

The sources: archives, historiography and debates

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The history of the relations between Geneva and Africa has yet to be written as a whole. The reader who wishes to explore it further has to rely on scattered sources. The archives of the missions, held in French-speaking Switzerland, document the Protestant presence in Mozambique and southern Africa. The archives of the trading houses, among them those of Volkart in Winterthur, shed light on colonial trade. The *Documents diplomatiques suisses* (Swiss Diplomatic Documents), published online, give access to the Confederation's files on the independence movements, on South Africa and on the cases concerning assets. The archives of the Geneva-based international organisations and of the International Committee of the Red Cross, for their part, preserve the traces of humanitarian action on the continent.¹ Academic research over the past two decades, in Geneva, Lausanne, Basel and Zurich, has renewed the reading of "colonial Switzerland". The national research programme devoted to relations with South Africa, despite the restrictions on access to archives that it suffered, has produced works of reference.²

These sources feed a public debate that the financial centre cannot ignore. Historians, non-governmental organisations and diaspora associations are asking Switzerland to acknowledge its part in the colonial economy, in the support given to apartheid and in the reception of diverted fortunes. Business circles reply that Switzerland had no colonies and that its practices have changed. Both positions are documented. With regard to the Second World War, Part D showed that historical debate, when it is conducted on the basis of sources, eventually produces a shared memory. The relationship with Africa would benefit from the same.

1 Notes

1. Dodis, Documents diplomatiques suisses (dodis.ch): research centre of the Swiss Academy of Humanities and Social Sciences, centre of

competence for the history of Switzerland's international relations since 1848, with an online database; ICRC Archives (icrc.org): some 18,000 linear metres of documents since 1863, general archives open for consultation up to 1975 by appointment, files of the Central Tracing Agency since the war of 1870, online catalogue (archives.icrc.org). ↩

2. Swiss National Science Foundation, press release of 27 October 2005: publication of the synthesis report of NRP 42+ "Les relations entre la Suisse et l'Afrique du Sud" (Relations between Switzerland and South Africa) (Georg Kreis), a programme conducted from 2000 to 2005 with a budget of two million francs; Sandra Bott, Bouda Etemad and Sébastien Guex, *Les relations économiques entre la Suisse et l'Afrique du Sud durant l'apartheid (1945-1990)*, Antipodes, 2005; Thomas David, Bouda Etemad and Janick Marina Schaufelbuehl, *La Suisse et l'esclavage des Noirs*, Antipodes, 2005; swissinfo.ch, 17 April 2003 (closure of the archives). ↩

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