

Online Article

Beyond the Colonial Meridian: Towards Historical Self-Grounding in African Historiography

“When will this independence end?”

a Congolese peasant asked, ... amid the reign of Mobuto Sese Seko.’

(Mamdani 2022: 14–15)

Introduction: The Trouble with a Successful Word

Few words in the contemporary humanities and social sciences carry as much moral and intellectual charge as ‘decolonise’. Curricula are to be decolonised. Archives, museums, universities, disciplines, methods, languages, canons and minds are all summoned to the work of decolonisation. The proliferation testifies to a real dissatisfaction. It reflects enduring inequalities in the production and certification of knowledge, the continued authority of intellectual traditions formed within imperial worlds, and the inadequacy of merely adding African material to conceptual frameworks whose questions were generated elsewhere. There is therefore no serious argument for returning to the complacencies of colonial scholarship.

The difficulty lies elsewhere. A concept can become ubiquitous precisely when it begins to lose discrimination. The more activities ‘decolonisation’ is made to

Ibrahim Abdullah

Department of History and
African Studies
Fourah Bay College
University of Sierra Leone

name, the less clearly it identifies a specific process. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang made one influential version of this objection from the context of settler colonialism, warning against turning decolonisation into a metaphor for any desirable reform (Tuck and Yang 2012). Olúfemi Táíwò has mounted a different critique from African philosophy, arguing that the contemporary expansion of decolonisation into a catch-all intellectual programme can understate African agency and treat provenance as destiny (Táíwò 2022). These interventions matter, but the problem can be pushed further.

The deeper issue is not simply that ‘decolonial’ has become fashionable. Fashion passes. The more consequential question is what

kind of historical intelligibility the fashion reproduces. If African thought is continually described as *precolonial*, *colonial*, *postcolonial*, *anticolonial* and *decolonial*, colonialism remains the grammatical centre of the sentence. It supplies the temporal coordinates and the epistemological antagonist. Even the language of escape can preserve the object from which one is trying to escape.

The argument advanced here is therefore not an argument against studying colonialism, nor against the serious traditions of scholarship grouped under the term decoloniality. It is an argument against granting colonialism an a priori right to organise African historical time and intellectual purpose. The task is to restrict its explanatory jurisdiction: to study colonial rule where it transformed social relations, and coloniality where the concept explains persistent structures, while refusing to make either the universal key to African experience.

The alternative proposed here is deliberately modest in name and demanding in practice: historical self-grounding. It does not describe a new fad, still less another ‘-ism’. It names a methodological disposition in which the historical movement of the societies under investigation generates the primary problems, temporal divisions and categories of explanation. External forces remain fully part of the story, but they enter as historical forces to be demonstrated rather than as automatic organisers of meaning. Such an approach, I suggest, is closer to the unfinished ambitions of an older African intellectual tradition than the current vocabulary sometimes acknowledges.

Genealogies and limits of decoloniality

The first requirement of a critique of the current decolonial turn is historical memory. Questions now presented as urgent problems of epistemic freedom did not begin with the recent institutional popularity of decolonisation. African intellectuals and liberation thinkers had already posed them with remarkable force by the middle decades of the twentieth century.

Patrice Lumumba’s last letter to his wife Pauline is often remembered for the declaration that ‘Africa will write its own history’. The sentence matters not because it promises a celebratory African narrative but because it relocates historical authorship. Lumumba contrasted the history produced in Brussels, Paris, Washington and the United Nations with a history produced in societies that had freed themselves from colonial domination (Lumumba 1960). His claim was inseparable from political struggle, but it exceeded political sovereignty. A people denied control over

the terms in which its past was narrated had not yet recovered the full capacity to appear as a subject of history.

Fanon radicalised the problem. The conclusion to *The Wretched of the Earth* is frequently reduced to its denunciation of Europe, but its more demanding injunction concerns invention. Fanon rejects ‘nauseating mimicry’, warns against turning newly independent societies into replicas of Europe and insists that new historical circumstances require ‘new concepts’ (Fanon 1961). The point is not intellectual isolation. Fanon does not propose forgetting European thought; he proposes refusing Europe as the compulsory measure of possibility. Freedom becomes intellectually substantive when formerly colonised peoples can generate responses not predetermined by imitation or permanent reaction.

