

Editors' Introduction

The six articles within this issue range widely over time, space, and thematic focus. Yet they share three defining characteristics which reflect the vitality of African history in this moment. The histories produced in this issue are energized by an outward-looking determination to engage productively with frameworks and debates emerging in allied disciplines and sub-disciplines. Each article encourages readers to reflect on their understanding of concepts central to African History, such as development, racialism, and sovereignty. And they combine the meticulous analysis of documentary records and oral testimonies with a desire to consider how the past speaks to the issues dominating our present, from Black Lives Matter to the climate crisis.

The first article addresses the efforts of extractive industries across the continent to simplify land and mineral rights, typically through a mutually beneficial alliance with national governments. In many cases, the quest for legal neatness has overridden or ignored the social logics which govern local communities' land, in terms of access, usage, and ownership. One partial exception to this trend is the former Bantustan of Lebowa in northeastern South Africa. As **Laura Phillips** shows, it was, somewhat ironically, the long history of capitalist infiltration and governmental interventionism in the region that ultimately prevented mining companies from extracting its increasingly lucrative platinum. Corporations' repeated efforts, meanwhile, also generated a wealth of documentation which has enabled Phillips to reveal in unique depth how their demands stimulated the co-constitution of political authority and property rights. A succession of mining companies through the twentieth century were confronted with multiple, enmeshed, and restricted forms of property rights held or claimed by individuals, chiefs, and local government entities. Corporations' efforts to bolster political authorities' capacity to grant access to mineral rights in the end failed to enable extraction, but partially succeeded in transforming subterranean rock into a commodity, and reframing political relationships between the individual and the collective.

The relationship between political power and materiality is further complicated in **John Cropper's** analysis of fuel history in Senegal. In this pioneering examination of energy production and use in colonial Africa, Cropper highlights the hybrid nature of Senegal's fuel economy. Rather than the colonial state directing a transition from organic to mineral-based energy, instead a blended economy developed, in which the tools of empire were absorbed by Africans, and supplemented by indigenous refinements of longstanding technologies. Crucially, the article discusses how different organic fuels were dominated by specific identity groups, and how new forms of class and ethnic politics reflected a division between those who produced fuel resources by expending physical energy and the entrepreneurs who developed new markets. What resulted was a colonial energy economy which was highly integrated, profoundly contested, and fundamentally different from the systems of fuel and transport which preceded it.

That commodities have evolving symbolic as well as material meaning is the central theme of **Elijah Doro** and **Sandra Swart's** contribution to one of African History's classic debates, the nature of agrarian transformation within settler economies. Doro and Swart emphasize the need to narrow the focus from concepts such as peasant agency, or even 'agency in tight corners'.¹ To fully understand the periodization of peasant opportunity and constraint, they argue, a longitudinal analysis of a single agricultural commodity is required. By examining how a 'hegemonic crop' such as tobacco

¹J. Lonsdale, 'Agency in tight corners: Narrative and initiative in African history', *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 13:1 (2000), 5–16.

was governed by settler notions of what was fitting as well as what was profitable, Doro and Swart demonstrate that market conditions alone fail to explain the vicissitudes of African cash crop production in Southern Rhodesia. Instead, their article shows that agrarian policy was dictated by value-laden concepts of purity and healthfulness, as well as hard-headed calculations of how far African entrepreneurialism could be allowed to run. Corners, then, were tightened to limit African tobacco farmers' opportunities, directing cash crop farming towards conservatism and subservience, rather than ambition and autonomy, restraining rural discontent to ensure White survival.

That development could facilitate the achievement of social control was widely recognized across colonial Africa. As **Jonathan Jackson** shows, the concept of progress could leverage the coercive potential of the colonial state particularly effectively when it was energized by the disruptive, legitimizing power of an epidemic. In his study of sleeping sickness concentrations in central Tanganyika, Jackson analyses how an initial strategy of evacuation and retreat morphed into a project of social transformation. Planning optimists within the Tanganyikan government grew convinced that concentrating populations would not merely save lives, but increase production and facilitate service provision. As would be seen in multiple contexts later in the twentieth century, villagization did not deliver all that was promised. That a project of this scale and ambition occurred at all in underfunded and understaffed wartime Tanganyika revealed how much could be achieved by district officials with recognized ethnographic expertise and the capacity to persuasively interpret the League of Nations mandate as not merely enabling development but imposing a moral duty to compel betterment.

