

Chapter 9

From S.E.K. Mqhayi to Dumile Feni: By Way of Arthur A. Schomburg

ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on two creative intellectuals, S.E.K. Mqhayi and Dumile Feni, who, despite living in different eras and practicing different art forms, were both affected by colonialism's "cultural bomb." Drawing on Arthur A. Schomburg's idea that understanding African history is essential for understanding the present and future of Black people, the chapter explores how both Mqhayi and Feni resisted the notion that African people have no history or intellectual contributions. The chapter examines how these two figures used their creativity to challenge colonialism and reimagine African history as a space for resistance, memory, and reclaiming African identity. Ultimately, the chapter questions the role of African history in the decolonization process.

INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS HISTORY?

The word 'history' depicts the impression of a point of departure, suggests the idea of moving from one point to another, and gives the horizon of the trajectory – a perspective of the past. From this perspective of the trajectory, things can be different because they are viewed from a different position – the present. History is thus a trajectory of the future perceived in the present. What was once the future, in the present becomes the past – a history of the present and the future. Therefore, if history is a story of the past in the present, and the present is the history of the future in the making, then history is something worthy of interrogation in the present for the future. There must be history for humanity – without history, there is no humanity. However, the mutual understanding of history and the human subject has imposed

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-8716-7.ch009

a division, suggesting that a human being can indeed be without history. After all, having no history means having no ontological genealogy, trajectory, and horizon to make a stand as a full human being. History is a narrative of where something or someone has been. It tells where a person comes from, where the person is and where they must go. In this sense, history becomes a navigation system informing the human path. The conception of history has to do with the being and non-being of the human subject. The being completed by history – a human subject who is authoritative, the human *in toto* – is the one that history embodies as the victor and master of the world, who controls what history means, as opposed to the non-being who is empty and inferior. Therefore, history is not a free signifier but a defined and defining narrative. Wrestling with history is questioning the past.

First, it is important to ask: *What is the meaning of history regarding the African subject? Why history now, during the moment of decolonisation and decentralisation? What does it mean to rethink history? Is it that the past and the present are the same? Or, put differently, what is history in the matrix of modernity and coloniality?* Various questions are worth exploring about history in the realm of blackness and whiteness, the past and the present, the human and the non-human. In addition, there are limitless questions worth considering about who is human and who is not according to the colonial system.

Second, regarding the questions posed, it is important to understand that history defines the human subject in the modern world. Scientific explanations, political ideologies, institutional policies, and colonial infrastructures push the indigenous cultures behind European systems and support the idea of the human subject as defined by history. The focus here is not on the formation of history and its chronological development but on its meaning to the ontological formation and the definition of the human subject. The concealing scandal – the erasing effect of history – is what is of interest here. What is known as the history of the modern world has everything to do with being human or non-human. The politics of history and the definition of the human subject define the present. It clearly reflects who holds absent history and who must hold the present history. So, *what about those who are in the zone of absent history?* The black subject exists as the figure of absent history. Therefore, existence in blackness is history in absentia. Importantly, this history does not hold the sentimental and ontological value of the human that gives and takes history. However, what becomes more profound is the question of the present history that is absent. *What does it mean, then, to think from the horizon of the absent history?* The position of the black subject is that of the absent history – a position in which S.E.K. Mqayi and Dumile Feni are located but one which they are refusing. Accordingly, the question that preoccupies this duo is the question of history – the story of one's life. History introduces different questions to someone who is black than someone who is white. The darker side of history and its decolonisation will be scrutinised

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