

# Hemispheres

Studies on Cultures and Societies



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# The Probable Extinction of Storytelling and Moonlight Games: Effects on Culture and Wellness among the Igbo of Nigeria

## Abstract

In African culture, storytelling and moonlight games are all vital parts of people's way of life, especially the Igbo people. Storytelling and moonlight games go a long way in upholding ethical communal behaviour and passing down social education at various crucial moments, serving as mediums for transmitting values, history, and communal bonding. However, such practices are increasingly at risk of disappearing with modern technology and urbanisation. This research seeks to explore the probable extinction of the act of storytelling and moonlight games among the Igbo people. Through qualitative research methods, including interviews and participant observations, this paper investigates the current state of these cultural practices and their significance in contemporary Igbo society. The findings reveal a marked decline in the prevalence of storytelling and moonlight games, particularly among younger generations. The paper concludes that for these cultural practices to be preserved there is a need for initiatives and policy interventions to ensure their survival and the continued relevance of storytelling in Igbo society.

**Keywords:** storytelling, moonlight games, culture, wellness, oral tradition and extinction.

## Introduction

In all African societies, orality (oral tradition), which includes storytelling, has been one of the ways traditions and cultural identities have been preserved from one generation to another. Storytelling has been part and parcel of every individual in any given society and can be seen as the fundamental human right of everyone in the community wherein both the griot (teller) and audience (listeners) are communally bonded. The basic feature of nearly all literary works is that they were initially expressed and transmitted orally

before arriving at the state of written literature or written heritage. Orality, such as moonlight stories, prevailed where the spoken conveyance of ideas, beliefs, and values was dominant. Storytelling plays a vital role in preserving cultural identity by transmitting knowledge, values, and traditions from one generation to the next. These traditions are crucial for comprehending the lives of a people, regardless of whether they belong to literate, oral culture models or mixed model societies.

Wherever human beings exist they have a language, and in every instance a language that exists basically as spoken and heard, in the world of sound (Siertsema, 1955). Indeed, language is so overwhelmingly oral that of all the many thousands of languages – possibly tens of thousands – spoken in human history only around 106 have ever been committed to writing to a degree sufficient to have produced literature, and most have never been written (Org, 1982). Yet, not every aspect of a people's history can be recorded. It may also be true that some of the most interesting aspects of oral history may be overlooked by history writers, even in literate societies (Segun, 2014). In such situations, community chroniclers are relied upon. In the case of predominantly oral cultures, oral tradition is an indispensable source of history, an indicator of deep thought, and a transmitter of cultural and religious values (Okwechime, 2004). An oral expression can exist and mostly has existed without any writing; writing is never without orality (Org, 1982).

Despite the oral roots of all verbalisation, the scientific and literary study of language and literature has for centuries, until quite recent years, shied away from orality. Texts have clamored for attention so preemptorily that oral creations have tended to be regarded generally as variants of written productions or, if not, then as beneath serious scholarly attention (Org, 1982). Only relatively recently have we become impatient with our obtuseness here (Finnegan, 1977). Yet, it is through the vast ocean of the oral tradition of an oral culture that one can discover their historical being and their contribution to the metaphysical world (Segun, 2014), as in the case of the Igbo in Nigeria. In that case, one might argue that the term 'literature', though devised primarily for works in writing, has simply been extended to include related phenomena such as traditional oral narrative in cultures untouched by writing (Finnegan, 1977).

The Igbo people, the major focus of this research, are among the subgroups of sub-Saharan African society. It is pertinent to note that this group is one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria. The Igbo people occupy mainly the eastern part of the country and are predominantly found in the five eastern states of Anambra, Abia, Enugu, Ebonyi and Imo states. There are also large Igbo populations in the Delta and River states. Through migration, the Igbo

people are found in different parts of Nigeria and the world at large. They have interesting traditions and customs, among which is the act of storytelling and captivating moonlight games.

Storytelling, which refers to the practice of sharing stories, folklore, myths, legends, fairy tales, and fables among other things, through spoken word rather than written text, can be seen as the means through which we come to know ourselves and others, and the non-human elements of the universe (Davies, 2011). It is a vital source of orality because it is being communicated through the indigenous languages, which brings deep meaning, standards and morals in the societies and deeply helps in preserving the cultural identity of a given society. The embodiment of storytelling is one aspect of the integration of mind, body, and emotion. The psycho-biological connection is readily apparent. Not only is the body used to transmit words, for example through the mouth and ears but, oral storytelling generally involves a face-to-face encounter, meaning that both teller and hearer can see each other's expressions as emotions and body language change (Abram, 2005). The storyteller transmits the story using mouth, facial expressions and body language and the hearer listens and interprets the teller's verbal and non-verbal cues. The moral instructions embedded in all the stories make young minds smart, intelligent, wise and psychologically mature to better navigate the affairs of life. Storytelling is also a means through which indigenous languages are learned, cultures are preserved and the traditions of the land are transmitted from one generation to another (Ogbu, 2018).

The thrust of this paper is to explore storytelling as an alternate and relational form of pedagogy. The paper sets out to investigate the probable extinction of storytelling and moonlight games, and the effects of this on culture and wellness among the Igbo. It seeks to understand how storytelling can reveal character traits of the young mind in Igboland and connect the impact of storytelling and moonlight games to character development.

### **What is Storytelling/Oral Tradition?**

Storytelling, which is found in orality, or orature – the combination of orality and literature (Finnegan, 1977; 1990) – is a unique action that is ubiquitous and is well-liked, especially among children in many African societies, including Igbo society. When a people's history/identity is (re)constructed through storytelling, oral testimonies, and cultural data provided by individuals or groups, either in the absence of, or to complement, writing it lays the foundation for future reconstructions based on oral transmission. This method is known in historical scholarship as orality. Besides the ancient existence of orality

in literature, writing has an important place in preserving the oral tradition. Orality refers to the transmission of facts, values, and fiction through oral means or storytelling (Finnegan, 2015; Segun, 2014). Storytelling qualifies as a “tradition” not because it is a fleeting, temporary approach to historical knowledge, but because it is a method that persists, endures, and remains stable over time. The term means the transmission of facts, values and fiction through oral means/storytelling. It is therefore one used by the observer – the scholar – to refer to the source of his/her knowledge of a people’s history and culture (Ezeigbo, 2013).

The chronicles of events told by griots (either local historians, storytellers, praise singers, poets, or musicians) – the myths; legends; cosmological ideas; and proverbs of sages, the folktales of storytellers, and the riddles and tongue twisters of verbal artists – constitute a people’s cultural data. When utilised properly, this data provides largely reliable knowledge, founded on a tradition of understanding that has been trusted by generations.

Not all elements of oral tradition originate from the desire to document history. Folktales, proverbs, songs, and chants may primarily serve to entertain and express ideas of ultimate reality and meaning for the people. Nonetheless, these forms can also aid scholars in understanding their history. The most crucial characteristics of oral tradition are its oral nature/ and its role as a medium for cultural continuity (Segun, 2014, p. 32).

In the Igbo cultural settings, storytelling has been the medium through which the people have preserved their cultural continuity, communal lifestyle, beliefs, social values, wise sayings, and cultural experiences (Verbina, 2013). It has provided an avenue for elders in Igbo society to impart essential moral norms and values to the younger generation, who, in turn, pass them on to their children, and the circle continues from one generation to another. Storytelling can be dated as far back as Igbo society has existed. It was a common practice in pre-literate Nigerian societies, serving to educate, preserve oral history, and transmit cultural norms to the indigenous population. Nigerian communities used storytelling as oral discourse, since writing was unknown to most of the populace (Achebe, 1959).

Scholars like Esther Oduolowu and Akintemi, Eileen Oluwakemi (2014) argued that in the traditional African environment, specifically Nigeria, young children are told stories by parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts. Ikechukwu Asika (2020) illustrated how storytelling works in Igbo traditional society, the stories often involving human beings, spirits, and animals in the struggle to survive in a mystifying world. These stories are believed to have taken place

in the past and the vital focus was to instill moral values in the heart of the listeners, fostering enduring good behavior, and promoting a harmonious way of life within the community.

During storytelling sessions, typically held during moonlight evenings, everyone learns from each other's mistakes, misdemeanors, and misconceptions. This communal learning through storytelling is a cherished aspect of Igbo society, contributing to its endurance and vitality. Through storytelling, children practice listening skills, learn how to follow elders' instructions and gain insight into their heritage. For adults, these stories highlight the wisdom, knowledge, and authority of the elders. Folktales are usually shared in the evenings after daily chores are completed. Children gather around the fireside in their father's *obi* or their mother's hut to listen. These tales often include proverbs, short, memorable sayings embedded with lessons.

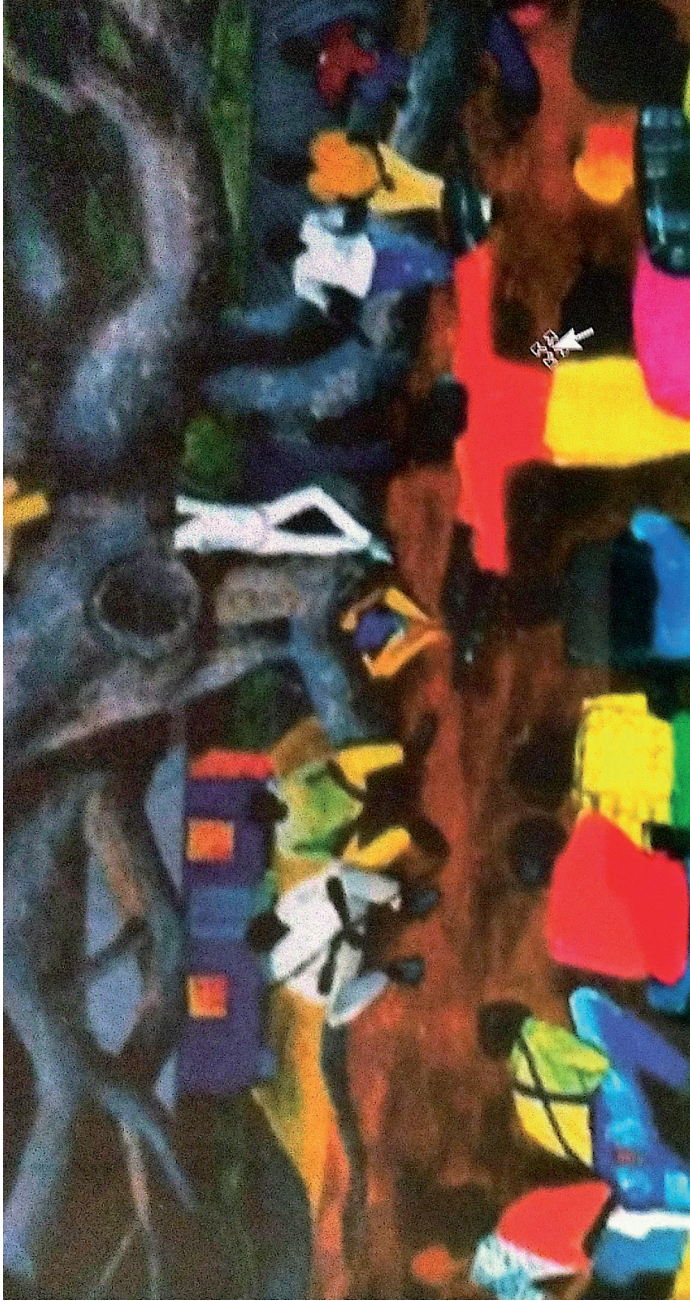
The storytelling of Igbo society, therefore, embraces both oral traditions in terms of reported accounts from the recent or remote past as well as oral history, the testimonies of contemporaries of such events. The Homeric epics, the Biblical accounts, the hadith of the Islamic tradition, the ballads, saga, and epics of many national literary traditions, which once took the form of storytelling, belong to the category of oral tradition written down and transformed from that tradition to the point where it started to give over to written tradition. In this sense, it may be claimed that storytelling in Igboland has been a universal tradition. The oral tradition is universal also in the form of oral history since this form of oral tradition co-exists with the written tradition and complements it in every culture, including Igbo culture (Aharanwa, Ubaku, and Ugwuja, 2014).

Storytelling in Igbo culture embraces forms of information preserved in the lives of people outside the literary system. Data of this type may be subsumed under terms such as folklore or ethnographic record. In the oral societies of Africa, much information of a historical character was embedded in ritual incantations, festivals, dances and masking, drumming and declamatory utterances and various economic, social and political institutions and activities.

### **The Igbo Culture and its Wellness**

According to Adrienne Chan, culture is viewed as a crucial resource for indigenous communities (Chan, 2021). Retaining and strengthening cultural roots and practices is viewed as a means to maintain community coherence and strength. More specifically, Chandler and Lalonde (2008) connect the preservation of traditions, beliefs and language with societal wellbeing, for example the minimalization of alienation or anomie and collective

**Fig 1:** A sketch Picture of Storytelling



**Source:** Igbo Culture: Oke Iregbu's Musing, <https://images.app.goo.gl/kHe6EBWg3t4fxwr06>

self-damaging tendencies. In addition, Carlson (2010) posits that maintaining cultural connections and continuity is crucial in preventing self-harm among indigenous youth; other studies such as Sesan (2014), call attention to the vitality of self-reliance, self-control and the use of traditional/indigenous language, in re-discovering everyday customs that may have been lost due to cultural annihilation and genocide. According to some researchers, it is pertinent to re-learn customs and culture and for indigenous communities to make concerted efforts to preserve cultural practices and invest in elders and cultural facilitators to promote knowledge and shared history, which, in turn, develop individual and collective identities (Baladasaro, Maldonado and Baltes, 2014).

The onus of this work is for the Igbo member to know the indigenous language and practice the culture because this is connected to wellness and is the basis of cultural continuity, unity and preservation of cultural identity both at home and abroad. The wellness of an individual is connected to the deep connections they know, exhibit and practice. This can only be possible when an individual knows his/her roots by communicating with the indigenous language and embracing in the totality of cultural heritage. Where an individual is not conversant with his/her language and does not know his roots, how can the individual know what is expected of him/her in his community?

### **Significance of Storytelling and Moonlight Games in Igbo Culture**

The historical significance of storytelling in the Igbo culture can never be over-emphasised as it has always been a vital means of communication, acquiring the indigenous language and cultural preservation. Through oral narratives passed down from one generation to another, the Igbo people have maintained a rich tapestry of myths, legends, histories and moral teachings. As stated by Chinua Achebe:

It is only the story that can continue beyond the war and the warrior. It is the story that outlives the sound of war drums and the exploits of brave fighters. It is the story...that saves our progeny (off-spring) from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence. The story is our escort; without it, we are blind. Does the blind man own his escort? No, neither do we, the story; rather it is the story that owns us and directs us (Achebe 1987, p. 12).

The moonlight games, traditional nighttime activities often associated with cultural and social gatherings, involve storytelling, singing, dancing, and sometimes drama performances, which are often performed after a day's work, such as *Egwuonwa* or *Apèèrè Eré Ídàrayá Òşúpá*, and provided a space for

social interaction, recreation, and community bonding. These games were not only fun activities but also served as a way to reinforce social norms, foster cooperation, and instill a sense of belonging among participants. Moonlight games, according to Asika (2020), are activities carried in Igbo land at the appearance of the full moon, when the light emanating from the moon is visible enough to bring a good and clear sight in the compound or village square. The moonlight games provided a magical backdrop for these communal gatherings, enhancing the experience and creating lasting memories.

The origin of moonlight dates back to the days of the Igbo forefathers (Ijioma, 2024), part of the tradition of playful interactions. These games typically occur within the family courtyard or compound, especially for the younger children, and occasionally at the village square. The games usually take place during the dry season, to ensure the rain does not interrupt them. Children between the ages of five and seventeen are mainly the participants. The play is a recreational activity which commences especially after dinner and runs into the night (Ijioma, 2024). It is a rich source of entertainment, education, and recreation.

Moonlight games include various activities, such as songs, précis and responses, wrestling, dance, mimes, riddles, puzzles, storytelling, group dynamics, and more. Women engage in a type of dance, (*ikpo oga*), singing and gossip about lovers and affairs. The younger men delight in engaging in stunts, wrestling, acrobatics and other games. Adults also take part in the games, but on a different level. The elderly men sit around the fire to make jokes *njakiri* and reminisce on heroic feats they achieved in various endeavors. Lastly, the mothers engaged the little ones in folklore, where moral values are impacted (Chima, 2024).

This study adapted some of the collection of Asika (2020) on moonlight games in a particular part of the Igbo land. The study did so because these games are similar in all Igbo lands but different in the oral rendition in different indigenous languages. Examining these games rendered in the Igbo language helps to show the significance of the moonlight games and storytelling. It also goes a long way to revitalise the nostalgic socio-cultural and moral values of the Igbo people. Asika (2020) compiled a few of the raw moonlight songs and games collected in Nise, a town in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State. One of the collected games is called *Dodo nido, Doni*. In this game, participants are split into two teams. Each team grips one side of a bamboo stem and, as soon as the contest begins, they start singing:

*Dodo nido, doni. (2x) – (suggesting let us pull, let us pull)*

*Ngodo wete ogugu ka anyi nafo do- do ni – Ngodo (bring the bamboo stem so that we contest)*

**Fig 2:** Youths Reaffirm Identity during Moonlight Game



**Source:** <https://images.app.goo.gl/Tbc3UQHbP674woW8A>

*Arah weta ogugu ka anyi nafa do- do ni* – (Arah bring the bamboo stem so that we contest)

*Umuazu weta ogugu ka anyi nafa do- do ni* – (Umuazu bring the bamboo stem so that we contest)

*Isiakpu weta ogugu ka anyi nafa do- do ni* – (Isiakpu bring the bamboo stem so that we contest).

The next game is titled *Nwa m Nwa m*, and involves two groups with an equal number of team members. In each round, one member from each team is sent out to hop on one leg while the group sings:

*Nwa m, Nwa m, nwa m o- kpangene* – (My child, my child – group chorus)

*Nwa m jelu oku na agbaja- kpangene* – (My child that went to answer a call in faraway land)

*Okpa luo gi ani gi nodu oo, – kpangene* – (If your two legs touch the ground, then stay back) *Okpa elughi gi ani gi nata ba – kpangene* – (you can return if your legs do not touch the ground then return).

The rule about two legs touching the ground means if you are comfortable, do not return; if you are not, return to us. The two contestants continue to dance and challenge each other on one leg. The first to put their second leg down is recruited by the other team. The game continues in this manner until one team runs out of members.

Another game collected by Asika (2020) is called *Asigene*. In this game, children sit in a circle with three major characters: *Amagu*, *Ichele*, and the lead singer, *Asigene*. A pebble serves as the bone of contention. *Ichele* is tasked with keenly observing the pebble's movement within the circle. Whoever fails to pass the pebble correctly is caught and must replace the person in the middle of the circle. The game then restarts. During the game, the leader sings and passes the pebble around:

*Asigene kpanga ofe, oho oo, oho* – (Asigene passes on the pebble)

*Onye na onye ka nchiche nata?* – (Who is being plagued by leprosy?)

*Ima na nchiche anaro atanu m oo* – (I am not plagued by leprosy)

*onona ogbo ka nchiche n'ata* – (It is the one standing in the middle that is plagued by leprosy).

In the context of the song, whoever is in the middle is assumed to be afflicted with leprosy. This derogatory remark and the associated shame motivate the individual to find a replacement at all costs to escape the humiliation. Once this

occurs, the game restarts with a new individual, now considered the victim of the leprosy menace, occupying the middle.

Another game is called *Ayolo*. Before the game begins, the groups are divided into two equal teams. Each group has a mother figure overseeing and caring for her children (group members). Each group dispatches a member on a mission to lure and snatch a child from the other group to add to their own. The person sent addresses the mother of the opposing group as *Ayolo*. She chants:

*Ayolo na abia m be gi* – (Ayolo I have come to your house)

*Ibakwa be m noo (2 times)* – (If you have come to my house, you are welcome)

*Isi nke a di ka isi nwa m oo* – (This head of this one is like the head of my child)

The team echoes: *oburokwa nwa gi!* – (She is not your child!)

*Anya nke a di ka anya nwa m oo* – (The eyes of this one are like the eyes of my child)

*Oburokwa nwa gi oo!* – (She is not your child!)

*Imi nke a di ka anya nwa m oo* – (This nose is like the nose of my child.)

*Oburokwa nwa gi oo!* – (She is not your child!).

(She will continue naming other parts of the body until she begins negotiating with the opponents).

*Mu welu nke a?* – (Should I go with this one?)

*Eee ooo na ona echu iyi eee ooo* – (No, No, No, she fetches water! No, no, no!)

*Mu welu nke a?* – (Should I go with this one?)

*Eee ooo na ona awa nku eee ooo* – (No, No, No, she cuts firewood! No, no, no!)

*Mu welu nke a?* – (Should I go with this one?)

*Eee ooo na ona esi nri eee ooo* – (No, No, No, she cooks food! No, no, no!).

