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Education in Africa: a critical historiographic review

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ABSTRACT

Examining developments in the history of education in Africa as a whole raises far-reaching philosophical, anthropological and historical questions about what Africa *is* and whether such a history is even possible *as such*. The course of that history and its tributaries wend around social theories; its dominant issues, tensions and gaps represent ideological interventions that highlight competing narratives in attempts to theorise social progress along a set of converging historiographic projects through which the conflicts between positivist, Marxist and poststructuralist (and other critical theory) perspectives – and the Eurocentricity of their objects – become visible. Anticipating broadened inquiries that centre Africans in historical narratives concerning education in Africa, this review (a) critiques historians' obsession with and dissensions on colonial education, (b) clarifies epistemic ruptures in the well-worn quest for 'truth' in history evident in that obsession, and (c) proposes some prospects for decolonial futures in the history of education in Africa.

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Introduction: what history, education, Africa?

In his ruthlessly precise satire, *How to Write About Africa*, the Kenyan memoirist, Binyavanga Wainaina, admonishes those who write about Africa as follows: 'Don't get bogged down with precise descriptions . . . keep your descriptions romantic and evocative and unparticular'.[1] The history of education in Africa has much at stake in Wainaina's pasquinade. So, before plunging (recklessly) into a discussion of the *history of education in Africa*, it is important to raise questions, and concerns, about the nature, scope and, indeed, possibility of such a project. Severally, *history*, *education* and *Africa* are beset with telling ambiguities and complications such that, while they constitute lexical centrepieces of the wider disciplinary commons, it is never quite clear whether they possess definitive referents or are merely metonymic of more elliptic phenomena.

Take history. One need not go as far as question the possibility of history[2] to recognise that western historians frequently quibble over the rubrics of their trade: from Hegel and

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[1]Binyavanga Wainaina, 'How to Write About Africa', *Granta: The Magazine of New Writing - The View from Africa* 92 (2005): 92.

[2]Hilda D. Oakeley, 'How is History Possible? The Presidential Address', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, 1940–1941* 41 (1940): i–xviii; Georg Simmel, *The Problems of the Philosophy of History: An Epistemological Essay*, trans. and ed. Guy Oakes (New York: Free Press, 1977[1907]). While earlier defenders of historical realism note that, for historians to do their work, they cannot afford to pay much attention to philosophy (see Gordon S. Wood, 'Review of *Truth is History* by Oscar Handlin', *Journal of Modern History* 53, no. 1 [1981]: 87), it is minimally in, with and through philosophy that these clarifications can be fruitfully carried on.

Nietzsche through the various disciplinary 'turns' (cultural, gender, social science, cliometrics, linguistic) to epistemological debates since the late twentieth century; the referential language of the historian and the representationality of its function have always been as contested – and elusive – as they are entangled with its object, the past.[3] The collision of ontology and epistemology, or perhaps more accurately the epistemological reconstitution of ontology in such debates, offers a stark reminder that while it is justified to question the naive realism that historically formed the bedrock of the historian's enterprise – the belief the past was objectively real, and access to it the function of meticulous objectivity – recent populist reappropriations of history and enduring crises of modernity suggest that these debates have significant (both thrilling and terrifying) consequences.[4]

Like history, education presents its own ambiguities and complications. On the face of it, it might seem pedestrian to force the familiar distinction between education and schooling or among formal, non-formal and informal education, for these are distinctions of scale, not essence.[5] A similar claim can be made regarding other permutations of that distinction: levels of schooling (kindergarten through to tertiary), kinds (traditional/indigenous, western, etc.), sectors (public, private, religious), and a concatenation of governance structures, economic interests and cultural arrangements that organise modern ideas concerning education. If we conceptualise education as experience and collapse, in principle, the corpus of curricula, pedagogy and structure in- and outside learning contexts through a reclination on an overarching theory of experience (John Dewey offers a handy example[6]), we can bypass these distinctions as incidental. Yet, if examining developments in the history of *education* requires not only a determination of which experiences qualify as educative but, crucially, what historians have to say about those (lest we be bogged down with the histories of *all* experiences), then our tangle with the speculative certitude of historical knowledge outlined above offers little succour.

The complications are compounded by the geographic marker, Africa. That is, a historiographic inquiry into the history of education in Africa *as a whole* raises far-reaching philosophical, anthropological and obviously historical questions about what Africa *is* in the first instance, and whether such a continent-wide history is even possible *as such*, considering the vastness and interbraiding of its fluid referent with everything else. A prefatory to 'the great debate' in African philosophy on the inauguration of African philosophy to the world exposed the slipperiness of any attempt to ontologise

[3]For commentaries, see Axel Schneider and Daniel Woolf, eds., *The Oxford History of Historical Writing, Vol. 5: Historical Writing Since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); for a brief summary, Alun Munslow, 'What History Is', *History in Focus*, https://archives.history.ac.uk/history-in-focus/Whatishistory/munslow6.html (accessed January 8, 2022).

[4]For the founding of the source-based empiricist tradition in history, see Leopold Von Ranke, *The Theory and Practice of History*, ed. Georg G. Iggers with an Introduction, trans. Wilmer A. Iggers (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011); Barry Schwartz, 'How is History Possible? Georg Simmel on Empathy and Realism', *Journal of Classical Sociology* 7, no. 3 (2017): 213–37.

[5]In the African context, these distinctions are portmanteaus for handling questions concerning the relevance of European colonial education; see, e.g. George J. Sefa Dei, *Schooling & Education in Africa: The Case of Ghana* (Trenton, NJ/Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press, 2004); Birgit Brock-Utne, 'Decolonisation of Knowledge in the African University', in *Knowledge and Change in African Universities*, ed. Michael Cross and Amasa Ndofirepi, vol. 1: *Current Debates* (Rotterdam/Boston/Taipei: Sense Publishers, 2017).

[6]John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Touchstone, 1938). Dewey's use of the criteria of *continuity* (all experiences continue in future experiences, in that they *internally* transform the person who experiences) and *interaction* (*external* reality is transformed as individuals act *outwardly* on their materials world in response to their experiences) essentialises informal learning, not merely as foundational for formal education, but as constitutive of the social and interactive processes of biological and sociological existence.

Africa.[7] That inaugural act was itself a response, indeed an effrontery, to earlier European ontologising acts that produced images of a dark continent whose peoples existed, until discovery by Europeans, in a void of history, language, religion, culture and rationality – an impressive tale based entirely on the probative calculus of particular instantiations of European rationality, starting from Herodotus (the 'Father of History') and carried on through the spokesmanship of Hegel, Kant, Levy Bruhl, Evans-Pritchard, Steven Lukes and Martin Hollis, to name but a few.[8]

To stay with Africa a bit longer, it is tempting to begin with the simpler descriptive question, 'where is Africa?' But geographic contiguity, in cartographic terms, historically yields to political expediency (otherwise, Russia, China, and the whole of Asia and the Middle East would form one contiguous continent with Europe), and the congenital unity evoked by the name, Africa, is more phantasm than reality. Historiographic and comparative treatments of education tendentiously lump Northern Africa with the Middle East, in racialised demographic contradistinction to the sub-Saharan region, creating a transcontinental subregion (MENA – Middle East and North Africa) that serves as an unsubtle reminder that Africa's identity is always under negotiation *elsewhere* and perpetually entangled in what it is not.[9] As a pertinent side note, in the US census and cultural landscapes, immigrants from the MENA subregion form one homogeneous racial category with people of European descent.

Key international education organisations like UNESCO and the World Bank deploy similarly disruptive cartographic reclassifications,[10] an outré North–South bifurcation considering that the *name* Africa, with its origin tales (all of foreign derivation) has been increasingly divorced from its initial North African 'coding' as it extended southward to the rest of the continent by the same degree to which the *idea* of Africa increasingly lost its original meaning to acquire more pejorative nuances.[11] Some African scholars now propose treating the moniker as a racial slur and reverting to an autochthonous alternative, Alkebulan.[12] In navigating these multiple registers, the material dimension of Africa's spatial configurations collides with the imagined and the constantly reconstituted concrete and symbolic boundaries through which 'Africa's spatiality, like all spaces,

[7]See, e.g., Pauline J. Hountondji, *African Philosophy: Myth & Reality* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1976); V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Oxford/Bloomington, IN: James Currey and Indiana University Press, 1988); Tsenay Serequeberhan, *African Philosophy: The Essential Readings* (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 1991).

[8]E. H. Bunbury, *A History of Ancient Geography Among the Greeks and Romans from the Earliest Ages till the Fall of the Roman Empire* (London: John Murray, 1879), 262–98; Okpe Timothy Adie and Joseph Simon Effenji, 'The Problem of Rationality in the History of African Philosophy', *GNOSIS: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Human Theory and Praxis* 1, no. 1 (2018): 95–105.

[9]See, e.g., Gilbert A. Valverde, 'Curriculum Policy Seen through High-Stakes Examinations: Mathematics and Biology in a Selection of School-Leaving Examinations from the Middle East and North Africa', *Peabody Journal of Education* 80, no. 1 (2005): 29–55; Sergio Saleem Scatolini and George Milton, *Education and Society in the Middle East and North Africa: English, Citizenship and Peace Education* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020).

[10]Safaa El Tayeb El-Kogali and Caroline Krafft, *Expectations and Aspirations: A New Framework for Education in the Middle East and North Africa* (Washington, DC: World Bank Publications, 2019); UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report: Non-State Actors in Education – Who Chooses? Who Loses?* (Paris: UNESCO, 2021). UNESCO has shifted from 'Arab States' and 'Middle East and North Africa' used in the earlier *Education For All Global Monitoring Report* to 'Northern Africa and West Asia' in designating the same region.

[11]Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, 'The Inventions of African Identities and Languages: The Discursive and Developmental Implications', in *Selected Proceedings of the 36th Annual Conference on African Linguistics*, ed. Olaoba F. Arasanyin and Michael A Pemberton (Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project, 2006), 14–26.

[12]Jonathan O. Chimakonam and Uti O. Egbai, 'Is "Africa" a Racial Slur and Should the Continent be Renamed?', *African Identities* 20, no. 1 (2021): 10.

encompasses the vast intricacies, the incredible complexities, and interlocking and dispersive networks of relations at every scale'.[13]

Demographic, historical, cultural and epistemic boundaries are no less troublesome. If one asks instead 'who is African', how, for instance, can one classify (or fail to classify) as African people of Asian or European descent in settler colonial African societies, such as South Africa, cognisant of the explicitly anti-African racist ideologies that established South Africa's political culture and land tenure? What about diasporic Africans, both those forced into slave bondage in an episode of European imperialism and those dispersed by the 'depredations of colonial and postcolonial misrule'?[14] And if Africa can be deterritorialised, what modal category can accommodate all appeals to Africanness: culture, indigeneity, logos, being, etc.? Evidently, these issues are forefront in the *au courant* allegation that someone has lost their Africanness, say, through western schooling; the Ocol character in Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino*, *Song of Ocol* comes to mind.[15] Absent a definitive exclusionary measure, a more eclectic view of Africa – as a place, surely, but also a shifting imagination, a commodity, a condition, an ideal, a question mark – profoundly complicates any attempt to review the history of education in Africa.[16]

The goal here, far from an attempt to satisfactorily set appropriate discursive boundaries or categorically assert the impossibility of such a historiographic review, is to foreground that nothing is obvious about Africa – or history, and education. More importantly, the ambiguities, complications and contradictions, familiar as they are in their scope and significance, are not regrettable distractions. Nor are they caveat insurances against any expectation of an exhaustive treatment, as if resolving them would give way to a comprehensive historiography. If the foregoing hints at the impossibility of an encyclopaedic narrative, it should hopefully also underscore this paper's underlying argument: an encyclopaedic account of the history of education in Africa is unnecessary (and likely impossible), and it is in attempting such sweeping (or swooping) interpretations that we generate antagonistic, colonising images and realities *as African*. A more productive strategy would be to approach Africa, its peoples, societies and cultures, not only education, 'as signs of something else'.[17] For this gnostic historicity and ideologies of alterity have been more generative of anything African, including education, than any other performative categorial tangibility. Any history of education that ignores this fact and thus contents itself with shadow gazing risks presenting as reality a ragtag of *invented* categories and layers of material and discursive commodities that such categories make possible.

