussions for Lesotho and Blacks in South African townships. The authors show how this setback provoked the apartheid regime to lash out against Lesotho, authorizing the Maseru massacre of 1982, which in turn foreshadowed the apartheid regime's unbridled use of military force against Blacks in South African townships and in neighboring states that housed anti-apartheid fighters and infrastructure.

Apartheid was a complicated business of violence and control. The article by **Lennart Bolliger**, **Richard Levi Raber**, and **Dino Esteveao**, brings all three factors of complex human relations, violence, and patriarchal control into analytic symbiosis. They do so by telling the story of the South African Defence Forces' 32 Battalion, which brought into its military community many African female refugees from the UNITA side of the Angolan Civil War, in which apartheid South Africa was a key player. How does one write the history of an apartheid military community while not over-humanizing it, and while centering the complex lives of subaltern and elite African women in the orbit of a military community governed by a set of patriarchal and racialized ideas of African womanhood? The authors deftly maneuver in this delicate historical field by being attuned to the system of surveillance and control established to regulate the activities and rights of the female refugees. The emergence of visible and respected African women members called "block leaders" signposted the transformation of this military community and the place of African women refugees in it. The block leaders, the authors argue, used their positions as intermediaries to legitimize the logic and quotidian practices of military rule over female civilian members of the barracks. But they also used their acquired mediatory legitimacy to "advocate for their community," a group of women whose membership on the margins of this White military community rendered them vulnerable to abuses and the vagaries of intersectional oppression.

It is not just the apartheid industrial military complex that utilized the techniques of military rule to discipline and control citizens and refugees. Postcolonial African military regimes similarly

invested in the logics and optics of discipline and order, although as **Kevin P. Donovan** enunciates in his article in this issue, the origin of this postcolonial idea of political discipline may be more diffuse. Analyzing the implementation and fallout of an investigative and penal regime over accusations of a variety of economic crimes related to “essential commodities” in 1970s Uganda, Donovan provides a novel lens through which to understand seemingly draconian and capricious state action in a postcolonial authoritarian state. Going against the popular and obvious interpretive trajectory of seeing state paranoia in accusations of illicit hoarding, price gouging, and sabotage, Donovan argues that it was the masses’ own existential anxieties in a time of acute but seemingly contrived commodity shortage that drove state accusations and the tribunal that adjudicated them. It was not the state’s arbitrariness and scapegoating that filtered downwards to generate mass economic confusion and recrimination. Donovan’s analysis demonstrates that, once unleashed, state and popular economic anxieties — whatever their origins and motivations — converged to create self-reinforcing ambiguity in perceptions of access to commodities. This fed the rising emotions of food insecurity and eroded an established “sense of consumptive entitlement.” The relative rather than absolute scarcity of essential commodities, Donovan contends, resonated in popular consciousness because it threatened societal notions of “masculine respectability,” equity, and the ability to uphold the social ethos of hospitality and mutual responsibility. The fragility of the distributive network for essential commodities reinforced class animosities. It also conferred credibility on comforting, if malicious, rumors, and created a space for the proliferation of allegations as well as yearnings for a state response founded on discipline and control — over people and commodities.

In this issue’s History Matters section, **Gregory Mann** explores the history of the ideology and practice of military rule itself. He challenges historians of Africa to pay keener attention to the political history of military rule in Africa, which has been thrown in sharper relief by the resurgence of, and nostalgia in some parts of Africa for, military rule. He argues that historians are best placed to answer the “why” question in the current debate on the return of military rule. A historical inquiry into the logics and mechanics of military rule in Africa, Mann notes, can reveal the roots of both ongoing failures of liberal democracy and Africans’ disillusionment with it. The essay advances insights that, in today’s certitude about the binaries of “democracy” and “autocracy,” would be counterintuitive, such as Mann’s point about the cultivation of popular “democratic” political legitimacy by some military regimes and the appropriation, consciously and subconsciously, of some military techniques of governance by civilian “democratic” governments. These osmoses, overlaps, retentions, and legacies point, Mann argues, to a richer, deeper, political and ideological history which should interest and attract the attention of Africanist historians.

