

Nkiruka:

## The Best is Still to Come

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Welcome to the second issue of the inaugural volume of the *Journal of West African History*. This issue opens with Mariano Pavanello's fascinating article, "Foragers or Cultivators? A Discussion of Wilks's 'Big Bang' Theory of Akan History." In it, Pavanello contributes to the ongoing debate surrounding the soundness of Ivor Wilks's assessment of the origins of the Akan civilization, as well as the evolution of agriculture in the West African rainforests therein. Pavanello rejects Wilks's chronology as too conservative, and instead provides proof—anchored on extensive and variegated evidence from archeology, economic anthropology, demography, and history—to theorize about the establishment of agrarian cultures in the forest region at least two centuries earlier. His argument is simple: Akan agricultural civilization existed four centuries before the launch of the international trade in human beings across the Atlantic.

Several centuries and a few nations separate the subject matter of Pavanello's article from Jonathon Reynolds's, "Stealing the Road: Colonial Rule and the Hajj from Nigeria in the Early Twentieth Century." In this intriguing article, Reynolds engages colonial administrative documents housed in the Nigerian archive Kaduna in his exploration of British preoccupation with hajj movement in colonial northern Nigeria, and their attempts to regulate and control it. Reynolds is as interested in exploring the fate of destitute pilgrims as British colonial reasoning behind their attempts to quell the spread of what they deemed unsavory anti-British Islamic propaganda. Reynolds argues that northern Nigerian pilgrims' reaction to British attempts to control their movements materialized in their "stealing" across colonial boundaries, therefore challenging British attempts to

limit their choices. “Stealing the Road” also explores the inconsistencies, contradictions, and complexities of British colonial rule in Africa’s most populous nation, Nigeria.

The next article takes us into the personal. In “Conflicting Interpretations in the Biography of a Modern Artist of African Descent,” Simon Ottenberg mines the scant, but distinctive, source materials on Suzanna Ogunjami Wilson in an attempt to piece together the life and times of the gifted modern artist. Although the author’s task is daunting, he pursues it meticulously. In the end, Ottenberg is unable to confirm some important details of Ogunjami’s life, but he is able to begin the process of recovering to West African history, as well as African and African Diaspora Art histories, the accomplishments—fragmented as they may be—of a notable artist of African ancestry.

Then there is Elisha Renne’s article, “Small-Scale and Industrial Gold Mining Histories in Nangodi, Upper East Region, Ghana,” in which she explores the history of gold prospecting and mining in Nangodi in Ghana’s Upper East Region. Renne discusses the competing mining excursions of expatriate and indigenous actors who intended to extract gold from the site, while also addressing the changes in the legal climate for gold mining in northern Ghana since the 1930s. An important question that the article attempts to answer is, what was the impact of mining activities by expatriate prospectors and migrant miners on the enterprise of local Nangodi miners? The article also provides a reading of the indigenous Nangodi residents’ understanding of this history, realized though Renne’s rich collection of oral interviews. Renne also documents the residents’ experiences in small-scale gold mining since the 1980s and articulates indigenous feelings and observations about the degradation of the environment and the health hazards occasioned by these mining attempts.

This second volume of the journal ends with two retrospectives from senior scholars in the fields of West African archaeology and women and gender studies. Each commentary is as different as it is important. Each is situated at, and speaks to, intersections: in the first, the intersection of history and archaeology; in the second, the intersection of autobiography, gender ideology, history, and politics. “Begho: Life and Times” is a personal thought piece, a memoir of sorts, which was undertaken about four decades ago by archaeologist Merrick Posnansky, whose pioneering work in West African archaeology helped establish the field. Its importance lies not only in the fact that the author synthesizes and interprets little-known material about one of the seminal archaeological projects in West Africa (the Begho-Hani site) and in so doing adds to our understanding of urbanism in West Africa; it is important because the site became a training ground, under Posnansky, of some of the most gifted and senior scholars—both African and non-African—of West African archaeology. Ifi Amadiume’s “Of

Kola Nuts, Taboos, Leadership, Women's Rights, and Freedom: New Challenges from Chinua Achebe's *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*" works to place Achebe's memoir (see review essay by Herbert Ekwe-Ekwe) within the broader context of Igbo gender dynamics. The author explores and attempts to fill what she terms the "empty spaces" in Africanist historiography, or put differently, gaps resulting from colonial interruptions. In her challenge to underscore the tensions between tradition and modernity, and Igbo women's experiences therein, Amadiume looks to the kola nut and its rituals, the *mgba* ritual, and *ofo* ritual power to interrogate the "empty spaces," that is, the assumptions made about Igbo women's rights and freedoms. She concludes that Igbo women's privileges and liberties cannot be attributed to a so-called postcolonial modernity, but should be seen in continuity with (or as part of an evolution from) precolonial realities.

It is with great pleasure that I now present volume 1, issue 2 of the *Journal of West African History*.

