

Osonduagwuike—There Is No Boredom in the Pursuit of Life Happiness

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Welcome to the first issue of Volume 3 of the *Journal of West African History*. I have entitled this introduction “*osonduagwuike*—there is no boredom in the pursuit of life happiness” because in varying ways the articles in this issue tell the histories of individuals and groups of people in pursuit of “life happiness.” From emancipated slaves in Upper Guinea Coast, to an emancipated slave in south-eastern Nigeria; from groups of the Qhōri people resisting French colonialism in World War I Dahomey, to a select group of West Africans gaming the colonial system by participating in white collar international crime in the Gold Coast and Ivory Coast, the West Africans in the articles of this issue are all, in one way or another, engaged in the pursuit of their life happiness.

The volume opens with Katrina H. Keefer’s “Group Identity, Scarification, and Poro among Liberated Africans in Sierra Leone, 1808–1819.” In it, Keefer uses the 1808–19 Freetown Vice Admiralty Court records of 15,967 Upper Guinea Coast recaptives, or liberated Africans from British ships and barracoons, to argue that descriptors such as facial and body marks (e.g., dents, cuts, marks, scratches, lumps, purrah, tattoos, and “scarification”; and the illustrations of markings that they were unable to clearly describe) can be used to understand origins and identities of individuals within these documents from the Sierra Leone Public Archives. She notes, however, that the meaning of ethnicity in these parts is often in flux within time and place and therefore historians must acknowledge these evolutions in their historical reconstructions of ethnicity.

In these archival records, Keefer argues, Africans are divided into three broad categories—individuals with no marks, individuals with marks, and individuals recorded as having purrah marks. The British clerks who entered these records,

however, did not describe the characteristics or specificities of the purrah markings, which Keefer suggests is indicative of the fact that these Poro initiation markers were very well known. The author further suggests that the descriptor purrah was used by British clerks to denote associations with the inter-ethnic initiation society called the Poro society, and further argues that owing to the inter-ethnic composition of the society, the descriptor purrah employed by the British clerks did not necessarily identify the ethnic affiliation of a person, but rather the individual's identity. The article also highlights the role and importance of Poro society to the Upper Guinea Coast.

From deciphering the ethnic and individual identities of enslaved Africans of the Upper Guinea Coast to interpreting the biography of an emancipated Igbo slave, "Performing *Ogaranya*: Kalu Ezelu Uwaoma, Male Slavery, and Freedom Politics in Southeastern Nigeria, c. 1860–1940," by Ndubueze L. Mbah, is a beautifully wrought piece that brings to light the fascinating tale of survival of Kalu Ezelu Uwaoma, who was "in pursuit of his life happiness." The author skillfully narrates Uwaoma's rise from a life of slavery to the wealth and prestige of a slaver, warrant chief, church elder, autobiographer, and British Knight in early twentieth-century southeastern Nigeria. Uwaoma's is a life history and meta-narrative of gender, mobility, adaptation, and social transformation, set in the context of slavery, emancipation, and British colonialism in southeastern Nigeria. The author places Uwaoma's life narrative within a reality of constant flux, occasioned by a complex web of transformation, evolution, and reordering brought about by slavery, emancipation, the shift to legitimate trade, and British colonial and Scottish missionary intrusion.

It was within this evolving context that Kalu Ezelu Uwaoma was able to rapidly rise from slavery to freedom, gaining power, wealth, and political influence, first by penning his autobiography, which, on the one hand, earned him a certificate of honor and knighthood from the British Crown, and on the other hand, brought the emancipated slave prestige and legitimacy within his natal community. Uwaoma would eventually perform wealth (*ogaranya*) by amassing human beings and commodities. In Kalu Ezelu Uwaoma's determination to avoid re-enslavement, we further see him ingeniously position himself in both the indigenous world of his Igbo people by taking titles and marrying polygamously, and within the world of the intruding British colonials and Scottish missionaries by becoming Christian, attending the first missionary schools, and serving in the low-ranking position of colonial houseboy. He would eventually rise to the prestigious office of British-imposed warrant chief, becoming one of two known Igbo authors of slavery origin—the other being Oluadah Equiano—to write his autobiography and by so doing elevate himself and his story to the permanent medium of books.

From precolonial and colonial Igboland to southern Dahomey, the article by Marcus Filippello, “Settling Ḣri: Reassessing Rebellion, Gender, and Foundation ‘Myths’ in Colonial Dahomey,” is a detailed and compelling article about the effects of an anti-colonial armed rebellion in southern Dahomey during World War I. Focusing on an area called Ḣri, and following what is arguably the most important resistance to the French after the formal establishment of the colony in 1894, “Settling Ḣri,” contributes to our understanding of the complex interactions between community leaders and colonial authorities, as well as the unique generational tensions engendered by the French colonial demands imposed upon these West African communities. The article is as much about these societies’ reliance on spiritual processes in the explanation of, and understanding of, important political occurrences. These same societies, the author contends, also sought divine intervention in important political (especially leadership matters) and economic (e.g., whether or not to pay French colonial taxes, or work as forced laborers) decisions.

