



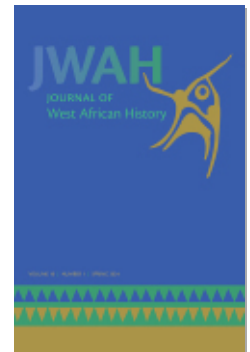
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Amaechina— May Our Path Never Close

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Amaechina—May Our Path Never Close

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Welcome to the first issue of the tenth anniversary volume of the *Journal of West African History*. About fourteen years ago, I dared to dream: to imagine a journal that would illuminate the rich histories of West Africa and, at the same time, challenge and redress the geographies of knowledge production on Africa. That journal is the *Journal of West African History (JWAH)*, a journal that is celebrating its tenth year of life. As we mark this important anniversary, I reflect on the path that we have taken on our remarkable journey.

In founding the *Journal of West African History*, I envisioned the role that open and fair inquiry from both sides of the Atlantic could play in the dissemination of West Africanist knowledge. By this I mean that through *JWAH*, we provide a platform wherein the conception of what knowledge is can be debated, while simultaneously poking holes in academic discourse around the nature and dissemination of that knowledge. At *JWAH*, we are indeed traversing, journeying through, this rapidly evolving, political, and polarized academic landscape, as we reconsider what we as a field define as, and determine to be, new knowledge.

Over the ten years that *JWAH* has been in print, the journal has served as a beacon of scholarly excellence, providing space for rigorous inquiry, challenge, and understanding of our diverse West African pasts. From anti-witchcraft movements to the practice of power in the Western Sudan; from LGBT organizing in Nigeria to marriage, divorce, and adultery disputes in Abeokuta; and from the

“therapeutic itinerary” of indigenous medicine in Senegal to the modernizing of royals in Kumase, *JWAH* has been at the fore of creating, documenting, and analyzing the multifaceted worlds of West Africa and its peoples.

One of *JWAH*’s greatest strengths is its determination and commitment to elevate the scholarship of indigenous West African scholars. We have done this by providing a platform for the intellectual exchange of a wide range of ideas, perspectives, and voices; we have done this also with our introduction of the *JWAH* Mentorship Program, which matches emerging African-based scholars with senior published scholars. This initiative is one way in which *JWAH* hopes to actualize our philosophy of redressing systemic inequities and supporting the work of West African scholars. As a result of this and other initiatives, *JWAH* has enriched and continues to enrich our understanding of West African pasts, while at the same time providing space for challenging conventional narratives. From highlighting the contributions of seasoned and established scholars to providing a platform to emerging scholars, the *Journal of West African History* has afforded, and will continue to afford, an important space for dialogue and exchange and advancing knowledge.

In *JWAH*’s forums—those dedicated spaces for intentional dialogue around a particular issue—*JWAH* has not rested satisfied with merely chronicling the West African past. It has also sought, in ingenious ways, to engage with the pressing issues of the day. In its pages, our authors have been encouraged to explore histories of health, health care, and disease in West Africa; they have also been encouraged to engage with, and explore, digital and other pedagogies for the study of West African worlds; still others have engaged with issues of political and environmental sustainability, as well as gender dynamics. This demonstrates the relevance of historical research and inquiry to contemporary debates and policy making. Thus, *JWAH* has worked to underscore the enduring significance of West African history in shaping our world today.

As we celebrate this important milestone, I recognize the dedication and hard work of the editors, contributors, anonymous reviewers, the press, and our readers who have made *JWAH* the success that it is today. Special thanks go to our inaugural editorial team—Hilary Jones, Thabiti Willis, and Harry Odamtten—we together built the strong foundation on which *JWAH* sits today. *JWAH*’s editors in the present team—Trevor Getz, Saheed Aderinto, Harry Odamtten, Vincent Hiribarren, Ndubueze Mbah, and Mark Deets—have helped elevate that foundational vision to the next level and serve as dedicated ambassadors of the journal. I would be remiss if I did not thank the slew of dedicated *JWAH* editorial assistants and office managers we have had through the years, including Shaonan Liu, Tara Hollies, Russell Stevenson, Nana Kesse, Chioma Nwaiche, Caitlin Barker, Ryan Carty, Bernard Moore, and Henry Fagan. Their passion and commitment