Cabral brought the problem closer still to historical method. In ‘The Weapon of Theory’, he insisted that revolutionary theory had to emerge from a rigorous analysis of concrete social reality rather than from the mechanical transfer of formulas developed elsewhere (Cabral 1966). In ‘National Liberation and Culture’, he defined national liberation through the ‘inalienable right of every people to have their own history’ (Cabral 1970). This was not a doctrine of cultural purity. Cabral explicitly allowed positive accretions from the cultures of former oppressors and others. His concern was the restoration of a society’s capacity to develop through its own contradictions, productive forces, cultural struggles and political choices.

Historians were developing a related programme. Kenneth Onwuka Dike and the Ibadan genera-

tion challenged the assumption that African history became knowable only through European documentary archives. Their use and defence of oral traditions, their attention to African institutions and initiative, and their role in establishing African history as a professional field were not terminological gestures; they changed the evidentiary basis of historical research (Abdullah 2026; Afolayan 2026). J. F. Ade Ajayi famously treated colonialism as an episode rather than the organising totality of African history, emphasising continuities and transformations that exceeded the colonial interval (Ajayi 1969). Walter Rodney’s *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast* likewise sought to reconstruct African political and social dynamics while treating European traders as participants entering an already constituted historical field rather than as the agents who brought history into being (Rodney 1970).

These traditions were neither uniform nor beyond criticism. Nationalist historiography could privilege political elites and nation-building narratives; oral traditions could be used too confidently; anticolonial theory could itself generalise ‘Africa’ across profound social differences. The point is not to canonise an earlier generation. It is to recover the fact that the central problem—*how African societies become authors and producers of historical knowledge*—has a genealogy far older than the current academic vogue.

That recovery changes the question. Instead of asking whether contemporary scholarship has finally discovered the need to decolonise knowledge, one can ask why earlier African problematics of historical authorship, conceptual invention and methodological

reconstruction became sufficiently obscured that they could reappear under the sign of novelty. *The history of the decolonial turn must therefore include a history of forgetting.*

A serious critique must engage the strongest version of the position it questions. Contemporary decolonial scholarship is not simply a collection of slogans. Aníbal Quijano's concept of the 'coloniality of power' was developed to explain how racial classification, Eurocentric rationality, labour regimes and structures of authority could outlive the legal end of colonial government (Quijano 2000). The distinction between colonialism and coloniality made it possible to ask why formal independence did not automatically dissolve hierarchies constituted through conquest and the making of the modern world economy.

African scholars working within or alongside this tradition have extended the question to knowledge. Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, for example, defines epistemic freedom in terms of the capacity of African people to think, theorise, interpret and write from their own locations without being confined by Eurocentric hierarchies of knowledge (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018). Such work identifies genuine institutional and intellectual asymmetries. It also refuses the complacent assumption that independence dates mark clean epistemological ruptures.

The objection developed here does not deny those continuities. It concerns the point at which a powerful concept becomes a totalising disposition. Coloniality is most useful when it identifies a demonstrable historical structure: a pattern whose genealogy, mechanisms, reproduction and effects can be specified. It becomes less use-

ful when it operates as a presumptive explanation for whatever is unequal, hierarchical, alienating or externally derived in African life. At that point, colonialism acquires a paradoxical omnipotence. Nearly every present condition becomes its afterlife, and African history risks being flattened into a long encounter with Europe.

This produces three related dangers. First is causal inflation. Colonial conquest undoubtedly transformed African societies, but not every social hierarchy, political conflict, epistemological problem or institutional failure originated in colonial rule. African societies possessed histories of inequality, state formation, warfare, migration, slavery, gendered authority, religious change and commercial transformation before European conquest. Those histories continued to interact with colonial and global forces. To explain them adequately requires discrimination among causes, not a master category.

