

## Nkolika—Recalling is Supreme

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Welcome to the second issue of volume 2 of the *Journal of West African History*. This issue opens with Steven Pierce's "The Invention of Corruption: Political Malpractice and Selective Prosecution in Colonial Northern Nigeria," a "supreme recalling" of a somewhat minor case of corruption in an early twentieth-century northern Nigeria. The year was 1924, and the case centered around a village head, Mohama Sani, who was forced to resign after falling short on his tax collection. He claimed that the reason that he fell short was that taxes were being levied on dead people. Pierce uses Sani's case as an instructive example of his work on the history of corruption, and the myriad ways in which graft has evolved in Nigeria. His article fills a lacuna in the burgeoning literature on corruption by providing what he calls a "rigorous" history of the development and evolution of political graft in Africa's most populous nation.

In this important article, Pierce traces the shifting meanings of corruption across twentieth-century Nigeria. He rejects interpretations by theorists that suggest that corruption emerged at start of the oil boom in 1970, or Nigeria's Second Republic, or the military juntas of Babangida and Abacha. He instead argues that there existed well-documented systemic and pervasive corruption during Nigeria's colonial and early independence periods. Mohama Sani's forced resignation and resulting investigation is the case study that the author uses to support this argument. In the final analysis, "The Invention of Corruption" presents a convincing argument that the history of Nigerian corruption is inseparable from the very structures of the Nigerian state, and that moreover there exists a strong continuity in schemes of personification and malpractice evident in the early to mid-colonial period, and Nigeria's present-day 419 epidemic.

Robert M. Baum's article is set approximately two decades after Pierce's case study, but this time, the history that he is "recalling" originates in French colonial West Africa. In "Prophetic Critiques of Colonial Agricultural Schemes: The Case of Alinesitoué Diatta in Vichy Senegal," Baum suggests that there is a strong connection among indigenous agricultural knowledge, resistance, and the indigenous Diola religion. He argues that in the aftermath of World War II, the Diola and their neighbors were marred by increasing hardships—a continued conscription into French armies, the elimination of privileges for Senegalese who were subject to *indigenat*, the disruption of trade networks, and a severe and persistent drought.

It was into this context that a Diola woman by the name of Alinesitoué Diatta emerged. She was the first prophetess to direct her teaching to resisting French colonial agricultural schemes. She taught that there were connections between the challenges that her people were facing (devastating droughts, the invasions of Christianity and Islam, rural migration into cities, and the abandonment of the community rain ritual) and the groundnut and imported rice agricultural programs that the French imposed on Diola farmers; and that these contacts allowed the French to alienate Diola land and transform it into French territories where Christianity would reign supreme. This introduction of cash cropping in groundnuts led to a 50 percent decline in indigenous rice production. Moreover, Baum contends, the minimally farmed imported rice species from Asia, which were intended for export to northern Senegal, and were supposed to produce higher yields, were not tested, and turned out to be susceptible to drought and disease.

Thus, Alinesitoué Diatta spurred her people to resist the French and their agricultural schemes. She warned that these schemes undermined Diola indigenous rice cultivation, and distanced people from the spiritual nurture and protection of their great genderless God, Emitai—the supreme being responsible for the rainy season, and nourishing and protecting the land. As a result of her teachings, the southern Diola resisted the spread of French-imposed groundnut farming. Diatta was, however, soon captured and convicted by French under *indigenat*. She would later die in exile in Timbuctou some months later.

From Diola land in Senegal, we move to Buea in Cameroon, where the authors "recall" the life of another exile: this time a Muslim exile by the name of Sa`id Ibn Hayatu. The year was 1923, and according to the British colonial government, Shaykh Sa`id Ibn Hayatu had planned to overthrow the colonial regime in northern Nigeria. In "The Life and Experiences of Sa`id Ibn Hayatu, a Mahdist Leader: New Findings from the Buea Archive," Harmony O'Rourke and Mohammed Bashir Salau explore the life of Sa`id Ibn Hayatu through records contained in the Buea National Archives, Cameroon. Theirs is the first article to present evidence about Sa`id Ibn Hayatu from Buea, Cameroon, his place of exile from 1924 to 1956. The authors were able to unearth a treasure trove of never-before-consulted

primary source materials on Hayatu, much of it in his own words. From these records they were able to uncover information on his household, finances, personal letters to and from the colonial administration, and letters to relatives and aristocratic rulers in northern Nigeria. The authors also uncovered correspondence from the colonial office about Sa`id, Mahdism, and how the British perceived the Mahdist threat.

These Buea records reveal important facts that have never been considered in scholarship on Sa`id. The authors are able to provide answers to two important questions that have previously befuddled historians. First, why Sa`id's exile lasted as long as it did; and second, what informed the British decision to allow him to return to Nigeria? The authors argue that the answer to the first question can be gleaned from the changing political landscape of northern Nigeria. They argue that the British obsession about a Mahdist danger facing northern Nigeria after 1924 became focused on him. O'Rourke and Bashir feel that Sa`id's failing health left the British more favorably disposed to him. In other words, the British no longer perceived him as a threat, and therefore, had no problem allowing him to return to Nigeria.