to scholarly excellence in the published form, and their unwavering belief in the power of knowledge to transform the field, have propelled *JWAH* to new heights and will guarantee its success for years to come. *JWAH* would simply not exist without the support and dedication of the MSU Press. Gabe Dotto, past MSU Press director, approached me with the charge to found and edit any journal of my choosing. That, in essence, was the beginning of this journey. Along the way, MSU Press journal editor extraordinaire, Natalie Eidenier, has been a constant support and companion. Natalie, *JWAH* could not be what it is today without your selfless dedication. I am also grateful to the new director of MSU Press, Elizabeth Demers, who has continued to empower *JWAH*'s excellence by supporting the reimagining and extending of our thinking about what is actually possible. MSU Press *will* ensure that *JWAH amaechina*—*JWAH*'s path will never close!

I am thrilled to announce that issue 10.2 will be our first French language special issue: an issue on military history. For this I would especially like to thank Vincent Hiribarren, for his relentless dedication in making this a reality. Moving forward, we also plan to introduce abstracts in a variety of West African languages, perhaps paving the way for a special issue written in West African languages—a wonderfully aspirational goal on this path of ours that will never close. We will also be introducing, starting with issue 10.1, short interviews with *JWAH* authors and editors. Many thanks to Ryan Carty, Caitlin Barker, Bernie Moore, and Henry Fagan for their diligent efforts in conceptualizing, visioning, and bringing to life this *JWAH* assistant/manager series. And with the recent addition of Lusophone West African editor Toby Green, in the ensuing years our journal will provide a space for the dialogue and debate of a cadre of West Africanist scholars from the Lusophone world. We will also be welcoming Nana Kesse as book review editor. We look forward to working with both these incredible scholars for years to come.

Beyond print, we will be celebrating ten years of *JWAH* this October in a conference at Michigan State University. We have invited scholars to engage a number of vitally important thematic discourses, as well as to assess the state of the field. Our hope is to produce a special issue commemorating this important anniversary.

Unraveling the Threads of Influence

These tenth-anniversary articles uncover a rich mosaic of West African experiences, each thread interwoven within the complexities of colonial legacies, socio-political transformations, and international engagements. The scholars unearth narratives of resilience, resistance, and transformation, each offering a tapestry of insights into the continent's complex relationship with colonialism, global powers,

and the quest for self-determination. Indeed, Mark-Thiesen, Asiedu-Acquah, and Maguire provide us with illuminating insights into various facets of this intricate narrative, while Zimmerman and Turtio, the English-language threads of our first *JWAH* French language special issue (10.2), provide us with a path to thread together and bridge the narratives of issues 1 and 2 of *JWAH* volume 10.

Mark-Thiesen's examination of Liberia, "Black American Agricultural Experts and the Vernacularization of American Science in Liberia Prior to Decolonization in Africa," unveils a fascinating chapter in the nation's history, marked by its unique status as a non-colony. Amid state-sponsored agricultural initiatives backed by the United States, Mark-Thiesen unveils underlying racialized dynamics and the propagation of American influence, echoing broader themes of "Americanization" in postcolonial contexts. Specifically, her article examines Liberia's agricultural initiatives during World War II, supported by the U.S. Economic Mission. It argues that these efforts, aimed at promoting American farming techniques, had racialized undertones and served the interests of black Americans in U.S. foreign service. The article also explores how these initiatives contributed to "Americanization" in Liberia, discussing sociopolitical transformations and funding dynamics. Indeed, the article highlights the racial biases in United States-sponsored agricultural education, noting the intertwined nature of agricultural support and politics. Ultimately, Mark-Thiesen concludes that while World War II brought the United States and Liberia closer, U.S. assistance had limitations due to unevenness and racialization issues.