In what follows, I highlight, in the first section of this three-part review, competing narratives concerning the history of education in Africa as part of an effort to theorise social progress along a set of converging historiographic projects through which the tensions among positivist, Marxist and poststructuralist (and other critical theory) perspectives – and the Eurocentricity of their objects – become visible. These theoretical

[13]Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, *Retinking Africa's Globalisation, Vol. 1: The Intellectual Challenges* (Trenton, NJ/Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press, 2003), 3.
[14]Ibid., 4.
[15]Okot p'Bitek, *Song of Lawino, Song of Ocol* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1966).
[16]Willem Fourie, 'Four Concepts of Africa', *HTS Theological Studies* 71, no. 3 (2015): 1–10.
[17]Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, ix.

interventions are evident in the contested historiography of education and development (read social progress) and the competing significations of Europe's era of Empire building and its legacies: from missionary and colonial education through (post-)independence state building and twentieth-century meliorism, to international education agendas and their unfolding neoliberal comportments.[18] While the grounds here are fertile for understanding the shift from sweeping binaries to nuanced micro-mapping of those histories, the epistemological and methodological imports of this shift have yet to materialise within and beyond disciplinary practices.

Because the issues, trends and tensions under review denote this epistemological and methodological predisposition to truth, the second section considers how the history of education in Africa embodies a paradox in what Lewis Gordon calls 'disciplinary decadence',[19] manifest in the prioritisation of methodological purity over meaning to selectively appropriate epistemic ruptures without any real epistemic or political progress. The challenge for today's historian, thus, no longer resides in exiting the familiar positivist cul-de-sac but in mobilising that epistemic egress politically to expand the limits of what can be uncovered and narrated regarding education in Africa historically. The possibilities for a broadened historiographic enterprise, equipped with recalibrated epistemic lenses and a purposeful transcendence of disciplinary boundaries, is already anticipated in the decolonial turn, a patently historiographic endeavour that beckons the pivotal engagement of historians of education, as the third section outlines.

Issues, trends and tensions

To take Anglophone scholarly journal publications as portal into the discussion,[20] it is worth noting that western historians of education have always felt a keen sense of their ignorance concerning education in Africa.[21] Indeed, western historians are compulsively obsessed with their own local contexts, what Clossey and Guyatt call history's 'small world' problem, with little knowledge of historical processes abroad, although there are indications that historians elsewhere conversely focus on Europe more than their home countries.[22] The claim regarding ignorance has some veracity, but perhaps for different reasons, for, as I argue shortly, historians of education have been preoccupied with Africa for a while. To compensate for this ignorance, however, the history of education in the West has been mostly engrossed with images of itself in Africa with an overwhelming focus on western-style formal

[18]Damiano Matascia, Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo and Hugo Gonçalves Dores, 'Imperialism, Internationalism, and Education in Africa: Connected Histories', *Paedagogica Historica* 57, no. 3 (2021): 221–7; Damiano Matascia, Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo and Hugo Gonçalves Dores, *Education and Development in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

[19]Lewis Ricardo Gordon, *Disciplinary Decadence: Living Thought in Trying Times* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

[20]Addressing an academic audience *in writing* sets boundaries around every key element of the narrative. A completely different set of assumptions, modalities, epistemic frameworks and sources would be necessary if the primary audience of this review were a non-academic cadre of African historians, both those working in official capacities, such as in royal courts, and those (often elders) more diffused in communities as historical knowledge bearers.

[21]Richard J. Wolff, 'European Perspectives on the History of Education: A Review of Four Journals', *History of Education Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (1986): 87–94.

[22]Luke Clossey and Nicholas Guyatt, 'It's a Small World After All: The Wider World in the Historians' Peripheral Vision', *Perspectives on History* 51, Iss. 5 (May 2013), assessed May 20, 2023. https://www.historians.org/research-and-publications/perspectives-on-history/may-2013/its-a-small-world-after-all; Julia Adeney Thomas, 'Why Do Only Some Places Have History? Japan, the West, and the Geography of the Past', *Journal of World History* 28, no. 2 (2017): 187–218.

schooling and, specifically, colonial education, often defined loosely to include the preceding missionary, philanthropic and 'scientific' educational activities. Of the handful of publications on the subject in four notable Anglophone European and North American journals, over 84% are on colonial education.[23] A cursory review of French, Spanish and Portuguese journals paints a grimmer picture. Barring fragmentary pieces on Islamic influences, much concerning the educational activities outside western-style schooling remains largely ignored or grossly underexplored.

Now, there were certainly some interests in precolonial education (tellingly stylised 'traditional' education), although this was generally viewed, often to the consternation of a burgeoning African intelligentsia during colonial times, as an epitaph to a crumbling antiquity at the dawn of Africa's ascent to modernity.[24] Before returning to these 'other' African educational traditions, however, let us first consider five broad lessons and some discernible tributaries through which to make sense of academic historians' image of education in Africa.

Ideological tensions on colonial educations

The overwhelming focus on colonial education in Africa belies underlying disagreement among historians on the very meaning, scope and significance – then and now – of colonial education, not only for the political constructions of social change over time but also for clarifying conceptual and methodological tools for making sense of that change. Departing from the assumption that of all imperial projects none has been as impactful, or contentious, as the introduction of western education,[25] historians' commitment to explicating Europe's role in the significant political, economic, cultural and ideological changes on the continent mirrors the ideological wars that marked the inconsistencies and instabilities of imperial encounters and the contemporaneous scholarly disquisitions they provoked. Indeed, it is impossible to make sense of imperialism broadly without understanding tensions and shifts in education as 'sites of close interactions between colonizing and colonized populations [and] loci of cultural contact that illustrate' what Saada calls 'the dynamics and inner conflicts of colonial societies; the social spaces that served as zones of both contact and separation between colonial and colonized societies; the borders between groups and the question of how those borders are constructed'.[26] The contours of these tensions and shifts in colonial education itself are being sketched elsewhere.[27]

[23]The journals include *History of Education*, *History of Education Quarterly*, *Paedagogica Historica* and *History of Education Review*. If one were to include publications by the *Journal of Negro Education*, considering their long history of publication on Africa, including several pieces in the 1990s focusing on Apartheid and post-Apartheid transitions, the number rises to about 99%. Publications that focus on Eurocentric education traditions (e.g. post-independence educational developments) were excluded, although these are arguably part of an ongoing colonial intervention.

[24]Margaret H. Read, 'Education in Africa: Its Patterns and Role in Social Change', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 298 (1955): 170–9.

[25]Philip Curtin, foreword to Ronald Robinson, John Gallagher and Alice Denny, *Africa and the Victorians: The Climax of Imperialism in the Dark Continent* (London: Macmillan, 1992).

[26]Spencer D. Segalla, *The Moroccan Soul: French Education, Colonial Ethnology, and Muslim Resistance, 1912–1956* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 7; Emmanuelle Saada, 'Regards Croisés: Transatlantic Perspectives on the "Colonial Situation"', *French Politics, Culture and Society* 20, no. 2 (2002): 2.

[27]See, e.g., Peter Kallaway and Rebecca Swartz, eds., *Empire and Education in Africa: The Shaping of a Comparative Perspective* (New York: Peter Lang, 2016).

By the second half of the twentieth century, at the crepuscule of colonial rule, two distinct ideological positions had been clearly staked on the import of colonial education, one advancing a positivist functionalist interpretation that centres the nation-state[28] and the other representing a neo-Marxist critique of colonial education and state structures as imperialism.[29] The former, ensconced in the African independence movements, saw education as the 'primary instrument, if not an automatic solution' to the agenda for modernisation and 'development'.[30] The latter, however, saw in colonial implantation of western education a flagitious attempt to conquer, deracinate, dispossess and exploit. In the ensuing decades, these competing strains, sometimes subtle in their intellectual recrimination, ossified into paradigmatic discursive instruments both for signifying the material imports of imperialism for social change in Africa and, importantly, for characterising imperial intents and motives.[31] A key benefit of this debate is that, in broad terms, we now have clearer pictures of life in colonial times with the tensions and anxieties surrounding the novelty of colonial education and its prospects that were shared by the colonised and coloniser alike. However, these works remain largely Eurocentric and ideologically hewn. The history of education in Africa as a whole tells us more about European interests and activities, *tout court*, than about the various formations of education in Africa.

Importantly, the preoccupation of these serialised (re)interpretations of colonial education with conceptually delineating education's role in unilineal progress has meant that while historians of neoliberal-capitalist leanings emphasise volitional attributions to an African demand for western education as implicit exculpation of Europeans from the cultural violence charge levelled against imperialism, both strains tacitly invest in the 'Dark Continent' narrative trope (with a familiar distinction between so-called 'developed' and 'developing' or 'underdeveloped' societies), differing only on the role assigned to western education in framing the origin of and solution to Africa's 'problems'.[32] It does not help matters that there is today little social science evidence linking education to macro socio-economic development.[33] As new generations of historians take cue from, and sides with, these ideological stakes, often calibrating their

[28]See, e.g., Colin G. Wise, *A History of Education in British West Africa* (London: Longman, 1956); Philip Foster, *Education and Social Change in Ghana* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965); John E. Anderson, *The Struggle for the School: The Interaction of Missionary, Colonial Government and Nationalist Enterprise in the Development of Formal Education in Kenya* (Nairobi: Longman, 1970); James Keith Watson, ed., *Education in the Third World* (London: Croom Helm, 1982).

[29]B. Ọlatunji Ọlọruntimẹhin, 'Education for Colonial Dominance in French West Africa from 1900 to the Second World War', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* VII, no. 2 (1974): 347–56; Philip G. Altbach and Gail P. Kelly, *Education and Colonialism* (New York: Longman, 1978); Martin Carnoy, *Education as Cultural Imperialism* (New York: David McKay, 1974); Martin Carnoy and Joel Samoff, *Education and Social Transition in the Third World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

[30]David J. Finlay, 'Review: Education and Polity in Ghana', *History of Education Quarterly* 11, no. 3 (1971): 319.

[31]Peter Kallaway and Rebecca Swartz, 'Introduction', in Kallaway and Swartz, *Empire and Education in Africa*, 2; note the telling distinction between 'excellent historical studies of the construction of education systems' immediately after African independence and the 'more recent literature [that] has been patchy and often linked to contemporary fashions associated with the progressivism or the radical education turn of the 1960s and 1970s'. See also Clive Whitehead, 'The Historiography of British Imperial Education Policy, Part I: India', *History of Education* 34, no. 3 (2005): 316.