After much questioning, when the mother is not vigilant, the visitor seizes one of the children and attempts to flee. If successful, she takes the child to join her group. If unsuccessful, she returns. Then it will be the other group's turn to attempt the same act and gain a member. The game concludes when a mother in one group loses all her children to the mother of the other group.

The last game we shall consider here is *Onye enena Anya n'azu*:

*Onye ene na anya na azu* – (No one should look behind)

*Mmonwu anyi na aga n'ilo* – (Our masquerade is passing in the village square)

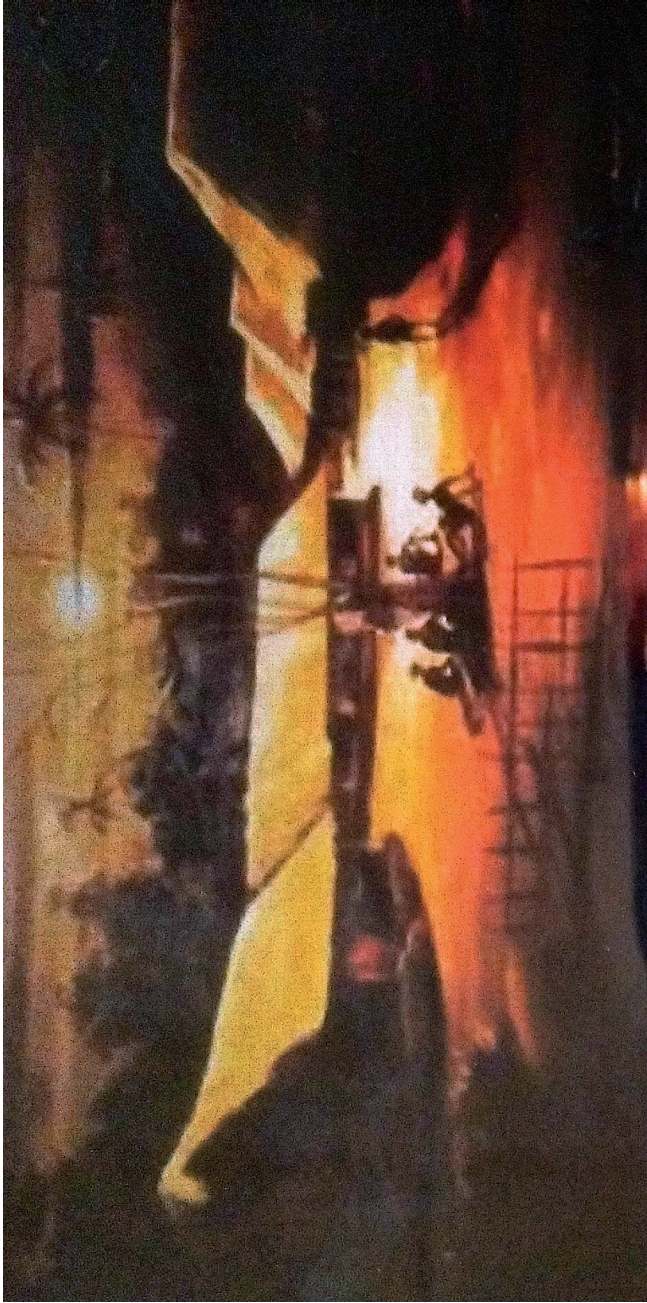
*Onye nee anya n'azu* – (Anyone who looks back)

*Mmonwu anyi ga apia ya utali* – (Our masquerade will flog him/her).

This game is very popular among the Igbo people and is typically played by children. The children sit in a circle while one child runs behind them with a stick, shouting intensely and warning everyone not to look back. The rest of the children respond affirmatively, acknowledging the consequences of being flogged if they do look back. At some point, the running child drops the stick behind someone. If the chosen child completes a circuit of the circle and sits down without the other noticing the stick, the inattentive child receives a flogging for their lack of vigilance. However, if the child catches up with the runner, they give the stick back before settling back into their original position, and the game continues. It is therefore pertinent to note that the various games promote obedience and diligence in a child, which in turn enhances the chances of a child abiding by the customs, laws, and ethical values that govern society. The communal closeness, co-existence, unity of purpose and harmony that moonlight brings, make Chinua Achebe recognise this great value of the novel *Things Fall Apart*: “When we gather together in the moonlight village ground, it is not because of the moon. Every man can see it in his compound. We come together because it is good for kinsmen to do so. Therefore, let us continue with the team spirit and enjoy the power of togetherness...” (Achebe, 1987, p. 45).

Storytelling and moonlight games are part of the culture of the Igbo people and culture is a total way of life of the people (Umeasiegbu, 2007). Culture is an essential part of human existence and to preserve it from generation to generation, indigenous languages are vital tools. In recent times, it is sad to mention that the delightful tradition of playing under the moonlight, *Egwuonwa* and storytelling in the indigenous language, is a neglected cultural practice among the Igbo people and that trend is also affecting the acquiring of indigenous dialects. One may say that these stories are preserved but that poses the question, in what language is it preserved? The decline of storytelling and moonlight games in Igbo culture despite their profound cultural significance is facing a steady decline.

**Fig 3:** Picture of Moonlight Gathering



**Source:** African Folktales: Tales by Moonlight, 1995. <http://www.bookshybooks.com/2012/10/throwback-tales-by-moonlight.html>

## Statement of the Problem

The issue that prompted this research is the significant decline in the use of the indigenous Igbo language, which our forefathers once taught through storytelling and moonlight games in Igbo society. Additionally, there is a gap and a waning interest in sharing our stories in the indigenous language within modern Igbo homes. This decline may be attributed to technological advancements and sophisticated inventions, facilitated by Western education and acculturation, which have transformed our modern-day societies and eroded our once-cherished ideals and indigenous cultures. Therefore, this begs the question:

1. Is there a probable extinction of storytelling in indigenous languages among the Igbos?
2. How well do young people know about the Igbo culture?
3. Do inter-tribal relationships affect the act of storytelling and moonlight games?
4. Are the Igbo parents living in the diaspora tell stories in their dialects of the Igbo heritage to their kids more than those living in Nigeria?

## Objective of Study

The objectives of the study were to work towards: resuscitating the act of storytelling using the Igbo indigenous languages; using technology to revive moonlight games among young minds using indigenous language; and educating young couples on the importance of training their young ones at home with indigenous languages. This research is also aimed at renewing interest in storytelling and moonlight activities in the Igbo language in a modern Igbo home. Just like the trending song “*gwo gwo ngwo*” story of *Nnambe na Enyi* (The Tortoise and the Elephant), *Mmere Mbe n’azu* (Why the Tortoise Has a Cracked Back), and many other enthralling folktales. Moonlight games activities include “hide and seek,” “action songs,” “tongue twisters,” “breath control games,” “riddles,” “puzzles” song display/dance choreographies and some dramatic performances. Even if they are not done under the moon again it should be encouraged among kids in the community, compound and environment. Through fieldwork, the research rediscovered the wealth of Igbo stories and moonlight games, and their educational, social, religious, and cultural impacts. Storytelling and games are imbued with underlying philosophical ideologies that can be harnessed to guide the Igbo people, and Africans at large, toward a more humane and desired destination. This study addresses some evident gaps in previous research on storytelling and moonlight

games and, most importantly, ignites the scholarly need for further refreshing, exciting, and thought-provoking discussions about storytelling and moonlight games in Igbo and African languages.

## **Research Method**

This research adopted the qualitative method that used a historical approach and ethnographic survey. The historical method was based on oral, primary and secondary sources. The samples for the research were oral interviews conducted on a randomly selected twenty-one interviewees gleaned from different parts of the Igbo land in the southern part of Nigeria. Thirteen interviewees are residing in the Western world, one in Benin Republic, while seven interviewees reside in different states in Nigeria. The accounts from the interviewees, seven females and fourteen males, formed the nexus on which the study drew its inferences.

## **Results of the Interviews**

The following questions were asked: is there a probable extinction of storytelling in indigenous languages among the Igbo? How well do married couples know the Igbo culture? Do they tell their kids about their culture or tell them stories in their indigenous language? How often do parents and their kids bond in indigenous games and storytelling? Do inter-tribal relationships affect the art of storytelling and moonlight games? Are the Igbo parents living in the diaspora telling stories in their dialects of the Igbo heritage to their kids more than those living in Nigeria?

Some parents born in the early 1980s to early 1990s attested to the fact that they enjoyed the moonlight games (Eke, 2023) and storytelling (Eze, 2024 and Onukaogu 2024) in a communal environment where unity, love and the speaking the Igbo language thrived. A few admitted not getting involved in storytelling in the Igbo language and moonlight games (Ajies 2024; Nwazue and Nwazue, 2024; Osagie and Osagie, 2024; Nwosu 2024) because they had elite parents who lived in the western part of Nigeria and they had to speak only the English language as their first language and the language of the environment. Some others admitted that they were conversant with the popular folktale television programme (*Tales by Moonlight*) that was aired on Nigeria Television Authority (NTA), but that they heard these enthralling stories in the English language and not the indigenous Igbo language (Kalu, 2024; Ugwuanyi 2024; Jaja, 2024; Ekuma, 2024).

Some adults born in the early 1990s said that they were not taught their indigenous Igbo language nor told stories in the language because their parents had white-collar jobs and had little or no time for the teaching and learning of the Igbo language through storytelling and games (Ipiankama, 2024 and Azubuike, 2024). Most of them lived in cities and never visited their hometowns, thereby not knowing the culture. Some of the interviewees who visited the village were not allowed to mingle for fear of evil people (Azubuike, 2024 and Chimaije, 2024). This unconscious act of relegating the Igbo language to the background in the late 1990s until the 2000s is being handed down to the generation known as Gen X. What these adults learned from their parents they are transferring to their children.

Furthermore, inter-tribal marriages have also impacted the learning of the Igbo indigenous language through storytelling and moonlight games. The Igbo men whose wives are not Igbos tend to speak just the English language at home. Some of them who did not even know that their language allowed their women folk to teach the children their (wives') dialects, thereby making the children more tilted to their mothers' culture (Jaja, 2024).

Surprisingly, it was observed that some of the interviewed Igbo parents living in the Western world like the United Kingdom, United States of America, Australia, Canada, among others, taught and ensured that their children speak the Igbo language more than the Nigerian parents that were interviewed. The diaspora parents told their children stories and made time out of their busy schedules to teach them the moonlight games, although it was not done at night. The reason is that they seem not to want their children to lose touch with home although they are not home. But this cannot be said to be the same for most Igbo parents in Nigeria, who prefer to westernise their children in Nigeria by banning them from speaking the Igbo language, let alone engaging the children in moonlight stories or moonlight games. As a result of this, the Igbo language is now threatened and may go into extinction in Nigeria.

### **Factors Contributing to the Lacking of Storytelling and Moonlight Games**

There is a serious decline in storytelling and moonlight games in Igbo culture despite their profound cultural significance. These factors mean the teaching and learning of the indigenous Igbo language faces a steady decline: firstly, the changing lifestyles in our modern society. Parents, teenagers, adolescents, and little children are increasingly preoccupied with work, school, and digital entertainment, leaving little time for the leisurely pursuits of storytelling and moonlight games. Urbanization, technology and globalisation have disrupted

the traditional rhythm of life that brought so much glamour and humour to the heart and mind (Chike, 2024).

Still battling with the changing lifestyle, the next profound factor is generational shift. As younger generations grow up in an increasingly digital world, their exposure to traditional cultural practices diminishes. The oral tradition of storytelling competes with flashy media forms, while moonlight games are often seen as outdated or uninteresting compared to video games and social media (Chima, 2024). Furthermore, there is the displacement of true elders and custodians of the Igbo oral traditions and cultural practices. Unfortunately, most elders who are revered as great storytellers or game organisers are losing their memories or some are passing away. With their deteriorated state or their departure, there is a risk that valuable knowledge and skills linked to moonlight games or storytelling will be lost.

Lastly, there is a lack of institutional support. It has been observed that schools, community centres and cultural institutions often prioritise academic subjects over cultural education (Ijoma 2024). As a result, opportunities for young people to learn and engage in storytelling and moonlight games are limited, leading to a serious disconnection between the younger and older generations.

### **The Effect of Lack of Storytelling and Moonlight Games on Culture and Wellness**

One can deduce that the probable extinction of storytelling and moonlight games in Igbo culture has a profound effect on the people and their culture as it undermines the learning of the language in the community. Some of the effects are:

1. **Misplacement of Cultural Identity:** Storytelling and moonlight games are pillars of Igbo cultural identity, which embodies the beliefs, moral values and historical truths of the society. If these practices are not continued, future generations may likely struggle to connect with their cultural traditions and heritage.
2. **Oral Tradition Decline:** The act and art of storytelling is a fundamental aspect of the Igbo culture. Through a good storyteller, wisdom, sound knowledge, moral ethics and values are transmitted from one generation to the other. If the art of storytelling continues to fade away, a vital link to the past will be lost, there will be no memory to preserve in the present, leading to the loss of collective memories that will be severed for the future. This will have an impact on how the community understands its history and place in the world.

3. Erosion of Social Cohesion: Storytelling and moonlight games have long served as social glue, bringing people together, fostering empathy and understanding, and strengthening community bonds. Their decline could lead to a loss of shared experiences and a weakening of social ties within the Igbo communities. (Sanchez and Stewart 2006)

## Recommendations

Efforts to preserve and revitalise storytelling and moonlight games in Igbo culture are essential to safeguarding the community's cultural heritage and promoting cultural continuity. Some strategies to consider include:

There should be an organisation of cultural events in the cities that brings together young people and elders to share stories, play traditional games and exchange wisdom and knowledgeable facts. This kind of intergenerational exchange will go a long way to help bridge the gap between generations and ensure the transmission of cultural practices. Also, there should be organised cultural festivals that can reignite interest in traditional practices and participation.

The Ministry of Education should integrate moonlight games and storytelling into the educational curricula and community centres. By so doing the children will learn about their cultural heritage and identity in a structured and meaningful method.

It is useful that the Igbo people digitalise their stories in the indigenous language and not in English. Embracing digital technologies to document and archive traditional stories, games and cultural practices is of paramount importance. Even creating games apps using the Igbo language to preserve the kind of games played under the moon will go a long way to ignite the interest of the younger generation towards participating in the richness of the Igbo culture. Creating digital repositories can ensure that these valuable cultural assets are preserved for future generations and made accessible to a wider audience.

## Conclusion

In recent times, it is apparent that Igbo society has shifted from the golden era of storytelling, known as *Egwuonwa* to the challenging age of technology. While Igbo and African cultures are dynamic and ever-evolving, certain elements, such as storytelling and moonlight games, remain fundamental to the socio-cultural identity and essence of the Igbo people. As has been stated during the course of this research, storytelling is a powerful tool for preserving and promoting cultural identity because it connects the past with the present,

educates and inspires, and ensures that the rich tapestry of cultural heritage continues to thrive across generations. Therefore, losing these cultures and traditions could signify the gradual loss of identity of the society.

The probable extinction of storytelling and moonlight games in Igbo culture represents a significant loss that could have far-reaching consequences for the community. These cultural practices are not just forms of entertainment but essential components of Igbo heritage, identity, and social bonding. By recognising the important values of storytelling and moonlight games and implementing strategies to preserve them, the Igbo community can ensure that these cherished cultural practices continue to enrich the lives of the present and future generations.

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# Afro-Brazilian Cultural Heritage in Nigeria: Mapping Contemporary Practices of Commemoration and Initiatives Toward Future Preservation

## Abstract

This paper explores the contemporary practices and initiatives established by the community of Nigerians of Afro-Brazilian origin with particular attention to how their cultural heritage intersects with the notion of cultural memory, different practices of commemoration and hybrid identity. Based on fieldwork research in southern part of Nigeria, Lagos in particular, I argue that there are three areas of action proposed by the representatives of Afro-Brazilians in Nigeria. They are as follows: 1. The necessity for mapping architectural manifestations of local and collective memory; 2. The initiation and execution of memorial practices as contemporary cultural activities; 3. The strengthening of institutional, commercial and international interactions. This analysis contributes to a nuanced understanding of cultural practices or spaces within multicultural societies in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Afro-Brazilian, cultural heritage, commemoration, Nigeria, identity.



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## Introduction

Contemporary Nigeria, like many societies in Sub-Saharan Africa, faces numerous challenges related to the preservation of unique heritage and cultural memory, alongside the need to reconstruct identity and historical awareness. The proliferation of globalisation, alongside social and political changes, necessitates a reconstruction of identity and historical consciousness, which constitutes a significant theme for researchers focusing on cultural heritage. This article delineates the objectives, theoretical framework and outcomes of field research concerning Afro-Brazilian cultural heritage, the role of cultural memory in constructing the identity of Nigerian communities within the contexts of local, regional, and national values.<sup>1</sup> The overarching

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is the result of the author's research conducted under the project titled "Pamięć kulturowa a dziedzictwo afro-brazylijskie w Nigerii – w poszukiwaniu tożsamości" [Cultural memory and the Afro-Brazilian heritage in Nigeria – in search of identity]. This research was

aim of the research is to analyse memory practices and traces of heritage, including elements of urban space in Nigeria, facilitating new perspectives on contemporary negotiations of group identity.

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, migrants of Brazilian and African descent started arriving in Lagos and Badagry, including not only Afro-Brazilians but also Afro-Cubans and Sierra Leonians known as Saros (Otero, 2010). Among these, the Afro-Brazilians and the Saros were the most prominent groups. The Afro-Brazilians in West Africa were descendants of African slaves, mainly of Yoruba descent, who had been taken to Brazil and returned to West Africa between the 1820s and 1890s, mainly after the abolition of the slave trade in Brazil (Araujo, 2010; Castillo, Mann, 2024; Olinto, 1964; Ojo-Ade, 2009). In Nigeria, both Afro-Brazilians and Afro-Cubans were collectively referred to as ‘Brazilians’ or Aguda (a Yoruba term for Catholics), likely due to their predominant Catholic faith (Amos, 2017; Castillo 2016). The Afro-Brazilian community settled in their own quarter on Lagos Island, significantly influencing architecture and developing a unique creole culture during the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Lindsay, 1994). Their architectural style, that made substantial and even revolutionary contributions to Lagos’s urban landscape, was characterised by a blend of Brazilian, Portuguese and British colonial elements and traditional Yoruba spatial layouts (George, 2013; George, 2021; Harrison, Igwe, 2015). Afro-Brazilians were celebrated for their design and construction skills, craft and innovation (Ojo-Ade, 2009).

## Methodology and Research Implementation

The focus of this scientific endeavour, which aligns with the field of cultural and heritage studies, encompasses both material and spiritual testimonies: specifically, the traces of the material heritage of Afro-Brazilians in Nigeria, as well as manifestations of cultural memory mechanisms among their representatives. The study group comprises Nigerians with Brazilian surnames, who identify as descendants of Africans in Brazil (from West Africa).<sup>2</sup> The return migration took place in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, settling along the West African coast, with the largest single wave between 1835–1837 and when Brazil’s participation in the Atlantic slave trade ended in 1850s. (Castillo, 2016;

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<sup>2</sup> The author would like to thank the interviewees for their valuable ideas and contributions to this research on the community, inhabitants and members of Popo-Aguda, including Martins families, Gomez and Fernandez, and a joint visit to the Brazilian Quarter in Lagos carried out thanks to representatives of the Afro-Brazilian Association.

Cunha 2012; Castillo and Mann, 2024). The overarching goal is to investigate the role of cultural memory and Afro-Brazilian heritage in Nigeria within the context of identity construction. This scientific inquiry aims to enhance understanding of contemporary processes and experiences in the Diaspora and provide a critical interpretation, thereby addressing the following questions: 1) What are the most important contemporary practices of commemoration and initiatives toward future preservation of Afro-Brazilian heritage in Nigeria?; 2) How and for what reasons does the studied community utilise memory in cultural productions, interactions, oral and material transmissions?; 3) What institutional, social and cultural mechanisms enable the transformation of memory and the recovery of the group's forgotten heritage, and where do they lead?

The outcomes of this research include filling critical knowledge gaps regarding the participation of Afro-Brazilians in shaping the cultural reality of the region, encompassing various aspects and contexts: historical (colonialism, memory, migration, Diaspora life, mutual influence), cultural-religious (the richness of ethnic and religious diversity, cultural hybridity), and social (communication, elements of conflict). During a two-month field work research, traces of heritage were examined, focusing on the practices of residents and elements of urban space. A field study was predominantly conducted in southwestern Nigeria, specifically in Lagos, Ibadan, and Badagry, key locations where Afro-Brazilian communities are most active, have the largest architectural setting and play a significant role in shaping the contemporary landscape of the Lagos agglomeration. Additionally, there are formal structures with an official representative of Afro-Brazilians known as 'onipopo'. The selection of these sites was justified by the richness and preservation of cultural heritage, alongside the presence of relevant associations. Moreover, the research area in Nigeria was precisely defined and limited to a few spaces, with the study group, comprising the largest representation of Afro-Brazilians, being historically and familiarly linked to the Popo-Aguda district. Nigeria is an appropriate location for initiating this research due to its unique material heritage.