Second is temporal capture. If coloniality is taken to persist everywhere after colonial rule, and if everything before formal conquest is 'precolonial', colonialism becomes the temporal meridian from which the entire history is measured. The terms appear to mark succession; in fact, they organise attention. *The centuries or millennia before conquest become a preface, colonial rule becomes the decisive rupture, and everything afterwards becomes aftermath.*

Third is relational capture. An intellectual project defined permanently as decolonial remains constituted through the object it negates. Its aspiration is freedom, but its language can make freedom interminably relational: the colonised subject is forever undoing, refusing, unlearning, recovering,

provincialising or resisting colonial power. Negation is indispensable in conditions of domination; it is a poor permanent home for intellectual life.

The critique, then, is not that decolonial scholarship sees colonial power where none exists. It is that its most expansive versions can make colonial power the necessary background against which Africa remains intelligible. A vocabulary designed to displace Eurocentrism can, by making colonialism the indispensable explanatory referent, preserve the very centrality it seeks to contest.

Beyond the colonial meridian: Historical self-grounding

It is useful to give this practice/habit a provisional name: the colonial meridian. A meridian is a line from which positions are calculated. The colonial meridian describes the historiographical convention by which African time is repeatedly positioned in relation to colonial rule: precolonial, colonial, postcolonial. It also describes a parallel epistemological sequence: colonised knowledge, decolonisation, decolonial knowledge.

The problem is not that these words can never be useful. 'Colonial' is indispensable when referring to institutions, laws, economies and political structures created under colonial regimes. 'Postcolonial' can function as a simple chronological shorthand. 'Precolonial' can occasionally orient a reader. Difficulty begins when shorthand becomes explanation—when a relational label substitutes for the historical character of a period.

'Precolonial', for example, tells us principally what had not yet happened. It does not tell us whether the societies under discussion were

centralised kingdoms, small-scale political communities, commercial diasporas, frontier settlements, ritual confederacies, agrarian systems, mobile populations or combinations changing over time. Nor does it identify the transformations that differentiated one century from another. A thousand years of political change can disappear into a category whose only common property is that European conquest had not yet occurred.

The asymmetry becomes evident by comparison. European history is not normally organised as 'pre-French Revolutionary', 'French Revolutionary', and 'post-French Revolutionary' across all periods simply because the Revolution was transformative. Nor is all British history before industrialisation routinely classified as 'pre-industrial'. Transformative events acquire importance within histories already divided by many other processes. African history should enjoy the same analytical freedom.

The colonial meridian also shapes the questions scholars ask. If the basic sequence is already given, research gravitates towards origins of colonialism, experience under colonialism, resistance to colonialism, legacies of colonialism and decolonisation after colonialism. All are legitimate subjects. Together, however, they can create a closed circuit in which colonialism supplies both problem and periodisation.

Peripheralising the colonial meridian therefore means neither minimising conquest nor erasing its consequences. It means withdrawing colonialism's automatic jurisdiction over times and problems that require other explanations. Colonial rule must earn its explanatory importance in the same way

as any other historical process: by demonstrating what it changed, through which mechanisms, for whom, where and over what duration.

This shift also alters how one understands rupture and continuity. Ajayi's insistence that colonialism was an episode was provocative precisely because it challenged the tendency to treat conquest as the beginning of modern African time. Yet 'episode' should not become a formula for minimising violence or institutional transformation. The issue is empirical scale. Some processes were broken sharply; others were redirected; others persisted beneath new administrative forms; still others emerged from interactions that cannot be classified as either indigenous continuity or European imposition. The historian's task is to reconstruct those different temporalities rather than decide in advance that colonialism must be either everything or merely superficial.

If critique stops at exposing the colonial meridian, it remains negative. The more difficult task is to describe an alternative without manufacturing another fashionable doctrine. 'Historical self-grounding' is offered here as a working phrase rather than a new fad.