[32]Whitehead, 'The Historiography of British Imperial Education Policy, Part I: India'; Clive Whitehead, 'The Historiography of British Imperial Education Policy, Part II: Africa and the Rest of the Colonial Empire', *History of Education* 34, no. 4 (2005): 441–54; Peter Kallaway, *The Changing Face of Colonial Education in Africa: Education, Science and Development* (Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, 2021).

[33]Simon McGrath, *Education and Development* (Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 2018); Clive Harber, *Education and International Development: Theory, Practice and Issues* (Oxford: Symposium Books, 2014); Emily Hannum and Claudia Buchmann, 'Global Educational Expansion and Socio-Economic Development: An Assessment of Findings from the Social Sciences', in *Educating All Children: A Global Agenda*, ed. Joel E. Cohen, David E. Bloom and Martin B. Malin (Cambridge, MA: American Academy of Arts and Sciences and MIT, 2006), 495–534.

methodological certitudes against the presumed errors of others, it becomes unquestionable that 'historians need [and deploy] social theory to conduct their research whether they are acknowledged or not'.[34]

From blueprint historiography to microhistory

Notable departures from these ideological positionings mark the second key lesson: while the underlying interest remains colonial education, historians of education in Africa have mostly (not entirely) moved past the broad-strokes binaries – of Empire and nation, coloniser and colonised, metropole and colony – to underscore the complexities and contradictions of imperialism. Earlier comparative historiography, which sought to discern signature colonising strategies of different European powers and missionary groups – a *blueprint* historiography that imagined a cohesive imperial agenda hatched in the metropole and executed with relative consistency across colonial frontiers – has now yielded to a more nuanced understanding that imperialism, far from the product of clearly articulated conspiracies of conquering empires or coordinated anticolonial resistance, was fickle and characterised by widespread contradictions, instabilities and unpredictability.[35] Historians now pay keener attention to how multiple competing European imperialist ideologies shifted as they interacted with local realities, which were also being transformed by their encounters with different European actors; the axes of influence, we now know, were never unidirectional but zigzagged between colonial heartlands and colonies, between colonial metropoles, and between different colonies.[36]

[34]V. P. Franklin, 'Response: Reflections on History, Education, and Social Theories', *History of Education Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (2011): 264; Carl F. Kaeste, 'Ideology and Educational History', *History of Education Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (1982): 123–37.

[35]Derwent Whittlesey, 'British and French Colonial Technique in West Africa', *Foreign Affairs* 15, no. 2 (1937): 362–73; Remi P. Clinet and Philip J. Foster, 'French and British Colonial Education in Africa', *Comparative Education Review* 8, no. 2 (1964): 191–8; A. I. Asiwaju, 'Formal Education in Western Yorubaland, 1889–1960: A Comparison of the French and British Colonial Systems', *Comparative Education Review* 19, no. 3 (1975): 434–50; Arie J. vanderPloeg, 'Education in Colonial Africa: The German Experience', *Comparative Education Review* 21, no. 1 (1977): 91–109; Bob W. White, 'Talk about School: Education and the Colonial Project in French and British Africa (1860–1960)', *Comparative Education* 32, no. 1 (1996): 9–25; Ọlọruntimẹhin, 'Education for Colonial Dominance in French West Africa'; Matthew Lange, James Mahoney and Matthias vom Hau, 'Colonialism and Development: A Comparative Analysis of Spanish and British Colonies', *American Journal of Sociology* 111, no. 5 (2006): 1412–62; for commentary on the British adaptation policy, see Albert Charton, 'French Tropical and Equatorial Africa: The Birth of African-French Culture', in *The Year Book of Education* (London: Evans Bros, 1949), 366–79; Udo Bude, 'The Adaptation Concept in British Colonial Education', *Comparative Education* 19, no. 3 (1983): 341–55; Michael Omolewa, 'Educating the "Native": A Study of the Education Adaptation Strategy in British Colonial Africa, 1910–1936', *Journal of African American History* 91, no. 3 (2006): 267–87; for French assimilationism, associationism and elite education, Raymond F. Betts, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory 1890–1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961); Martin Deming Lewis, 'One Hundred Million Frenchmen: The "Assimilation" Theory in French Colonial Policy', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 4, no. 2 (1962): 129–53; Tony Chafer, 'Teaching Africans to be French?: France's "Civilizing Mission" and the Establishment of a Public Education System in French West Africa, 1903–30', *Africa: Rivista Trimestrale di studi e Documentazione dell'Istituto Italiano per 'Africa e l'Oriente* 56, no. 2 (2001): 190–209; for Portuguese assimilationism, Eduardo Moreira, 'Portuguese Colonial Policy', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 17, no. 3 (1947): 181–91; James Duffy, 'Portuguese Africa (Angola and Mozambique): Some Crucial Problems and the Role of Education in their Resolution', *Journal of Negro Education* 30, no. 3 (1961): 294–301; Antoinette Errante, 'Education and National Personae in Portugal's Colonial and Postcolonial Transition', *Comparative Education Review* 42, no. 3 (1998): 267–308.

[36]Spencer D. Segalla, 'The Micropolitics of Colonial Education in French West Africa, 1914–1919', *French Colonial History* 12 (2012): 1–22; Kallaway and Swartz, *Empire and Education in Africa*; Desmond Ikenna Odugu, 'Historiographic Reconsideration of Colonial Education in Africa: Domestic Forces in the Early Expansion of English Schooling in Northern Igboland, 1890–1930', *History of Education Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (2016): 241–72; Matascia, Jerónimo and Dores, 'Imperialism, Internationalism, and Education in Africa'; Matascia, Jerónimo and Dores, *Education and Development*.

Several key features of this shift can be seen in (a) growing interests in microcosmic history, with an emphasis on local rather than national developments, including case studies of particular educational institutions, missionary adventures and/or scientific conferences, and on specific themes (e.g. gender, curriculum, discipline, etc.),[37] (b) a flourishing of focused biographies of colonial actors and the precarity of colonial life for individual Europeans,[38] (c) an attenuation of the explicit (but not necessarily implicit) invocation of the 'civilising mission' narrative that defined earlier colonial education historiography,[39] and (d) efforts to distinguish colonial education policies from practices and the subtleties characterising their interplay,[40] although this, with its epistemic predilections for archives, can perversely suggest that colonial education policy (or the lack thereof) holds more weight in colonial education historiography.[41]

Among the most insightful, indeed exciting, outcomes of these developments is the view that paying attention to the micropolitics of colonial front lines sheds much light on particularities obscured by previous sweeping narratives, especially since the early twentieth century when a series of '*petit fait[s] symbolique[s]*' ('symbolic little acts') of defying European authority by an emerging African elite, to use Segalla's note on French West Africa, was becoming central to colonial education policy debates in the metropoles.[42]

[37]Felix K. Ekechi, 'Colonialism and Christianity in West Africa: The Igbo Case, 1900–1915', *Journal of African History* 12, no. 1 (1971): 103–15; Shokop Yamada, '"Traditions" and Cultural Production: Character Training at the Achimota School in Colonial Ghana', *History of Education* 38, no. 1 (2009): 29–59; Kay Whitehead, 'Inventing and Commemorating Queen Elizabeth School, Ilorin, in Nigeria (1956–2016)', *History of Education* 48, no. 2 (2019): 254–72; Heather J. Sharkey, 'Christians among Muslims: The Church Missionary Society in the Northern Sudan', *Journal of African History* 43, no. 1 (2002): 51–75; Fiona Leach, 'Resisting Conformity: Anglican Mission Women and the Schooling of Girls in Early Nineteenth-Century West Africa', *History of Education* 41, no. 2 (2012): 133–53; Julia Allen, 'Slavery, Colonialism and the Pursuit of Community Life: Anglican Mission Education in Zanzibar and Northern Rhodesia 1864–1940', *History of Education* 37, no. 2 (2008): 207–26; Jenny Collins, 'They Came with a Purpose: Educational Journeys of Nineteenth-Century Irish Dominican Sister Teachers', *History of Education* 44, no. 1 (2015): 44–63; Felicity Jensz, 'The 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference and Comparative Colonial Education', *History of Education* 47, no. 3 (2018): 399–414; Pierre Guidi, '"For Good, God, and the Empire": French Franciscan Sisters in Ethiopia 1896–1937', *History of Education* 47, no. 3 (2018): 384–98; Peter Kallaway, 'German Lutheran Missions, German Anthropology and Science in African Colonial Education', in Kallaway and Swartz, *Empire and Education in Africa*, 205–32; Judith van Allen, '"Sitting on a Man": Colonialism and the Lost Political Institutions of Igbo Women', *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 6, no. 2 (1972): 165–81; Jamaine Abidogun, 'Western Education's Impact on Northern Igbo Gender Roles in Nsukka, Nigeria', *Africa Today* 54, no. 1 (2007): 29–51; Misty Bastian, 'Young Converts: Christian Missions, Gender and Youth in Onitsha, Nigeria 1880–1929', *Anthropological Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (2000): 145–58; Elsie Rockwell, 'Tracing Assimilation and Adaptation through School Exercise Books from *Afrique Occidentale Française* in the Early Twentieth Century', in Kallaway and Swartz, *Empire and Education in Africa*, 235–70; Kwabena Dei Ofori-Attah, 'The British and Curriculum Development in West Africa: A Historical Discourse', *Review of Education* 52 (2006): 409–23; Clive Glaser, 'Nostalgia for a Beating: Discipline, Generational Authority and Corporal Punishment at a Soweto High School, c.1960–2000', *History of Education* 48, no. 3 (2019): 395–409.

[38]Andrew Bank, 'The Berlin Mission Society and German Linguistic Roots of "Volkekunde": The Background, Training and Hamburg Writings of Werner Eiselen, 1899–1924', *Kronos* 41 (2015): 166–92; Richard Glotzer, 'A Long Shadow: Frederick P. Keppel, the Carnegie Corporation and the Dominions and Colonies Fund Area Experts 1923–1943', *History of Education* 38, no. 5 (2009): 621–48; Peter Kallaway, 'Diedrich Westermann: Linguistics and the Ambiguities of Colonial Science in the Interwar Era', in *The Changing Face of Colonial Education in Africa: Education, Science and Development* (Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, 2021): 167–92, 353–62; Peter Kallaway, 'Diedrich Westermann: Linguistics and the Ambiguities of Colonial Science in the Interwar Era', in *The Changing Face of Colonial Education in Africa: Education, Science and Development* (Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, 2021).

[39]Wallbank, 'The Educational Renaissance in British Tropical Africa', 105–8; Edward Coleson, 'The Impact of European Education in West Africa', *History of Education Journal* 6, no. 2 (1955): 169–78.

[40]White, 'Talk about School'; Matascia, Jerónimo and Dores, *Education and Development*.

[41]Clive Whitehead, 'Education in British Colonial Dependencies, 1919–39: A Re-Appraisal', *Comparative Education* 17, no. 1 (1981): 71–80; Whitehead, 'The Historiography of British Imperial Education Policy, Part I'; Whitehead, 'The Historiography of British Imperial Education Policy, Part II'. Such emphasis on policy has (mis)led Whitehead to jump from archival impressions that the British never had a cohesive education policy to outright dismissal of the charge that British colonial education was cultural imperialism.

[42]Segala, 'The Micropolitics of Colonial Education in French West Africa', 4.

