Azubuike—The Past Is Our Strength

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Welcome to the first issue of volume 4 of the *Journal of West African History*. I have entitled this introduction, "*azubuike*—the past is our strength" because in varying ways the articles in this issue tell the histories of how the events of the past inform the present. From the genesis and genealogy of a new religion in Togo and Benin to the genealogy of a Malian song; from the genesis and genealogy of a fundamentalist religion in what was to become Nigeria to the genesis and evolution of the nation, Ghana; and the genesis and genealogy of a disease in Sierra Leone. The West Africans in the articles featured in this issue are all, in one way or another, engaged in processes of evolution, evolving the strength and power (or lack thereof) of their pasts into forceful and meaningful futures. Each article gives layered meaning to the Igbo saying, *azubuike*, "the past is our strength."

"Intellectual Traditions, Education, and Jihad: The (Non)Parallels between the Sokoto and Boko Haram Jihads," by Jennifer Lofkrantz, connects the present to the past, and by so doing, upholds the ideology of *azubuike*. In this article, the author investigates the genesis, genealogy, and historical context of Islamic reform movements, starting with the Sokoto jihad led by Usman Dan Fodio, and ending with the Boko Haram jihad. She considers the debates surrounding the similarities and differences in the ideology, leadership, and tactics of the two reform movements. Lofkrantz suggests that although existing scholarship on jihads in northern Nigeria has tended to emphasize the similarities between the two, both movements in fact draw upon different theological traditions: Maliki Madh'hab in the case of the Sokoto jihad, and Salafi/Wahhabi discourses in the case of Boko Haram. The author further argues that both jihads were rooted in environmental, economic, and perceived political crises of their respective eras and locations.

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In particular, Lofkrantz links the emergence of both jihads to drought, which she contends limited the economic opportunities of young adults, which in turn created an attractive space for militarist action. Lofkrantz suggests that the leadership of both jihads pointed to the prevailing political, moral, and religious corruption in their societies, and she links that to the failure of the state to address the economic, security, and religious needs of their people. Lofkrantz also makes connections between the significance of trade/education networks in West Africa, and the spread of the Maliki school of jurisprudence. She concludes that the spread of Salafi schools and the Izala movement in Northern Nigeria were important factors in the emergence of Boko Haram.

Alessandra Brivio's article on the genesis of a new *vodun*, called *gorovodu,* speaks to the history and elasticity of indigenous West African religions—*vodun* in particular—as a transnational religion. By focusing on the regions of the Gold Coast, and especially Togo and Benin, Brivio explores its transformation from a religion concerned almost exclusively with anti-witchcraft movements, to one that, with the introduction of European vaccinations, and the subsequent deaths that those vaccinations were believed to have engendered, under the Germans, would emerge as a therapeutic solution that combined indigenous conceptualizations of health, the body, and healing.

Brivio's article also speaks truth to the ever-evolving nature of the West African pantheon, in which new gods or beliefs are constantly being adopted, integrated, and evolved. Thus, older indigenous West African belief systems—Islam, in the form of Muslim amulets, and Christianity, embodied by the essence of the Ten Commandments—all found expression in *gorovodu*. Brivio further argues that neither Christianity nor colonialism could defeat *gorovodu,* because it continued to provide something that neither encroachment could do, namely, a sense of stability and a solution to unexplained and persistent deaths, which the people themselves ascribed to witchcraft or *vodun* attacks. Moreover, the ambiguity in the moral aptitude of *vodun*, which had the power to protect and kill at the same time, worked to bind people to *gorovodu* through uncertainty and fear. Occupying a space that was neither altogether "traditional" or "intrusive," *gorovodu* emerged to create what Brivio describes as a new ritual comfortable space and innovative religious language capable of meeting the peoples' everyday life and religious requirements.

Naaborko Sackeyfio-Lenoch's article, "Women's International Alliances in an Emergent Ghana," is also about a genesis and evolution, this time of a nation. It focuses on the life and private papers of an important Ghanaian woman leader, Evelyn Amarteifio, who in the 1950s and 1960s founded and led one of the nations' first women's organizations, the National Federation of Gold Coast Women

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(NFGCW), which sought to mobilize, connect, and shape Gold Coast women's activist, nationalist, and other agendas by cultivating international and transnational connections, networks, and exchanges. Sackeyfio-Lenoch argues that by so doing, Amarteifio and the Federation created a "new form of internationalism" that married the nation-building and Pan-Africanist agenda of Kwame Nkrumah with women's strategies in West Africa and the African Diaspora. As a result, they were able to tap into the synergies and strength of the past to create a new and emerging internationalism. As a nonpartisan federation, the NFGCW's women, she argues, positioned themselves as "agents of change," stressing the importance of private and public engagements in the family, and voluntary social services to transform society, improve women's legal position, and forge leadership models for women at the local, regional, and international levels. The group assisted in the project of nation-building by fostering educational, cultural, and civic engagement, and by improving the economic condition of women and encouraging local industries.