Historical self-grounding begins from a simple proposition: a society's history should be rendered intelligible primarily through the movement of its own historical problems, relations, contradictions, institutions and transformations. 'Own' does not mean culturally sealed or territorially isolated. No African society developed without interaction. Migration, commerce, ecological change, religious networks, warfare, long-distance exchange, Islam, the Atlantic econ-

omy, capitalism and imperialism all crossed boundaries and became internal to local histories. Self-grounding concerns the organisation of explanation, not the exclusion of external forces.

The first implication is that periodisation should be earned from transformations in the historical field. Changes in settlement, political authority, production, technology, demography, ecology, systems of exchange, religious institutions, social stratification, warfare, mobility and language may provide more meaningful divisions than the arrival or withdrawal of a colonial administration. Where conquest reorganises those structures, it will constitute a major periodising rupture. Where it does not, other chronologies may be more revealing.

The second implication is that concepts should be judged by explanatory adequacy rather than provenance. A concept does not become true because it is African, and it does not become suspect simply because it was first formulated in Europe. Cabral's refusal of both cultural inferiority and cultural purity remains instructive. Intellectual freedom includes appropriation: the capacity to take, translate, transform, discard and combine ideas according to the problems at hand. A society that can use only concepts certified as Indigenous is no freer than one compelled to use concepts certified elsewhere.

Third, evidence must be plural without becoming romantic. African historians fought hard to establish oral traditions as legitimate historical sources; archaeology, historical linguistics, material culture, environmental evidence and local knowledge have greatly enlarged what can be known. Yet no source becomes epistemically

innocent because it is Indigenous. Oral traditions can legitimise ruling lineages and suppress defeated groups; archaeological sequences can be overextended; linguistic reconstructions carry uncertainty; colonial archives preserve distortions but also information unavailable elsewhere. Historical self-grounding requires these evidentiary forms to interrogate one another.

Fourth, agency must include the power to make bad choices, create domination, reproduce inequality and destroy institutions. Restoring African agency cannot mean assigning creativity to Africans only when outcomes are admirable and colonial causation when outcomes are destructive. 'Their history: theirs to make and unmake' is analytically demanding precisely because it treats African societies as fully historical. They build and dismantle orders; appropriate and reject foreign practices; incorporate strangers; generate hierarchies; wage wars; reform institutions; forget, remember and invent traditions. Agency is not innocence.

Finally, historical self-grounding changes the location of theory. Africa should not appear merely as the empirical terrain on which concepts produced elsewhere are tested. Historical experience in African societies can generate concepts of wider analytical value. This is the strongest meaning of intellectual autonomy: not withdrawal from universal conversation but entry into it as a producer of categories rather than merely a supplier of cases.

This alternative therefore differs from both nativism and permanent decolonisation. Nativism seeks security in origins; permanent decolonisation remains secured to an antagonist. Historical self-ground-

ing asks a more ordinary but more radical question: what concepts are required to explain this history well?

Sierra Leone and an agenda for historical practice

Sierra Leone makes the colonial meridian unusually visible because the chronological disproportion is so large. Conventional narratives often take 1787 or 1792, the founding phases of the Sierra Leone settlement, or 1808, when the peninsula became a British Crown Colony, as practical points of departure. Other accounts privilege 1896 and the declaration of the Protectorate. Those dates are indispensable to the histories of Freetown, abolition, recaptive settlement, British imperial expansion and the territorial state. The problem arises when they become beginnings for the history of the geographical space and the peoples who inhabited it. Framed that way, Sierra Leone can appear exceptional: a place summoned into history by abolition, settlement and British rule. A longer and more regionally grounded chronology dissolves that exceptionalism. It places the societies of the Sierra Leone region within historical processes that were also unfolding across Upper Guinea and, in different forms, along much of the African coast.