A comprehensive analysis was conducted on the symbolism and narratives surrounding indigenous architecture integrated into the Afro-Brazilian legacy (both secular and sacred structures) in the historical Popo-Aguda district located in Lagos Island, as well as the practices surrounding holidays, the celebration of festivals and carnivals, and the activities and roles of formalised associations, such as the Brazilian Descendants Association Lagos (founded

in 1963)<sup>3</sup> and the Yoruba-Brazilian Descendants Renascimento Association.<sup>4</sup> The research expedition employed qualitative methods, including narrative analysis, observation of memorial practices, and visual or photographic documentation of the old Brazilian Quarter. Thanks to this, some specific cultural practices that signify Afro-Brazilian identity and meanings were investigated. Queries were conducted in library and museum archives, including The Nigerian National Museum in Lagos, the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Bayero University in Kano, Lagos State University Centre for Afro-Brazilian Studies (LASUCAS), the Lagos State University Library, and the Onikan House Library. Specific cultural practices that delineate Afro-Brazilian identity were examined, particularly among members of two above-mentioned Afro-Brazilian organisations. Conversations with representatives from the Martins, Salvador, and Gomez families, as well as individuals involved in the management of the Afro-Brazilian Cultural Centre on Lagos Island, facilitated the gathering of data regarding their experiences, traditions, and perceptions of identity.<sup>5</sup>

## 1. Theoretical Framework

### 1.1. Cultural Heritage and Identity

Preliminary research in this area indicates that the topic of cultural heritage is not frequently addressed in current scholarly literature, with existing works either general in nature or situated solely within political and literary contexts (Keitumetse, 2016). Heritage is understood here, following Gregory Ashworth's perspective, as a process in which objects, places, events, and actions derived from the past – treated as carriers of historicity that meet social,

<sup>3</sup> The 1960s was the period during which scholars from Brazil showed an interest in the history and culture of Aguda society. However, this phenomenon occurred against the backdrop of a more extensive history of organisations advocating for Brazilian cultural heritage.

<sup>4</sup> The oldest lay organisation within the Brazilian community and the Catholic Church in Nigeria was the Catholic Friendly Society inaugurated in 1903, followed by the Brazilian Descendants' Union (1919). Its founders were the second generation of Brazilian returnees, who, unlike their predecessors who only spoke Portuguese, were proficient in English. They were: P.F Gomes, S.J Sawyer, J.F Branco, J.T Munis, H.M Reis, J.P Marquis, V. F Munis, J.J Martin, A.F Gomes, D.P Siffre, E.E Gomes, E.I de Souza, J.B da Silva, F.E da Silva. The Society was actively supported by Fr. Pedro Martins (Later Monsignor Pedro Martins), whose current family, dedicated to the memory of Brazilian origins, this author met in Lagos in 2020 and 2024.

<sup>5</sup> Discussions on the researched topic were also conducted during the scientific conference, the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Lagos Studies Association Conference titled "African Identities: Peoples, Cultures and Institutions in Motion," organised at the University of Lagos by the Lagos Studies Association, of which this author is a member.

political, or economic needs or demands – are transformed into experiences of the contemporary (Ashworth, 2015, p. 31–40). The process of engaging with the past occurs through diverse forms of remembrance, storytelling, and commemoration, which include artifacts, traditions, sources, and monuments. It entails transforming the past into experiences that are lived in the here and now, as well as creating representations of the past within the present context. Meanwhile, the role of education is to safeguard this heritage, which is understood as the preservation, conservation, and transmission of cultural legacies to future generations. Essentially, heritage acts as a social construct that allows for the preservation of sites, objects, and memories, which in turn shape our understanding of the past and identity. The selection of tangible or intangible heritage resources is based on subjective criteria, and historical components are adapted and utilised in the present according to the requirements of those engaging with them. As defined by UNESCO in the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage from 2003:

The ‘intangible cultural heritage’ means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity (UNESCO, Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2003).

Heritage can signify a cultural and political process of remembering and forgetting, as it can not only be accepted, commemorated, and passed on to future generations, but also rejected and forgotten. If heritage no longer provides benefits, it is rejected and removed from public spaces and social awareness.

## **1.2. The Memory and the Practices of Commemoration**

In the context of African research, various theories of cultural heritage and memory are of special value, including works of Elisabeth Mudimbe Boyi (*Remembering Africa*, 2002), Kodzo Gavua (*The Politics of Heritage in Africa: economies, histories, infrastructures*, 2015), or Sabine Marschall (*Landscape of Memory. Commemorative monuments, memorials and public statuary in post-apartheid South-Africa*, 2010). The works collectively explore the intricate

interplay between memory, heritage, and identity within the African context, while also engaging with broader themes of cultural representation and the legacies of colonial encounters. A common thread among these authors is their emphasis on the significance of memory, not merely as a recollection of the past but as a dynamic process that shapes identities and cultural narratives in contemporary Africa. Mudimbe-Boyi's collection of essays highlights the multifaceted nature of Africa's memory through various textual expressions and personal experiences. By focusing on the dialogues that emerge from the meeting of Africa and the West, the author underscores how memories of the continent are inscribed and re-inscribed across different cultural artifacts and narratives. This approach resonates with Gavua's examination of heritage, which moves beyond traditional museum studies to consider a wider array of knowledge production. By analysing the marketing of violent pasts in Ghana and South Africa, Gavua situates heritage as a contested site where memory and identity are continually negotiated, reflecting both local and global dynamics. Marschall's exploration of "memory objects" further enriches this discourse by exploring the role of material culture in the lives of intra-African migrants. Her findings challenge prevailing assumptions about the sentimental value of objects, highlighting instead the socio-cultural contexts that inform emotional attachments. This focus on the significance of everyday items as vessels of memory aligns with Mudimbe-Boyi's notion of memory as a site of dialogue and Gavua's understanding of heritage as a form of knowledge production. Together, these works underscore the importance of memory in shaping cultural identity and heritage, illustrating how personal, collective, and historical narratives intersect to inform contemporary experiences. By bridging various domains such as literature, heritage studies, and material culture, the authors contribute to a nuanced understanding of how memory operates as a vital force in the ongoing construction of African identities.

What is more, memory includes past recollections that are expressed in contemporary locations. Identities can be shaped through personal, familial, and communal practices, traditions, or stories that define our sense of self. This also encompasses how people use memory to establish a sense of home. Mirjam de Bruijn, in her essay about a confrontation surrounding the political transformation of the Sahel, provided a thoughtful comment on the past in the present: "Forgotten and unforgotten pasts inform the present (Trouillot 2015) and help us imagine the future [...] The importance of the past operates at two levels. First, stories and images from the pre-colonial era provide people with the collective memory they use to exert power in the present. Second, remembering the past plays a role in establishing a person's identity, and it does not need to be a conscious process (de Bruijn and Both 2018; Stoler 2016)." (de Bruijn, 2022, p. 171).

Commemoration, as a cultural practice, serves to render past events or individuals present for the purpose of veneration by specific social groups, thereby affirming their own identity. This practice can manifest in tangible forms as well as through various ceremonial actions, such as anniversary celebrations and speeches. Cultural modes of commemoration are interwoven across diverse media and cultural realms, which include the establishment of holidays within the calendar, public gatherings, and the construction of enduring memorials, such as commemorative plaques, epitaphs, monuments, and lists honouring the deceased. The essence of commemoration lies in the incorporation of specific elements from the past – events, individuals, locations that no longer exist, or even objects – into collective memory, effectively transferring these elements into the broader public domain. Commemoration is typically situated within a social ritual, utilising specific media that serve as tangible manifestations of the past within the present. A critical analytical dimension in the inquiry of these commemorative practices is the concept of participation, which is articulated through the co-presence of individuals and the performative realisation of rigorously defined patterns.

To introduce the latest research perspective on cultural memory, it is worth citing Milton Guran's example. The research conducted by Guran, titled "The Bricolage of Memory," explores the intricate connections between memory, commemoration, and identity in Benin. The study delves into how Aguda individuals and community construct their identities through the selective remembrance and representation of past events (Guran 2002). Being Aguda in present-day Benin involves sharing a collective memory tied to a series of accomplishments and a distinct "Brazilian" identity.<sup>6</sup> In the context of the Afro-Brazilian community in Nigeria, diverse cultural practices of commemoration serve to either establish or reinforce communal bonds by coordinating activities within the public sphere. These practices create a framework for rituals, which may include the observance of a calendar that marks significant holidays (such as festivals or carnival), or the erection of monuments that designate sacred spaces of remembrance.

## **2. Identity and Belonging: Afro-Brazilian Cultural Practices**

Many Afro-Brazilians face challenges regarding their sense of belonging due to the erasure and marginalisation of African heritage from world history. While in many cases an experience or history is linked with a sense of pride, in others it is forgotten or neglected. In an effort to address the cognitive gap in the cultural narrative of Nigeria's past, various conceptualisations of memory and

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<sup>6</sup> On Aguda communities in Benin see more: Turner 1975; Verger 1976; Soumonni 2004.

cultural heritage related to the African field of study need to be incorporated. Apart from the theoretical background presented before, the author draws on the theories of different African scholars, such as Amadiume, Mudimbe-Boyi, Gavua, Gildea, Barber, Marschall. Nigerian scholar Harry Garuba focused on the processes of knowledge creation and narrative construction that shape socio-cultural memory while transcending European premises.

The author posits that in certain West African countries – Togo, Benin, and particularly in southern Nigeria – the intensification of practices related to a shared Afro-Brazilian heritage manifests in two domains: spatiality and subjectivity, as evidenced by the group’s significant emphasis on visual identification (through architectural objects, memorial sites, or symbolism). Research in this area is necessary for several reasons: to highlight historical connections, to protect culture, and to strengthen mutual understanding. Understanding the group’s perspective aids in uncovering the historical context of the slave trade and its impact on both sides of the Atlantic, as well as documenting and preserving cultural practices, enabling future generations to comprehend and celebrate their heritage. It fosters mutual understanding between Brazil and the multicultural countries of West Africa and promotes awareness of shared histories and cultural exchanges, facilitating dialogue.

Investigations into Afro-Brazilian heritage in Nigeria reveal the complexity of identity processes and the significance of cultural memory in a historical context. The contemporary cultural practices identified during the research respond to challenges related to migration, the experience of slavery, and the current needs of the group regarding identification and the preservation of a sense of community. Data analysis indicates that cultural memory plays a pivotal role in shaping the social and cultural identity of Afro-Brazilians, not only enabling the reconstruction of forgotten narratives, familial histories, and traditions but also strengthening social bonds and fostering integration within local communities. As a result of the conducted research, key themes concerning Afro-Brazilian cultural memory were identified. The most significant findings include: 1. The necessity for mapping architectural manifestations of local and collective memory; 2. The initiation and execution of memorial practices as contemporary cultural activities; 3. The strengthening of institutional, commercial or international interactions. The author offers the insights on the matter below.

## **2.1. The necessity for mapping architectural manifestations of local and collective memory for preservation**

Community representatives, with whom the author had conversations during city walks in a former Brazilian Quarter, highlighted the importance of historical events from the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries that shaped their dual identity, reinforced by the experiences of their ancestors, as well as actions that help maintain connections to the past. Research participants underscored the significance of memorial sites, family genealogies, and simple symbols associated with Afro-Brazilian architectural heritage that contribute to the strengthening of their identity, for instance, street names (Martin Street, Tinubu Square, Broad Street, or Kakawa Street), old residencies under prolonged renovation, or lost symbols of Lagos, such as Ilojo Bar (Zeijl 2021; Teriba, 2017). As the author interrogated memories in the context of the increasingly diverse multicultural communities found in urban areas, the observations underscore the significance of architecture not merely as physical structures but as vessels of historical narratives and cultural identity. The reflections on the state of the Afro-Brazilian quarter in Lagos provide a poignant commentary on the interplay between cultural heritage and urban development. They encapsulate the essential role that certain edifices, for instance an old Water House, play in preserving the memories and experiences of past communities (Amos, 2017). The Water House is one of the few extant residential structures that exemplifies Brazilian architectural style in Nigeria (formerly known also as Latin-American style). Situated on Kakawa Street in downtown Lagos, the building was constructed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century during the period of the Lagos colony. It is “of considerable architectural merit in addition to its great sentimental and historic interest. The facades are well proportioned and detailed and the gardens are of great charm and contain the well, which gave the house its name” (MacRow, 1959, p. 96). It was owned by Candido Da Rocha and is currently inhabited by a senior Da Rocha family member. By contrasting the decaying facades of historic buildings with the new constructions that replace them, the landscape highlights the loss of cultural continuity and the erasure of collective memory that often accompanies urban renewal initiatives.

Moreover, the above-mentioned Ilojo Bar – known also as Casa do Fernandez, regarded by Graciano Martins, President of the Brazilian Descendants Association in Lagos, as the centre of the community’s past social scene, which stood on Tinubu Square, serves now as a critical case study in the discourse of practices and sites of commemoration. Recognised as a national monument, its illegal demolition in 2016 represents not only the physical loss of a beloved community hub but also a symbolic severing of the ties to the cultural landscape that once defined the area (Zeijl, 2021; Folorunso, 2020, p. 3). Martins,

focusing on his own memories and experiences, pointed out that any act of erasure raises important questions about the values that guide urban development and the prioritisation of commercial interests over cultural preservation for further generations that may finally lose bonds. The bulldozing of such a significant site, albeit neglected and underfunded for many years – as explained by Nkechi Olatubosun-Adedeji, current Curator of the National Museum in Lagos, reflects a broader trend observed in many urban centres around the world, where the imperatives of modernisation frequently overshadow the need to honour and protect historical landmarks. Her insights resonate within the larger framework of urban studies, museum studies and heritage conservation, drawing attention to the need for a more nuanced approach to urban planning – one that recognises the intrinsic value of cultural heritage. The tension between development and preservation of similar architectural examples, such as the Mohammed Shitta Bey Mosque, designed by Brazilian architect João Baptista da Costa, or Holy Cross Cathedral,<sup>7</sup> necessitates a dialogue that includes the voices of those who are directly affected by such changes, particularly the local communities whose histories and identities are at stake (Omanka, 2004; Teriba 2017). The Cathedral, with its simple cruciform shape resembling a hand in plan, has origins dating back to 1864, a period following the abolition of the slave trade. As argued by Ejiga, Igwe and Kashim, Holy Cross Cathedral initially served as a place of worship exclusively for the Brazilian returnees, but today – rebuilt in 1930s in Neo-Gothic style – it stands as a multicultural, multi-ethnic church, with the practice of Catholicism uniting all its members (Ejiga, Igwe, Kashim, 2015).

What is important, the Aguda community values the history, significance and origins of the site and treats it as a symbol of the Brazilian heritage. In this context, initiatives undertaken by local Afro-Brazilian communities, social entrepreneurs and private property owners become crucial, as they advocate for the recognition and preservation of spaces that embody the rich tapestry of cultural narratives. Fundamentally, recently a lot of iconic Afro-Brazilian structures dating as far back as the 19<sup>th</sup> century have simply vanished from the urban landscape. This reminds us that the built environment is not just a backdrop for contemporary life, but a living archive of the past, deserving of protection and respect. As the city of Lagos continues to evolve rapidly, the challenge lies in finding a balance that respects historical significance while accommodating the needs of a modern populace (Olatunji, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> In 1864, the Aguda community, led by Senghor Izidore Ezechiel de Souza, negotiated with the British Government to acquire land for the construction of the church and a large wooden cross was placed on the site as a symbol of their claim. Fourteen years later, the foundation stone of the Holy Cross Cathedral was laid. Brazilian craftsmen and master builders, led by Lazarus Borges da Silva, were contracted to construct the church (Ejiga, Igwe and Kashim, 2015).

However, locations, artefacts and events possess multiple meanings and are used for diverse purposes by different groups, each conveying unique messages. Distinct members of the Afro-Brazilian descendants' community may interpret the same object or practice in various ways, leading to conflict, indifference or neglect of cultural origin. This situation is referred to by John E. Tunbridge and Gregory Ashworth as "dissonant heritage," indicating that a single place, event, or object can elicit both positive and negative emotions from individuals (Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996).

## **2.2. The initiation and execution of memorial practices as contemporary cultural activities**

Preliminary analyses of the collected data and observations revealed that the group engages in diverse forms of expression, such as art, music, festivals, family and spiritual ceremonies, which reflect the values they uphold, and reference places associated with so-called 'troublesome' heritage. Additionally, different practices can manifest as ritual activities in their own right, such as public gatherings, festivals or anniversaries honouring the deceased. Practical aspects of cultural heritage preservation at the local level, located in the Brazilian Quarters in Campos, Olowogbowo, Bamgbose, Popo Aguda, or Sandgrouse areas on Lagos Island, have been used as resources for constructing and legitimising representations of the past, manifest through: the organisation of cultural events (e.g. regular meetings in a local community club) and festivals (the Festival of our Senhor do Bonfim, the Carnival celebrated annually, the Afro-Brazilian Heritage Festival in December), as well as efforts towards the renovation of monuments contrary to land use plans, and the co-creation of local museums. In December 2023, during Afro-Brazilian Heritage Festival in Lagos, numerous families draped in Ankara fabrics participated in a procession within the historic residential Brazilian Quarters to celebrate their heritage and honour their ancestors.<sup>8</sup> The festival, held under one of the slogans "May the spirit of our forefathers guide us. Viva Brasileiros!" was accompanied by dances, music performances and food. It was organised by the Brazilian Descendants Association Lagos. Interestingly, even though the promotion of cultural cuisine is particularly relevant to African diasporic communities, a similar trend is popular among group members during bigger celebrations and family events. Particular Bahian

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<sup>8</sup> Families included: Balthazar dos Reis, Hilario Campos, Cardoso, Marinho, Jorge Ferreira, Rodriguez, Cypriano Miguel da Silva, Antonio da Costa, Abosoz-Joaquim, Hermenegildo Gaspar da Silva, Lazaro Borges da Silva, Aruna, Jose Martins, Pedro Pacheco, Dominga da Souza, Laguda, Sheteolu Gomez, Salvador, Bamgbose Martins and others (The Façade Nigeria, 2023).

dishes (from Salvador de Bahia, Brazil, such as *frejon*) strengthen bonds and promote emotional health, while the shared experiences of preparing and enjoying meals together contribute to building community and reinforcing social connections. The food itself – if we apply the beforementioned category proposed by Sabine Marchall – can be treated a “memory object” that link the members to particular past (Marschall, 2010).

Hence, the goal of such institutions is to provide a platform to reconnect with symbolic or returnees’ homelands and each other, creating hybrid identities and using nostalgia through cultural practices. These cultural products serve as carriers of memory, facilitating the transmission of history and values from generation to generation. In dynamic spaces, (re)formulations of personal and local collective memory reflect the underlying social-cultural dynamics within communities and neighbourhoods.

### **2.3. The strengthening of institutional, commercial and international interactions**

The third identified key theme concerning Afro-Brazilian cultural memory is the role of strengthening of institutional, commercial and international interactions. The increase in collaboration between Afro-Brazilians in Nigeria, including the Martins and Gomez families, and their relatives or similar associations in Brazil (e.g. through international visits to Brazil), contributes to the reinforcement of a sense of connection and the creation of new hybrid cultural forms. Mechanisms of institutionalised social life, such as the activities of a formalised association, play a crucial role in the process of reclaiming forgotten heritage. Notably, actions undertaken to preserve or promote a shared history and traditions have an interventionist character.

As explained by representatives of the Brazilian Descendants Association Lagos, the members, currently comprising 170 individuals, support initiatives aimed at protecting deteriorating tangible and intangible heritage, signalling their presence in public spaces, and potentially playing remarkable roles in shaping the knowledge of younger generations regarding the history of Lagos, Nigeria, human rights, and identity-forming attitudes. The members highlight the mission role of their association, that states: “We aim to revive and unlock the historical, cultural and touristic value of the Portuguese/Brazilian Quarters to reposition its cultural relevance and enable us to showcase its past glory as being one of the rare cultural hubs in Lagos State with a unique relationship with Brazil.” (BDA Lagos, 2024). The goal is to promote mutual understanding, cooperation and a fraternal relationship among members in Nigeria and the Diaspora. Moreover, the association has been actively involved

in various educational initiatives, including the promotion of the Portuguese language. The first Portuguese language class in Lagos, in conjunction with the Federative Republic of Brazil, was launched in 2022. The classes aimed to promote the Portuguese language and provide youth with an opportunity to learn the language.

Furthermore, in the era of globalisation and in response to potential cultural homogenisation, the Afro-Brazilian community exemplifies that grassroots strategies are aimed to protect and preserve the unique cultural values of communities that may be threatened. Given that a significant portion of the community possesses distinct self-awareness and self-identification, interventionist actions, particularly glorification of the past, have the potential to garner substantial public attention, despite the government's inadequate concern. Local memorial sites can, in turn, become spaces for reconnections with ancestral homelands, for civic mobilisation and sensitisation of subsequent generations to past, present, and future experiences. They are sites for evolution of remembering, reconstructing, memory-making, or forgetting.

