

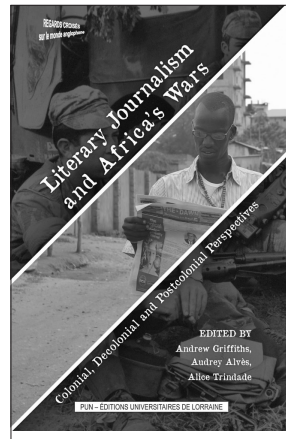
Looking at Africa's Wars

Literary Journalism and Africa's Wars: Colonial, Decolonial and Postcolonial Perspectives
 Edited by Andrew Griffiths, Audrey Alvès, and Alice Trindade. ReportAGES Series,
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“War is either a failure to communicate or the most direct expression possible.”
 Charles Bernstein, “War Stories” (2003)

The second volume of the ReportAGES series, this collection of essays presents examples of literary journalism from Europe (England, France, Poland, Portugal, and Spain) and the United States that cover several wars and conflicts of (de)colonization which took place in Africa from the 1860s to the 1990s. The primary sources selected, as well as the essays exploring them, are culturally, linguistically, and politically complex in their different ways of looking at Africa's wars, pondering the impact of literary journalism on war reporting in different countries while allowing us to observe how discourses about Africa have changed over time.



With a thoughtful introduction by John S. Bak and Andrew Griffiths, the book comprises eight chapters, each providing an extract from a literary journalistic source focusing on a specific war, followed by a brief (yet comprehensive) contextual gloss and a scholarly essay. The primary sources contain a diversity of voices and perspectives—some of them comparatively unknown—that draw on different traditions and authors who represent them. While the original excerpts are presented both in their native language and in English, the essays are multilingual, ranging from English to French and Portuguese. Besides reflecting the diversity of ReportAGES, which is a research project that combines the efforts of several international partners, the inclusion of different languages reflects an editorial effort to “engage with the greatest possible diversity of perspectives,” as Griffiths writes in the introduction (4). Though granting diversity and coherence to the volume, this multilingualism hinders access to some of the essays, which limits somewhat the possibilities of a fruitful dialogue between readers and scholars.

Starting from war reportage, *Literary Journalism and Africa's Wars* stands at the crossroads of history, journalism, and literature, addressing from multiple angles the

complex intersections between war, language, and power. Indeed, several primary sources take a critical stance on the political and cultural structures of their time, questioning the logic of the dominant colonial discourse pervading them by exposing the asymmetries it creates and supports. Chapter 1, for instance, focuses on Henry Morton Stanley, a Welsh-American explorer, writer, and journalist, who, after being sent in 1868 by the *New York Herald* to cover a British campaign to release European hostages in Abyssinia, voiced his disapproval of the attitude of British officials with regards to having African servants. As Andrew Griffiths observes in his essay, Stanley was very critical of the sense of entitlement displayed by the British, defining “himself in opposition to this privileged Other” (32). Chapter 5 illustrates the critical positioning against dominant structures that Frederick Forsyth and Kurt Vonnegut took in their writings on the Nigerian Civil War (1967–70), condemning the policy followed by the United Kingdom and the United States in this conflict. As highlighted by Cristopher Griffin in his comparative analysis, though coming from different backgrounds, these authors had a similar style, using techniques of literary journalism, namely the clear presence of a “point of view,” to convey a personal perspective that criticized British and U.S. policies in Biafra, hence exemplifying the use of “literary journalism as a medium of resistance in a conflict that marked both authors profoundly” (142).

Still in the realm of power and language, while certain texts project an authorial voice that condemns the dominant structures of their time, other writings illustrate how this voice can be muffled by the political power through mechanisms of control such as censorship. Focusing on the Spanish-Moroccan War, chapters 2 and 3 present different strategies of working around censorship, showing photography and literature as an alternative way of telling the truth about the horrors of war that were meant to be hidden from Spanish readers. While Juan Galindo and Antonio Naranjo explore how *La Unión Ilustrada*, a graphic magazine founded in 1909, resorted to “literary photojournalism” in a way that countered its neutral editorial line, José Maneiro’s comparative reading of three different perspectives on the Rif War (1920–27)—those of José Díaz Fernández, Ramón J. Sender, and Arturo Barea Ogazón—emphasizes how literature stood as an alternative to censored journalism by conveying a more accurate portrait of the violence and cruelty of war.

