

**César Braga-Pinto, Mendonça, Fátima.** *João Albasini e as luzes de Nwanzengele: Jornalismo e política em Moçambique, 1908-1922*. Maputo: Alcance Editores, 2014. Illustrations. 414 pp. \$34.00 (paper)

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The book *João Albasini e as luzes de Nwanzengele: Jornalismo e política em Moçambique, 1908-1922* (translated as João Albasini and the lights of twilight: journalism and politics in Mozambique, 1908-1922) was published in 2014. [1] However, the year 2017 is an appropriate time to review this text. Between 2014 and 2017, the nation of Mozambique, the focus of the text, experienced great political and economic transformation and at times, upheaval. For the third time in its nascent history as an independent nation, Mozambique held democratic elections. The political party Frente da Libertação de Moçambique (Frelimo), which has remained in power for forty years since Mozambique's independence, declared victory. However, opposition parties like the Mozambican National Resistance (Renamo) expanded their presence in the national parliament and at the provincial level. Following the election, members of Frelimo found themselves confronting questions about their legitimacy and claim to power from Renamo, a political movement that Frelimo holds responsible for the postindependence war (1975-92). Renamo used the election results to challenge the premise of the 1992 Rome Peace Accords that ended the war, thereby fueling rumors of the possible secession of provinces under Renamo's control. At the same time, Mozambique's economic fortunes rapidly

changed from being on the cusp of a mineral resource boom to finding itself unable to pay its financial debts due to bad business deals. Journalists have either faced prosecution or found their lives threatened for any reporting that criticized the party in power or aided the efforts of the opposition. Reading *João Albasini and the Lights of Twilight: Journalism and Politics in Mozambique, 1908-1922* is a powerful reminder that recent historical developments in Mozambique are part of longer and extended histories of territorialism, political activism, and journalism that date back to the early twentieth century and involve other historical actors, like the nations of South Africa and Portugal.

César Braga-Pinto and Fátima Mendonça's co-authored and co-edited text offers insight into the early origins of the press in Mozambique and explores the historical processes and political discourses of the early twentieth century that would inevitably influence Mozambique's history as a colony of Portugal, its path to independence, and its postindependence development. At the center of the text, which includes two introductory and contextualizing essays, are the actual *cronicas*, the columns or chronicles, written and published by the journalist and activist João Albasini. The life and work of Albasini (1876-1922) spanned critical phases of Mozambique's standing as a

colony of Portugal and in the development of the press. Between Albasini's birth and death, migrants arrived in Mozambique from Portugal and the social and political landscape for nonwhite and native populations changed. Social organizations like *Gremio Africano* de Lourenço Marques opened while Albasini and his brother José founded the newspaper *O Africano*, which they sold in 1918 before establishing *O Brado Africano* in 1919. Albasini used these press publications as platforms to demand "civil rights for Africans" and as a result became famous for his controversial and manifesto-like editorials. Due to illness, he traveled in 1919 to Portugal, the birthplace of his father, in order to seek medical treatment. There, he formed a relation with the *Liga Africana*, through which he met the Angolan Dr. José de Margalhões, who was a supporter of Pan-Africanism. At this juncture, he also drafted writings that argued for the end of the 1917 Assimilation Law, racial discrimination, forced labor, and the expropriation of territories (p. 43). He also managed to publish in *O Combate*, the publication of the Portuguese Socialist Party. Upon returning to Mozambique, he unsuccessfully ran for the position of deputy of Parliament as a representative of Mozambique. Before his death in 1922, Albasini submitted requests to join the Legislative Council of Mozambique, which were denied by the high commissioner. The book, which includes an introductory essay by each co-author, offers insight into the formation of the press in Mozambique, the life of Albasini, and an opportunity to explore firsthand the editorials and chronicles that he published during his brief life. The aim of this collaborative editorial project, according to its co-authors, is to "to offer elements for the study and reviving of the work of João Albasini within the political, social, and literary history of the country [Mozambique] and all the colonial context[s] and of Pan-Africanism of the first half of the twentieth century" (p. 13).