The interviewees strengthened the role of establishment of dedicated museums in Lagos and across Nigeria to celebrate and document the extensive contributions of Afro-Brazilians and their descendants to Nigerian society since their arrival in West Africa in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Their aim is to provide effective and efficient measures in preserving cultural heritage and monuments. As African museums confront their colonial legacies and the challenge of redefining cultural identities in a post-colonial context, the unique narrative of Afro-Brazilians or other returnees remains largely overlooked and underrepresented. Few examples of institutions that stand as a tribute to the returnees and the history of the slave trade include the Afro-Brazilian Cultural Centre working under Loving Lagos in Lagos (a Lagos-based company aimed at providing activities on the history and cultural heritage of Lagos), the National Museum in Lagos (albeit devoid of a permanent exhibition on the Brazilian component), and the Brazilian Baracoon in Badagry (also known as Seriki Faremi Williams Abass Slave Museum, built in the 1840s). Their current activities clearly indicate that Afro-Brazilian cultural heritage is a crucial component of Nigeria's national identity, highlighting how these communities have influenced various aspects of urban life in Lagos, including architecture, performative arts and social customs.

The Afro-Brazilian Cultural Centre stands as a tribute to the returnees from Brazil who shaped the cultural and architectural identity of Lagos. These returnees, often referred to as the *Aguda*, brought with them a fusion of traditions, cuisine, and artistry that continues to influence Lagos' vibrant culture. The centre captures this rich history and serves

as a living archive of their contributions, showcasing everything from traditional artifacts to modern artistic expressions [...] Step into the Afro-Brazilian Cultural Centre and let your senses come alive. Each corner of this dynamic space offers something unique: Exquisite Architecture: Marvel at the Afro-Brazilian design elements that reflect a harmonious blend of African and European influences; Interactive Exhibits: Dive into history with multimedia displays and artifacts that chronicle the journey of Afro-Brazilian communities; Art and Performances: Enjoy exhibitions by contemporary artists and live cultural performances that celebrate the enduring ties between Lagos and Brazil; Culinary Delights: Savor traditional Afro-Brazilian dishes at the centre's café, where every bite tells a story of cultural fusion (Loving Lagos, 2024).

Even though the centre is commercialised, its message strongly suggests that visits not only contribute to preserving and promoting Lagos's rich heritage for future generations but also serve as opportunities to uncover stories of migration, Diaspora, resilience, and cultural exchange that shaped Lagos's identity. By tracing the historical migration patterns and cultural exchanges that occurred between Brazil and Nigeria, such institutions demonstrate how the development of exhibitions on Afro-Brazilian heritage can serve as catalysts for social change and a more inclusive understanding of Nigerian heritage. Furthermore, they engage with contemporary museum or cultural sites' practices that advocate for collaboration and community engagement, drawing on successful examples from other African nations. By confronting colonial frameworks and embracing the hybridity of identities, Nigerian museums can evolve into vital spaces for dialogue and reflection, ultimately contributing to a richer, more nuanced understanding of belonging in post-colonial Nigeria.

Other crucial initiatives, particularly of an academic and educational nature, are: The LASU Centre for Afro-Brazilian Studies (LASUCAS) and the Nigerian-Brazilian Public History Project. The LASUCAS was developed in 2019 at the Lagos State University, after a cooperation agreement was signed between the Federal University of Bahia, Salvador, Brazil and the University. It is "conceived as an academic, sociocultural and economic institution for Brazilian heritage in Lagos in particular and in Nigeria and the Diaspora in general. It is a confluence of sociocultural and economic research activities in the area of Afro-Brazilian studies and an umbrella body for all Afro-Brazilian research and studies in Lagos or in Nigeria" (LASUCAS, 2024). The LASUCAS Director, Professor Tayo Ajayi, shared his thoughts in our conversation in July 2024, on the matter that discussions on cultural heritage and connections between Brazil and Nigeria have been ongoing for many years and persist

today. The centre provides an opportunity for students to learn Portuguese and examine these trans-Atlantic exchanges, focusing on Brazil and Sub-Saharan Africa, along with the movement of people, artifacts, and concepts across the Atlantic, both in the past and present. The focus is on bridging Brazil and Africa, with a special attention to the Afro-Brazilian community in Brazil. Its objective is also to promote commercial relationships between the Afro-Brazilian descendants' entrepreneurs in Lagos and their counterparts in Brazil with partnership with the Brazilian Descendants Association, the Brazilian Government and research institutions in both countries.

The second organisation, the Nigerian-Brazilian Public History Project, represents a scholarly initiative aimed at recovering the significant contributions of Afro-Brazilians and their descendants to Nigerian society, tracing their impact from their arrival in West African communities in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century through the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. As described by the founders, “the project will curate, archive and disseminate various aspects of social, cultural, religious, economic and political life of Nigerians of Afro-Brazilian descent to the transformation of Nigerian society in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial contexts [...] to underscore the enormous role of Afro-Brazilians in West African public and private life, serve as important teaching tools from elementary to tertiary levels, provide resources for research and scholarship, and for useable knowledge for all learners” (The Nigerian-Brazilian Public History Project, 2024). The project, coordinated by a prominent scholar in Francophone and Anglophone postcolonial studies, Ekuia Agha, based at Birkbeck University of London, aims at contributing valuably into the development of knowledge production on Afro-Brazilian heritage. The goals resonate with the meaning of heritage provided by Laurajane Smith, that is as primarily a social practice, a process of engagement, an act of communication, and the creation of meanings, rather than a material object (Smith, 2007). The researcher, sharing her own experience of having Afro-Brazilian ancestors, demonstrated that the value of heritage is not linked to physical objects or locations, but rather to the ways in which these objects and places are utilised to impart values that form the foundation of various identities. Similarly, the Project's Team member, Aduke Gomez, added a noteworthy perspective on the Gomez family contributions in the urban life of Lagos.

## **Conclusions**

The research on Afro-Brazilian heritage in Nigeria constitutes a significant step towards understanding the complex relationships between cultural memory and identity, primarily serving as a foundation for a long-term programme aimed at comprehending the role of Afro-Brazilian heritage in identity

construction within the context of West Africa. The findings emphasise the necessity for further analysis of the “plural and contested senses of place” – as proposed by Amin (Amin, 2002, p. 959), processes of remembering, occurring within the studied community, the dynamic interactions among multiethnic communities, and their impact on contemporary cultural life. The distinctive nature of different commemorative practices lies in their reliance on repetition, which explicitly engages with the past; through this symbolic reiteration, they achieve an end that transcends mere functionality. However, not everything originating from the past qualifies as heritage; its significance is defined by the community that engages with it. Understanding these phenomena is crucial for the preservation of cultural heritage, community building and solidarity, nostalgia, and the promotion of mutual understanding between West African countries and Brazil, and the awareness of social issues and challenges, such as cultural identity, migration, Diaspora, urban studies, and their impact on local communities. In conclusion, this research illuminates the intricate dynamics of Afro-Brazilian heritage and cultural memory within the context of Nigeria, revealing how these elements play a crucial role in the ongoing negotiation of identity and belonging among descendants of Afro-Brazilians. Through an in-depth exploration of historical narratives, architectural legacies, and contemporary cultural practices, we have established how the Afro-Brazilian community in Nigeria actively engages in memory-making processes that both preserve and redefine their cultural identity. The findings underscore the significance of memorial practices, spatial representations, and institutional efforts in developing a collective identity that honours ancestral legacies while simultaneously responding to contemporary challenges posed by globalisation and urbanisation. The analysis demonstrates that cultural heritage is not merely a remnant of the past but a vibrant, living aspect of the present that shapes social interactions and community cohesion. Initiatives undertaken by local associations are pivotal in enhancing awareness of Afro-Brazilian contributions to Nigerian society, advocating for the preservation of cultural sites, and facilitating international dialogue with Brazil.

Moreover, this study highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of cultural heritage that embraces the complexities of identity formation in post-colonial contexts. As communities navigate the challenges of cultural or historical erasure, their ability to reclaim and celebrate their heritage becomes essential for building a sense of belonging and continuity across generations. Ultimately, the ongoing efforts to map architectural manifestations, initiate memorial practices, and enhance institutional collaborations underscore a broader movement toward cultural revitalisation and recognition of the Afro-Brazilian narrative within the tapestry of Nigeria’s national identity. This

research not only contributes to the academic discourse surrounding cultural heritage and identity but also serves as a clarion call for further exploration and engagement with the rich histories that continue to shape contemporary Nigerian society. As we move forward, it is imperative to recognise the value of diversity in cultural expressions and the role they play in mutual understanding and respect among communities in an increasingly interconnected world.

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HEMISPHERES

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# The Ethno-Religious Complications of Farmer-Herder Conflict in Contemporary Nigeria

## Abstract

This paper explores the ethno-religious complexities of the farmer-herder conflict in contemporary Nigeria, offering a detailed analysis of its evolution and implications. Through qualitative discourse based on an extensive literature review, as well as primary and secondary data, the study argues that this conflict, originally driven by competition over resources, has evolved into a deeply entrenched identity-based struggle. The transformation of this conflict is framed within the concept of elite manipulation theory and the theory of eco-violence, illustrating how the contestation has shifted from resource-related tensions to more complex, culturally and religiously charged disputes that are usually constructed, activated, mobilised, and manipulated in advancement of the interests of the political elite who resort to that as a means of engendering socio-political capital for the purpose of ensuring competitive political advantage. By tapping into long-standing ethnic and religious divides, the farmer-herder conflict has escalated into a form of ethno-communal crisis that has dramatically altered its scope and intensity. This paper further contends that the shift from economic motivations to identity-driven violence has significantly heightened the stakes, making the conflict a serious threat to Nigeria's national security. The examination highlights how these transformations have been opportunistically exploited by different actors, leading to wider regional instability, particularly in the North-Central region of the country. In conclusion, the study emphasises the need for a nuanced understanding of the conflict's ethno-religious dimensions, as well as the urgent need for targeted interventions to address both the immediate and long-term security challenges it poses.

**Keywords:** ethnicity, religion, farmer-herder conflict, culture, Nigeria, North-Central Nigeria.



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## Introduction

Nigeria is a large and diverse polity. It is characterised by immense heterogeneity in terms of ethno-cultural composition and complexion. Hosting a multiplicity of cultural, religious, linguistic and sectionalist formations (Ngare, 2012) and over 250 ethnic nationalities, Nigeria represents a typical instance of a poly-

ethnic and multi-ethnic society (Diamond, 1983; Barth, 1998; Ademoyega, 1962; Okoli and Iortyer, 2014). The ethnic groups that make up the country are not monolithic in themselves. In effect, each of the ethnic nationalities is also characterised by marked divergences in terms of religion, language, and other aspects of culture (Laitin, 1986; Okoli, 2003).

The ethnic and religious dimensions of ethnicity has remained a crucial aspect of national life in Nigeria. The country's peculiar socio-cultural mix makes it possible for people to define and differentiate themselves along ethno-religious lines. For instance, the Hausa-Fulani people of northern Nigeria are largely Muslims, and the people of southern Nigeria are predominantly Christians. The differences between these groups of people have the tendency to assume religious or ethnic characterisation. In this respect, the majority of inter-religious conflicts in Nigeria often develop into inter-ethnic conflicts, even where they started obviously as religious disagreement or resources-related issues. This has been the situation in most parts of northern Nigeria where ethnic conflict often switches into religious conflict, or vice versa. Cases in point include the perennial Jos crisis between the Hausa-Fulani and the ethnic Birom people of Plateau State (Ngare, 2012). The Jos crisis as referred to in the above citation constitutes the fulcrum of the inter-communal conflicts in the state since the 1990. The crisis situation has been episodic in occurrence with prominent instances being the 1994, 1998, 1998, 2004, and 2012 episodes. The context of these series of conflicts is the changing dynamics of power relations in the state (Egwu, 2004). The groups involved in the conflict are indigenous ethnic groups (Birom, Anaguta and Afizere) and settler ethnic groups (Hausa/Fulani). The indigenous peoples are largely Christians while the Hausa/Fulani are predominantly Muslims. This conflict, which was originally ethnic, has over time assumed ethno-religious dimensions, pitching the Christians against the Muslims. Most herders are adherents of Islam, while most farmers are Christians or native worshippers. The conflict between these two occupational groups has often turned into ethno-religious conflagrations in view of the ethno-cultural mix of the people. The contradictions have over the years given rise to internecine violence, leading to catastrophic humanitarian consequences and complications. This situation is not only peculiar to Nigeria but involves Global South countries involving Africa, Latin America, Asia, Oceania depicted as low income countries with underdeveloped economies, fraught with high incidences of various forms of violent conflict (Dados and Connell, 2012). These conflicts are often associated with contestations for ownership and control of resources (Kucera, *et al.*, 2011). Conflicts over resources are common where there is a high premium on available resources as the means of livelihood and survival (Adisa, 2012; Idowu, 2017; Okoli and

Atelhe, 2014). In West Africa, conflicts over resource use, especially natural resources, have remained on the increase and have been quite devastating. One critical dimension of such resource conflict is the farmer–herder conflict, which has been noted as a common feature of the livelihood crisis in West Africa (Tonah cited in Ofuoku and Isife, 2010, p.15).

Nigeria has continued to experience more than its fair share of natural resource conflicts, especially those involving farmers and herders, which often have grave implications for society. Chukwuma Okoli and Godwin Atelhe assert that, “this appears to be most prevalent and pervasive in the North-Central region of Nigeria, which has witnessed the worst occurrences of pastoralist/farmer violence as a result of livelihood struggles.” (Okoli and Atelhe, 2014, p. 76). In effect, of all the other forms of resource conflict in Nigeria in contemporary times, the farmer-herder conflict has remained one of the most prevalent, intractable and destructive (Blench, 2004).

The parties to the farmer-herder conflict are migrant cattle herders and settled-farmers. Hence, “the phrase ‘farmer – herder conflict’ refers to conflict between herding and farming groups.” (Turner, *et al.*, 2003, p. 2). This form of conflict that pitches farmers against herders has often been triggered by contestation over the use of the land-based natural resources for grazing or crop cultivation. Umeh and Chukwu (2016, p. 135) note that “among competing resources, however, use resources has remained an overwhelming source of conflicts among various land users, groups, as well as individuals at varying thresholds.” The conflict takes the form of violent clashes over the use and/or ownership of arable land, grazing fields/routes and fresh water, which remain vital to the achievement of livelihood aspirations of the parties. This scenario is common in densely settled rural landscapes where livelihoods, and food security is substantially tied to these resources (Fasona, *et al.*, 2016).

Clashes over the use of arable land resources have overtime manifested in enmity and conflict among the two groups, the herding and the farming communities, in many parts of Nigeria. (Umeh and Chukwu, 2016). In most instances, the conflicts have been induced or fueled by a scarcity of environmental resources (land and water) and escalated by feelings of marginalisation and outright deprivation by these resource-use communities (Idowu, 2017).

The contemporary trajectory of farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria indicates that the conflict is degenerating into a genre of ethno-communal or religious conflagrations, especially in the North-Central area of Nasarawa and Plateua states, which are characterised by immense ethnic diversity. In fact, this is second only to the North-East zone in terms of ethnic spread and diversity. Prominent ethnic nationalities that are found in the region are the Tiv, Idoma,

Igede, Birom, Katang, Hausa, Egbira, Yoruba, Igala, Eggon, Kambari, Alago, Migili, Mada, Fulani, Nupe, Gwari, and Gbagi (Gwari). In terms of cultural characteristics, the North-Central region is also equally diverse. It has a fair distribution of adherents of Islam, Christianity and traditional beliefs. It is also characterised by complex communal and linguistic divergences (Ngare, 2012). No fewer than fifty languages are spoken in the region. This tendency is evident in the apparent ethno-religious articulation and convolution of the conflict over the years, especially in North-Central Nigeria.

The main aim of the paper is to explore the nature, causes, dynamics, effects and implications of the farmer-herder conflict in the Plateau and Nasarawa states. This is against the backdrop of the rising incidence and prevalence of hostilities and tensions between herders and farmers in the region and Nigeria at large. What is the nature and character of this conflict's transformation? What underpins its incidence and saliency? What are the effects and implications of this conflict? The remainder of the paper is thematically structured as follows: situating farmer-herder conflict in a theoretical context: nature, causes and dynamics; the ethno-religious fault-lines/dimension of the farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria; and conclusions.

### **The Farmer-Herder Conflict in Theoretical Context: Nature, Causes and Dynamics**

Scholarly literature on the subject abounds, much pointing to climate change as the major driver and complication of the conflict (Blench, 2004; Sayne, 2011; Ofouku and Isife, 2010; Hanson, 2013; Okoli and Atelhe, 2014; Olaniyan and Uzodike, 2015; *The Global Hunger Index*, 2016; *The Global Food Security Index*, 2015). This perspective explores the impacts climate change, such as desertification in the north, drought, massive soil erosion and drying up of water bodies, and how these outcomes have engendered large scale migration of herders to regions hitherto dominated by settled farmers, thereby engendering hostilities. Sayne captures it succinctly when he asserted that "Nigeria's climate is likely to see growing shifts in temperature, rainfall, storms, and sea levels throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century." He adds that "poor adaptive responses to these shifts could help fuel violent conflict in some areas of the country" (Sayne, 2011, p. 1).

Research on the impact of climate change in Nigeria as reported by Sayne (2011) indicates that a combination of rising temperatures and lower rainfall has raised the specter of widespread desertification, especially in northern Nigeria. It is thus estimated two thirds of Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kano, Kaduna, Kastina, Kebbi, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara states could turn

into desert or semi-desert in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Sayne, 2011, p. 4). This has led to the migration of grazers away from the areas affected by climate change in the far north towards southern regions (Olaniyan and Uzodike, 2015). Again, since the Sahelian drought of the 1970s and 1980s and the accompanying migration of a huge number of pastoralists into the fringes of the humid forest zone of West Africa, there has been a massive increase in incidences of farmer-herder conflict (Ofuoku and Isife, 2010). This in turn has led to depletion in the productive capacity of both groups and huge shortages in food availability in the country. A plethora of scholarly views exist on the nature and causes of this conflict. Anecdotal evidence suggest that the clashes arise when the Fulani herdsmen wander into the fields during cropping or growing season and their herds eat or trample the crops (Adebayo and Olanyi, 2008). Conflicts between farmers and herders occur because, “universally, the pastoralists depend on moisture and vegetation in the right place, time, quantity and quality” [...] “It is generally known that there are competing uses of resources between pastoral and crop farmers this then leads to conflict” (Adebayo and Olanyi 2008, p. 71). De Haan’s work as cited in Adisa (2012, p. 101) claims that the conflicts result from the “destruction of crops by cattle and other property (irrigation and infrastructure) by the pastoralists themselves are the main causes for conflicts cited by farmers, whereas burning of rangelands and *fadama* and blockage of stock route and water points by crop encroachment are important direct reasons cited by the pastoralists.” This conflict as a social phenomenon takes place when there are incompatible group interests. Audu (2013) prefers to trace the cause of these conflicts to competition for access to water and grazing land between farmers and pastoralists. Others see these conflicts resulting out of the overlap of farmlands with cattle routes, even as farmers take over such routes for growing of crops (Muhammed, Ismaila and Bibi, 2015).

Others trace the causes of these conflicts to factors other than the direct migration of cattle herders’ from the desert north to the more fertile southern axis. One such account points to the introduction of irrigation farming in the savannah belt of the country, which was meant to boost food security for the growing population. According to this narrative, this led to increased farming activities, which limited access to a vast area of land initially used by the herdsmen, thereby resulting to conflicts (Musa, Shabu and Igbawua, 2014). Other scholars claim that the conflict between farmers and herders cannot be divorced from the introduction of improved veterinary medicines, such as *Trypanocides*, which has led to the successful control of diseases that affect herds, prompting larger herds and inducing migration of herds out of their traditional ecological zones southwards in search of ‘greener’ pastures (Blench, 2004).

There exist abundant cases of farmer-herder conflict within the North-Central region of Nigeria that are basically endemic, perennial and intractable, and have threatened the agricultural fortunes of the region (Okoli and Atelhe, 2014). Adogi noticed that, since the 1990s especially, these conflicts have touched many rural areas of the region where the dwellers are predominately small-scale farmers (Adogi, 2013). He also points to climate change induced migration of herdsmen from the northern part of the country to the middle belt region of the country in search of greener pastures for their herds. This brings the migrant population into direct conflict with the root and tuber farmers of the region (Adogi, 2013).

Theoretical inquiry into the nature and causes of the farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria has disproportionately implicated the issue of climate change. This does not provide a full account of the conflict. Okoli and Ayokhai (2015) associate the increasing spate of farmer-herder conflicts to the migration of herders from the humid and semi humid zones of the north in search of greener pastures southward. However, their position does not clearly show the direct triggers of such devastating conflict and clashes between these two land-resources users. Adekunle and Adisa (2010) provides a reason for the eruption of conflict between farmers and herders when they claim that the movement of the herdsmen into farmlands during the growing season, which leads to destruction of farm plants, leads to tensions between farmers and herdsmen, resulting in clashes. Implicit in this position is the fact that the farmer-herder conflict is a necessary dimension of climate change.