Censorship is also tackled in chapter 4, addressing the early days of the Angolan wars and their coverage in the Portuguese newspaper *Diário de Notícias*. After providing a detailed historical background of this conflict, Alice Trindade discusses the control exerted on mainstream press at the time, forced by censorship to convey the official discourse of *Estado Novo*. By looking more specifically at writings by Martinho Simões, Trindade argues that, as a consequence of such pressures, new strategies of representing war—stylistically aligned with literary journalism—emerged, namely the use of cinematic imagery from movies on World War II, which were familiar to the Portuguese audience, to represent a foreign reality in a way that was both apolitical (thus safe) and closer to the reader’s understanding.

This way, Trindade points out, literary journalism played an important role in recreating a vision of Africa for a non-African audience, bridging the epistemic gap

between Europe and the so-called “dark continent.” The use of language to bridge this gap is also addressed in chapter 8, where Ivan Gros analyzes several articles from *Le Monde* that cover wars in Africa from 1948 to the present time, and argues that French journalists created “metaphors of invention” so that readers could “see the invisible and make sense of the unintelligible” (208). In addition to granting access to the unfamiliar, these metaphors of invention also allowed verbalizing the extreme experience of war, an issue that is very much present in other texts. In chapter 6, for instance, Aleksandra Wiktorowska examines five different works by the Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuściński, written about several wars and conflicts in Africa, in order to illustrate how the author’s style became increasingly personal and autobiographical when translating the lived experience of war into words, merging different areas (history, journalism, philosophy, sociology, and anthropology) in what Wiktorowska calls “integrating reportage.” The use of individual testimony to verbalize the violence of war is also observed in chapter 7, that focuses on Philip Gourevitch’s account of the Rwanda Massacre in 1994. While exploring the way literary journalism uses history and transforms it into a verbal representation of extreme events, Juan Domingues looks at Gourevitch’s incorporation of the voices of those who survived the massacre, weaving a personal, impactful, and multivocal testimony that guides the author in telling these events.

As a whole, this volume outlines the academic field of literary journalism by clearly demarcating it (i.e., arguing why specific texts fit into this category) and by projecting a rich constellation of writers and scholars (Norman Sims, Tom Wolfe, among others) capable of upholding it. In fact, there is a systematic theoretical framing of literary journalism in the essays, presenting several definitions and different traditions (European and North American), pinpointing its style and constitutive aspects, and examining how its liminal position blurs the lines between objectivity and subjectivity, journalistic accuracy, and authorial voice.

Though a solid framing of literary journalism is provided, theoretical aspects related to colonialism and postcolonialism could have been further explored in dialogue with the primary sources. The issues rightfully raised by Griffiths in the introduction, namely the problematic of representing the Other, the fine line between “giving voice to” and “speaking for,” among others, could have been furthered in some of the essays, especially where the work of seminal authors such as Frantz Fanon and Edward Said is mentioned but not compellingly aligned with the primary texts.

To conclude, the volume fully meets the goals set by ReportAGES, as it offers an overview of literary journalism on an international scale while exploring how it affects our understanding of war and its manifold impacts in personal and political terms. In a specifically academic scope, this collection is well suited for its target audience (students and scholars interested in literary journalism and war reportage), given the diversity of the primary sources, the depth of the historical and theoretical background that supports the analyses in the essays, and the different research methodologies put forth. In the wider context of war reportage, this collection lets us ponder the relationship between war and language, touching upon “the collective memory of what it means to be human—or inhuman,” as Bak writes in the introduc-

tion (ix). In a way, war reporting shows humanity at its worst, in its ability to make war, and at its best, in its ability to endure and make language, which somehow echoes Toni Morrison's well-known statement at her Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech, in 1993: "We die. That may be the meaning of life. But we do language. That may be the measure of our lives."