Archaeology immediately unsettles the late eighteenth-century architecture. Christopher DeCorse notes evidence from Yengema Cave suggesting human occupation in Sierra Leone for at least the last 10,000 years (DeCorse 2015). M. H. Hill's earlier, explicitly tentative attempt at a cultural sequence proposed an archaeological horizon extending to roughly 10,000 BCE and argued that archaeology and linguistics could illuminate a past stretching over 10,000 to 20,000 years (Hill

1970). These are not grounds for pretending that every millennium is equally documented, nor do they authorise a single seamless national narrative projected backwards from the present. They establish something more basic: the historical field is vastly older than the documentary chronology created by Atlantic contact, Freetown or colonial administration. The problem is therefore not simply to move the conventional beginning backwards, but to construct periodisations capable of registering different scales of social transformation across that much longer span.

Walter Rodney provides an indispensable intermediate scale between this deep human past and the familiar late eighteenth-century beginning. *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast, 1545–1800*, first completed as a doctoral thesis in 1966 and published as a book in 1970, deliberately takes as its field the coast from the Gambia to Cape Mount, with Sierra Leone as its southern portion. Its opening date, 1545, is tied not to a European founding but to the Mane invasions and the political reordering associated with them. Rodney's stated purpose was to reconstruct the society of the mid-sixteenth-century coast before profound European influence and then to analyse the external forces acting upon it, including pressures from the hinterland and adjacent African regions as well as European commerce. Most significantly, European activity was to be understood in relation to African rulers, African peoples and African polities rather than as the autonomous motor of the narrative (Rodney 1970). Rodney therefore does more than push Sierra Leonean history three centuries behind 1792. He changes the unit of analysis and the direction of explanation.

At the same time, Rodney's 1545 should not be converted into another privileged origin. Portuguese navigators had reached the Upper Guinea coast during the fifteenth century, and Atlantic commerce, including the trade in enslaved people, was already developing before the Mane invasions. The significance of Rodney's chronology is therefore not that it recovers a pristine, pre-mercantile Sierra Leone. It reveals an overlap: older African political formations, systems of exchange, migrations and regional rivalries continued to operate while new Atlantic commercial relationships were being inserted into them. That overlap is precisely what a history beginning in 1792 or 1808 largely obscures. It permits us to ask how societies already possessing political structures and regional connections selected, resisted, redirected and were eventually transformed by new commercial forces. The Atlantic world appears as a historical formation emerging through interaction with African worlds rather than as the stage on which previously static societies suddenly become visible.

Rodney's regional frame also removes any temptation to treat Sierra Leone as an isolated historiographical anomaly. He explicitly objected to projecting the colonial partition of Upper Guinea backwards into centuries when those frontiers had no historical validity. His geographical field cuts across the later territories of Senegal, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia, and it follows movements and political relations that did the same. Temne, Bullom and Sherbro communities, Susu- and Mande-speaking populations, coastal trading settlements, hinterland powers and shifting political confederations belonged to

overlapping fields of interaction rather than to sealed national containers. Once Sierra Leone is read through that Upper Guinea history, the abolitionist settlement is no longer the event that separates it from the rest of Africa. It becomes one late and highly consequential development within a regional history whose political and commercial trajectories long preceded Freetown.

The larger continental implication is equally important. Across substantial parts of the African coast, the arrival of European navigators is occasionally treated—explicitly in older scholarship and implicitly in the organisation of archives—as the point at which societies 'enter history'. Yet Europeans encountered political worlds that had histories of their own: the Jolof and successor states in Senegambia, Benin in the Bight of Benin, Kongo in west-central Africa and many other kingdoms, confederations, towns and less centralised societies whose institutions were not created by European contact. John Thornton's account of the early Atlantic world similarly emphasises that African political and institutional structures and African economic developments shaped the commerce that followed; Africans were participants in the making of the Atlantic system, not peoples awaiting incorporation into 'history' (Thornton 1998). The thickening of European written documentation after contact must therefore be distinguished from the beginning of historical existence. Coastal societies entered European archives; they did not enter history.