Audu (2013) asserts that the major cause of the conflicts between farmers and herders in Nigeria is climate change-induced fresh-water scarcity, which dovetails into competition for access to this diminishing natural resource. He points to visible signs that show the intensification of water scarcity, which includes hitherto flowing rivers drying up, diminishing rainfall, shrinking arable land for farmers and fewer pastures for pastoralists. All of these constitute critical indicators of climatic variability and volatility in the era of climate change. From the standpoint of the climate-demography nexus, Blench (2004) provided a more causal relationship between demographic changes and the farmer herder conflict when he notes that the cause of the continued conflict lies in the increase in population within the affected areas owing chiefly to the migration of large number of cattle herders from the drying savannah region of the country to the grassland areas of the middle belt. For him, this trend is buoyed by the introduction of cheap *Trypanocides* and other veterinary drugs, leading to the migration of pastoralists from the drying north towards the greener south and thereby leading to huge competition over the use and ownership of land resources.

A different strand to the nature and dynamics of the conflicts between farmers and herders was provided by Musa, Shabu and Igbawua (2014) and Ofuoku and Isife (2010) who argued that the farmer-herder conflict results principally from the introduction of irrigation farming in the savannah belt of Nigeria in order to boost food production. Their claim remains cogent but can only be better placed when seen as a direct impact of the climatic changes in the country within the first few decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The climate change theory of farmer-herder conflict is a clear manifestation of the impact of climate change in the affected areas and has been a subject of scholarly polemics. The theory is predicated on the assumption that the farmer-herder conflict is a direct result of the vicissitudes and adversities of climate change, as evident in increased desertification, drought, and the like. This position is plausible. Yet it fails to account of other important critical political, demographical, structural, socio-ecological and socio-economic factors that have shaped conflict dynamics. Such factors include governance and identity questions.

Beyond climate change as the major cause of the farmer-herder conflict, Coser (2000) as seen in Kucera *et al.* (2011) and Idowu (2017), posit that the main cause of the incessant farmer-herder conflict is failure to harness scarce resources and the inadequate management of these resources, chief amongst which is land. This viewpoint is closely linked to the position espoused by the United Nations Institute for Peace Report (2007) and corroborated by Adebayo and Olaniyi (2008), which holds that unmoderated competition over natural resources leads to intensified and sustained violent conflicts between natural resource users like farmers and herders in Nigeria.

Another contrary view to the climate change position was provided by the 2012 Natural Resources and Conflict Management report of the Economic Commission for Africa, which argues that population increase remains the major reason for the increased spate of natural resource-based conflicts in Africa, including farmer-herder conflicts (*Economic Commission for Africa*, 2012). In this regard, Fosona and Omojola (2003) quoted in Umeh and Chukwu (2016), claim that the conflict between farmers and herders was as a result of rising population in the affected areas. This position remains tenable but it has not fully answered the crucial question of what have given rise to this.

In their seminal work, Muhammed, Ismaila, and Bibi (2015) argue that the farmer-herder conflict arises out of the apparent failure to ensure the proper demarcation of grazing lands and areas, a situation according to them that has given rise to these conflicts. They stress that available lands are diminishing at an alarming rate and livestock pathways are blocked through land use,

urbanisation and frontiers. They also blame an increasing spate of overlap of farmlands with cattle routes as a major cause of the conflicts between farmers and herders.

From the standpoint of Zamfara state, Farouk (2015) provides a different perspective and standpoint to the understanding of the origin and causes, arguing that the conflicts between farmers and herders result from the erosion of customary property rights as a result of the state's incapacity to administer nationalised pastures efficiently. His position reinforces our earlier mention of governance failure. The various viewpoints expressed above on the origins and causes of the farmer-herder conflict seem to revolve around the impacts of climate change resulting in mass migration of people and herders in particular to the fertile grassland savannah region.

In respect of Nasarawa State in North-Central Nigeria, Okoli and Atelhe (2014) posit that the conflict between farmers and herders there is caused by the continued pattern of migration by herdsmen from the drying north to the grassland area of the middle belt, which cannot be unconnected with climate change. Sylvester Ayih (2003) notes that the conflict between farmers and herders in Nasarawa State is a result of the recent upsurge in the population of the state in what he terms a population explosion, arising principally from high birth rate and immigration. According to Ayih, "people tend to move from Northern and Southern Nigeria into the Middle Belt region where population is relatively low and where there is availability of vast arable land. The consequent rapid growth in population has caused the farmers to struggle for farmland which is becoming scarce by the day. With this development, grazing areas that were hitherto abundant are being taken over by scattered small farms, making grazing in these areas difficult." (Ayih, 2003, pp. 10–15).

The above affirms the position of Adogi (2013), who suggests migration of herders from the desert-encroached northern part of the country to the middle belt area of the country is the main reason for the increased spate of farmer and herder conflict in Nasarawa State.

## **Methodology**

The study is a qualitative and exploratory research. It adopts a synthesis of primary and secondary research, enabled by a combination of key informant interviews (KII) /focus group discussions (FGDS) and library sources. The creative application of primary and secondary data in this context makes for methodological hybridisation, which ensures that the limitations of both data sources are moderated in such a manner that enhances research validity and reliability (Singleton and Straits, 1998; Flick, 2009).

In presenting the analysis proper, the study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach based on thematic consideration of the salient issues. The KII was in the form of semi-structured interviews whereby the views of selected respondents on the causes, nature, character, dimensions of ethnicity, and triggers of ethno-communal as well as farmer-herder conflict and its impact were solicited based on both scheduled and 'chance' contacts. The FGDS were conducted in series of rounds. These took the form of group conversations whereby the researcher interfaced with a selected number of groups deemed to be knowledgeable on the various aspects of the study.

Field interviews and discussions targeted selected individuals and groups drawn from the population under investigation based on purposive and non-probabilistic sampling. Field research activities were systematically guided so as to ensure that the sampled population was reflective and representative of the socio-demographical characteristics of the focal areas where the crises occurred in North-Central Nigeria. This period encompasses the era of the current democratic dispensation in Nigeria, which many analysts have characterised as being marred by ethno-communal conflict, particularly in North-Central Nigeria. Field investigations were conducted with the aid of *ad hoc* research assistants recruited and trained for that purpose. Proceedings of the field interviews (oral) and discussions were recorded by means of audio recorder and transcribed verbatim. Interviews and group discussions focused on sundry themes, namely: origins, nature, patterns, trends, dynamics, drivers, triggers, and impact of communal conflict in the focal areas.

The FGDs were held only in the capitals of Nasarawa State. Two rounds of FGDs were held, with each comprising a total of 25 persons capturing both male and female adults and male and female youths. In all, a total of 50 persons were resorted to for FGDS. The rest of the respondents, numbering 20, were interviewed through the KII technique. Hence, the actual sampled population for the field research amounted to 90. The sampled population for the study was purposively chosen from relevant community, public/government, and civil society stakeholders tentatively in the ratio of 5:3:2.

Data generated in the course of the field research and secondary data were qualitatively harnessed and weaved into synthesis. The thrust of analysis was schematically laid out under select themes and sub-themes carefully designed to answer the basic research question in fulfillment of the research objectives (Rossman and Rallis, 1998). Conclusions were reached at the end of the analysis in the light of the assumptions of study.

## **Theoretical Framework: Eco-Violence and Elite Manipulation Theory**

This paper is anchored on elite manipulation theory and the theory of eco-violence. Eco-violence theory as an emerging perspective seeks to explain the nexus between environmental factors and violent conflicts in society. The theory was developed by Homer-Dixon (1999). Homer-Dixon posits that scarcity of resources such as water, arable land, and forests in combination with other social factors can lead to violence as groups struggle or compete for available limited resources. The people who are affected could be forced to migrate to newer land, which could trigger ethnic conflict as they move to newer places, regions or areas and lead to “decreases in wealth [that] can cause deprivation conflict (Homer-Dixon, 1999, p. 30).

Linked to this paper, the theory throws more light on the nature and dynamics of the herder-farmer conflict in Nigeria and Nasarawa and Plateau states in particular where the conflict is also linked to the need for survival and the desperation of the people concerned to protect their means of livelihood in the face ecological challenges characterised by scarcity of resources, population increase and livelihood dilemma. This paper links eco-violence theory with key tenets formulated with contemporary elite theorists (Putnam 1976). It highlights the importance of ethnic identities in local politics, the vulnerability of those identities to political manipulation by the key political actors; and it stresses the dialectics of elite politicking in a pluralistic society. In fact, it endorses the view that ethnic politics and accompanying communal conflicts are to a large extent products of elite competition in a pluralistic societal context (cf. O’Brien, 1993). Even more, elite manipulation theory is concerned with the abusive influence of political elites in the context of high-stake inter-group political relations (Putnam, 1976). According to Etzioni-Haley (1989, p. 215), it looks at “the manner in which power is used, and frequently abused” by the ruling elites often in advancement of vested interests that are primordial. The theory thus explains ethno-religious conflicts as elite-driven clashes and contestations (*Journal of Nationalism Studies*, 2008). Being elite-driven, ethnic and religious conflicts result from political manipulation of subjective ethnic consciousness in a manner that passes for politicisation of ethnicity and religion (Putman, 1976). The process of ethnic manipulation reflects the dialectics of subjective political mobilisation in primordial polities where ethno-communal ties and cleavages play a crucial role in conditioning the political processes and determining political outcomes (Nnoli, 1978).

The point being underscored here is that ethnicity lacks innate political saliency. It is usually constructed, activated, mobilised, and manipulated in advancement of the interests of the political elite, who resort to it as a means

of engendering socio-political capital for the purpose of ensuring competitive political advantage. It is this politicisation of ethnicity and religion that accounts for its saliency in the context of inter-group political relations.

Elite manipulation based on ethnicity and religion is a fundamental challenge to peace and stability in most African countries with ethnic pluralism. In respect to Nigeria, “this acquires more significance because of shrinking ecological space and the struggle for access to a variety of limited resources which could include grassland, water spots for animal, rival claims to land” (Tenuche, 2002, p. 3).

### **Summary of the findings on the Ethno-Religious fault-lines of Farmer-Herder Conflict in Nigeria**

The data showed that Nigeria is a typical instance of a hyper-plural country with a high degree of heterogeneity in terms of ethnic diversity and mix broadly polarised in a manner that precipitates sectionalism and primordialism. This is evident in the country’s immense ethnic and religious diversity. Nigeria is one of the most ethnically diverse countries globally, with estimates of 250 to over 300 distinct ethnic groups (*Central Intelligence Agency, 2022; Pew Research Center, 2023*). This range reflects differences in classification criteria (e.g., language, cultural practices, or self-identification). This is in addition to the existence of a variety of religions, ranging from Christianity to Islam, including traditionalists (Nlewem, 2016).

This peculiar aspect of Nigeria’s national heritage accounts for its socio-cultural richness and dynamism. Nonetheless, it has also provided pretexts for ethnic and religious crisis, especially when struggles for power or resources exploit existing identity fault-lines (Okoli and Ayokhai, 2015). “Fault-lines are hypothetical dividing lines between group members based on various social attributes (familial, communal, ethnic, religious, etc.) that can potentially split the overall group into sub-groups” (Tian, Tuttle and Xu, 2016, cited in Okoli and Nnabuihe, 2019, pp. 123–138). When contestations that are innately political or economic hit the fault-lines of social identity, such as religion and ethnicity, complex communal conflict becomes inevitable.

As this paper is inclined to argue, farmer-herder conflicts are not necessarily identity-based but are not innately ethno-religious as most extant literature in Nigeria would tend to suggest. Essentially, the conflicts result from ecological or economic struggles (resource-based conflict) with identity factors serving as the catalysts. The conflict gets rather complicated and politicised when it plays into the hands of power-seeking politicians who capitalise on the prevailing identity-based differences and prejudices to foment crisis in service of their partisan interests.

Following the hypothetical ethno-religious fault-lines, the farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria has over the years assumed dimensions of either religious or ethnic violence. The two livelihood categories that are involved in the conflict, namely the farmers and the herders, incidentally, can be nominally categorised as members of one ethnic or religious stock. For instance, most of the nomadic herders in northern Nigeria are members of the Fulani ethnic group. Their local adversaries in that context are mostly members of diverse native communities that are not Fulani (Abbass, 2012). Expectedly, the conflict between these categories often assumes an ethnic dimension as parties import ethno-communal narratives into the conflict situation. This has been the case with the internecine Fullani-Habes (Hausa) conflicts in Zamfara and Kebbi State in the far North West Nigeria (Rufa'i, 2018). *Local Participant No.1* explains how the conflict began:

We had less land for farming, which is how the conflict began. We had very little crops, and the herders brought their cattle, and we had no way to keep them safe. These crops are essential to our family's diet and to our market sales. Not only is food lost, but our means of subsistence is also lost (*Local Participant No.1*).

More apparently, the farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria has been associated with religious violence in keeping with its opportunistic manifestations. The nomadic herders have corollary identity as Muslims. In effect, most of the migrant herders in northern Nigeria are non-Christians by faith, while a substantial percentage of the settled crop farmers are Christians. The ecological confrontation between these two communities has often taken a religious dimension as parties are inclined towards mobilising along such primordial lines. This tendency has brought about orgies of violence in states like Plateau, Taraba, Nasarawa, Kaduna, and Benue, all in the North Central Nigeria (Okoli, 2016). This participant explains the conflict as a lack of government intervention on policies to resolve these issues. *Local Participant No. 5* says that:

The government is failing both sides. There are no clear lines separating where we can farm and where they can pasture their cattle. Without proper policies or intervention, we are forced to fight for survival, which has turned neighbours into enemies (*Local Participant No. 5*).

Available anecdotal and empirical evidence reveal that the incidence of the farmer-herder conflict in northern Nigeria has been most pronounced in states that have a combination of Christian and Muslim native populations. In these states, violence by herdsmen has been more or less focused selectively on communities that are not Muslim. This has been evident in the hinterlands

of Kaduna, Plateau and Nasarawa States, where Christian communities have often been selectively attacked by Fulani herdsmen in reprisal of a perceived 'Christian confrontation' orchestrated by the native farmers. In most of these attacks, Muslims have been discreetly spared. This has given rise to the popular local narrative in the North Central Nigeria that the recrudescence of Fulani nomadic herdsmen's militancy against the settled communities in the area represents a neo-jihadist grand-design by the Fulani Islamic Establishment to further forced Islamisation of the wider northern Nigeria (Okoli, 2016).

The ethno-religious nature of the farmer-herder conflict has been one of the major drivers of crisis and instability in North-Central Nigeria. It has accounted for the seeming intractability of communal conflict in the area. It has also led to dire complications that negate sustainable human security and rural stability in that context. The prevalence of this pattern of conflict has further more brought about volatile inter-group relations among communal groups in the region, thereby threatening the unity and corporate existence of the country.

## **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The phenomenon of the farmer-herder conflict has been a major national security threat in Nigeria. From a rudimentary stage of localised skirmishes between farming and herding communities, the crisis has gravitated towards militancy, involving a great deal of arms bearing and criminal impunity.

Thus, from this study, the articulation of ethnic and religious factors into the crisis has complicated the scenario, making it seemingly intractable. So, rather than being resource-based contestations between two livelihood communities, the crisis has assumed an identity-based essence and characterisation in its apparent dynamics of degeneration.

To mitigate the perennial incidents of herders-farmer conflict in Nigerian in general, the federal government in liaison with the various state governments should create grazing reserves for pastoralists. Existing but moribund grazing reserves should be re-activated and modernised. In addition, there is a need to map out grazing routes leading to the reserves in such a manner that would forestall the incessant encroachment of herders on crop farms.

Finally, there is a need for the revision of the Land Use Act in Nigeria: The current Land Use Act reserves propriety rights over land for both state and individual citizens. Land issues therefore double as both civil and customary matter. The lacuna in this creates pretexts for crisis of land tenure and land holding in Nigeria; hence the need for its review.

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## Wives in Pre-Colonial Oyo-Yoruba Societies of Southwestern Nigeria Before 1900

### Abstract

In 1827, Richard Lander (a European explorer) stated that Alafin (the king of the Oyo Empire) had 2,000 wives. But these women were not necessarily wives; they were wives of past kings, wives of the present king, wives of men in Alafin's lineage and female slaves and relatives. This article aims at unravelling the strategic roles of women as wives in the palace and society, with a view to explaining the nature of African womanhood. The article examines the roles of women as wives in the precolonial Yoruba society of Southwestern Nigeria. Understanding the roles of these women lends credence to the fact that Yoruba women's power was manifested in the traditional political system and reflected in the social and economic development of the palace and community. This work contends that the role of women as wives indicates power and powerlessness in the context of gender roles, with nuanced narratives about gender and interconnectedness with patriarchy and masculinity. It is significant as it adds to the knowledge of gender and power dynamics in Yoruba societies before colonialism. Furthermore, it justifies the assertion that African women should be studied based on their realities, devoid of foreign interpretations alien to the peculiar features in Nigerian societies. Therefore, it explains the features of African womanhood. Accounts of European explorers, works of anthropologists and oral traditions complement the historical analysis.

**Keywords:** role of wives, pre-colonial Oyo-Yoruba societies, intra-gender politics, Alafin, African womanhood.

### Introduction

This paper examines how gender is constructed in Oyo-Yoruba societies. The Oyo-Yoruba societies feature a sub-ethnic category with familiar Yoruba language intonations and culture. In certain accounts of the missionaries, Oyo-Yoruba societies are comprised of communities with geographical proximity to the savannah region along the Trans-Saharan trade routes. Women as wives were an important institution that shaped the power dynamics in traditional Oyo-Yoruba societies.

The Oyo-Yoruba societies are largely an agglomeration of empires and kingdoms formerly in the Old Oyo empire before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The empire was the largest and best-known of the Yoruba kingdoms. Located in

the savannah below the bend of the river Niger in the Bussa-Jebba region of southwest Nigeria, it achieved prominence during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries but collapsed and disintegrated in the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Oyo-Yoruba societies refer to all empires and kingdoms that Oyo imperial rule extended to. They shared similar language intonations and cultures. Oyeronke Oyewumi analyses the inclusion and exclusion of women in the making of politics and power in Oyo-Yoruba societies. While Oyewumi posits how gender has been understood and used by men, this paper engages the nuances of power that exist in the lives of women as wives in Oyo-Yoruba societies (Oyewumi, 1997, p. 85). Subsequently, she challenges the writings of scholarly and non-scholarly historians as biased and asserts that they have distorted history to reduce women to mere regents. The existence of these women as wives and holders of administrative roles is affirmed in the scholarly works in Yoruba history (Johnson 1921; Adediran, 1994). *Ile* (family/compound/lineage) in Oyo-Yoruba understanding is a basic political unit that determines kinship politics and its influence on society. Through wifely arrangements, power shifts manifested as status in paternal/maternal families, were reflected in displays of authority. Also, motherhood, seniority, and economic advantages are reflected in the ways power features in Oyo-Yoruba societies. In contemporary Oyo-Yoruba societies, politics and governance in traditional terms are mostly masculinised, yet in the accounts of the pre-colonial era, wives of the palace and society held important roles in public and familial milieus. In masquerading practices, marketing, domesticity and governance, wives tend to be portrayed in scholarly and non-scholarly works as means of power transmission and determinants of kinship relations. Invariably, being a wife could thus indicate power and powerlessness.

This article construes gender by examining how and what women display and offer as wives. Bolanle Awe emphasised the necessity and the need to study women in their own terms (Awe, 1977; Oladejo, 2018) within the construct of societies presumed to be exclusively paternalistic. Oyewumi's argument is affirmed in Robert Smith's findings from oral traditions collected from Arokin in the 1960s, which described women as Kings. The case of Orompoto showed that she was a king who ruled for twenty years (Smith, 1965; Oyewumi, 1997). The construction of gender among the Oyo-Yoruba counters aspects of Western feminism. This is because the African understanding already embedded some feminine roles, aesthetics and appearance as part of a whole, where women already had respectable status in domestic and public affairs. At the centre of Oyewumi's argument, several complexities question the sense of gender portrayed, but more importantly, the female domain is nuanced with varieties of roles which translated to power, especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The role of wives in sustaining the political economy is clear as the palace was an institutionalised public setting. The Alafin controlled a lot of officials who assisted in ceremonial and administrative responsibilities; they occupied compounds around the palace in their thousands (Law, 1977).

Thus, power systems revolved to come extent around gender roles. The gendering of wifely status translates into political and economic power. In the administration of the palace, the roles of women in the court are analysed to unravel how intra-gender roles were manifested in everyday life. Given the series of migrations of Oyo refugees into other parts of Yorubaland, emphasis is placed on how the Oyo-Yoruba political system interfaces with Otta, a Yoruba town, that was an extension of Oyo in terms culture and values. Otta was once under the control of the Kingdoms in the Old Oyo empire. Its history is symbolic because it witnessed a series of migrations and refugees from Oyo, Gun and Egbado. Power and gender were well embedded in the pre-colonial society of Otta, and the influence of Oyo also mattered. This paper explains how gender roles in Otta are largely related to the Oyo-Yoruba political system. The role of wives in precolonial Oyo-Yoruba significantly portrays African realities of womanhood before the advent of colonialism. The paper advances Ade Ajayi's argument that colonialism is an episode in African history (Ajayi, 1969). He advanced the fact that rather than focus on errors of the past in Africa through condemnation, African realities should be presented as they are. Hence, this paper analyses the milieus of African womanhood through their wifely status in precolonial Oyo- Yoruba society.