Whatever their accomplishments, though, the shift towards local particularities is unlikely to resolve the smouldering tension between colonial apologia and their critics. Therefore, at a time of splintered interests and microcosmic inquiries, one might wonder whether historians of colonial education can contribute to a clearer view of the 'colonial situation', to follow Balandier's invitation, as '*un complexe, une totalité*' ('a complex "totality"') that seeks to construct 'a coherent notion of Empire',[43] even if that is predicated on said complexities and contradictions.

Transcending siloed discourses and geolinguistic barriers

A third lesson, arguably a by-product of the predominant focus on colonial education, pertains to siloed historical dialogues across the Anglophone, Francophone, Germanophone, Hispanophone and Lusophone academy. This regional linguistic divide is unsurprising, even if unfortunate, as western academia remains patently monolingual, and few scholars emerge on the scene who possess the interfluent linguistic repertoires that sustained archival and/or fieldwork requires. Bar the few *blueprint* comparative analyses cited earlier and disparate efforts by individual historians to weave evidence from multiple linguistic backgrounds into one narrative, there is hardly any intentional engagement among historians of education across these Eurocentric regional divides.[44] Some notable exceptions include the 2001 conference organised by the Institute of French Studies of New York University on the theme, '1951–2001: Transatlantic Perspectives on the *Colonial Situation*', which was intended to bring French and US scholars into more sustained dialogue, and the 2002 Portuguese/African Encounters Congress at Brown University as part of an initiative for integrating Lusophone Studies into the social sciences and humanities, an event that resulted in a special issue of The *International Journal of African Historical Studies* on 'Colonial Encounters between Africa and Portugal'.[45]

Considering that Europeans were embrangled in both cooperation and conflicts before and after the Berlin Conference, and that imperial cartography has not erased primordial ties that bind contiguous African communities, more can be expected of education historians who now have at their service emerging technologies that can facilitate reading across geolinguistic lines.[46] Although no known journal publishes primarily in African languages, most non-English journals, unlike their Anglophone

[43]Georges Balandier, 'La Situation Coloniale: Approche Théorique', *Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie* 110 (2001/1951): 16; Saada, 'Regards Croisés', 2.

[44]Magnus O. Bassey, *Western Education and Political Domination in Africa: A Study in Critical and Dialogical Pedagogy* (Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1999); Ọlọruntimẹhin, 'Education for Colonial Dominance'.

[45]Saada, 'Regards Croisés'; Jeanne Marie Penvenne, 'Colonial Encounters between Africa and Portugal: An Introduction', *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 36, no. 1 (2003): 1–6. Pieces appearing in the NYU Institute of French Studies journal, *French Politics, Culture & Society*, while rarely on education, provide some historical insights that might be of interest, especially in the North African context; see, e.g., Frédéric Viguier, 'A French Educational Meritocracy in Independent Morocco?', *French Politics, Culture & Society* 38, no. 2 (2020): 148–73; Johann Le Guelte, 'Photography, Identity, and Migration: Controlling Colonial Migrants in Interwar France and Senegal', *French Politics, Culture & Society* 37, no. 3 (2019): 27–52.

[46]*Histoire de l'éducation* publishes both French and English versions of its articles, *Cadernos de História da Educação*, in Brazilian Portuguese and English, *Educació i Història* of the Societat d'Història de l'Educació dels Països de Llengua Catalana, in Catalan, Spanish and English, and so forth. For a list of other such journals (although this does not include any journal from Africa) and a monthly list of history of education pieces appearing in outlets that are not frequently read by western scholars, see Rick Mikulski, 'History of Education Journals, Periodicals, and Series', Humanities and Social Science Online, accessed May 20, 2023. https://networks.h-net.org/node/14281/pages/2050427/history-education-journals-periodicals-and-series.

counterparts, now host dynamic multilingual websites with full articles (or at least abstracts) in multiple languages. Without invoking sentiments concerning linguistic hierarchy, one can only speculate why this ubiquitous technology appears to have eluded English-language journals so far, although there is an indication that this trend might be shifting.[47] A perusal of Francophone journals, which also feature relatively active scholarship, suggests a similar preoccupation with colonial education, with the accompanying ideological tensions, growing recognition that imperialism was messy and miry, and the polemic quest to characterise imperial motives.

Not only does French historiography of education partake in history's 'small world' problem, but about 80% of publications on Africa as of 2008 deal with colonial education, with 43% on Algeria alone.[48] The undercurrent of the debate, as with the English context, can be summarised as having to do with whether European colonialists (a) harboured any genuine intentions of extending the vaunted enlightenment liberties to their colonial subjects through prototypic European education, (b) attempted to adapt European education to Africa's 'state' in the hierarchy of civilisation, or (c) modified colonial educational policies and practices to the dictates of imperialist exploitation. The pendulum swing, in the case of colonial French West Africa, from wholesale transplantation of metropolitan education model to '*l'invention des "écoles rurales"*' follows the familiar pattern of tensions between colonial administrators and the nouveau African elite as well as shifting dissensions among Europeans.[49]

Absencing and the politics of re-presenting Africa

On to a fourth related lesson: an illustration of what these disparate yet overlapping historiographic narratives focus on reveals more about what is missing. Regarding the long-running attempt to adjudicate the political ethics of imperialism, some historians take European avowal of interest in not disrupting 'traditional' African life as *prima facie* evidence of European benevolence.[50] There were certainly Europeans who believed – as Gamble reminds us regarding some colonial administrators in the lead-up to the 1944 Brazzaville conference – that colonial education should not undermine traditional ways, preferring that Africans '*développent conformément à leur génie propre et que la France Noire, bien enracinée sur le sol africain, soit une création originale, vivante et féconde*'

[47]Matascia, Jerónimo and Dores's *Education and Development*, as well as their accompanying special issue on 'Imperialism, Internationalism, and Education in Africa: Connected Histories', published by *Paedagogica Historica*, includes pieces that engage with French literature and sources.

[48]Vincent Alamercy, 'L'historiographie française de l'éducation: essai de cartographie de ses objets et de ses auteurs', *Histoire de l'éducation* 117 (2008): 97–116. For comparative reference, over half of French publication on the history of education focus on France and Europe, with seven countries (Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom) making up over 76% of all geographic indexations. See Alamercy, 'L'historiographie française de l'éducation', 112.

[49]Harry Gamble, 'La crise de l'enseignement en Afrique occidentale française (1944–1950)', *Histoire de l'éducation* 128 (2010): 131; Harry Gamble, 'Peasants of the Empire: Rural Schools and the Colonial Imaginary in 1930s French West Africa', *Cahiers d'études Africaines* 195 (2009): 775–803.

[50]Clive Whitehead, 'The Historiography of British Imperial Education Policy, Part I: India,' History of Education 34, no. 3 (2005), 315–29; Clive Whitehead, 'The Historiography of British Imperial Education Policy, Part II: Africa and the Rest of the Colonial Empire,' *History of Education* 34, no. 4 (2005), 441–54; Dinesh D'Souza, 'Two cheers for colonialism,' *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 10 May 2002, B7.

(develop in accordance with their own genius and that Black France, firmly rooted in African soil, be an original, living and fertile creation).[51]

But far from benevolent cultural sensitivity, this support and the broader debate it responds to, including during the Brazzaville conference that ushered in a new wave of school de-ruralisation, unmasks colonialists' frustration and wrangling when unanticipated African responses threatened to derail imperialism's prime mandate: the extraction and expropriation of African resources to feed Europe's growing industrial needs. Frederick Lugard, beyond whom hardly any better mouthpiece exists for this mandate, aptly links the discovery in the nineteenth century of 'power-driven machinery', rapidly rising 'demand for raw materials and for markets for [industrial] products', and massive population growth and 'improvements' in living standards that Europe and the West could not support with its domestic resources, to the quest to control Africa and the tropics for resource extraction and new markets, all under the ideologised 'trusteeship of civilisation'.[52]

Europe's arrogative trusteeship for 'civilising' Africa was a conjectural contingency to this primary trusteeship 'for humanity of territories endowed with great material resources', claiming that 'the best interests of humanity [nay Europeans?] demand that these vast economic potentialities be developed'.[53] Education was to secure Africa's compliance to this scheme, through both natural rights concessions to full control of Africa's resources and a steady supply of extractive labour.[54] But this logic did not anticipate Africans' resistance to the manual labour curriculum of adapted/rural schooling, the demand for academic education, or emigration out of the rural frontiers of resource extraction, all of which would imperil the imperial plot.[55] On their part, Africans seemed leery about the apparent hypocrisy of a meretricious promise of enlightenment civilisation that required educating Africans into a subject labourer class simply because, as Lugard notes, 'the white man cannot, or at any rate will not … do manual work in the tropics'.[56] The strategic question of the right education policy was always predicated on the overriding quest to secure European supremacy, even if by brutal violence; for as Sir Arthur Hardinge, then Colonial Head of British East Africa, wrote about the Somalis, '[T]hese people must learn submission by bullets – it's the only school; after that you may begin more modern and humane methods of education'.[57]

This African response, more than anything else in existing literature, starkly signifies to historians of education that Africa is much more than a passive extension of European imperialist imaginations. Africa has always had rich, complex and dynamic histories, including of education, science, religion, culture, economy, politics and ideas that are irreducible to the retrospective 'traditional education' trope fragmentarily scripted onto imperialist mood swings that are characterised by *hope* in the possibility of 'civilising' Africans and *fear* that doing so would create racial equality. The obsession with colonial

[51]Gamble, 'La crise de l'enseignement en Afrique occidentale française'.
[52]Frederick D. Lugard, 'The White Man's Task in Tropical Africa', *Foreign Affairs* 5, no. 1 (1926): 57–8; Frederick D. Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (Edinburgh: Frank Cass & Co, 1922).
[53]Wallbank, 'The Educational Renaissance in British Tropical Africa', 107.
[54]Ibid.
[55]See Gamble, 'La crise de l'enseignement en Afrique occidentale française'.
[56]Lugard, 'The White Man's Task', 59.
[57]Sir Arthur H. Hardinge to Sir C. Hill, April 25, 1897, The National Archives, London, FC. 107/77; see also E. R. Turton, 'The Introduction and Development of Educational Facilities for the Somali in Kenya', *History of Education Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (1974): 347.

education reveals, besides the pablum fact of its Eurocentricity, the near total absence of other African educational developments that pre-date and survive imperialism. Thus, if we make much of the claim that 400 years of European contacts with Africa following Portuguese's fifteenth-century explorations resulted in barely a toehold on the continent and that the scramble for Africa lasted less than a century (although, as Mudimbe reminds us, this brief 'moment is still charged and controversial, since . . . it signified a new historical form and the possibility of radically new types of discourses on African traditions and cultures'), it is intriguing that earlier interest in 'traditional' African education was only patchy and has waned over time.[58] While these seminal works underscore the historically diverse and interfluent trajectories of 'traditional', Islamic, western and other educational developments across the continent, the idea of 'traditional' here, unlike the primarily ideological distinction between traditional and progressive education,[59] assumes a categorial, territorialised, geoepistemic distinction, outfitted with the primitive → modern chronology of 'civilising mission' to confine views concerning Africa's non-European educational processes to some mummified antiquity of oral traditions, myths and customs that can then be ignored or merely acknowledged.