Seen this way, Sierra Leone becomes a particularly clear instance of a general African historiographical problem rather than an exception. Its history can be approached

through several nested scales: a deep history of human occupation and environmental adaptation; histories of settlement, technology, migration, language, political formation and regional exchange; the transformations of Upper Guinea from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century as Atlantic commerce intensified; and, much later, the abolitionist, colonial and territorial-state projects associated with 1792, 1808 and 1896. None of these scales supplies an absolute beginning. Rodney's 1545 is a powerful hinge because it makes an African political transformation analytically visible, just as archaeology pushes the inquiry far beyond the documentary horizon, but neither should become a new zero point.

What would it mean to take this argument beyond historiographical criticism? The first task is to reconstruct chronologies whose major divisions are not given in advance. This requires research programmes designed around social transformations rather than around the availability of European archives. Archaeology becomes especially important where the documentary record is late, but the objective is not to replace one privileged source with another. The objective is to create evidentiary conversations capable of reaching beyond the temporal limits of any single archive.

A second task is conceptual. Historians should become more explicit about why a period deserves its name. Labels such as 'precolonial' often conceal heterogeneous formations because they require no account of what unifies the period. A stronger periodisation states the process it is trying to capture and remains open to revision when new evidence changes the sequence. This may produce regionally dif-

ferentiated chronologies rather than a single national timetable. That should be regarded as analytical gain rather than inconvenience.

Third, the history of African historiography itself requires rewriting. The present popularity of decolonial vocabulary can make earlier African intellectual work look like preliminary material for a theory finally articulated elsewhere. The direction of genealogy should be reopened. Fanon and Cabral need not be recruited as honorary founders of every contemporary decolonial claim; neither should Dike, Ajayi, Rodney or the Ibadan and Dar es Salaam traditions be treated as superseded nationalist stages. Their arguments should be read as independent interventions whose questions may expose limitations in current scholarship.

Fourth, the institutional politics of knowledge needs more exact language. There are real inequalities in publishing, archives, funding, academic prestige, language and curricular authority. Calling them all 'coloniality', however, can obscure the mechanisms through which each operates. Intellectual critique becomes stronger when it can specify whether a problem is caused by market concentration, language hierarchy, unequal research finance, state policy, disciplinary convention, institutional inheritance or some combination. Naming mechanisms is more useful than invoking a total atmosphere.

Fifth, the alternative must resist a new authenticity test. African scholarship should be free to use Marx, Weber, Foucault, Quijano, Fanon, Cabral, oral theory, archaeology, political economy or any other conceptual resource that clarifies a problem. The relevant question is not 'Where did this concept

originate?' but 'What does it reveal, what does it conceal and how must it be transformed here?' Appropriation is one of the ordinary powers of intellectual life.

Finally, the goal should be a scholarship that can eventually dispense with the adjective 'decolonial' because intellectual autonomy has ceased to require permanent announcement. This is not a prediction that colonial histories or their effects will disappear. It is a criterion of maturity. A liberation vocabulary that can never imagine a condition in which liberation no longer supplies the compulsory name of thought risks converting a transition into an identity.

The agenda, then, is not to found 'post-decolonial studies'. That would reproduce the very habit being criticised: another stage named by its relation to decolonisation. The more consequential ambition is to normalise a practice in which African histories can set problems, formulate categories and organise time without seeking permission from either colonial or anticolonial reference points.

Conclusion: When decolonisation is no longer the name of freedom

The contemporary decolonial turn has performed a valuable service by refusing the fiction that formal independence automatically liberated knowledge. Yet its very success has produced an intellectual temptation: to make coloniality the master explanation of African historical experience and decolonisation the permanent description of intellectual virtue. *The result can be a strange continuity. Colonialism remains central when it is being defended, central when it is being resisted, and central when it is being deconstructed.*

The older African problematics considered here suggest a way beyond that circle. Lumumba's insistence that Africa would write its own history was a claim to authorship. Fanon's demand for invention rejected both imitation and sterile negation. Cabral located liberation in the recovery of a people's historical process and required theory to be accountable to concrete reality. Dike, Ajayi, Rodney and their contemporaries changed the sources, subjects and scale through which African history could be written. None supplies a complete programme for the present. Together, however, they remind us that epistemic freedom was never simply a matter of replacing European voices with African ones. It concerned the capacity to generate problems, evidence, concepts and futures from the movement of historical life itself.