### **Gendered Power in Pre-Oduduwa Tradition**

The extent to which Yoruba societies were patrilineal before the emergence of Oduduwa cannot be fixedly juxtaposed, as power status was accorded to women, including matriarchal lineage connections that revolved around political affairs. The parallel roles by which feminine positions exist are articulated in the analysis of Awe (Awe, 1977). The Porto Novo legend of Abeesan (a woman who bore nine sets of twins) lends credence to the way women led society. Roles and power were not gender-biased, rather being based on a culture of respect and values for adulthood. The pre-Oduduwa communities showed four settlements led by women namely: Mepere, Akere, Bokolo and Panku (Adediran, 1994). These women were title holders that contributed to society. Within the lineage, the wifely and motherhood roles are gender neutral. Either the father or mother had the final jurisdiction on family or lineage affairs. This showed how powerful some women were in the society, for example, Iya Mepere as an influential head of the Opo-Meta settlement, who could not accommodate the Ede group (Parrinder, 1967, p. 18).

The role of women in early Yoruba societies lack documentation, but the few references to them that exist give the impression that female rule was conditional and circumstantial. Even in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, female leadership became circumstantial, mainly in times of crises, which led – for example – to the emergence of Ina Mego in Ile-Sabe (Adediran, 1994). Accounts of Ina Mego's reign show her emergence in a still predominantly paternalistic society. The impression given was that she emerged as an opportunist who took advantage of anarchy. However, her emergence meant that leadership was not exclusive to men. Ina Mego's rule was rare, but women had parallel roles in the form of feminine versions of political offices, thus negating overly deterministic paternalistic accounts. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, accounts of feminine positions existing separately were also reflected in Oyo societies, and became prominent in certain political relations.

### **Gendering Wifely Status and Connotations of Power**

In the words of Oyewumi, marriage is a delicate institution and thus care is taken to avoid marrying wrongly (Oyewumi, 1997). The wifely role of reproduction is held in great esteem and wives are often considered instrumental in reproducing lineage wealth. Nathaniel Fadipe's study of the sociology of the Yoruba, and Oyewumi's work, give accounts of 20<sup>th</sup> century perceptions of being a wife in Oyo-Yoruba societies, which rarely differed from the precolonial era. The justification of women's relative powerlessness is a function of the family, kinship and group, they argue. Wives in polygamous families co-exist by virtue of rank, where economic and political power connect. In this ranking, elderly wives have more opportunities to explore political and economic peace. Controlling gains from trade in the adjoining markets creates economic power to finance the political aspirations of the household or lineage. The conjugal implications are evident in the way the economic power of wives projects the political ambitions of men (mostly sons) within the lineage.

Fundamentally, the social power of wives within the family indicates that she could be powerful or otherwise. Powerlessness recurs in the relational attitudes of the mother-in-law and sister-in-law in her husband's family, while she could be powerful as the first wife to other co-wives as she must be consulted on family matters (Okome, 2005). Entangled in this power status is the place of motherhood, which further increases the spheres of the wife's power. Motherhood was an important phase that influenced women's power in the Oyo-Yoruba world. Social power is accorded to a woman whose home is filled with children because she has fulfilled her reproductive role, and is referred to by names such as *Iya Sola* (called by the name of her children). The inability to fulfil the biological role meant powerlessness within the lineage,

which also connotes to attributes of witchcraft or spiritual possession (Apter, 2013). Motherhood enhanced relations among co-wives and was a form of female socialisation. The *Agbo-Ile* (lineage) is interesting for intra-gender politics as several issues unfold in everyday life here. An artistic impression of the architectural design of *Agbo-Ile*, as presented by Majorie McIntosh, shows a communal living style that attests to these assertions (McIntosh, 2009). In the Ifa corpus, a body of literary knowledge in Yoruba traditional religious system, the challenges of co-wife relations goes a long way to expose intra-gender politics within the family. According to Wande Abimbola, the attitudinal behaviours of wives in polygyny create complex situations of conflict at the family level (Abimbola, 1968, pp. 25–26).

### **Wifely Relations in the Oyo Palace**

The Oyo court was the centre of decision-making in the palace and was never devoid of feminine influence. The place of wives as mothers is nuanced in the consideration for power accord and distribution. In Alafin's palace, all women are termed *Ayaba* (wife of the King) though not all were involved with the king in sexual relations. The categories of women that formed the composition are as follows: *Iya Oba*, *Iya Kere*, *Iya-Naso*, *Iya-Monari*, *Iya-in-Iku*, *Iyalagbon*, *Orun-Kumefun*, *Are-orite* (Johnson, 1997, p. 63). The names given to these women depict old Yoruba feminine roles assigned to women. These are examples of traditional political offices women held in pre-colonial Yoruba societies. The *Ayaba* (wife of the king) in the palace involved roles that connote women's power in the community. The nomenclature of these women informed Lander's observation that there were about 2,000 wives. To maintain the everyday life of the palaces, women were very important, especially in the pre-colonial era as Yoruba was already occupied the attention of men.

For example, *Iya Kere's* role in maintaining the *Ilari* meant that she possessed significant control in the palace; she managed the royal treasury and was the feudal head of some Oyo-Yoruba towns such as Iseyin, Iwo and Ogbomosho. *Iya Kere's* function creates the impression that wifely roles in the palace were highly regarded and this challenges the perception of patriarchy. The *Iya Oba* (King's Mother) was a wife of the past King and the Alafin's biological mother. In Oyo traditions, a woman attains wifely status before motherhood. The practice meant that wives in the palace had the potential of becoming a King's mother. The situation where the *Iya Oba* becomes an interface king is peculiar. Therefore, wifely status and motherhood mattered in the governance to fill the vacuum – or interregnum. Part of the strategies for retaining power would be that wives became Kings in Oyo history, to maintain power within the family. Gender rarely mattered as women were deemed fit to

hold it. Specifically, *Iyayun* (a female title holder) ruled as the King in place of her son Alafin Kori (who was a child). Mainstreaming wives to power status meant a lot in the traditions. The regency status accorded to these women meant that at the emergence of their sons as the Alafin, they were expected to commit suicide.

The status of the Alafin was powerful, therefore, once a woman had held such status she should not return in the palace (Law, 1977). Entangled in the relevance of motherhood in power relations was that social mobility changing the rank of a woman to *Iya Oba* is latent. Accounts of slavery in the Oyo Empire implied that there were female slaves in the *Ilari* who worked with *Iya Kere* (Little Mother). Therefore, at what point could a female *Ilari* become a wife and by implication be a King? Richard Lander tried to distinguish between the categories of women in the palace by differentiating Alafin's wives from other palace women. While it is limitless to put a figure on the number of women that could bear children for the Alafin, the place of the female *Ilari* is almost that of being able to bear children for the King. Lander's *Records of Captain Clapperton's Last Expedition* observed that there was no restriction on the kind of woman that could enjoy sexual relations with the King. And every child born of a slave woman had equal status with freeborn women. Evidently, slavery rarely constrained the place of power for women. Robin Law posited that palace slaves were so powerful that they enhanced the power of the King despite the opposition from Oyo Mesi in the 1750s (Law, 1977). Having slaves in and out of the Empire and with other Yoruba societies ensured the continuity of culture and civilisation that evolved from the palace.

### **Wives and Priesthood in Otta**

The politics of ethnicity tend to determine power relationships in Nigeria, but Oyo culture and gender intersect. John Thabiti Willis extensively studied 'masquerading practices' in Otta (Willis, 2018). As mentioned earlier, the *Ayaba* had powerful roles within the palace, while outside it, many advocated for the political hegemony of the Oyo. A key factor that shaped these relations was the Trans-Atlantic trade that constantly rejigged the lineage settings of Oyo-Yoruba societies. The Oyos' power was exerted by control of the slave trade across geographical settings (Law, 1977). Oyo representative culture is reflected in Otta from the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Gender and religion featured as Sango and *Egungun* masquerading tradition were part of the imperial policy. In the waves of inter-Yoruba wars, Oyo imperial policy became the norm that governed these societies. Favourable commercial ties were made in an understanding that ultimately accrued returns to the Oyo central governing system.

Support for the Alafin, as evidenced from the occupants of the quarters around the Alafin and the institution of representatives outside Oyo, had several ramifications for wifely agencies. Entangled in this wifely philosophy are the intertwined constructs of gender and religion. Alafin is regarded as Sango incarnate and the ritual performers were the wives and sons of the King. The metaphor appears complex and paradoxical because a Sango priestess, who is the daughter of the Alafin, was also her father's wife. These paradoxes highlight notions of the roles that could determine power. The double significance of the Sango priests and priestesses and sons, daughters and wives obviously elevates an African sense of gender in which the memories are translated into contemporary worship of traditional religions in Yoruba societies.

The late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century made the Oyo culture visible as these traditions were performed, generating a sense of history as the genealogies of the priests trace their origin to central Oyo. Family traditions were thus expressed. This was due to a decline in the Oyo Empire from 1789 to 1836, which made migrants in Central and Southern Yoruba more likely to perform oral renditions of their genealogies. They re-enacted family history through masquerading performances. Such expressions have conventions that link them to the Oyo Empire (Willis, 2018). The delegation of representatives to Otta from Oyo was evident in the Itimoko tradition as Odikaye (Ajele) was sent to collect tributes. Odikaye's role was important in the gender context because he was a Sango priest and Otta, being a slave trade town, made it strategic to Oyo. He established a house referred to as *Ajele Oloyo* in *Iga Ajele*. Oyo became more entrenched when Aina, Ege Odikaye's younger brother, joined and established his house, *Iga Ege*, with the institution of Ege's masquerade. The beaded crown of the masquerade they introduced had the symbol of imperial Oyo. The gendered implications of Sango's priest and priestesses as wives of Alafin manifested in the politics of Basorun Gaa. It was evident that Basorun Gaa through the institution of Oyo Mesi formed a parallel rule to the Alafin. Indirectly, he disrupted the political structures and attempted to disengage the role of wives in the political economy. By the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Basorun Gaa had destroyed the structures by targeting the wives (Sango priests and priestesses). They were destroyed using the notion that they were protecting the interests of the Alafin and aiding the expansion of the Empire. Alafin's power was thus reduced and became merely symbolic. The wives were no longer empowered to function for Alafin's power. Alafin Abiodun had to rejig the political structure by appointing new sons to represent him and counter officials appointed by Gaa and also introduce new forms of *Egungun* (Morten-Williams, 1967). Indirectly, gendered interpretations of sons and wives still hold for Alafin Abiodun, but more importantly the wives were replaced with

his children to avoid disloyalty. Therefore, rituality was adjusted to give way to political royalty. The ritual wives were not really the focal interest of power, but sons of Alafin were considered as protecting and maintaining the political interests of the Oyo Empire. Ritual wives and masquerading practices together were revolutionised by Alafin Abiodun to create a new brand of Oyo gender symbolism still embedded in imperial culture and often expressed through the celebration of festivals.

The Oyo influence in Otta was expansionist but rarely imperialistic because Odikaye, Aina and Olataya, who were wives in Otta, maintained the culture but fairly integrated into the local ruling system in Otta. The politics of ritualisation could, arguably, have been economic. The purpose was to ensure tributes accrued to the Oyo Empire. The works of Saburi Biobaku were meant to ensure that the commercial networks from Egba towns created wealth (Biobaku, 1957). The contours of wifely agencies were thus an economic initiative.

Gender in the context of *Egungun* traditions is not of sex, but of culture. Being a wife means a source of money for the Oyo power system. Mojubaolu Okome explains that women's experience is especially relevant if we take seriously the contention that gender is socially constructed. It has to be understood as emerging out of the particularity of a people's history. It ought to stand to reason then, that in every instance constructions of gender react to and reflect the social, political and economic realities of the cultures from which they are drawn (Okome, 2005).

### **Wives and Involvement in *Egungun* Practices in Otta**

In this context, power for a wife implies that her ambitions are in line with those of her husband's lineage, which earns her respect. Within the lineage, the skills and work of a wife are held vital once they add value to the occupation that brings prosperity to the family (Barnes, 1990). From this understanding, in the Oyo Empire, the palace women partook in the economy to favour the powers of the King.

In the domestic realm, wives were no longer seen as necessary for imperial roles with the statehood of Alafin, competition and rivalries among wives in the expansionist agenda, reduced the power of wives in the agency of being a male or female. Rather, the domestic wife was more conspicuous. The status of domestic wives aptly fits into accounts by Europeans that Alafin had 200 wives. Retaining women at home was normal for it was a period of wars of displacement. Historical circumstances in the 19<sup>th</sup> century mattered in the new wifely model.

In the view of Karin Barber's work, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow*, women as wives articulate their roles in the patrilocal societies they belong to. The oral tradition was an indication of the roles played in exercising and preserving family tradition. Women were very important as depicted in the oral traditions as expressed in the oriki (praise poem). The powerful role of lineage wives in their patrilocality is well expressed in the account of Moniyepe's life narrated below:

According to oral tradition, an Oyo woman named Moniyepe arrived at her new home, the town of Otta, during the days of Oyo imperial rule, as the second wife of her new husband, a warrior named Arogunmola. Before emigrating to her husband's town, Moniyepe had inherited an Egungun mask from her father. She brought to the marriage the essentials of an Egungun that her descendants practice to this day. When the newlyweds arrive at their home in Otta, one of their first acts was to introduce the Oya masquerade into the community. It was the warrior Arogunmola's senior wife, Osungbayi, who organised, financed, and led the first performance in which her husband carried the mask as Oya (Willis, 2018, p. 143).

Secondly, the co-wives relationship between Moniyepe and Osungbayi and their role in Arogunmola's career manifested. Osungbayi was a wealthy trader who financed the performances. In this regard she uses her assets as a prominent cloth trader, she introduces a new style of clothing and mode of performance for the *Egungun* ritual, which was witnessed by the entire town and immediate neighbours. Osungbayi went on to become the first occupant in the town to hold a chieftaincy office known as Iyalode, charged with representing the interests of women and merchants on the King's advisory council (Willis, 2018).

The Arogunmola family performed the Oya masquerade around the 1850s. Karin Barber's analysis is evident in Moniyepe's skills before marriage. She knew performance, prayers and the chants needed for *Egungun*. Moniyepe's roles transformed into significant power that resonates in contemporary times. Thus, the intersection of politics and economy is reflected in the translations of power for the Arogunmola family because Moniyepe had political power, while Osungbayi had the economic materials and necessities. The economic role of Osungbayi is emphasised as she was a cloth merchant and adviser on textile use. At the core of her networks were market women and the *Egungun* practitioners, who were needed to gather a large audience from the town. The material wealth she had accumulated was probably critical to the family's ability to provide a feast for the town and give Arogunmola and Moniyepe opulent cloth to wear for the occasion. Osungbayi used her inventory of rich fabrics to supply Oya *Egungun* with new clothing: *an agenda* of a long, flowing

garment: The agbada (male garment) consisted of velvet, damask, cotton and aso-oke (woven fabrics). Arogunmola wore the mask made of fine fabrics that Osungbayeri provided (Willis, 2018, p. 144).

The kind of innovation that Osungbayeri introduced to *Egungun* masquerading costumes was influenced by Islam as the costume is designed like men's *agbada*, and it was adapted to resemble the dress of Muslim men. Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, several women as wives already became Christians or Muslims while the men were at war. And of course, while the men were at war, waves of migration from Oyo, Egba and Lagos to Otta engaged the people with a new religion. To appeal to the sensibility of European explorers, missionaries and Islamic clerics, the masquerade clothes were designed to fit into the Yoruba flowing dress style (*Agbada*). This style was evolved by women to create a synergy for 19<sup>th</sup> century religious diversity in Otta.. Muslims particularly from the 1850s became powerful in Otta and hence the perceptions of society were mixed up in the religions of Islam and African traditional belief systems. The journals of James White attest to this (White, 1855; Willis, 2018). And particularly, the fashioning of the regalia showed adherence to Muslim dress style to create an impression that both religions co-exist. Osungbayeri's innovation in the 1880s blended the interests of Muslims into traditional religious practices.

The roles of Moniyeye and Osungbayeri as promoters of culture are evident in the beliefs in Oya mythology in Iyana (the Oyo quarters in Otta.) Oya was an ideal wife and this appealed to society. The interaction between Moniyeye and Osungbayeri is realistic in the assertion of Obioma Nnaemeka's analysis that "Africans who are in polygamous marriage are not morons or powerless, exploited, downtrodden victims" (Nnaemeka, 1997, p. 15). Invariably, polygamy in itself was a source of power, where women work collaboratively for political and economic reasons. Being that there are mutual gender understandings that women also work to generate income for the family (McIntosh, 2008). Furthermore, this view resonated in the way women as co-wives in a family engaged in market days to network the commerce of commodities in Trans-Atlantic trade.

### **Politics, Wives and Power**

Wives in Oyo-Yoruba societies often are referred to as Iyawo. They fulfilled the biological and social functions within the lineage to serve as wives, mothers and workers. Typical of the Yoruba family structure, by marriage, a wife possesses lower status, initially, but with time more power is accorded to her, and it advances into public spaces. Within the Oyo-Yoruba family,

a woman marrying into the family is powerless, in the sense that she resides in the patrilocal lineage house and has lower status. Men and women in the family symbolise the authority of husbands. The husband's female relatives are more powerful than her. Often, she offers domestic services to everyone in the family.

Economic factors featured in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Oyo-Yoruba societies. The geographies of proximity to the coast were very prominent in Otta. A series of displacements in the 19<sup>th</sup> century entrenched new frameworks of being Yoruba. The historical links of lineage relations in the previous centuries could not create a central/homogenous identity in Otta. The Oyo influence was important to pass on tributes to Oyo. Monetary value was in the economic activities of wifely women who generated wealth through commerce in the Trans-Sahara and Trans-Atlantic trades. Scholarly work on the economic history of the 19<sup>th</sup> century found the Trans-Atlantic trade interconnected with the waves of migration and resettlement (Hopkins, 1968). Indirectly, wives were involved in the lineage practices that generated wealth in the new era of legitimate commerce. For example, women were known to engage in commodity trade at short and long distance. Therefore, they facilitated the supply of textile materials used in designing masquerade regalia. In other words, women profited from masquerading practices and they were also involved in performative spiritual practices in the lineage they belong to. This maintained the heritage of lineages that possess the power to perform *Gelede* and *Egungun* masquerades. Wives within lineages sponsored masquerading ceremonies to create wealth and increase patron-client relations in the community. This was meant to facilitate the purchase of imported European cloth, combs, cowries, glasses, paints, and beads among other things. Wives facilitated the arts and crafts work used in the making of regalia; provision of food and other roles. In this, women in lineages provided these services to ensure success and uphold the political status of the family where they are patrilocally resident. The dynamics sufficed throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The internal Yoruba wars of the 19<sup>th</sup> century drifted men out of their homes by being captured into slavery. Some men regained freedom because the missionaries and Europeans made efforts to stop the wars and slavery as the decision to quit the slave trade gradually influenced the new converts to Christianity. Men involved in the slave trade outside their homes returned in the 1880s and 1890s. Their return complicated gender relations with their wives. This is because wives in Otta were already keyed into the economy of masquerading and made fortunes that enhanced their relevance in the lineage compounds. The returnee husbands aimed to take over the households where their wives had been wealthy and found prosperity in emerging modern

legitimate commerce. Wives in households clearly used wealth to challenge patriarchy in their patrilocal status, thereafter, creating a new social order in the family.

## Conclusions

Women as wives significantly influenced the social construction of gender in Oyo-Yoruba societies. Their roles were explicitly interwoven within the traditional political system. This paper unravelled the models and agencies of wives in the political economy. The economic roles of wives sustained the palace, tradition and society. The nuances and dynamics of being wives and their roles feature in traditional practices of modern times. Despite the waves of displacement from the late 18<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, wives remained custodians of culture and resiliently sustained the traditional institution of womanhood. Polygamy and co-wives' relations within a lineage also increased the relevance of women in the political economy of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The wifely agencies and models of power therefore indicate that gender is constructed; that gender equality is dynamic; and that power is performed and expressive, ultimately Trans-Atlantic and Trans-Sahara trade were defining factors that shaped the economic power and political relevance of wives in Oyo-Yoruba societies.

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## 60 Years of African and Oriental Studies at the Polish Academy of Sciences. Memories and Remarks

### Abstract

The year 2022 marked the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the creation of Pracownia Zagadnień Społecznych i Kulturalnych Afryki Współczesnej [The Center for Studies on African Societies and Cultures], only the second academic institution in Poland and the first within the Polish Academy of Sciences devoted to research on the African continent. This jubilee is an excellent occasion to recall the history of this reputable and academically important institution. Hence the paper documents the evolution of the center, which was initially founded by Professor Józef Chałasiński, and a gradual widening of its geographic scope and transition to research within the field of wider Oriental Studies. It not only shows the various academic angles of the research conducted within the center and presents the biographies of some prominent staff members, but through a history of the institution it also gives a glimpse into academic studies on non-European countries in Poland at the various stages of the country's turbulent modern history. The paper refers to all the main turning points in the history of the institution. Starting from its establishment in 1962, it moves through the early years and then describes the transformation into the Center for Studies on Non-European Countries. It then describes the Center's present-day form, as in 2010 CSNEC was merged with the Research Centre for Mediterranean Archaeology and transformed into the Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures, Polish Academy of Sciences.