It is unlikely that this gap will be filled by retooling and scouring African scholarly libraries for archives or by propping up some 'stagnant' indigenous practice, fossilised in irretrievable protohistory, as Africa's parallel educational accomplishment.[60] Nor was it ever convincing to bemoan the non-existence of historical sources on Africa, comparable to European archives.[61] There is, however, a minimal need to recalibrate the epistemic aperture not only on Africa but, crucially, in the historian's own craft.

A few potentially promising areas that such recalibration might open include, for instance, Islamic influences, from North to South, on the cultural politics of social transformation out of which arose in Africa the world's oldest continuously running higher education institution – the University of al-Qarawiyyin (جامعة القرويين in Arabic or ⵜⴰⵙⴷⴰⵡⵉⵜ ⵏ ⵍⵇⵔⵕⵡⵉⵢⵢⵉⵏ in Berber) in Fez, Morocco, as well as the Sankoré Masjid (University of Sankoré) in Timbuktu, Mali, which was established in 988, a century before the University of Bologna. Another is the longer arc of China's involvement in educational development in Africa that pre-dates recent investments in African higher education, including the ideological flirtations and socialist educational cooperation between African countries and China, the Soviet Union, East Germany, Cuba, as well as several other Asian, Middle Eastern and Latin American countries, which offered alternative promises at independence and now highlights the multiple forces around which Africa's divergent histories bend.[62]

[58]Whittlesey, 'British and French Colonial Technique in West Africa', 362; Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, 1; for early commentary on traditional systems of education in Africa, see Abdou Moumouni, *L'Éducation en Afrique* (Paris: Françoise Maspero, 1964), 34; A. Babs Fafunwa, *History of Education in Nigeria* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1974); Michael Omolewa, 'Traditional African Modes of Education: Their Relevance in the Modern World', *International Review of Education* 53 (2007): 593–612.

[59]Dewey, *Experience and Education*.

[60]Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, 'Manufacturing and Consuming Knowledge: African Libraries and Publishing', *Development in Practice* 6, no. 4 (1996): 293–303; John E. Anderson, *The Struggle for the School: The Interaction of Missionary, Colonial Government and Nationalist Enterprise in the Development of Formal Education in Kenya* (London: Longman, 1970), 1.

[61]Desmond Ikenna Odugu, review of *Empire and Education in Africa* by Kallaway and Swartz, *History of Education Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (2019): 137–41.

[62]Kenneth King, *China's Aid & Soft Power in Africa: The Case of Education & Training* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: James Currey, 2013); Martin Bailey, 'Tanzania and China', *African Affairs* 74, no. 294 (1975): 39–50; Jane Weiß and Ingrid Thea Miethe, *Socialist Educational Cooperation and the Global South* (Berlin: Peter Lang Verlag, 2020); Constantin Katsakioris, 'Nkrumah's Elite: Ghanaian Students in the Soviet Union in the Cold War', *Paedagogica Historica* 57, no. 3 (2021): 260–76.

Adult education also deserves new approaches beyond European interventionism, say, in the backdrop of aforementioned racial tension over adapted/rural education but also of a cultural ethos of lifelong learning braided into various manifestations of traditional African life.[63] The critical point here is that while nearly all African economies run on the tinkering genius of 'roadside' technical expertise (from auto mechanics to welding, electrical and electronics engineering, computer engineering, and so forth), the history of so-called 'technical and vocational training and education' prioritises institutionalised practices of statist actors and development discourses extending from that colonial-era debate and treats the education of Africa's vast technical experts as a remedial anomaly.[64]

Other areas, relevant to understanding the colonial situation as a *complex totality*, pertain to the divergent refractions of multiple educational ideologies that interconnect Africa not only with Europe and North America, but also in other contexts with diasporic Africans and indigenous peoples (e.g. the Caribbean and Australia), the institutional networks they spun beyond Africa, and the roles such networks played in the construction of multiple conflicting European and African identities in diverse colonial settings at the same time that European identities in relation to 'others' were being forged in Europe.[65] More effort could also be made to understand post-independence educational development (e.g. oscillation of school governance between the state and religious organisations, the unfolding impacts of political economic policies such as neoliberalism, the expansion of privatisation, etc.).

The tributaries outlined above pertain mostly to what historians of education focus on or ignore. But they also hint at a deeper issue with weightier ramifications regarding an untiring tension over epistemological shifts in history that were well underway even before Oscar Handlin's notable *cri de coeur*.[66] This fifth key lesson, to which we turn in the next section, holds important explanatory powers for what has been outlined concerning the history of education in Africa so far, as well as a guiding light for what historians can contribute to a much-needed reclamation of the political vocation of the historian's interpretive agency.

Epistemic ruptures and palimpsests of education historiography

Historians of colonial education in Africa spar not simply because they develop divergent interpretations but because those divergences reveal loaded assumptions concerning what qualifies as a historical source, who has legitimacy to make that determination and to

[63]Michael Omolewa, 'The Practice of Lifelong Learning in Indigenous Africa', in *Integrating Lifelong Learning Perspectives*, ed. Carolyn Medel-Añonuevo (Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Education, 2002); M. B. M. Avoseh, 'Learning to be Active Citizens: Lessons of Traditional Africa for Lifelong Learning', *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 20, no. 6 (2001): 479–86.

[64]Aaron Benavot, 'Vocational-Technical Education in Tropical Africa', *Sociology of Education* 56, no. 2 (1983): 63–76; David E. Gardinier, 'Vocational and Technical Education in French Equatorial Africa (1842–1960)', *Proceedings of the Meeting of the French Colonial Historical Society* 8 (1985): 113–23; Edwin Hamilton and Kobina Asiedu, 'Vocational-Technical Education in Tropical Africa', *Journal of Negro Education* 56, no. 3 (1987): 338–55; Anthony I. Akubue and Edward C. Pytlik, 'Technology, Technical, and Vocational Education in Nigeria: Past Neglect and Present Attention', *Journal of Epsilon Pi Tau* 16, no. 2 (1990): 43–8.

[65]Kevin Lougheed, '"Teach the Mutual Interest of the Mother Country and her Dependencies": Education and Reshaping Colonial Governance in Trinidad', *History of Education* 50, no. 6 (2021): 745–63; Michael O. West, 'The Tuskegee Model of Development in Africa: Another Dimension of the African/African-American Connection', *Diplomatic History* 16, no. 3 (1992): 371–87; Rebecca Swartz, 'Civilisation and Colonial Education: Natal and Western Australia in the 1860s in Comparative Perspective', *History of Education* 47, no. 3 (2018): 368–83.

[66]Handlin, *Truth in History*.

interpret such sources (i.e. who qualifies as a historian), and, indeed, the purpose of historical inquiry.[67] Convinced that objectivity in history is not only desirable but possible (often with no more than offhand remarks about those who think otherwise), and that archival explorations hold the key to historical *truth*, many historians of education in Africa today feel no need to justify their own epistemic frameworks or engage the potential social and political consequences of their interpretations in shaping public beliefs.[68]

Handlin's *Truth in History* offers a lucid course on this despairing nostalgia for history's bygone era of truth and the scathing charge against historians' unwise surrender of their craft to ideologically driven speculators: 'propagandists, politicians, dramatists, novelists, journalists, and social engineers', a shift that was a familiar object of depressing and sometimes rancorous disciplinary introspection in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.[69] These inept sectarians, the tale goes, had no taste for historical facts or the methodological prudence and professional integrity that was the hallmark of the historian's craftsmanship. With the decay of that craftsmanship, which Handlin and other stalwarts of the cause fought to defend with rectitudinous Rankean zeal, came unprecedented disillusionment regarding the historian's commitment to the 'cumulative discovery of the past', and the deployment of scientific procedures, guided by an aspiration for objectivity, towards 'laboriously inching the world toward truth'.[70]

There is no need to restate why this epistemological calculation is purblind, as many an astute treatment of the subject now constitutes the core of the historiographer's corpus.[71] Obviously, historians do not have the luxury of unmediated access to the past. Even if they did, there is no indication that such access would result in any less disputation. Intellectual dissension is not collateral to but constitutive of human existence as a diverse and perceptually embodied species. Indeed, much of the disciplinary decadence Handlin bemoans is certainly not new and is 'the consequences of the recent [demographic] democratization of the profession that even Handlin concedes has had some beneficial side effects in increasing the variety of outlooks and research'.[72]

The 1930s – the golden era of Handlin's imagination – is limned by figures like Charles H. McIlwain, who voiced similar anxieties regarding disciplinary decadence

[67]Odugu, 'Historiographic Reconsideration of Colonial Education in Africa'.
[68]Kallaway and Swartz, 'Introduction', 2; Whitehead, 'The Historiography of British Imperial Education Policy, Part I: India'; Whitehead, 'The Historiography of British Imperial Education Policy, Part II'.
[69]Handlin, *Truth in History*, 21; see also Theodore S. Hamerow, *Reflections on History and Historians* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987); Geoffery R. Elton, *The Practice of History* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1967); and Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth Century Life* (London: Allen Lane, 2002/New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), 282–97.
[70]Handlin, *Truth in History*, 4–5.
[71]Adiele E. Afigbo, 'Oral Tradition and the History of Segmentary Societies', *History of Africa* 12 (1985): 1–10; Hayden White, 'Response to Arthur Marwick', *Journal of Contemporary History* 30, no. 2 (1995): 233–46; Alun Munslow, *Deconstructing History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006); Felix K. Ekechi, 'Oral Tradition and African History: An Example from Southeastern Nigeria', *International Journal of Social Education* 4, no. 1 (1989), 26–40; Christopher Lloyd, 'Beyond Sciences in Historical Theory? Critical Commentary on the History/Science Distinction', *Storia della Storiografia* 48 (2005): 128–38; Christopher Lloyd, 'For Realism and against the Inadequacies of Common Sense: A Response to Arthur Marwick', *Journal of Contemporary History* 31, no. 1 (1996), 191–207; Hayden V. White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973); Stephen Bann, *The Inventions of History: Essays on the Representations of the Past* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1990); Linda Orr and Jules Michelet: *Nature, History and Language* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1976); Ann Rigney, *The Rhetoric of Historical Representation: Three Narrative Histories of the French Revolution* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Frank Ankersmit, 'Tocqueville and the Sublimity of Democracy', *Tocqueville Review* 15 (1994): 173–201.
[72]Wood, review of *Truth in History* by Oscar Handlin, 86.

and the disillusionment of 'relativism and subjectivity' and a 'lack of faith in facts and truth'.[73] It was an era marked by 'the failure of many eminently professional historians to achieve much beyond antiquarianism and "chronicle" that led many others in the generation of Beard and Becker to revolt against collecting and transmitting facts about the past'.[74] It was also the era when truth-seeking historians were hardly persuaded, even by Handlin, to extend their scholarly interest beyond 'great white men' and to engage in the social history of ordinary people, including Africans, who were labelled in the most epistemically pejorative terms as 'the inarticulate' – a loaded commentary, not on any people's voicelessness but rather on the historian's 'deafness'.[75]

Mainstream historians of this era continued to hold popular western images of a continent immured in pristine antiquity emerging irrevocably into modernity under European tutelage. T. Walter Wallbank captures this mood on how 'the ferment of modernity [was] breaking down indigenous institutions and venerable customs', and Africans, like non-Europeans elsewhere, who were 'only yesterday safely submerged in the tranquil protection of a pathless forest or in a remote medieval village, are now confronted with the bewildering apparitions of motor cars, labour compounds, airplanes, and cinemas', and are thus now 'inevitably projected into the complex maelstrom of the modern Machine Age'.[76]

If much has been said to undress the flaws of the positivist epistemology, more needs to be done to reveal its dangers. To elaborate this need – as a separate space is needed for a more adequate treatment – let us turn instead to a much earlier (1914) piece with the same title as Handlin's book, 'Truth in History'.[77] Its author and founder of the Dunning School, known for advancing white supremacist interpretations and providing scholarly anchorage for the disenfranchisement of African Americans in the burgeoning US Jim Crow South,[78] expressed similar apprehension that the field 'has been less diligently cultivated by the scientific historian' who 'must know precisely what happened and . . . know it from the original contemporary evidence', a disciplinary decline he argued had been going on for about a century.[79] But he was also keenly aware of the hopelessness of the quest for truth – as an object of historical inquiry – and the ineluctability of subjectivity.