In "Sex, Drugs, and Female Agency: Why Siramori Diabaté's Song 'Nanyuman' was Such a Success in Mali and Guinea," authors Jan Jansen, Graeme Counsel, and Brahima Camara investigate and contextualize the genealogy and evolution of the song "Nanyuman," by Mali's legendary *griotte* Siramori, aka Sira Mory, Diabaté (ca. 1925–1989). The song, available in digital form via YouTube, provides an in-depth cultural analysis of Diabaté's lyrics, the acoustic components of the song, and the audience's reactions to her performance. Taken together, the lyrics, video, and historical interpretation of "Nanyuman" provide a topical moral discussion—in verse, music, and visual form—about the position of women in 1960s Guinea and Mali. Through the voice of "Nanyuman," the authors argue that *griotte* Diabaté is able to challenge traditional orthodoxies while respecting the intrinsic values of *mògòya*, "being a respectable person."

The authors further contend that the four characters in "Nanyuman" represent a micro-society of Maninka life. Through the toils of these characters, Diabaté sings about an unhappy marriage, sex, men's roles as husbands, and motherhood. She even sings about a drug dealer. In short, the authors argue that Diabaté sings about herself. In "Nanyuman," and we find a powerful validation of *azubuike* (the past is our strength) in which the *griotte* skillfully develops a narrative that emphasizes indigenous Maninka (Malinké) values of marriage and appropriate female behavior while at the same time calling for a woman's right to agency in her married life.

One important aspect of this article lies in the provision of the oral translation of a primary source, and the contextualization of the song through the personal history and narrative approach of Siramori Diabaté. Jansen, Counsel, and Camara also engage the literature on the rise of Diabaté, and that engagement affords the

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scholars the opportunity to speak to the reasons for the *griotte*'s popularity, and that of other *griotte*s of the 1960s and 1970s.

Likewise, in "Ebola, Poverty, Economic Inequity and Social Injustice in Sierra Leone," Tamba E. M'bayo documents the genesis and genealogy of a disease. From 2014 to 2015, the Ebola pandemic claimed the lives of at least 11,207 Sierra Leoneans. M'bayo's analysis recognizes the importance of *azubuike*, or in this instance, lack thereof, in his situating of Ebola virus disease (EVD) epidemic within a broader historical context. He adopts a *longue durée* approach to argue that the pandemic and its dramatic spread in Sierra Leone can be linked to poverty, economic inequality, and social injustice.

In an article that marries documentary evidence from the World Health Organization, Médicins Sans Frontières (MSF), the National Ebola Response Center (NERC), the Sierra Leone Ministry of Health and Sanitation, and testimonies from both Sierra Leoneans and non-Sierra Leoneans, M'bayo historicizes the Ebola pandemic while linking it to the burgeoning literature on epidemiology. The article also locates the pandemic within the historical course of infectious diseases in Sierra Leone and argues that during the colonial period, the colonial government not only failed to satisfactorily respond to the outbreak of several epidemics, it failed to provide sufficient training to indigenous health-care providers who were expected to lead the effort in controlling these epidemics. In addition, the colonial government failed to build institutional structures that would provide health-care amenities. In short, M'bayo links disease prevention to state incapacity while at the same time establishing how the spread of the disease could have been contained.

Like the genealogies and evolutions engaged by this issue's contributors, JWAH itself is also going through its own evolution. In many ways, the past has been JWAH's strength, and in it we see the progression of that growth. It is thus in this vein that I extend my heartfelt thanks to outgoing associate editors, Hilary Jones and John Thabiti Willis, whose consummate professionalism and informed contributions helped propel the intellectual evolution of JWAH. Harry Odamtten remains as associate editor (book reviews).

It is with great pleasure that I present volume 4, issue 1, of the *Journal of West African History*.

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