**Keywords:** Józef Chałasiński, African Studies, Oriental Studies, Cultural Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences, The Center for Studies on African Societies and Cultures, Center for Studies on Non-European Countries, ZKPPAN, Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures, IKSiO PAN.

Sixty years is an impressive anniversary for any institution, especially one whose creation was, quite surprisingly, closely linked to the turbulent events of Polish history and which in its formative years heavily relied on the position and scholarly reputation of its leader and creator – Professor Józef Chałasiński, a renowned sociologist and expert on the development of the Polish village, but also a respected theoretician and chronicler of the achievements of Polish sociology. He received his PhD in 1927 with the thesis *Wychowanie w domu obcym jako instytucja społeczna* [Upbringing in another's home as a social

institution] supervised by Florian Znaniecki, and in 1937 he was already working as a professor and director of the Chair of Sociology at the University of Warsaw.

In the surrealistic reality of a communist country, this scholar – with a very specific and localised background – became a harbinger of academic interest in African nations and the creator and long-time chairman of only the second institution in Poland dedicated to this type of research.<sup>1</sup> Pracownia Zagadnień Społecznych i Kulturalnych Afryki Współczesnej [The Center for Studies on African Societies and Cultures] was created in 1962 and Professor Chałasiński was its director until his retirement in 1974. The reference to the surrealistic system where freedom of speech is limited and where breaking of any social taboos can lead to serious consequences, was neither accidental or exaggerated. In 1957, Chałasiński published an article *Drogi i bezdroża socjalizmu w nauce polskiej* [The highways and byways of socialism in Polish Science], which became a turning point for the last stages of his academic career (Chałasiński, 1957, pp. 7–43) and which affected all his previous achievements. It was not a work which proposed some novel ideas that revolutionised sociology and put focus on African nations as a melting pot of societies. Ghana's independence in 1957 happened in the background, but the referred paper was not anyhow related to this fact. On the contrary, the above-mentioned turning point was the criticism of local Polish politics (both internal and external) which according to the author were stained by an ideology that steered the country away from the Christian values and severed the ties with the Western culture. The reason for this was a “devotion to Marxism and the cult of Stalin”. The year was 1957, we can write a thing like that today but in the middle of Stalinist and socialist transformation in Poland this would be a very bold statement similar to the declaration about contacting a contagious plague and apparently, it was still controversial enough even a few years after the death of Stalin. The statement was later repeated in the paper delivered to the 4<sup>th</sup> International Sociological Congress in Stresa (Italy) and published in London in the same year (Chałasiński, 1959, pp. 139–146). The result? Some recognition on the international level, but locally – criticism, ostracism, neglect of his scientific achievements and exclusion of Chałasiński's works from the University's curricula. His Center in the Polish Academy of Sciences was disbanded, he was excluded from any management positions in the Academy and removed as the editor-in chief of the journal “Kultura i Społeczeństwo” [*Culture and Society*], which he created. In 1962, he was expelled from the University of Łódź, where he had been teaching for many years and which he had helped to

<sup>1</sup> The first one was Katedra Semitystyki – the Chair of Semitic Studies (currently Chair of African Languages and Cultures) established in 1950 at the University of Warsaw.

create in the 1940s. However, due to Chałasiński's reputation, which remained relatively strong despite the criticism or because of his pro-governmental stance in the late 1940s and early 1950s,<sup>2</sup> or due to his role in saving Staszic Palace for the Polish Academy of Sciences in 1959 (Kłoskowska, 1992, p. 21), or maybe because of the cumulation of these factors, he was allowed to stay in academia.

The banishment was real, however, and even if it did not take the form of total oblivion in the abyss of unemployment, it had a mostly intellectual and somehow geographical nature. Chałasiński was allowed to stay in academic studies, but he was no longer allowed to diligently plow his field of the sociology of rural development in Poland. In turn, the merciful leaders granted him a possibility of moving his research interests far south from the chilling slopes of his native country to the sun-burned soil of the African continent. In other words, Chałasiński was forced to move towards the sociology of non-European countries with a main focus on Africa. Despite the circumstances, nobody can deny the fact that the 1960s were an African decade. With numerous countries gaining independence from the colonial powers and the huge potential of social changes within the new nations, Africa was certainly an interesting field for any ambitious scholar and it has remained as such until today. Chałasiński knew that and was already developing research interests in non-European countries, mostly the United States and North America, but he had some knowledge and works about the African continent and its state-making efforts.

### **The tradition**

Bearing that in mind, we can assume that even if the initial change within the main field of work of the Director of the new institution was a forced one, the Center for Studies on African Societies and Cultures was simply needed in the Polish Academy of Sciences and its potential was fully explored. The main goal of this new unit was multidisciplinary research on African statehood and societies and was reflected in the choice of the academic staff gathered here during its formative years. Sociology was prevailing, of course, but research on cultures and politics was also present and the amalgamate of skills and competences resulted in the publication of many works which were,

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<sup>2</sup> When he condemned the pre-war achievements of Polish sociology including his own works and the works of Florian Znaniecki – his teacher and long-time mentor. He was also expressing criticism towards pre-war social order in Poland, most likely as a result of personal opinions and not as a form of political support in the article called *Spoleczna genealogia inteligencji polskiej* [Social Genealogy of the Polish Intelligentsia] from 1946. For more detailed information see: Górlach, Krauz-Mozer, 2001.

back then, unique in Polish academic reality. Also, worth noting, is that even if the turbulent times of communist rule in Poland, works conducted in the new Center were free of any ideology which plagued and twisted scholarly circles in the countries of the socialist bloc. Africa was simply too far from Polish realities, affording the academic staff a freedom to express their own opinions and perform independent research within the spectrum and scope of the statutory research goals of the Center for Studies on African Societies and Cultures. They provided a good excuse to concentrate on work which despite obvious cultural differences gave the possibility to “legally” explore the similarities between African societies and the local, Polish situation. The research would then be some kind of a metaphor where the similarities were clearly visible. African countries gained their independence and freed themselves from the influence of the colonial powers whom for many years controlled the way how people think, what they are able to learn, how their international politics is conducted and so on. Poland at the same time was under the indirect control of its “most-friendly” neighbour and within the totalitarian system all the freedoms were limited, and all the above-mentioned ways of colonial control were enforced. Chałasiński’s struggle is just one of the examples, another one would be Andrzej Zajączkowski, whose work on the Polish nobility was situated so far from the ideologically approved image of this social group that it was not only rejected by academic circles but also led to the denial of Zajączkowski’s habilitation: *Główne elementy kultury szlacheckiej w Polsce. Ideologia a struktury społeczne* [Main elements of the noble culture in Poland. Ideology and social structure, 1961] and forced the aspiring scholar to change his field of interest and to become an expert in African studies, joining the team of the new research unit. These examples are just two of many (Podgórecki, 1995, p. 29). As a matter of fact, Zajączkowski not only became an Africanist, but he would also become a leading Polish specialist in the field and one of the future directors of the Center created by Chałasiński. He obtained the title of professor in 1978 being already an author of important publications about African religions, like the book *Pierwotne religie Czarnej Afryki* [Primary religions of Black Africa] published in 1965 about the role of social and historical factors in the development of the continent.<sup>3</sup> As a matter of curiosity, he maintained his fondness for the now neglected past even within his new framework of research interest; a legend of the Center says that during his tenure as director he would always check the family and heraldic background of any new person employed by his institution. It was

<sup>3</sup> For example, in the books such as *Niepodległość Konga a kolonializm belgijski. Zarys historyczno-socjologiczny* [Congoese Independence and Belgian Colonialism: A Historical and Sociological Outline, 1968] and *Muntu dzisiaj. Studium afrykanistyczne* [Muntu Today. An Africanist Study, 1970].

a reflection of his personal interest more than anything else, as there is no evidence which can show that the ancestral background of the hired person had anything to do with Zajączkowski's decisions during the staff selection process. He remained faithful to his passion and after the political transformation in Poland, in the last years of his academic career, he came back to the topics of nobility, which he explored in two books published in 1993. Just one year before his death.

Andrzej Zajączkowski was among the first employees of the new Center and his scholarly interests aligned with those of Professor Chałasiński, who initially surrounded himself with a group of sociologists and cultural anthropologists. Among them was Zajączkowski, but also Bogdan Moliński, Elżbieta Reklajtis, Teresa Pfabé,<sup>4</sup> Zygmunt Komorowski,<sup>5</sup> Małgorzata Szupejko, Andrzej Krasnowolski and Grzegorz Kaczyński. The socio-anthropological core team was expanded with the addition of specialists in literature studies, such as Wanda Leopold (who was hired in 1964), Halina Hanna Bobrowska and Krystyna Żytowiecka. The latter two shared interests in francophone writings, visible in early publications such as Krystyna Żytowiecka's work on the history of the French press (*Z historii prasy francuskiej* published in "Kultura i Społeczeństwo" in 1957), those interests later evolving into "ideologically neutral" studies on the literatures of the francophone Africa.

The search for academic freedom within the ideological neutrality was a turning point for many scholars who formed the backbone of the Center. We've already mentioned a few, including its director, but let's provide another quite detailed example of the highways and byways of academic studies in socialist Poland. The cause is right and so is the case as after the recent retirement of Elżbieta Reklajtis the only person from the first group of employees of the

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<sup>4</sup> We can find her publications both under the name of Teresa Pfabé and Teresa Pfabé-Kamal as in 1967 she married Safwat Kamal, an Egyptian scholar affiliated to the High Institute of Folk-Arts in Cairo. She was a well-travelled academic who spent three years during the scholarship in Sorbonne (between 1963 and 1966) and later permanently moved to Egypt. Throughout her life she maintained academic ties with Poland and the centre. After her death in 2007, her daughters – Hala, Magda and Ola Kamal - published a book on their mother's life and scholarly achievements. It was released in Polish in 2010 under the title *O początkach powieści egipskiej* [The Beginnings of the Egyptian Novel] by ASKON and includes some selected articles of Teresa Pfabé and the introduction from Professor Jerzy Zdanowski who was the director of the centre at this time. On a side note, we can mention the fact that the publishing house – ASKON - was established by Iwona Grabowska-Lipińska, a former employee of the Center.

<sup>5</sup> Komorowski was the author of numerous publications on cultural transformation in Sub-Saharan Africa and education in selected West African countries. As historical trivia, we can mention the fact that his son, Bronisław, became a president of Poland, after the tragic death of President Lech Kaczyński in 2010, and then as an elected Head of State in the years 2010–2015.

Center who is still scholarly active<sup>6</sup> is Małgorzata Szupejko. She is no longer with her first academic institution as she left the Polish Academy of Sciences in 2013, obtained her habilitation in 2015 and later worked at the University of Warsaw (within the Chair of African Languages and Cultures, Faculty of Oriental Studies). Similar to the careers of Chałasiński and Zajączkowski, she had to change her research interests and transform herself from a sociologist into an accomplished multidisciplinary expert in the field of African studies. The names of the two directors of the Center were invoked here on purpose as, quite symbolically, they both played a significant role in the early career of Małgorzata Szupejko. She was an MA student of Professor Chałasiński when she was working on a master's thesis about Polish theatre at the turn of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>7</sup> Her first paper: *Problemy osobowości i kultury w amerykańskim powieściopisarstwie XX w.* [The problems of identity and culture in American prose-writing of the 20<sup>th</sup> century] was published in "Kultura i Społeczeństwo" in 1970,<sup>8</sup> already moved her area of studies from Poland and reflected both the young scholar's interests in culture and the area of expertise of her mentor – Professor Chałasiński – who was one of the co-authors and the originator of the paper's topic. With the perspective of time, we can assume that in the political reality of the 1970s this topic would also not guarantee enough freedom to conduct research not plagued by ideological pressure. As in the cases of Chałasiński, Zajączkowski and many others, the safe haven for Szupejko was Sub-Saharan Africa. Her PhD thesis was prepared under the supervision of professor Zajączkowski and publicly defended in 1994. The title of the thesis – *Przemiany społeczno-polityczne w Afryce pod wpływem kolonializmu* [Socio-political changes in Africa under the influence of colonialism] was a result of earlier developed research interests in the field. Back in 1975, "Przegląd Socjologiczny" published Szupejko's article on colonialism-related sociopolitical changes in the Kingdom of Buganda,<sup>9</sup> a topic she would later expand not only in a PhD thesis but also in her book on Bugandan society. *Społeczeństwo Bugandy. Zmiana i rozwój* [The society of Buganda. Change and development] published in 1992, had a spark of novelty as it was carefully touching an understudied subject.<sup>10</sup> In her later career she

<sup>6</sup> Nowadays mostly as a member of Polish Africanist Society and paper presenting participant on seminars and conferences.

<sup>7</sup> Between the January Uprising of 1863 and Polish independence in 1918, to be more specific. Full title in English: *Theatre as an institution of national culture. From the social issues of Warsaw theatrical life of the years 1863–1918.*

<sup>8</sup> Under a name Małgorzata Majchrzak. The co-authors of this paper were Józef Chałasiński and Teresa Truszkowska.

<sup>9</sup> Also published under the name Małgorzata Majchrzak.

<sup>10</sup> However, scholarly qualities of the book were hindered by its cost-cutting feature – the pocket

pursued her interest in African identity and often combined this with literary workshops delivering valuable insights into the changes within the societies of African countries, with East Africa as a main, by not the only, region of interest. She was a head of the Polish Africanist Society for two terms between 2009 and 2015 and a chief-editor of the journal “Afryka” between 2015 and 2019. The early years of Szupejko’s career illustrate both the turbulence in the social sciences in communist Poland and the resilience of the “African field” under ideological pressure. As we noted in the case of Professor Zajączkowski, there were many similar examples of a change in research topics among scholars employed in the “Africanist Center” in the Polish Academy of Sciences.

The career presented here is an example of success forged from the transition and honestly speaking, Professor Chałasiński had a real foresight or at least a very good instinct while choosing his employers, as many of them made a significant contribution to the early development of African Studies in Poland.

Here, we can mention the achievements of Wanda Leopold, who worked in the Polish Academy of Sciences until her tragic death in 1977, a few days before her 57<sup>th</sup> birthday. Despite dying in her prime, she left an impressive publication record with around 130 works, including monographies, translations and scholarly articles. Although her early research interests oscillated around Polish literature (with a biography of Maria Konopnicka and articles about the works of Zofia Nałkowska, among published examples) she soon found her safe harbour on the warm coasts of Sub-Saharan Africa. Her PhD thesis – *Spoleczno-kulturalne przeobrażenia Afryki współczesnej w świetle narodzin i rozwoju powieściopisarstwa Nigerii* [Socio-cultural transformations of contemporary Africa in the light of the birth and development of Nigerian literature], was prepared under the supervision of Professor Chałasiński and publicly defended in 1968. It was not a sign of a radical and instant switch from a more familiar field, but a sign of the scholar’s growing interest in the culture of the continent often referred as the cradle of humanity. Shortly before that, she published a well-received paper about the language and literature of East Africa, but the most significant works of Wanda Leopold came a bit later. In the 1970s, she published her book *O literaturze Czarnej Afryki* [About the literature of Black Africa, 1973] – a compendium of the literature south of the Sahara. In 1974, together with Zbigniew Stolarek, she published an anthology of African poetry [*Antologia poezji afrykańskiej*] with examples ranging from Senegal and Nigeria to Kenya and Uganda. One of her last publications was actually one of the most important. *Eposy Czarnej Afryki* [Epics from Black

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format, which makes the publication easy to transport but quite painful to read due to small print, low spacing and minimalist page-size.

Africa] published in 1977 (with Zbigniew Stolarek and Ewa Fisher who provided the translations of the original texts) introduced to the general public translations of two epic stories – Sundiata and Shaka Zulu – published together with a long critical commentary about the role of the epic in African societies. Seeing the impact of the works of Ruth Finnegan on scholarly discourse about African literature in general and the African epic in particular, we can only imagine the possible influence of Leopold's work if it had only been published in English instead of Polish. However, both the books – the anthology and the epic – were a complete novelty in Poland and the introduction of this unknown material to the scholarly discourse in the country can be seen as a testament of Wanda Leopold's contribution to African studies in this part of the world. A contribution that is universal and timeless. Literature itself does not age, it is a reflection of the times in which it is written. We can debate about any form of literary criticism, but the source material, translated as it is into a commonly understood language, still remains a useful source for any related research even almost 50 years after the death of Wanda Leopold.

We can say similar thing about the publications of two other PhD students of Professor Chałasiński – Halina Hanna Bobrowska and Teresa Pfabé-Kamal. Hanna Bobrowska was the one who introduced the works of Léopold Sédar Senghor and other philosophers from francophone Africa into Polish scholarly circles. Teresa Pfabé's early research interests include education in Nigeria and the literature of Sub-Saharan Africa, but she soon turned her attention to Egyptian literature, society and culture. Thanks to her efforts, the works of prominent intellectuals and writers from Egypt, such as Muhammad Husein Heikal, Taha Hussein or Tawfiq al-Hakim, were introduced to Polish academic discourse. We will just signal those achievements here instead of going too deep into the biographies of these scholars.

However tempting would it be for the author of memoirs, it is simply not possible to include detailed biograms of all the people who were employed over the years by a long-standing research institution. Quite often, their careers took some unexpected turns as some people moved away from scholarly activities and disappeared from the academic radar, while others moved to politics either on national/international stage (for example Jan Parys and Joanna Wronecka) or at the local level (just as Andrzej Krasnowolski). Finally, some of the scholars have successfully combined unusual careers alongside academic ones. Perhaps the best example of a rather unexpected career merging is Stanisław Tokarski. An orientalist and philosopher by trade, translator, populariser and leading Polish analyst of the works of Mircea Eliade, he is also the author of important publications on the influences of Indian philosophy and culture on the pop-culture and societies of the Western Hemisphere. His books from

1984: *Eliade i Orient* [Eliade and Orient] and *Orient i Kontrkultura* [Orient and Countercultures] are two examples of these research interests. Throughout his long career he has amassed an impressive academic portfolio, but apart of that, Tokarski is also an accomplished judoka. Not a person who practised judo in his spare time to stay in shape, but the actual holder of a 5<sup>th</sup> dan (master's degree) in judo and the winner of five gold medals (ten medals in total) in national judo championships in Poland in the 1960s and the winner of European Academic Judo Championships in 1964. During his early years as a scholar in the Polish Academy of Sciences he also worked as a stuntman and stunt coordinator in more than 60 Polish movies including local blockbusters such as *Noce i dnie*, *Ziemia obiecana*, *Polskie drogi* and *Kung Fu*. The latter is hardly surprising, given Tokarski's sporting background and academic career in the field of Oriental Studies. *Revenons à nos moutons*,<sup>11</sup> as the French say. With the above digressions we went too far in time and space, so let's get back to the formative years of the Chałasiński's Center as they could be defined by two characteristic elements.

The first were the close links with sociology, not exactly treated as a dominant research discipline but rather as a connecting point, which opened the door to the publication of the interdisciplinary works from the field of African Studies in the leading Polish sociological journals. The second was the willingness and the feeling of necessity among the academic staff to tackle Europocentric views about Africa in particular and the world's social history in general. This opinion was expressed by Chałasiński in his book *Kultura i Naród* [Culture and Nation] (Chałasiński, 1968), especially within the closing chapter of this work entitled *Dialog Afryki z Europą i zagadnienie narodów afrykańskich* [Dialogue between Africa and Europe and the question of the African nations]. This mutual understanding and change of perspective was important as, according to Chałasiński, "in the dialogue between Africa and Europe not only new Africa is changing but also old Europe is transforming" (Chałasiński, 1967, p. 12). The embodiment of this attitude is best visible in the aforementioned works of Wanda Leopold and Halina Hanna Bobrowska, who gave a direct and unfiltered voice to African oral literature (Leopold) and African philosophy (Bobrowska). From the perspective of time, we can say that this statement is as relevant today as it was in the late 1960s, and that if the world's superpowers, instead of patronising and exploiting former Western colonies, had kept this in mind during the formative years of African independence, the world we know today would most likely be a better place.

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<sup>11</sup> "Let's get back to our rams."