To be sure, Handlin, too, had no illusions that

> while the world of the elapsed past has its own reality, independent of who attempts to view and describe it, and is thus objective, the scholar's vision is subjective, at least to the extent that his [*sic*] own point of observation and the complex lenses of prejudice, interest, and preconception shape what he discerns and therefore what he can portray.[80]

[73]Ibid., 87.
[74]Paul L. Ward, review of *The Practice of History* by G. R. Elton, *History and Theory* 8, no. 1 (1969): 114; for a more detailed account of this revolt, see Cushing Strout, *The Pragmatic Revolt in American History: Carl Becker and Charles Beard* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1958).
[75]W. E. B. DuBois, preface to *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*, ed. Herbert Aptheker (New York: Citadel Press, 1951); T. Walter Wallbank, 'The Educational Renaissance in British Tropical Africa', *Journal of Negro Education* 3, no. 1 (1934): 107; Wood, review of *Truth in History*, 84; Israel Shenker, 'Historians Still Debating the Meaning of the American Revolution if it Was a Revolution', *New York Times*, July 6, 1976.
[76]Wallbank, 'The Educational Renaissance of British Tropical Africa', 105.
[77]William A. Dunning, 'Truth in History', *American Historical Review* 19, no. 2 (1914): 217–29.
[78]John David Smith and J. Vincent Lowery, eds., *The Dunning School: Historians, Race, and the Meaning of Reconstruction* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2013).
[79]Dunning, 'Truth in History', 219.
[80]Handlin, *Truth in History*, 1.

But while Handlin and the defenders of objectivity focus on championing historical truth through methodical execution of established techniques and deepened self-understanding, Dunning, his racial bias notwithstanding, turned to a different and arguably more intellectually honest project: a justification for why historians should take 'false' interpretations more seriously. His logic is simple but bears potent political implication: 'the deeds of men have been affected more by the *belief* in what was false than by the *knowledge* of what was true'.[81]

Dunning cites the legendary historiographic origins of both Roman and Jewish history, populated as they are by mythological figures like Romulus, Adam and Moses, whose actual existence is no more empirical than any African-origin tale.[82] No thoroughgoing objectivist historian would hang their craft on the empirical reality of these characters who are part of 'a congeries of myths, legends, traditions, and patriotic fancies animated throughout by a purpose to glorify a not too glorious people'; yet, it is precisely upon these fables that 'the course of civilized life' depended and took inspiration, from kings, conquerors, lawmakers, military leaders, philosophers and clergy; from Dante to Machiavelli and Montesquieu.[83] The damning brutality of this familiar history warrants a pause; Dunning continues that the Europe of his day (and today still) is the product of historic decisions based on unfounded beliefs in mythical figures of Israel's past:

> Kings discovered there divine sanction for absolute monarchy; republicans, for popular sovereignty; moderate men, for the mixed form. If a tyrant was to be got rid of the way was pointed out by the achievements of Ehud and of Jehu and of Samuel, when he hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord. If a people was to be destroyed, the fate of the Amalekites and the recalcitrant tribes of Canaan furnished a divinely sanctioned model of efficiency. The Albigenses at Toulouse, the papists at Drogheda, and the Pequots in Connecticut were slaughtered with pious joy, based on the same historical evidence that the will of God was being executed.[84]

That historians and social scientists have, since the nineteenth century, demonstrated the mythical nature of these tales does nothing to erase their historic impacts on Europe and the world. Indeed, the Christian Pentecostal fervour sweeping through Africa lately suggests that Dunning's calculation – that belief trumps truth in the social calculus of historical insight – remains remarkably prescient.[85]

What, then, can the objectivist defender of truth who is intolerant of those accounts they find discordant with 'evidence' make of this? It would be tempting to conclude that, if indeed 'it is the error and not the fact that is important' in determining the course of history,[86] then the historian must recommit to eliminating erroneous interpretations. But this misses the point. For those who act under erroneous beliefs often (not always) do so in the conviction that they hold objectively true historical evidence. Thus, it is not so much from erroneous interpretation as from its reconstitution as truth that the

[81]Dunning, 'Truth in History', 224, emphasis added.
[82]Ulli Beier, ed., *The Origin of Life and Death: African Creation Myths* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publisher, 1966); Obiakoizu A. Iloanusi, *Myths of the Creation of Man and the Origin of Death in Africa: A Study in Igbo Traditional Culture and Other African Cultures* (New York: Peter Lang, 1984); Aribidesi Usman and Toyin Falola, *The Yoruba from Prehistory to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).
[83]Dunning, 'Truth in History', 221.
[84]Ibid., 223.
[85]Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
[86]Dunning, 'Truth in History', 228.

historian's critical arrows must be pointed. Otherwise, we evade the primary issue: that the objective existence of the past offers no clue to any *true* historical knowledge of that past.

An alternative interpretation would be to nurture tolerance and open-mindedness. Dunning's assessment here is as cutting: he argues, 'we are overwhelmed with the glory of our achievements in discovery and intoxicated with our superiority over the luckless generations that preceded us'.[87] The bare distinction is that in place of our predecessors, today's objectivist historian's sense of superiority is levelled at nonconforming contemporaries. Dunning's antidote is also simple: humility! Our inescapably unbreachable distance from truth should nurture an openness to (not dismissal of) divergent perspectives, contrary interpretations and different streams of evidence.

Before returning to the question of evidence, the argument here opens itself to a seemingly legitimate but misguided objection: if historians concede that truth is not possible, everyone would be 'free to invent the past as he sees fit', with the distinction between fact and fiction irredeemably blurred.[88] Hobsbawm would declare decades later: 'more history than ever is today being revised or invented by people who do not want the real past, but only a past that suits their purpose'.[89] This critique is not new or specific to history; it is a frequent charge against relativism, and one we should take seriously, especially at a time when the resurgence of populist political reappropriations or reinventions of historical interpretations reminds us that history is frangible – and politically costly. But the logical string to that objection is tenuous. We cannot prove a position by dismissing its competitors, as this amounts to *argumentum ad coelum*. Herein lies the danger of the truth-seekers' cause: the fact that we fear the consequences of unregulated diversity of views (or, to psychologise, that we struggle to reconcile ourselves to the limits of human knowledge) provides no route map to epistemic certitude.

It is precisely this leap of faith – and its methodological redeployment in the canonisation of colonial archives – that blunts the positivist historian's case. Handlin, for instance, concedes that his view of truth as absolute and real, and ontically indifferent to anyone's subjectivity, expresses a 'minimal operational article of faith' upon which the historian's vocation depends.[90] To assuage this faith, he proposes that while 'no one can relive the past . . . everyone can seek truth in the records'.[91] But this only expands the geography of the historian's dogma by imposing capriciously on what qualifies as historical record the criterion of ontological empiricity. On cue, historians of education in Africa are led 'naturally', by *the records*, to colonial education, and in so doing, manage to 'naturally' ignore the perspectives of Africans in the entire episode.[92] Objections from generations of African historians who have effectively sourced beyond colonial archives have done little to buck the trend. For example, Adiele E. Afigbo, Felix K. Ekechi and other leading members of the Kenneth Dike Ibadan School of History have long demonstrated the necessity of centring African voices and oral sources in historical accounts of the African

[87]Ibid., 226.
[88]Wood, review of *Truth in History*, 86.
[89]Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times*, 296.
[90]Handlin, *Truth in History*, 405.
[91]Ibid., 406.
[92]Kallaway and Swartz, *Empire and Education in Africa*; Whitehead, 'The Historiography of British Imperial Education Policy, Part I'; Whitehead, 'The Historiography of British Imperial Education Policy, Part II'. For critique, see Odugu, 'Historiographic Reconsideration of Colonial Education in Africa'; Odugu, review of *Empire and Education in Africa*.

past.[93] Thus, when positivist guardsmen chide those they view as historical 'mythologists',[94] it is not because there is any philosophical or material ground to superordinate colonial archives over, say, oral sources; it is because their faith – that 'minimal operational article of faith' – sanctions it. On that note, the history of education in Africa, like imperialism itself, remains 'the white man's burden'.

Certainly, the case to broaden the historian's source beyond colonial archives is no appeal to an anything-goes 'vulgar relativism' – anyhow, this objection, again, is a 'strawman' dodge. The problem is also not with the desire for truth. It is with the certainty that particular kinds of evidence securely map its coordinates. This unwillingness – or inability – to see the limits of this or any theory of evidence that commits itself to ontological universality poses a graver threat within the discipline and beyond, not the ambitions to truth itself. For the window between truth in the abstract (as an intellectual virtue or object of desire) and its material manifestation (in subjective empirical experiences or interpretations) is always opaque, obliquely tilted to an observer's predisposition. If Kant's warning about the impenetrability of *noumena* (things as they exist in themselves, as against *phenomenal* objects of experience) was not compelling enough, contemporary cognitive science amply demonstrates our incapability to know reality as it really is, that is, beyond 'hacks and tricks' that merely allow us to survive.[95]

Moreover, quantum physics now shows that reality is composed of moments, or interactions, not the hardy stuff of daily experience.[96] That is, the Newtonian regularity that orders everyday existence disintegrates into uncertainty at the subatomic levels, and historians, like scientists, now face the possibility that reality itself is brought into existence in/by the very act of observation.[97] Indeed, at the time when positivist historians were defending records of the past and its empirical quiddity with linear notions of time as uniform and universal – the undifferentiated flow from the past through the present and into the future – scientists already knew that time operates differently from place to place and does not exist as the chronological linearity of familiar experience.[98] The historian's most cherished object and analytic tools have always been manifestly elusive.

The chimera of truth, therefore, provides a blanket of misleading epistemological assurance that, when deployed by anyone 'intoxicated with [a sense of their own] superiority', can result at best in hubris or worse, lead to the kind of pious beliefs under which the Albigenses, the papist, the Pequots, the Jews, the Tutsis and Africans were slaughtered, and enslaved and colonised – under the historical certitude of 'trusteeship'. Truth, thus, if it exists, abhors imposters.