Activism conducted by nonwhite populations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth cen-

turies served as the foundation for the development of the press in Mozambique over the course of Portugal's rule until 1975. In her essay titled "The Ideological Conflicts in the Press in Mozambique," the literary scholar Fatima Mendonça notes how populations living in Northern Mozambique, areas like present-day Quelimane and Ilha de Moçambique, produced the first news journals, such as *O Progresso*, *África Oriental*, and *Journal de Moçambique*. These publications displayed popular opinions ranging from support for racial difference as the premise of colonial rule to criticism of "corrupt" and "arbitrary" government officials. A particular ideological shift from liberalism to a "proto-nationalist socialism" started in the late nineteenth century and carried over into the early twentieth century.[2] Mendonça perceptively attributes this transformation in political ideologies to the law of assimilation instituted by Portugal (p. 22). According to Mendonça, the intent of the law was to create a nonwhite class that served the interest of Portugal. Instead, the result was a nonwhite literate class that actively protested and resisted Portugal's policies. Furthermore, the proliferation of journals in this period, made possible by acts of writing, reading, and speaking, produced a type of "light" that allowed readers and authors to confront, challenge, and adapt Western political and sociocultural thought. Mendonça also argues that after the founding of *O Brado Africano* and after the deaths of the Albasini brothers, journalism entered a new phase. In fact, as Portugal attempted to strengthen and consolidate its control over Mozambique, the local state under its direction actively printed its own news and monitored the activities of journalists. Much of the media landscape in Mozambique developed along the lines of pro- and anticolonialism, leading Portugal to authorize the prosecution of journalists and to obtain financial ownership of all newspapers in order to suppress any political opposition. As a result, these struggles over the control of the press and freedoms of the press acted as the backdrop against which urban popula-

tions came to understand Portugal's rule of Mozambique and their position within colonialism.

The development of the press in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Mozambique facilitated the emergence of a prominent and influential literary movement. Before the publication of *O Africano*, many English- and French-language newspapers circulated in Mozambique. *O Africano* represented the first journal published in Portuguese as well as local languages like Ronga and Zulu.[3] While language determined readership, the newspaper format allowed for the publication of different literary pieces. Newspaper writers organized their articles together and even published them as books. Braga-Pinto's essay, "João Albasini and a Cross-Eyed Look at *O Africano*," suggests that these individual stories, before their publication as book, resulted in local readers recognizing journalists as literary writers. The printed books (not dissimilar from the text reviewed here) also provide insight into the different editorial and writing techniques adopted by writers like Albasini. The writing personalities and approaches deployed by Albasini are of particular interest to Braga-Pinto.

Albasini often abandoned his own family name when writing. As a result, Braga-Pinto studies and ultimately identifies some of Albasini's unsigned writings through their tone and typographical errors. In editorials on topics ranging from native education to the financing of colonial projects, Albasini was of the ideological opinion that the legitimacy and advancement of settler populations happened at the expense of locals like himself and other nonwhites. Braga notes how it is easy to criticize Albasini for using words like "nonassimilated blacks," but Braga claims that such words were part of a rhetorical strategy to comment on the very capacity of Portugal "to civilize." Albasini's views were not without controversy. In fact, some of his opinions can easily give the impression that he was in favor of colonialism

under Portugal. Nonetheless, the ambiguity and uncertainty of Albasini's desired readership and his use of the pseudonyms Chico das Pegas (after 1913) and João das Regras (1911-15) served to highlight the multiple and contrasting perspectives that existed at any given point in time within Mozambican society. For example, Chico das Pegas was a cattle farmer who was supposedly perceptive of the cultures and practices of nonwhite populations, and João das Regras was an old settler rooted in notions of progressivism and civilization (p. 63). Braga-Pinto also draws readers' attention to Albasini's decision to start his story *in medias res* and his use of a discursive language that registered as "apocalyptic of the present" (i.e., that civilization efforts adopted by Portugal had brought the end but one that was not desired, and not good) (pp. 52-53).

