An Invitation to Work – Editors' Introduction

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This year's issue of *History in Africa* is an "invitation to work." It has six articles directly related to the history of labor relations and the European perception of work in Sub-Sahara Africa. On top of that several contributions in this issue remind us that research into the African past can be a substantial workload when sources prove to be difficult to trace or organized in unforeseen ways and formats. A final "invitation to work" is in the arguments that Africa's histories have become products of fixed or standardized research protocols related to the collection of data in the field or to an esteem attributed to (colonial) archives. Possibilities of breaking through the barriers of these fixed protocols are proposed by discussing fieldwork experiences as well as the desirability to break up the archive as an institution.

The first section on Critical Historiography starts with David Gordon's observation that historians have overestimated the value of oral traditions for the reconstruction of Africa's past. With a case study on Ngongo Luteta's rise and fall during Belgium's efforts to establish the Congo Free State, Gordon demonstrates the importance of archival research in the writing of a history of the first decades of colonial exploitation through the Congo Free State. Gordon invites a response to his suggestion that research based primarily on oral traditions too often has avoided challenging issues in reconstructing the past.

Erin Jessee and Sarah Watkins add to Gordon's challenge to the status of oral history as evidence to reconstruct the past. Their analysis of models to represent Rwanda kings reveals how these models reflect contemporary discourses on the past. They relate this classical critique of oral traditions to the efforts at societal reconciliation in Rwanda.

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By doing so, they give insight in the complex roles and functions of history in an African state, and demonstrate at the same time that these narratives are pertinent in the search for reconciliation and a well-functioning civil society.

Terri Ochiagha's article gives us an insight in the colonial classroom. A dedication by Chinua Achebe to one of his former teachers at Umuahia College provides the starting point for her detailed reconstruction of the education of writing and rhetoric. Her analysis suggests a substantial as well as remarkably constructive role for colonial education in the coming of age of some of Nigeria's future spokesmen of counter-colonial voices.

Richard Reid's analysis of historical writing on Eritrea from 2001 reveals the "presentist" focus on the "bad neighborhood" created by the authoritarian Eritrean state and its poor governance and human rights records. He adds that the Eritrean regime contributed to the limited research agenda through its restrictions on access to conduct independent historical inquiries. Reid argues for a new approach, unshackled from a teleological emphasis on the present, and focused on the critical era from 1940–1970.

Klas Rönnbäck's systematic analysis of reports of work ethic and labor attitudes in precolonial Africa confirms the widely accepted idea that the Africans were most of the time described as "lazy" in non-African sources. In contrast to the historiographical emphasis on slavery's association with this stereotype, Rönnbäck demonstrates that this thesis is more stubborn in European society and argues that the image of the lazy African antedated the era of slavery as well as survived the abolition of slavery.

Southern Africa has an abundance of source materials, but this evidential base does not mean that our ideas and impressions on Southern African history have reached broad consensus or even a generally accepted outline. The contributions to the section New Sources for South African History illustrate the methodological challenges for those who work in this field. Each of the three contributors to this section write a compelling historiographical analysis that will shift existing ideas about Southern Africa, and in particular Zulu history, and apartheid administration.

Robert Gordon, introduced by Bruce Kapferer, presents and analyzes an unpublished manuscript by Max Gluckman. In this manuscript Gluckman discusses his fieldwork method. We feel that this text has some merits for those who study Zulu history, but is in particular of historiographical importance because it reveals much about the fieldwork conditions in which the generation of our "predecessors" produced the classical works that we still use. Therefore it feels as a logical choice, in spite of *and* thanks to its emphasis on anthropological fieldwork, to publish this text in our journal of historical method.

For a similar reason, we include Paul Thompson's detailed analysis of another classical text of Zulu history, James Stuart's *A History of the Zulu Rebellion 1906*. Thompson's study of the internal validity of Stuart's approach

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is highly illuminating, showing how the work developed and changed during the writing process.

The third contribution on South Africa, by Lorena Rizzo, studies the *dompas*, the "dumb pass" used by the apartheid administration to segregate the population and to limit the mobility of the black African population. Her analysis demonstrates that the passes, and the pictures on the passes, tell a complex narrative that negotiates intentions and perceptions of both oppressors and oppressed.

This issue of *History in Africa* has a special section Labor History and Africa, which is one of the results of the project Global Collaboratory on the History of Labour Relations, 1500–2000. This project proposes a method to study labor relations worldwide. The project and its method are introduced by Karin Hofmeester, Jan Lucassen and Filipa Ribeiro da Silva. Then follow four case-studies on Sub-Saharan Africa which include mainland Tanganyika c. 1500–1900 by Paul Lane, Tanzania 1800–2000 by Karin Pallaver, Zimbabwe 1900–2000 by Rory Pilossof, and Angola 1800–2000 by Jelmer Vos. These four cases cover regions with strong interactions with internal and external markets. They may demonstrate, the authors argue, "the impact of connections with the global economy on the African labor markets and economies, as well as the impact of modern European colonization, decolonization, and African independence processes on labor and labor relations." We expect that these case-studies on work will convince some researchers to use quantitative methods (more often), and will challenge others to explore the labor dimension in their (field)work.

The section Africa's Archives in the Age of Web Democracy contains three contributions that we expect to go straight into the hearts of our readers. Enrique Martino introduces his blog: a collage of all the sources he gathered during the four years spent researching his PhD thesis on forced and contract labor in the Bight of Biafra (1901–1979). The author characterizes his website as an "experiment situated in the anarcho-communist wing of open-source Digital Humanities." After an explanation of the design of the website and of "hyperlinking as method," the article explores the deconstruction of the archive – the colonial archive in particular – and the potential benefits of the open circulation of sources as hypertext for academics, students, activists, bloggers, artists, teachers, and anyone with access to the internet. Martino not only challenges the idea of the coherence of the archive and the concept of ownership of, or restrictions on access to, archival sources, he also questions the claims of historians and other trained academics that they are in a better position than the general public to analyze and interpret archival sources. We invite reactions to this provocative discussion of open sourcing and the colonial archive in a future issue of *History in Africa*.

Martino's challenge is followed by two archive reports. Samuel Ntewusu describes that doing historical research on transportation issues in Ghana meant much transport for himself. Because his topics did not fit colonial

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administrative protocols, he could not predict where documents were archived, in the North or the South, or halfway. The title Ntewusu gave to his report ("Serendipity") expresses more his feeling than a method, and is at the same time a classical illustration of the work that a historian has to complete in an archive before he sees a result. John Edward Philips presents the first issues of the first newspaper in Hausa *Gaskiya ta fi Kwabo* that have become available on the Internet. These issues give remarkably idiosyncratic accounts of the Second World War, which may not only serve as sources for the study of the contemporary reception of the war in Nigeria, but may also may be of use to understand how this war is remembered in oral tradition.

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