Futures of education and shifting choreographies of history

The historian's calling commits her/him to elucidate the impenetrable with fragile and elusive instruments. Yet for the historian of education in Africa, an elastic

[93]Felix K. Ekechi, 'Oral Tradition and African History'; A. E. Afigbo, 'Oral Tradition and the History of Segmentary Societies', *History of Africa* 12 (1985): 1–10.
[94]Whitehead, 'The Historiography of British Imperial Education Policy, Part I', 316.
[95]Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Marcus Weigelt (New York: Penguin Classics, 2007/1781); Donald D. Hoffman, *The Case Against Reality: Why Evolution Hid the Truth from Our Eyes* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2019).
[96]Carlo Rovelli, *Reality Is Not What It Seems: The Journey to Quantum Gravity* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2017).
[97]Adam Becker, *What Is Real? The Unfinished Quest for the Meaning of Quantum Physics* (New York: Basic Books, 2018).
[98]Carlo Rovelli, *The Order of Time* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2018).

epistemological and methodological outlook invites exciting opportunities and challenges beyond the recovery and *inclusion* of 'forgotten' figures and events into a Eurocentric narrative. More than ever, there is reason for caution against 'rescue' history and a 'retro-tourism' into unexplored landscapes of the past without an accompanying critical consideration of, say, why they were 'forgotten' in the first instance,[99] or how inclusion can constitute a form of exclusion. To illustrate, Kallaway includes in his recent book illuminating biographies of two South Africans – the educationist, Donald Guy Sydney M'timkulu and the Xhosa *imbongi* (traditional poet), Samuel Edward Krune Mqhayi – who, like other Africans, were missing in earlier publications on colonial education.[100] These biographies represent a notable effort to 'rescue [Africans] from obscurity' in colonial education historiography, which, as noted elsewhere, says more about historians' priorities.[101]

Yet, it is unclear how these biographies add to or alter the broader narrative of colonial education besides buttressing the ideological tension over colonial education, and specifically the case against colonial critics who, the argument goes, disregard imperialism's complexity, precarity, and diverging currents of forces and outcomes that blur agentic boundaries – all in a bid to characterise European colonial activities as oppressive.[102] There is clearly no question that colonialism was complicated and the details of its life, difficult and unpredictable; for how could it not be? If the goal is to make debates on colonial education no longer about 'colonial exceptionalism via . . . a very specific kind of education designed for domination and colonialism' but about Europeans exporting 'the best international expertise in the area of education at the time', then integrating (or co-opting) African voices does little to move the conversation past the same 'trusteeship' idea that secured their colonisation as a 'natural' necessity.[103] That is, in the lexicon of apologia, 'complexity' becomes little more than an analytic code for substituting benevolence for domination.

Crucially, what we are confronted with is whether historians of education can become genuinely interested in Africans on the merit of their own educational activities in that incommensurable cultural ecology, not because of their proximity to colonial institutions or the amenability of their experiences to a specific logic. Much more has been going on and continues to go on educationally in Africa than was seeded through missionary and colonial encounters, and these warrant some attention, however the plot of colonial encounters twists.

A brief autobiographical note can illustrate the opportunities that remain open to historians of education in Africa. My father, hale and hearty to date, lived and worked with several European and American missionaries in today's Southeastern Nigeria until the 1967 outbreak of the Nigerian–Biafran war. His personal accounts, like those of many of his contemporaries, provide a powerful lens for reading any colonial-era archives, and consulting

[99]Mark Freeman, 'Adult Education History in Britain: Past, Present and Future (Part I)', *Paedagogica Historica* 56, no. 3 (2020): 384–95; Mark Freeman, 'Adult Education History in Britain: Past, Present, and Future (Part II)', *Paedagogica Historica* 56, no. 3 (2020): 396–411; Malcolm Chase, 'Stories We Tell Them? Teaching Adults History in a Postmodern World', *Studies in the Education of Adults* 32 (2000): 97.
[100]Kallaway, *The Changing Face*; Kallaway and Swartz, *Empire and Education*.
[101]Kallaway, *The Changing Face*; Odugu, review of *Empire and Education in Africa*.
[102]Kallaway, *The Changing Face*, 194–195; Matascia, Jerónimo and Dores, *Education and Development* for recent elaborations of colonial encounters as complex, precarious and indeterminate, with varied (and sometimes contradictory) roles and outcomes across time and context that voids any coloniser–colonised distinction.
[103]Kallaway, *The Changing Face*, 110–11.

these living libraries can become part of the historian's plodding expedition.[104] Yet, these accounts, clarifying and complicating in their fascinating contours as they are, represent only a footnote to a larger history that includes, in my father's case, the long metalsmithing careers of his own brothers who did not follow *uzo oyibo* ('the white man's ways'). Of more relevant interest is the link between my uncles' illustrious careers and the thriving iron-smelting technologies of the Nsukka region that long pre-dates the advent of European missionaries and explorers, and card-carrying researchers are only recently beginning to engage the extant archaeological evidence in Lejja, Opi and elsewhere, which has been carbon-dated to *c*.2000 BCE.[105] The constantly changing educational culture of this thriving metallurgical economy that is still densely populated today by descendants of the people Europeans would have encountered can be explored on its own merit through the narrative (re)collections of the people and material artefacts that survived the ensuing British colonial depredation introduced through a series of mineral and mining ordinances.[106]

Historians of education rarely insert themselves into their narratives due, perhaps, to modesty or the demands of objectivity, although the historian's inspiration and analytic framework are inextricably autobiographical. As a loosely connected community of inquirers, we embody in our respective genealogies the decussation of multiple incommensurable cultural ecologies and histories that paint a much larger and more complex picture of the world's education heritage. Treating the history of education in Africa as an appendage to imaginations of Europe's path of linear progress – the product, in retrospect, of a quest to foist *uni*-versal knowledge – is unpersuasive, especially now in light of developments in indigenous knowledges and in decoloniality.[107]

The decolonial turn (re)introduces a set of potent historiographic insights that helps to delineate the horizon for the history of education in Africa in the coming years. For one thing, the attempt to retrace the African past demonstrates that as consequential as colonialism has been, it remains one of many episodes in a longer history of transcontinental contacts of a people so vast and diverse, and those histories are irreducible to the universal coordinates of Euromodernity. Thus, to finally break free from the one-way world and its universalist narrative to enter decolonial pluriversality requires that historians learn

[104]For other fruitful examples see C. N. Ubah, 'Western Education in Africa: The Igbo Experience, 1900–1960', *Comparative Education Review* 24, no. 3 (1980): 371–88; Ekechi, 'Oral Tradition and African History'; and Afigbo, 'Oral Tradition and the History of Segmentary Societies'.

[105]Kenechukwu Chidiogo Daniel, Anselm Maduabuchi Ibeanu, Jacinta Uchenna Ikegwu and Emuobosa Akpo Orijemie, 'New Radiocarbon Dates from Archaeological Sites in Parts of Igboland', *Radiocarbon* 64, no. 1 (2022): 35–50; Catherine Obianuju Acholonu, *Eden in Sumer on The Niger: Archaeological, Linguistic and Genetic Evidence of 45,000 Years of Atlantis, Eden and Sumer in West Africa* (Abuja: CARC, 2013); Jamaine Abidogun, *African Science Education: Gendering Indigenous Knowledge in Nigeria* (Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 2018); Shadreck Chirikure, *Metals in Past Societies: A Global Perspective on Indigenous African Metallurgy* (New York: Springer, 2015).

[106]See for example, *The Mineral Ordinance, 1945* issued by King George VI for the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria as an amendment and consolidation of previous ordinances. For research commentaries on the link to the chequered history of mining in Nigeria and to global capitalism broadly, see A. O. Y. Raji and T. S. Abejide, 'The British Mining & Oil Regulations in Colonial Nigeria c.1914–1960s: An Assessment', *Singaporean Journal of Business Economics and Management Studies* 2, no. 1 (2014): 62–75; Raymond E. Dumett, *Mining Tycoons in the Age of Empire, 1870–1945: Entrepreneurship, High Finance, Politics and Territorial Expansion* (Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 2009).

[107]See, e.g., Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 'Decoloniality as the Future of Africa', *History Compass* 12, no. 10 (2015): 485–96; Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018); Anibal Quijano, 'Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality', *Cultural Studies* 21, nos 2–3 (2007): 168–78.

to 'travel away from the present modern/colonial world but never actually depart'.[108] This offers an important invitation for the historian of education to abandon the treatment of whatever in the African past does not fit a chronological template of universal modernity as the stuff of prehistorical inconsequence or relevant only to the extent that it provides a hollow, dark, contrastive backdrop for foisting Euromodernity. Doing this requires that historians first identify their 'locus of enunciation' and additionally take as a point of departure the decolonial task of provincialising European categories and sense of history.[109]

To return briefly to the illustrative epistemic dimensionality of 'rescue' (biographic) histories, seeking to 'locate [M'timkulu] between traditional African values and cultures ... and the demands of modern life' deploys an analytic trope that on one hand chronologically places the African in the past and the European in the future-oriented present, and on the other hand – and this is crucial – marks (that is, provincialises) what is African as *traditional* and correspondingly 'unmarks' or deprovincialises what is European (in this case, the learning of English language) as 'modern'.[110] The generative epistemic act of *marking* others while *unmarking* itself, to use Lynn Mario T. de Souza's apt framework, was always at the heart of the imperialist technology.[111] Indeed, one can read decoloniality as an attempt to finally *mark* the Eurocentric episteme, that is, to put it in its place, by *unmarking* and unmasking what it had buried under the debris of universalism. At the occasion of their encounters, African knowledge systems and cultural realities were as contemporaneously modern as were Europeans'. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni banally reminds us, Africans, as a people, were always present, 'never creatures of "discovery"'.[112]

There is another critical insight here: because the history of education in Africa has been as much about the development of educational activities as about the construction of ideas concerning those educational developments, the historian is always engaged in the epistemic reconstitution of reality. And if what the historian constructs of the past mirrors the historian's departing and organising analytic apparatuses, then a recalibration of those apparatuses holds a key for opening previously unfamiliar pluriversal domains that, while always there, had been obscured by a narrow epistemic aperture. Decoloniality identifies the task here as one of constant border-crossing.[113] In adopting different frames of reference and objects of inquiry, the historian of education is constantly crossing epistemic and historical borders that have coexisted not in chronological linearity but in interfluent complexity. Each border crossing constitutes a new locus, and new borders, all fluid and constantly reconfigured in the very act of their historicity.

[108]William Mpofu, 'Decoloniality as Travelling Theory: Or What Decoloniality is Not', Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research, presented August 7, 2017, https://wiser.wits.ac.za/system/files/seminar/Mpofu2017.pdf (accessed January 23, 2022).
[109]Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Walter Mignolo, 'On Pluriversality', *Walter Mignolo*, http://waltermignolo.com/on-pluriversality/ (accessed January 22, 2022).
[110]Kallaway, *The Changing Face,* 195, emphasis added.
[111]Lynn Mario T. de Souza, 'Foreword: A Decolonial Project', in *Language and Decoloniality in Higher Education: Reclaiming Voices from the South*, ed. Zannie Bock and Christopher Stroud (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), xiii–xxiii.
[112]Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Epistemic Freedom*, 2.
[113]Walter D. Mignolo, 'Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing: On (De)coloniality, Border Thinking and Epistemic Disobedience', *Postcolonial Studies* 14, no. 3 (2011): 273–83.

Historians of education in Africa can find in this border gnosis – both literally and figuratively – an invitation for acknowledgement (not inclusion) and for collaboration. While the academic, journal-article-publishing historian has much to learn about Africa's other education histories, it is noteworthy that some of what indigenous African historians and knowledge bearers know and transmit through cultural processes from one generation to another may never be legible to a western-trained (including African) historian. With careful observation and humility, however, their existence can be recognised. For academic journals interested in a more expansive coverage of the subject, a starting point might be to more proactively engage African academic historians of education in institutions across the continent. Much of what is published today comes from western academics and some Africans of European descent, and the publications of most African academic historians appear to flow with the stream of colonial education. A special issue of a journal that is thematically explicit about extending beyond colonial education historiography and unfettered intellectual control of African historians might produce worthy beginning outcomes.