The editors and co-authors leave the readers to explore the breadth, complexity, and evolution of Albasini's writings by dividing them into sections and subsections that span the course of his career, global events like World War I, and developments in his personal life (i.e., his relocation to Portugal and later return to Mozambique). As a reader, I was particularly struck not only by the range of topics that Albasini addressed but also by the very ways in which Albasini's analysis suggested that Mozambique and the readership he cultivated were not far removed from global historical events in Europe and Africa. Albasini displayed an acute sensitivity through his topics and the questions he posed to discuss structural complications related to the system Portugal instituted in Mozambique as well as to the ways in which such systems penetrated daily life. At one point, Albasini highlighted what it was like for workers to move across the border between Mozambique and South Africa in addition to native populations' use of identification documents. Albasini's commentary on race is extremely profound when one recognizes that he attempted to speak to marginalized black populations as somebody who Portugal classified as "assimilated." His treatment

of race is especially powerful when considering how Albasini argued for the advancement of nonassimilated populations and how his critique of the colonial system was not a question of morality but instead one about the structural capacity of the implemented system to institute change. Such ideological positions adopted by Albasini and the debates that ensued go to the heart of long-standing questions related to international development aid and social welfare programs.

The reviewed book remains untranslated from Portuguese, which conceivably restricts its readership to the Lusophone world. The University of Lisbon's Centre of Lusophone and European Literature and Culture first published this book in 2012, and the 2014 re-publication served to benefit audiences located in Mozambique. Within the field of Lusophone studies, this book will appeal to audiences with interests in Africa, critical race theory, histories of colonialism, media studies, or nationalist movements. However, the book's message is much larger than the restrictions imposed by the Portuguese language.

It is hard to imagine a world without social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, which have fundamentally given new license to political expression and mobilization along with new opportunities for governing institutions and their leaders to defend themselves in the wake of critique. Nevertheless, the journals that Albasini founded and wrote for were the social media through which people in Portugal and Mozambique at the time learned about election results, newly adopted political reforms, and the experiences of other segments of the population. The merits of the book lie in the introductory essays, which provide an interpretative guide to Albasini's writings, and the unique opportunity the co-authors present readers to explore and engage freely with these diverse articles. The text is as much about Albasini as it is about the conceptual and methodological approaches adopted by the co-authors and co-editors to investigate the com-

plexities of this often forgotten early colonial history. Ultimately, this comprehensive volume illustrates the transformative power of the practices of reading, writing, and journalism, all historical acts that are bigger than the present moment and that have presented marginalized literate and nonliterate groups platforms for activism. Appreciation of João Albasini's writings offers hope that institutions such as the press have longer histories that equip them to facilitate social commentary and activism amid political upheaval and state reformation.

#### Notes

[1]. *Nwandzengele* is actually not a Portuguese word but rather Ronga, a language local to Mozambique. The word can be translated as either "twilight" or "dawn."

[2]. Here it is important to note that the definitions of "liberalism" and "socialism" that the co-authors believe different newspapers promoted. In many ways, people in this period who subscribed to views considered socialist took inspiration from trade unions that previously caused disruption in Portugal. They also contested enforced racial divisions, contending that they "compartmentalized" the labor force. Premised on notions of the "universal man," liberalism in this historical context acknowledged the failures of Western civilization projects and other forms of social and political organization. For more, see Mendonça, "The Ideological Conflicts in the Press in Mozambique," 18-22.

[3]. For a brief period, *O Africano* distributed copies to miners working in South Africa. This circulation was one reason editors printed text in Zulu, a language spoken in South Africa.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-luso-africa>

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