In particular, the author argues that one of the outcomes of these tensions was a self-imposed migratory exile by the younger generation of Ḣri inhabitants, and the rebuilding of a community in an area politically and socially removed from the French and the elders of Ḣri communities, who the younger generation felt had betrayed them. He documents the last course in the French attempt to administer colonial rule, namely, the banishment of the Oba (King) Otoutoubiodjo, whom the French erroneously assumed was an “unrivaled political authority within the community” (i.e., the force behind the people), and whose banishment would consequently quell the outward movement of young Ḣri. However, the people had installed Otoutoubiodjo for other reasons—he was essentially a diplomatic ruse, a figurehead “who could feign a diplomatic stance with the French” while diverting French attention from community efforts focused on amassing arms in anticipation of rebellion against the French. Throughout the article, the author highlights the central role that women and gender played in the creation, recreation, and rebuilding of the migratory community and its economy.

From Africans engaging in migratory resistance to French colonialism and its prejudicial policies in Dahomey—in other words, the Ḣri people “in pursuit of their happiness”—to the adoption of international white collar crime and criminality by a select group of West Africans to game the British and French colonial system in colonial Gold Coast and Ivory Coast, Ellen Roseanne Feingold’s “International Currency Counterfeiting Schemes in Interwar West Africa” employs the case study approach to explore the myriad ways a group of West Africans were able to set up international currency counterfeiting schemes. It also considers the destabilizing potential of these international counterfeiting schemes on established British and French colonial monetary systems in their colonies of

Gold Coast and Ivory Coast, while arguing that these international counterfeiting schemes not only presented what amounted to a clear and present danger to colonial law, enforcement, and authority in said colonies, but also led to clashes between the colonies and their mother countries. These clashes, the author argues, could only be thwarted when Britain collaborated with other European nations. Feingold then highlights the various anti-counterfeiting mechanisms that the colonial government employed to curb these schemes, including the use of propaganda, policing, and the prosecution of offenders. The article is as much about how these new European-style currencies functioned in West Africa, and were understood by the West African consumers.

By highlighting the enactment and adoption of British colonial policies to control counterfeiting in British, and to a lesser extent, French, West Africa, “International Currency Counterfeiting Schemes in Interwar West Africa” engages important issues concerning the integration of West African economies into systems of imperial and global exploitation. It does this by framing the exploration within three broad historical precedents, namely, the adoption and institutionalization of colonial currencies as part of British and French economic policies in their West African colonies; the shifting and evolving patterns of crime and criminality in colonial West Africa; and, the evolving configurations of colonial governance, paying particular attention to the gaps between West African colonial bureaucracies and those in London.

Volume 3, issue 1 closes with the timely retrospective, “Historical Antecedents and Implications of Polio Outbreaks in Northern Nigeria,” by Folu F. Ogundimu, in which he situates the recent reoccurrence of wild polioviruses in northern Nigeria in historical perspective. Ogundimu links this latest outbreak to the historical refusal of people in the northern region of Nigeria to accept Nigerian government or Western donor-driven vaccinations, whether it be for the eradication of measles in the early 1960s and 1970s or wild polioviruses almost fifty years later. This refusal, he suggests, arose from rumors surrounding vaccinations, namely, that the vaccinations caused sterility in Muslim mothers who took them. The ferocity of these rumors was historically based, that is, a misguided attempt by the Nigerian government to carry out family planning initiatives in conjunction with measles vaccinations in the 1960s and 1970s. The result was that in northern Nigeria vaccinations would forever be linked to population control—read: sterilization. Sixty years later, this feeling had not changed. And, coupled with the Boko Haram insurgency, which vocally denounced all things “Western” as bad, including vaccinations, any attempts by polio workers to administer vaccinations in the region amounted to a deadly conceived cocktail. Indeed, eleven polio workers and security officers were murdered in northern Nigeria in January and February 2013.

Nevertheless, as Ogundimu is quick to point out, although the rumor mill and religious insurgency certainly impeded the eradication of wild polio viruses, that there are other, more important reasons for the failure of polio campaigns in northern Nigeria. He ends his important and timely article by speaking to the findings of a 2010–2011 WHO-funded polio eradication study (for which he was principal investigator). I summarize his five major takeaways: (1) if polio vaccination exercises are to succeed, investments in micro-planning must be made at the local ward level; (2) an overemphasis by program officials on certain types of outreach communication, especially the use of public cinema (*majigi*) is problematic, because it fails to reach intended audiences; (3) utilizing women's social networks and opinion leadership is important for ensuring the success of any vaccination program; (4) polio workers and funding agencies must cultivate the support of religious and traditional leaders, and protect the credibility and authority of these cultural institutions in order to sustain efforts to eradicate polio from northern Nigeria; and (5) the practice of using incentives and coercion to attain vaccination compliance often has negative implications for long-term success in getting local populations to accept vaccinations to ensure health.

In many ways, Ogundimu's intervention gives layered meaning to the Igbo saying, "*osonduagwuike*, there is no boredom" by all involved—both in northern Nigeria and internationally—in breathing life into our desire to see polio eradicated, so that all people throughout the world, regardless of how disenfranchised they might be, will realize "life happiness."

It is with great pleasure that I present volume 3, issue 1 of the *Journal of West African History*.