To hint at the promise of such collaboration, the *African Journal of Historical Sciences in Education*, the journal of the History of Education Society of Nigeria, an affiliate of ISCHE (International Standing Committee for the History of Education), has recently been publishing themed issues on mainly current issues, which, while clearly not decolonial in approach, rarely deal explicitly with colonial education.[114] Even more importantly, the Africanity Scholars Network at the University of Nigeria Nsukka features a small group of budding Africanist intellectuals whose works traverse western and African ecologies of knowledge. Indeed, members of this network played pivotal roles in drawing external attention to Nsukka's iron-smelting belt and its cultural ecologies, the surviving archaeological artefacts of which bear eloquent testament to the diverse cultures, including educational practices, of that region today.[115] Much could be gained in tapping such intellectual communities to engage in historical inquiry that can build on and extend beyond the traditions of the Dike-era Ibadan School.[116]

It bears reiterating that what awaits the historian is not a petrified object of indigeneity out of which something genuinely and authentically African can be discovered. Africa has not only always been present, but it has also been present in interaction with others within and beyond, and the diverse contemporary manifestations of educational practices on the continent bear an imprint of what is autochthonously African and what is not, all immanently metamorphic.

An additional example of the contemporaneity of pluriversal African educational formations conveys the loaded political dynamics of appropriating these decolonial insights in the history of education in Africa. An 'illiterate' farmer, Yacouba

[114]For recent issues, see the *African Journal of Historical Sciences in Education* website, https://hoedson.org/?page_id=9 (accessed January 3, 2023).

[115]Chidozie S. Agu and Chukwuma C. Opata, 'Iron Technology and Political Power: Examples from the Iron Smelting Belt of Nsukka Area, Enugu State, South-Eastern Nigeria', *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, no. 9 (2012): 166–75; Chukwuma C. Opata and Pamela Eze-Uzomaka, 'Beyond Stereotypes: Gender and Politics in Iron Smelting Society of Lejja, Nigeria', *Asian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 1, no. 3 (2012): 39–49; Christian Chukwuma Opata, 'African Education and Cultural Belief Systems: Extrapolations from Igboland, Nigeria', in *The Palgrave Handbook of African Education and Indigenous Knowledge*, ed. Jamaine Abidogun and Toyin Falola (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 233–44.

[116]Paul E. Lovejoy, 'The Ibadan School of Historiography and its Critics', in *African Historiography: Essays in Honour of Jacob Ade Ajayi*, ed. Toyin Falola (Harlow: Longman, 1993), 195–202.

Sawadogo, from Gourga in the Yatenga region of northern Burkina Faso, recently gained international popularity with a documentary film and books to boot, for 'stopping the desert' by using an indigenous water-harvesting technique that successfully halted and reversed desertification processes aggravated by the severe droughts of the 1970s and 1980s.[117] The water-harvesting technique, Zaï or tessa, comprises 20- to 40-centimetre-wide semicircular holes (Zapelle) dug in rows during the dry season to trap water in preparation for the planting season. Sawadogo and other local farmers modified this traditional Zaï by introducing manures during the dry seasons, which attracted natural excavators like termites and other microbes that would break up the compacted soil underground to make room for stronger root systems. The success of Zaï in this context depended on this modest innovation. The popularity, however, was partly on account of the failure of donor-funded development projects, which, had they succeeded, would have purportedly locked Zaï in the backwaters of cultural antiquity.[118] With sustained colonial erosion of indigenous educational practices through which such agricultural techniques were transmitted to and modified by successive generations, it is conceivable that generations of young Africans are persuaded, by dint of the civilising mission chronology of progress, that their ancestors developed nothing of practical or intellectual worth to modern times.

Historians of education could take interest in the 'Market Days' educational outfit (as well as the economic, cultural and political entanglements, domestic and foreign) that sprang from this endeavour as much as in its ordinariness. That the confluence of climatological changes and accompanying economic crises that triggered major demographic changes (due to massive emigration and deaths) would collide with layered Islamic and Euro-American colonial encounters to mobilise indigenous technologies that would generate adaptive translocal solutions and endogenous educational processes appears remarkably human. To attempt to fit Sawadogo, his community and the Zaï-induced 'Market Days' educational development or other similarly incommensurable historical involution under a linear Eurocentric historiography loses this fundamentally human reality – in its complex, dynamic and indeterminate ubiquity. Like Zaï, local educational solutions engineered in response to ever-changing local contingencies dot the African landscape, and western-style formal schooling, though popular and consequential in state-centred historiography, is only one of its many and still unfolding episodes.

Conclusion

The case for appreciating Africa's education heritage beyond colonial interventions harbours a risk: it can elevate *episodic* historical understanding of imperialism over the *epic* to suggest that, if colonialism was indeed short-lived, its impacts must have been shallow and

[117]Cullen Gwin, *Yacouba Sawadogo: The Man Who Conquered the Desert* (Atlanta, GA: LearningIsland, 2017).
[118]Ana Duarte Rodrigues, 'From Pairidaea to Planet Garden: The Homo-Gardinus Against Desertification', in *Gardens and Human Agency in the Anthropocene*, ed. Maria Paula Diogo, Ana Simões, Ana Duarte Rodrigues and Davide Scarso (New York: Routledge, 2019), 95–111; Rosemary E. Agbor and Wele Elangwe, 'Indigenous Peoples and Agrobiodiversity in Africa', in *Environmental Resilience and Food Law: Agrobiodiversity and Agroecology*, ed. Gabriela Steier and Aberto Giulio Cianci (New York: CRC Press by Taylor & Francis, 2020).

transitional.[119] This argument, besides foisting a riposte to colonial critiques, offers little to historical understanding of education's role in current social arrangements. For instance, the growing recognition that imperial forces and influences, in addition to being short-lived, did not always flow from metropole to colony and that empire was messier than previously thought, can mask the territorial fixities and racialised configurations of knowledge hierarchies through which exclusion, deracination and exploitation remain operative in and beyond education. A different political commitment is necessary to go beyond this fractally recursive recrimination if historians prioritise genuine interest in historicising these rhizomatous hierarchies, or 'heterarchies' of power, to use Grosfoguel's coinage for the 'entanglement' or 'intersectionality' of 'multiple and heterogeneous global hierarchies . . . of sexual, political, epistemic, economic, spiritual, linguistic and racial forms of domination and exploitation where the racial/ethnic hierarchy of the European/non-European divide transversally reconfigures all of the other global power structures'.[120]

Thus, rather than abandon colonial education historiography, the invitation here is to historicise it within the broader arc of Africa's long-running histories that brought multiple civilisations into chequered contacts on one hand and the still unfolding heterarchical colonial power matrix that result from Europe's epic entanglements with Africa and elsewhere since the fifteenth century on the other. In the short term, this will recommit historians of education to investigating not only primeval exotics but also 'post-independence' imbrications of education with other manifestations of that matrix. Other topics of potential interest here include the lingering consequences of international political-economic interventionism (e.g. the infamous World Bank Structural Adjustment Programmes, SAPs) on the erosion of public schooling and shifts in other indigenous African educational institutions, the boom of privatisation and the resurgence of private mission schools, shifts in education as gendered processes, and the educational reconstitution of Africa's history (e.g. in the decolonial turn).

To offer two illustrative examples, the Igbo people of Southeastern Nigeria have a long history of entrepreneurial education, *ịmụ-ọrụ/ịmụ-ahịa* or more recently *ịgba-bọị*, founded on a counter-capitalist cultural sensibility of community accountability and communal well-being.[121] Family decisions regarding education investment always pit this entrepreneurial tradition, with its relative track record of success, against western formal schooling. What might historians uncover concerning the evolution of *ịmụ-ọrụ/ịmụ-ahịa* in comparison with formal schooling, say, before colonialism or in the SAPs' aftermath?

Additionally, while some historians were still arguing that Europeans did not impose European languages or education on the colonised but were invested in promoting indigenous languages, conceptual developments in applied linguistics make abundantly clear that the linguistic artefacts presented as indigenous are in essence colonial inventions, notwithstanding vocal advocacy for so-called mother-tongue-based multilingual education that promotes the use of 'indigenous' African languages as media of

[119]For a critique of this position, see Ali A. Mazrui, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage* (London: BBC Publication, 1986); Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 'Decoloniality as the Future of Africa', *History Compass* 13, no. 10 (2015): 485–96.

[120]Ramón Grosfoguel, 'The Epistemic Decolonial Turn: Beyond Political-Economy Paradigms', *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2/3 (2007): 217.

[121]Awele Achi and Francis Chukwuedo Achi, 'Mutual Aid Economy: Exploring the Locally Generated Venture Capital Approach in Igbo Business Industrial Clusters', in *Indigenous African Enterprise (Advanced Series in* Management, ed. Ogechi Adeola (Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing, 2020), 177–88.

instruction and progressive integration of European languages in education.[122] How might the historian of education help to uncover, through an exploration of these other African educational practices like *ịgba-bọị* or Zaï, genealogies of linguistic practices that account for the existence of (African) languages today as organically interdependent, dynamic and indeterminate *processes* that are distinct from the fixed objects of monolingual policies in formal schooling? Understanding languages as semiotic practices, as processes of a unique sort, unleashes a new epistemic framework through which the history of education can begin to reconstitute ideas of its primary object: education.

Although exciting, these are no mean tasks, as they require a reconfigured epistemic and methodological toolkit that is only possible through a 'teleological suspension of disciplinarity' to use Gordon's formulation, which can liberate the historian from prioritising methodological purity over the greater political purpose of historical inquiry.[123] Yet, the challenges pale when compared with the other conclusion that the above warrants: the impossibility of a comprehensive history of education in Africa as such. For if we were to heed Wainaina's counsel, the alternative to romanticising Africa with the familiar 'unparticularities' is to follow its heterogeneous historical intricacies and to embrace the broader geontological scope of education beyond our familiar Anthropocenic obsessions.[124]

Disclosure statement

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[122]Sinfree Makoni and Alastair Pennycook, eds., *Disinventing and Reconstituting Languages* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2007); Monica Heller and Bonnie S. McElhinny, *Language, Capitalism, Colonialism: Towards a Critical History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017); Adama Ouane and Christine Glanz, eds., *Optimising Learning, Education and Publishing in Africa: The Language Factor: A Review and Analysis of Theory and Practice in Mother-Tongue and Bilingual Education in sub-Saharan Africa* (Hamburg/Tunis Belvédère: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning [UIL] and Association for the Development of Education in Africa [ADEA], 2011); Desmond I. Odugu and Camille N. Lemieux, 'Transitional Multilingual Education Policies in Africa: Necessary Compromise or Strategic Impediment?', *Language and Education* 33, no. 3 (2019): 263–81.

[123]Lewis R. Gordon, *Disciplinary Decadence: Living Thought in Trying Times* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006); Lewis R. Gordon, *Freedom, Justice, and Decolonisation* (New York: Routledge, 2021).

[124]Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016); Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think: Towards an Anthropology Beyond the Human* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013).