In summary, this important article highlights the parallels between Sa`id Ibn Hayatu's life in exile and that of other Muslim leaders exiled from British, French, and German Africa. Moreover, it provides a starting point for future historians to further probe the life and times of prominent Muslims forced into exile during the era of colonialism.

"Selecting Those 'Worthy' of Remembering: Memorialization in Early Lagos Newspapers," is an exploration of "the media of social memory." In particular, Nozomi Sawada explores new forms of "elite" commemoration that, she argues, evolved with spread of African-owned newspapers in colonial southwest Nigeria. Sawada suggests that although commemoration was not unknown in precolonial Nigeria (read: *oriki*, praise poetry in Yoruba), during the colonial times, the Nigerian elite, through newspapers, was able to practice a new form of visual and material commemoration. These memorials most notably took the form of newspaper descriptions of early twentieth-century memorial associations, memorial objects, and the publication of obituaries and memorial poems. "Selecting Those 'Worthy' of Remembering," also concerns itself with unearthing how these newspaper memorials helped shape the ideas of the colonial Nigerian subject's future. She focuses on seven important newspapers in her exploration of early memorial campaigns of the 1880s, emphasizing gender, "outsiderness," and commodification. Of particular interest to her is the specific language used by elite Lagosians to describe memorialization. Thus, Sawada attempts to understand that language through the prism of social memory (i.e., oral traditions, written sources, images, acts and spaces of commemoration).

She argues that there emerged unique forms of memorialization (oral traditions, oral poetry, oral traditions, images, acts and spaces of commemoration) that found expression in Nigerian newspapers. She further suggests that elite Nigerians reshaped these traditional methods of memorialization and praise (e.g., traditional Yoruba praise poetry) into elite, permanent written forms of memorialization. As a result, Nigerian newspapers became, for the indigenous elite, a permanent way to document their traditions.

Sawada explores N. T. King's Memorial Stained Glass Window (1885), the Glover Memorial Fund (1885–99), the Anna Sophia Williams Memorial (1904), the Edward Wilmot Blyden Memorial (1912–15), and the James Johnson Memorial Fund (1917–19) as “containers or carriers of memory,” in addition to memorial poems, which took the form of Lagosian newspaper “In Memoriams,” to show how Nigerian elite individuals and groups sometimes launched memorialization campaigns to ensure that their loved ones were “recalled” in daily Nigerian newspapers.

From newspaper memorializations in colonial Nigeria to commemorate individuals, to an unspoken secret Akan message form, Ntam Kese oaths (“a reminder of past pain”), Victoria Ellen Smith's “Secrets of West African Slave Ancestry: Fante Strategies of Silence and the Didactic Narrative in Ghanaian Literature” explores Fante strategies of silence (and silencing) surrounding indigenous slavery, as depicted by Ghanaian literary authors. Smith focuses on the works of Ghanaian playwrights, novelists, and poets—Ama Ata Aidoo's play, *Anowa*, Kwadwo Opoku-Agyemang's poetry collection, *Cape Coast Castle*, and Ebow Daniel's novel, *A Tale of Cape Coast* in her analysis of the mechanisms through which the secrets of West African slavery can emerge, and be consumed, in public discourse.

In this article, Smith analyzes the ways in which Ghanaian literary authors of the twentieth century have grappled, and continue to grapple with, the complexities of precolonial and colonial indigenous slavery, as well as abolition, in their novels, poetry, and plays. She grounds their contributions—including points for agreement and departure—in received historical debate, while cautioning that although the historical narrative of indigenous slavery in West Africa was one of benign treatment, the system was not without ill-treatment and oppression. Thus, in this important article, the author adopts the theoretical framework of a “paradox of secrecy” to explore the uses of oral testimony (or put differently, “recalling”) about Ghanaian culture, ancestors, memory, and forgetfulness surrounding the slave origins of a particular people.

Drawing on Fante historical perspective, Smith focuses on the Ntam Kese oath, which functions to bear the burden of a secret collective Fante history of trauma surrounding slavery and the slave trade. In the targeted literary texts, we witness a further disrupting of the secret, or trauma, of slavery. Smith shows that through the characters in their books, Aidoo, Opoku-Agyemang, and Daniel refuse to be

complicit in the silencing and denial of memory surrounding the slave trade—something that Ama Ata Aidoo has aptly termed “the collective amnesia or a history of secrets.” Instead, the authors attempt to break this silence by “recalling” real and imagined stories, geographical spaces, and communal sites of the slavery and slave trading. In the final analysis, through a close reading of these texts—these literary sites of indigenous memory of slavery—Smith is able to analyze the control of knowledge through silence, and provide a point of entry into assessing the West African literary consumers’ engagement with the emerging narrative of slavery and slave ancestry.

The Igbo people of Nigeria, in their great wisdom, give the name *Nkolika* to their daughters. *Nkolika* means “recalling is supreme.” Smith’s article, however, troubles this wisdom by reminding us that an awareness of “the need to forget” is fundamental to understanding the legacy of indigenous slavery in Ghana. Thus, as consumers of the articles in this issue, we witness “recollections” from colonial Nigeria to colonial Senegal and Cameroon. We also witness, through an engagement with Ghanaian literary texts, the paradox of secrecy, the power of choosing to silence memories that Ghanaian citizens have constructed as abominable.

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