In this issue’s featured review, **Harry Odamtten** uses the pioneering scholarship of **Ray Kea** on the Gold Coast and its Atlantic entanglements to make a simple but poignant point: while methodological, theoretical, and conceptual advancements can radically transform a historiography, much to the delight of historians in that field, such transformations can obscure the foundational work done by earlier scholars. Odamtten’s essay puts the work of Kea, a tri-continently trained polyglottic historian of the Gold Coast and its connections to African diasporic and Atlantic currents, in conversation with recent works on the history of the Gold Coast in the era of the Atlantic slave trade. The resulting analysis demonstrates the methodological, conceptual, and theoretical debt that those recent works owe to Kea, a historian who used sources, methods, and theories derived and adapted from multiple fields to study Gold Coast urban centers not just on their own terms but also in terms of their status as “world ports” and “sea towns.” This frame of analysis would not only inspire subsequent works in a growing Gold Coast Atlantic historiography but would also become a touchstone for one of its most enduring debates: the question of when, how, where, and to what extent the cultures, folkways, and cosmologies of the Akan people of the Gold Coast shaped identity and solidarity among enslaved and emancipated diasporic communities in the New World. Odamtten’s essay demonstrates that, while recent works on the topic might tilt in one or another methodological and conceptual direction, and

while they may quibble about details, their foundational assumptions and premises come from Kea's important but underappreciated work.

In addition, we have seven book reviews whose subjects range vastly. Two of the pieces are, in a sense, reflections on metahistory. **Robert Harms** considers **Patricia Van Schuylenbergh** and **Mathilde Leduc-Grimaldi's** edited volume on the extant scattered archival repositories related to the Congo Free State. Although focused on the colonizers, it is shown, these collections can be used creatively to allow historians to paint the lives of Africans. On the other hand, **Duncan Money's** review of **Thula Simpson's** volume offers insights into the state of South African historiography since the end of apartheid. If fragmentation appears to be one of the key features of the vitality of the historical field of South Africa in the postapartheid period, we are reminded of the need to bring the various strands of the historiography into dialogue.

The rest of the reviews are more thematic and their various geographic focuses extend to other parts of Africa. **Marleen de Witte's** piece sheds light on **Paul Grant's** exploration of cross-cultural encounters between German missionaries and Africans in the Gold Coast during the precolonial era. Key aspects of the study are not only the fact that they showcase Africans as agents in the missionary encounter, but they also demonstrate that missionaries were themselves transformed during their interactions with the Akuapem. Both **Kevin Donovan's** and **Christopher Muhoozi's** respective reviews take us to East Africa. In assessing **Jill Rosenthal's** monograph, the former highlights how the book challenges methodological nationalism in a bid to explore the long history of population movement across the border between Rwanda and Tanzania. Taking us to Uganda, the other reveals the revisionist insight of **Jonathon Earle** and **J. J. Carney's** study of the significance of Benedicto Kiwanuka and his Catholic faith in the making of the national politics of Uganda. Among others, they point out that while Catholicism was important to Kiwanuka, it did not over-determine his political work in forging a postcolonial nation.

The last two reviews deal with the military during the fight for decolonization or its aftermath. **Mesrob Vartavarian** engages **M. T. Howard's** fascinating study of the Black soldiers who came to form the Rhodesian African Rifles — a group of loyalist soldiers who fought on the side of the Rhodesian Army during the liberation war that followed the Unilateral Declaration of Independence. **Brian Peterson's** review, meanwhile, highlights how **James Genova's** study provides a highly readable synthesis of the cultural politics that came in the wake of the revolution in Burkina Faso in the mid-1980s. Cinema, in particular, seems to have played a central role in popularizing this episode in the postcolonial politics of liberation.

With this issue, the editors are delighted to welcome aboard **Abou Bamba** as the fourth editor, with a remit that includes book reviews, History Matters, and special projects. We also thank outgoing editor **Daniel Magaziner** for his unflinching cheer, sharp wit, and incredible service to the journal over past years.