Transitioning to Ghana in the tumultuous decades of the 1960s and 1970s, Asiedu-Acquah's analysis of student internationalism, "Engaging Africa and the World: Student Internationalism and Politics in Ghana, circa 1966–1979," unveils a potent brew of nationalism and global solidarity. Setting them against the backdrop of postcolonial nation-building, Asiedu-Acquah argues that internationalism and Ghanaian nationalism were mutually reinforcing, contributing to broader decolonization efforts. He shows how Ghana's students emerged as vanguards of Pan-Africanist ideals, challenging both domestic governance and international power dynamics. Their path, a journey from early support for Nkrumah's vision to disillusionment with subsequent regimes, underscores the enduring legacy of grassroots activism in shaping political landscapes.

"Artification and Decolonization at the Musée d'Art Africain de l'IFAN, Dakar" is an exploration of the Musée d'Art Africain de l'IFAN in Dakar that charts the evolution of cultural representation in Senegal, from ethnographic exhibitions to decolonized narratives. Specifically, the article explores the transformation of the Musée d'Art Africain de l'IFAN in Dakar, Senegal, from initially showcasing ethnography to later focusing on aesthetic expression that was divorced from its context. Maguire analyzes the shift, initiated by the Institut Français d'Afrique Noire,

as part of the decolonization of museums and a rebranding of colonial legacy. The museum, which opened in 1961, initially followed ethnographic exhibition practices. Senegalese President Senghor supported it as a means to promote African culture and strengthen ties with France. In this article, Maguire documents how opposition grew, fueled by Marxist sentiments and a student protest in 1968. The museum would soon close for renovation, allowing for significant changes under a leftist director. Importantly, Maguire suggests that these efforts to decolonize the museum were more than symbolic gestures; they involved acknowledging the violence inherent in colonial exhibitions and breaking free from French normative frameworks.

Turning to the militarized landscapes of the Sahel, Zimmerman's examination of French colonial legacies in "Militarization and Gender-Based Violence in French Colonial and Contemporary Sahelian Africa" underscores the enduring scars of militarization. Through a lens focused on gender-based violence, Zimmerman exposes the intersection of French military imperialism, Sahelian patriarchal structures, and a disturbing continuum of sexual violence against civilians. From the 1890s to the present, the article centers historical case studies and contemporary testimonies, to lay bare the systemic injustices perpetuated by militarized interventions. It reveals the plight of African soldiers caught in a cycle of brutality and urges a reevaluation of security paradigms in the region.

Lastly, Turtio's exploration of Cold War dynamics in Mali and Guinea, "Soviet Military Assistance to Mali and Guinea, 1958–1980," unravels the intricate web of superpower rivalries. Against a backdrop of ideological competition, Soviet military aid became both a tool of influence and a harbinger of instability, leading to widespread human rights abuses and economic turmoil. The shifting allegiances of the West African states of Mali and Guinea, caught in the crossfire of global geopolitics, reveal the high stakes of Cold War maneuvering, leaving behind a legacy of political turmoil and economic disarray. Turtio argues that Russia's resurgence in Mali today underscores the lasting imprint of these past interventions.

The common thread that emerges from these tenth-anniversary histories of Liberia, Ghana, Senegal, the Sahel, and beyond is a persistent struggle to reckon with the legacies of colonialism, imperialism, and hegemony. In more ways than not, these narratives, which cause us to confront uncomfortable truths, are histories of resilience and resistance—of agency, autonomy, and self-determination.

As we at *JWAH* continue to reckon with our West African pasts, we look ahead to our future—a promise of even greater opportunities to expand our reach and deepen our scholarship. We invite you, our readers, to embark on this next ten-year journey of scholarly exploration and distinction with us. And we pray that *amaechina*—that our collective paths never close.

I now, with great pleasure, present volume 10, issue 1, of the *Journal of West African History*.