Development can of course provide a route to self-empowerment as well as a means of domination. As **Anton Tarradellas** shows in his article, the politics of international aid were rarely more contested than during the 1960s. As Cold War tensions mounted, so superpower competition for influence within the African continent intensified. Tarradellas's analysis of one key battleground, tertiary education, demonstrates that Africa was more than a venue for East-West confrontation, but an active player in the shaping of global student mobility. By focusing on American aid, Tarradellas complicates narratives which prioritize US soft power diplomacy and power imbalances. Viewed from the perspective of newly-independent African states, engaging with multiple providers of international scholarships provided opportunities to maximize aid, reduce dependence on former colonizing powers, and deepen alliances with global foundations and overseas Pan-Africanist networks. As Tarradellas demonstrates, a range of African states set conditions on aid, to secure more generous terms, pre-select candidates for scholarships, or prevent the undermining of new national universities. Yet, for all the skill displayed in negotiations, the fundamental contradiction of this mode of educational development, that it facilitated the outflow of many of the continent's brightest minds, remained.

The final article in this issue offers a different perspective on Africa in the global 1960s, a decade defined by memorable moments such as Malcolm X's May 1964 visit to Ghana. How time is imagined and structured is one of the central issues explored in **Jean Allman's** analysis of the debates around race arising from Malcolm X's speeches. For Allman, understanding how racial discourse aligned and diverged across local, transnational, and diasporic networks requires an appreciation of contested chronopolitics. Whether pasts, presents, or futures were emphasized in responses to Malcolm X reflected ideological perspectives that drew on different time maps. For radical Black internationalists Ghana's future was shaped by centuries of global resistance against White supremacy. For Ghanaian intellectuals, Malcolm X's race narratives redefined Ghana's current position within the modern world order. Meanwhile, for White expatriates in Accra, understanding race in relation to the historical development of capitalism, or through processes of imperialism and liberation, placed it in the past, so that racial mobilization could only reproduce 'racialism'. Allman's sobering conclusion asks how scholarship which sustains the perception that post-independence Africa became post-racial connects to enduring patterns of racial inequity.

The fifteen reviews collected in this issue coalesce around three themes: political violence, biography, and cultural history. Our two featured reviews focus on Northeast Africa, especially on Ethiopia and the twinned (and regrettably relevant) questions of ethnicity and state violence. In one, **Safia Aidid** considers **Terje Østebø's** history of a regional rebellion and its aftermath during the 1960s; in the other, **Elleni Centime Zeleke** offers sustained and critical engagement with **Benjamin Talton's** history of black internationalism and Ethiopian politics during the civil war and attendant crises of the 1980s. Zeleke's review is a challenge to the historical discipline from a political theorist, written at a moment when history is spilling over its banks and flooding the region's present. Subsequent reviews pick up the theme of political violence from the late nineteenth through the late twentieth century. **Thuto Thipe's** review of **Mahmood Mamdani's** latest provides a palate cleanser, of sorts; Thipe assesses whether Mamdani's rather optimistic take on the South African model for defusing such violence withstands historical scrutiny. The reviews that follow pivot to consider two very different approaches to biography in African history. **Brian Peterson's** biography of Thomas Sankara, reviewed by **Benjamin Talton**, examines one of late twentieth-century Africa's best-known political leaders, whereas **Kwasi Konadu's** 'community biography' (reviewed by **Jonathan Roberts**) studies personalities and places far less known, but no less essential for understanding post-colonial West Africa. Finally, this batch of reviews closes with careful analyses of five recent cultural histories. The diversity of these reviews attests to the vitality of African cultural history, in that they range from the history of hip hop (**Seth Markle**), to sports in twentieth-century Africa (**Tyler Fleming**), to opera (**Liz Timbs**) and beyond.

THE EDITORS