Historical self-grounding names that capacity without pretending to resolve it. It asks that colonialism be treated as a historical force rather than a universal coordinate; that concepts be judged by explanatory power rather than birthplace; that African societies be credited with the full, morally ambiguous agency of making and unmaking their worlds; and that their histories be periodised by transformations that arise from the evidence.

Sierra Leone makes the challenge concrete. A human history extending at least ten millennia cannot be satisfactorily organised as an antechamber to 1792, 1808 or 1896. Rodney's Upper Guinea framework already showed how much is recovered when the lens is moved back to the sixteenth century and outward beyond colonial borders: Sierra Leone reappears within a regional African history of political formations, migrations, commerce

and conflict rather than as an abolitionist exception. Archaeology then pushes the problem deeper still. These dates must find their place within the history; the history should not be forced to find its place around those dates. The same confusion between entry into European documentation and entry into history has shaped narratives across much of coastal Africa, making the Sierra Leone case less an exception than a particularly revealing instance of a continental historiographical problem.

The point is not to erase colonialism. It is to erase its privilege as the compulsory meridian of African time. Nor is the point to replace decoloniality with a new orthodoxy. The most successful outcome would be more ordinary and more difficult: a historiography confident enough to investigate the past without continually naming its freedom in relation to Europe.

The intellectual task after the decolonial turn may therefore be stated simply. It is not to decolonise everything. It is to create the conditions in which decolonisation no longer has to be the name of thinking freely.

References

- Abdullah, I. 2026. 'Walter Rodney and the Unclaimed Past: Sierra Leone Historiography's Refusal of a Radical Inheritance', *CODESRIA Bulletin Online*, no. 5, June.
- Adeboye, O. 2015. 'J. F. Ade Ajayi, 1929–2014', *Africa*, vol. 85, no. 4, pp. 742–748.
- Afolayan, F. 2026. 'The Ibadan School of History', *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ajayi, J. F. Ade. 1969. 'Colonialism: An Episode in African History', in Gann, L. H. and Duignan, P. eds. *Colonialism in Africa, 1870–1960*, Vol. 1, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 497–509.
- Cabral, A. 1966. 'The Weapon of Theory'. Address to the First Tricontinental Conference, Havana.
- Cabral, A. 1970. 'National Liberation and Culture'. Eduardo Mondlane Memorial Lecture, Syracuse University.
- DeCorse, C. R. 2015. 'Sierra Leone in the Atlantic World: Concepts, Contours and Exchange', *Atlantic Studies*, vol. 12, no. 3, pp. 296–316. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14788810.2015.1062667>.
- Fanon, F. 1961. *Les damnés de la terre*. Paris: François Maspero. English translation: *The Wretched of the Earth*.
- Hill, M. H. 1970. 'Towards a Culture Sequence for Southern Sierra Leone', *Africana Research Bulletin*, vol. 1, pp. 3–12.
- Lumumba, P. 1960. 'Last Letter to Pauline Lumumba,' Thysville Prison, December.
- Mamdani, M. 2022. *Neither Settler nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities*. Belknap: Harvard University Press.
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. 2018. *Epistemic Freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and Decolonization*. London: Routledge.
- Quijano, A. 2000. 'Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America', *International Sociology*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 215–232. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580900015002005>.
- Rodney, W. 1970. *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast, 1545–1800*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Thornton, J. 1998. *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1800*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Táíwò, O. 2022. *Against Decolonisation: Taking African Agency Seriously*. London: Hurst.
- Táíwò, O. 2023. The idea of a 'pre-colonial Africa' is vacuous and wrong. Aeon, 13 January. <https://aeon.co/users/olufmi-taiwo-2>.
- Tuck, W., and Yang, K., W., 2012. 'Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor.' *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 1–40.