As we can see, the new Center was not only concentrated on the new and important field of research but was also trying to promote a unique attitude towards it. The symbolic “melting pot” for ideas was a weekly seminar conducted by Chałasiński even after his retirement. It was open to scholars from other institutions in Poland and abroad, but obviously the main participants were members of the academic staff of the Center for Studies on African Societies and Cultures – people with various academic backgrounds ranging from sociology (including anthropology and ethnology) through history, religion and political studies up to Arabic studies, law and philosophy. The people whom Chałasiński defined as the “tribe of Africanists” (Chałasiński, 1976). History shows that the creation of an institution devoted to studies of the African continent within the Polish Academy of Sciences, despite of the circumstances leading to it, was somehow a visionary move. The process started in Ghana with the proclamation of independence from March 1957, set into motion a domino effect and over the subsequent decades almost all countries and territories moved towards self-governance from colonial rule, with either resistance or some levels of cooperation from the ex-colonisers. These processes, which led to social and cultural changes, were studied at the Center and the unique approach along with the quality of works resulted in the gradual “academic rehabilitation” of its leader, even if his works from the “African chapter” are often ignored by his biographers (Kulpińska, 1992, p. 101). In 1966 Chałasiński returned to the University and took the chair of the Department of the Sociology of Culture (Katedra Socjologii Kultury). In 1968 he was elected to the presidium of the Polish Academy of Sciences and between 1969–1971 he was a secretary of Department I (Wydział I), which nowadays includes humanities and related studies. In 1970, the University of Łódź, the same institution which had dismissed Chałasiński in 1962, awarded him the title of *doctor honoris causa*.

In 1974, upon the retirement of Chałasiński, Professor Anna Mrozek-Dumanowska was appointed as acting director of the Center and she remained at the post for one and a half years. She was one of the longest-standing staff members in all the iterations of the Center for Studies on African Societies and Cultures, staying until her retirement in 2020. She passed away in 2021 but surely fulfilled her duty as a scholar by not only supporting and advising the junior staff in their academic development,<sup>12</sup> but also by expanding her academic bibliography with publications on various non-European regions. Back in the 1970s, she was an editor of a book on religions in Africa entitled *Religie w procesie przemian w Afryce* [Religions in the process of change in

<sup>12</sup> Not as a supervisor of PhD theses but by organising methodological seminars for younger staff members and by providing advice during the preparation of their publications.

Africa, 1977].<sup>13</sup> Later on, after years of work on various aspects of Islam and its influence on the political and cultural development of the Middle Eastern and African countries, Mrozek-Dumanowska turned to research on African branches of Christianity, the results of which were presented at the Academy's seminars and were included in her last book, published in 2014. It is also worth noting that even shortly before her retirement, she was still able to successfully operate within the grant system which redefined Polish academic culture in the early decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Perhaps the only person who exceeded Professor Mrozek-Dumanowska's length of tenure in the "Oriental Studies branch of Academy" was professor Elżbieta Reklajtis. Initially, a PhD student of Professor Chałasiński, she became a member of the academic staff of the Center in 1965 and remained among the ranks of the academic team through all the turbulences and transformations until her retirement from the Academy in the later part of the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Throughout her career she cemented her legacy as a leading specialist on the culture and societies of the Maghreb countries. Starting her research interests with the topics of the development of Algerian nationality and statehood, she soon became interested in local culture, especially literature and theatre, as well as the wider scope of cultural and social transition in the region, as can be seen in the book *Maghreb współczesny. Z badań nad kontaktem i współrozwojem kultur* [The Modern Maghreb. From research on contact and co-development of cultures] published in 1976. Later, she turned her attention also to Lebanon and her research on the country's culture, society and political situation can be found in books such as *Liban* [Lebanon] from 1993 or *Liban. Między wojną a pokojem* [Lebanon. Between War and Peace] from 2003. In 2022, in recognition of her scholarly achievements, Professor Reklajtis was awarded the golden Gloria Artis Medal for Merit to Culture, the highest official form of acknowledgement in the cultural field in Poland. Although now formally retired, Professor Reklajtis is still keen to share her knowledge and experience with scholars and students alike.

As we have wandered a little too far into the future, let's return to the time shortly after the retirement of the founder of the African Studies unit within the Academy.

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<sup>13</sup> At this time, this subject in the Academy was mostly covered by other member of the Center's research team – Grzegorz Kaczyński. He explored it for example in his 1976 PhD thesis on religion and statehood in Zaire (now Democratic Republic of the Congo), which became the basis for the book *Bunt i religia w Afryce Czarnej* [Revolt and religion in Black Africa], published in 1979

## The transition

The mid-1970s was a period of transformation for the Center for Studies on African Societies and Cultures, as the changes in the paradigms of global development justified further diversification of research and the inclusion of different geographic areas such as the Middle East, Asia and South America. To reflect those changes, in 1976 the Center for Studies on African Societies and Cultures evolved and was transformed into the Center for Studies on Non-European Countries – CSNEC<sup>14</sup> (Zakład Krajów Pozaeuropejskich<sup>15</sup> – ZKP PAN). The first director was Edward Szymański,<sup>16</sup> PhD at the time,<sup>17</sup> who held the chair for five years between 1976–1980. On 1<sup>st</sup> January 1981 he was succeeded by the abovementioned professor Andrzej Zajączkowski who remained director until his retirement in 1992. He was followed by professor Stanisław Tokarski who was acting director during the *interregnum* period, and between 1993 and 2010 the position was held by Professor Jerzy Zdanowski – one of the leading Polish experts on international relations and the history of the Middle East. In time, he would become the longest serving director of the Centre for Studies on Non-European Countries, a record which to this day remains unmatched. Jerzy Zdanowski started his career as a student of the Department of Economics at the University of Warsaw. He obtained his doctorate in 1978 from the Institute of International Relations in Moscow and in the same year began work at the Polish Academy of Sciences. He habilitated in 1994 at the Institute of History, Polish Academy

<sup>14</sup> Here's an interesting little factoid and as a matter of historical curiosity we should mention the fact that the Center functioned concurrently under two slightly different English names which used both, American and British, versions of transcription of the word "Center" ("Centre") and kept the rest intact. As a result of archive studies, personal memory and consultations with former staff we have decided to settle on the more commonly used version, which is included in the text. It was used on the CSNEC's website and in the majority of the administrative documents, business cards, etc. Another issue is the English name of the Center created by Chałasiński in the 1960s as it simply did not have an official English translation and was functioning internationally under various "customary" names.

<sup>15</sup> The name has sometimes led to some curious mistakes in correspondence delivered to the Center. The most impressive derivations include Zarząd Krajów Pozaeuropejskich (Management of Non-European Countries) and Zakład Krajobrazów Pozaeuropejskich (The Centre for Non-European Landscapes). Despite the character of the institution, similar mistakes were quite common.

<sup>16</sup> Not to be confused with Edward Szymański – the Polish poet and patron of at least 4 schools in the country, who was killed in Auschwitz in December 1943, and with Professor Edward Szymański, architect and expert in technical sciences, who died in 2018.

<sup>17</sup> Despite not having a habilitation, he held the position of "docent" granted to him in March 1968. Shortly after leaving the Academy, he habilitated at the University of Łódź during the Martial Law period in Poland.

of Sciences, and became a full professor in 2003, in the same year when his book, *Historia Arabii Wschodniej od czasów najdawniejszych do końca XIII w.* [The history of Eastern Arabia. From the earliest times until the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century], received an award in the field of Oriental Studies from the Department I of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Zdanowski's long career is marked by an impressive publication record with more than 120 articles and 20 monographies, including pioneering works on slavery and manumission in the Middle East (for example: *Speaking With Their Own Voices: The Stories of Slaves in the Persian Gulf in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, 2014), which contained the translations of the first-hand source material available in various archives of Europe and the Middle East. Proficient field researcher with specialisation in archive studies, he has also successfully completed numerous grant projects. Although he was a member of the Committee of Oriental Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences until 2023, Jerzy Zdanowski left the Polish Academy of Sciences in 2016 and currently works at Andrzej Frycz-Modrzewski Krakow University.

Attentive reader has probably noticed already that the academic profiles of the last two directors of the Center – Stanisław Tokarski and Jerzy Zdanowski – do not exactly match the profile of the institution originally created by Chałasiński in the 1960s. However, it corresponds very well with the expanded geographic scope proposed by the CSNEC. The scientific goal behind the creation of the new Center was to conduct interdisciplinary research on the so-called developing countries of Africa, Asia, South and Central America. As it was said above, the sociological profile which characterised the formative years of Chałasiński's Center was being gradually redefined even during his time, as the research interests of the academic staff were moving scholarly activities into other fields. The creation of CSNEC moved those paradigms even further. Initially, the studies carried out within the new institution oscillated around socio-cultural studies and literature, but with the expansion of the academic staff it became possible to cover also other areas of the development of non-European countries.

As the creation of the Africanist unit within the Polish Academy of Sciences was, apart from the unofficial reasons described above, a justifiable necessity which reflected and addressed the changes in global politics and economy, such was the decision to expand its research scope into other areas and further inclusion of a variety of topics and areas of scholarly interest. Apart from cultural studies, which remained the backbone of research, other areas include studies on religions, history, socio-economic aspects of development of the selected countries and political studies which, during the years of transformation in both non-European countries and in Poland itself gradually

gained more and more importance,<sup>18</sup> We can mention the numerous coup d'états and civil wars which have plagued the African continent even many years after the independence. We can also mention Cold War-related tensions and power struggles, which defined the political scene of South America and other parts of the world, which remained spheres of influence of the global superpowers who were flexing their nuclear muscles since the end of the Second World War. These global factors made the Centre for Studies on Non-European Countries not only unique within the Academy, but also made its research goals indispensable. The evolution towards political and economic studies started during the tenure of Edward Szymański, who hired a group of politologists (such as Piotr Kownacki, Bożena Ewa Bekier, Beata Bereza and Máximo Lira – a Chilean scholar who later pursued a career in diplomacy and was appointed as an ambassador of Chile to the Republic of Poland in 1990),<sup>19</sup> and continued even after Szymański left the Academy and the Center was operating under the leadership of Professor Zajączkowski (sociologist) and Professor Zdanowski (historian). Each of the directors tried to keep up with global paradigms, where politics and economics were always considered hot and important topics. These areas of study were gaining importance within the ranks of CSNEC, but never reached a level of total dominance in the research agenda, as the policy of successive directorships was based on the recruitment of scholars with diverse academic backgrounds and interests. In the early years of the new Center, the staff was joined by sinologists – Karin Tomala and Maria Roman Sławiński. Professor Tomala was a sinologist who got her PhD in political science in 1976, but throughout her career expanded her academic interests and became an expert in various aspects of Chinese society. Professor Sławiński was a “full term” sinologist, a graduate of the University of Beijing and the Institute of Oriental Studies<sup>20</sup> of the University of Warsaw, where he also obtained his PhD in 1964. He was one of the leading experts on Chinese culture and religion, but also an accomplished... painter, whose oil and watercolour works have been exhibited in Berlin, Lublin, Warsaw and other places.<sup>21</sup> The widening of the geographic scope lead to

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<sup>18</sup> The diverse scope of research was visible in the composition of the research teams, for example in the years 1981-1992 there were five of them and they covered various disciplines: socio-anthropological studies, economic studies, political studies, inter-cultural communication and religious studies.

<sup>19</sup> In 1994 he was awarded with the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland for his contribution to the development of the cooperation between Chile and Poland.

<sup>20</sup> The Institute of Oriental Studies for a long time was a part of the Department of Neophilology but is now an independent faculty within the University of Warsaw.

<sup>21</sup> Both of them sadly died within a few months of each other in 2014 (in May and November respectively). They have left a significant impact on Polish sinology and their passing tore

the expansion to different global areas and the acquisition of specialists on India, such as Stanisław Tokarski, Surender Bhutani (who was operating as a free-lance researcher but contributed enormously to the Center's academic activities related to India and Arab countries) and the Middle East, such as Jerzy Zdanowski, Teresa Stajuda, Bogumiła Iwasiów-Pardus and Franciszek Bocheński. There were, of course, other scholars, such as Henryk Szlajfer who conducted research on the development of capitalism in Latin America and Jarosław Bratkiewicz<sup>22</sup> who published a book about Western perceptions of the Orient and the development of socio-economical structures in Oriental countries. However, the history of the Center was long and quite turbulent, so it would not be possible to mention all the scholars who have contributed to the academic development of CSNEC and to the Oriental Studies in general.

As for African Studies, they remain one of the areas of interest within the research scope of the new institution, and the expansion of academic ranks in this area include the acquisition of real superstars in the field. The double meaning of the word "field" is actually very accurate as we are going to mention Augustyn Ponikiewski who joined the ranks of CSNEC in the early 1980s, after successful stays as an expert in Morocco and Laos. He came to the Academy with a wealth of experience in the field of agriculture and both practical and academic experience in Africa and Asia. His works on African topics and the books such as *Ludy gospodarki żarowej Azji Południowo-Wschodniej* [The slash-and-burn cultivation people of South-East Asia] published in 1985 were not only a result of a lifelong research of Professor Ponikiewski but also an indirect testament to the early academic interests of the founder of the Center – Professor Chałasiński. Another "heavyweight" acquisition was the transfer of Professor Tadeusz Dzierżykray-Rogalski, whom we will mention again very soon. As African studies remained within the scope of academic interests the influx of new scholars into the CSNEC was slow but steady. Apart of the professors mentioned above we can list, among others, also Elżbieta Promińska, Grzegorz Waliński and Robert Piętek. We can also mention the author of this article, as your humble chronicler joined the ranks of CSNEC in 2005, during the tenure of Professor Zdanowski and Malwina Bakalarska who joined in 2007.

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a huge gap not only within research related to China within the Center but to Asian Studies in general. Professor Sławiński was a creator and head of the Centre for Studies on Modern Confucianism within CSNEC, and his death, the passing of Professor Tomala, and the death of Teresa Halik – an expert in Vietnamese studies and a specialist in the Vietnamese diaspora – just a year after, was significant blow to this area of studies within this institution.

<sup>22</sup> Who later became Polish ambassador to Latvia (between 1997 and 2001).

However, the history of CSNEC has not been a bed of roses, as the Center was often facing financial difficulties and troubles with staffing (as a direct result) certainly limited the academic expansion of this institution. However, this has not affected the academic quality of the works of its employees. Looking at the list of publications, we can see that despite the limited staff, the Center maintained its strong publication record and covered many areas of the development of the regions included in its research scope. It also maintained close international ties with academic institutions and scholars from all continents and countries, as far as the UK, Italy and Sweden, but also Burkina Faso, Chad, Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, India, China and Cuba – to list just a few examples. This cooperation not only resulted in the exchange of journals and research materials and mutual exchange visits<sup>23</sup> of scholars but also in joint conferences, workshops and seminars.

One such case is the participation of the Center within the international project *Individual and Society in the Mediterranean Muslim World* which was founded by the European Science Foundation and coordinated by la Maison Méditerranéenne des Sciences de l'Homme in Aix-en-Provence and St Antony's College in Oxford. Throughout its duration (1996–1999), the project included the organisation of high-profile conferences in Granada, Istanbul, Marseille and other European leading research centres, which in turn resulted in the series of publications. The main contributors for the project from the side of CSNEC were Jerzy Zdanowski, Paulina Lewicka and Joanna Wronecka who, apart of the publishing activities, also participated in the conferences.

Another example is the Polish-Finnish research project *State and Everyday Life in Africa*, coordinated by the director of CSNEC – Professor Jerzy Zdanowski. The three-year project began in 1998 and its culminative point was an international conference held in Accra, Ghana, in 2001 with Robert Piątek and Małgorzata Szupejko as the representatives of the Center<sup>24</sup> and

<sup>23</sup> The first two parts were especially crucial as during the of the “Africanists Center” and in the early CSNEC era, that is prior to the political transformations in Poland after 1989, access to academic publications from Western countries for those from the Eastern Bloc was greatly limited. Thus, personal connections such as Prof. Zajączkowski's ties with French sociologists were crucial in obtaining Western publications and also opening possibilities for academic visits and scholarships in the renowned scholarly centres at the other side of the Iron Curtain. For example in the *École des hautes études en sciences sociales* in Paris which hosted many young scholars from CSNEC during Prof. Zajączkowski's tenure. However, the acceptance of the research visit by the host institution was often not enough to facilitate the visit itself as the government sometimes blocked the travel permits for an individual scholar who was (even baselessly) accused of any anti-governmental activity.

<sup>24</sup> The Polish delegation was very strong, with prominent experts on African studies among the members of the team. In addition to the representatives from CSNEC who were both PhD's at the time, among the participants were Professor Stanisław Piłaszewicz, Professor Jan Milewski and Professor Michał Tymowski.

Grzegorz Waliński, the Center's former employee, among the organisers. The conference under the theme *State Formation and Everyday Life in Africa* was held in November at the University of Ghana, Legon, and was organised in cooperation between this academic institution, the University of Helsinki (Finland) and the Polish National Commission for UNESCO. Grzegorz Waliński's role in the organisation committee should not be overlooked as at the time he was a member of the Polish delegation to UNESCO (a post he held between 1996 and 2001). He later became Polish Ambassador to Nigeria, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea in the years 2002–2008. An expert in African studies, especially on the pre-colonial history of the Zulu kingdom and political dynamics in West Africa, whose career was cut short by malaria. He died in 2021 at the age of 58.

Another form of formal international cooperation is the role of the Center for Studies on Non-European Countries within the international initiative of the African Borderlands Research Network (ABORNE), where CSNEC acted as the representative in Poland and Jerzy Zdanowski was coordinating the participation of Polish researchers in ABORNE activities between 2009–2013. The ABORNE project was founded by the European Science Foundation (ESF) as an umbrella for the organisation of workshops and seminars in Europe and Africa. One of the first global events was the conference *How Africa is Transforming Border Studies*, which took place at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa, on 10–14 September 2009. The conference was followed by a short fieldwork trip (focused on the various aspects of migration and displacement) to the Bushbuckridge District on the Mozambiquan boorder. Poland was represented by Mariusz Kraśniewski from CSNEC and Krzysztof Trzcziński who was, at the time, part of the staff at the University of Warsaw's Department of Geography, but who later briefly joined the Polish Academy of Sciences and was working at the Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures for three years between 2014 and 2017.

Apart from international cooperation and the participation of the Center's academic staff in the symposiums organised abroad, CSNEC also organised its own events like, for example, three conferences on the Middle East (between 2012 and 2014). Their scale was obviously smaller but with the contribution of the scholars from academic institutions from European and Non-European countries, their scientific quality and achievements should not be overlooked. At the grassroots level the Center also maintained close ties with leading Polish academic institutions devoted to research on similar topics. This cooperation technically started during the time of Professor Chałasiński who, apart from his role as director of the Centre for Studies on African

Societies and Cultures, since 1966 was also a part of the academic staff of the Department of Sociology of the University of Warsaw. It continued during the time of Professor Zajączkowski, who, for many years, taught the sociology of Africa to students of the Chair of African Languages and Cultures<sup>25</sup> at Warsaw university. Close ties with this institution were maintained for many years. Here, the author can give a first-hand account as he was introduced to the academic profile and the library of CSNEC by Professor Stanisław Piłaszewicz who, during his many years of work at the University of Warsaw would bring his students to Staszic Palace in order to familiarise them with the Center's research in the field of African Studies. Professor Piłaszewicz – a prominent scholar and one of the world's leading specialists in Hausa literature, was not only head of the abovementioned Chair of African Languages and Cultures for more than 20 years (from 1988 to 2009), but was also a member of the Scientific Council of the Centre for Studies on Non-European Countries and, later, the Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures. The council is actually one of the best examples of cooperation between the centre and other academic institutions in Poland. Long-standing head of the Scientific Council was Professor Bogdan Składanek, an Iranist and Director of the Institute of Oriental Studies at the University of Warsaw (between 1986 to 1996). The current head of the Scientific Council is Professor Marek Mejor, an Indologist affiliated to the University of Warsaw but also Head of the Committee of Oriental Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences (until 2024) and former Head of the Polish Oriental Society. Among other members of the council we can mention Professor Jolanta Sierakowska-Dyndo – Director of the Institute of Oriental Studies at the University of Warsaw from 2002 and the first Dean of the Faculty of Oriental Studies after its creation in 2008. We can also mention Professor Janusz Danecki, former Director of the Chair of Arabic and Islamic Studies of the University of Warsaw. These are just a few examples and cooperation between Polish academic institutions reached far wider than the activities of the abovementioned Scientific Council, with scholarly connections with leading academic institutions and scholars from Warsaw, Lodz, Cracow and other places CSNEC always remained an important place on the Polish scientific map as far as African and Oriental studies are considered.

Obviously, international and local cooperation, although fruitful and beneficial to all concerned parties, was not the main purpose of the existence of the Center. The list of publications shows an impressive range of research subjects

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<sup>25</sup> This is the current name of the same institution which was mentioned much earlier in the text, in footnote 2. Similarly to many academic institutions in Poland, it experienced some changes in nomenclature and affiliation within the structures of the university but maintained its scientific profile. To avoid confusion, the following section of the paper will refer to the current names of the academic institutions mentioned in the text.

and testifies to the willingness of the academic staff to explore the areas which were often ignored in wider academic circles or simply understudied in Poland. Works on the religions in Africa have been mentioned. Some other examples include the monographies exploring the links between Western subcultures and Oriental philosophy [*Orient i subkultura*; *Orient i kontrkultura* – both by Stanisław Tokarski], the first monograph in Central European literature on the history of Taiwan [*Historia Tajwanu* by Maria Roman Sławiński], the history of China [*Nowożytna historia Chin* by Roman Sławiński], the monograph on various aspects of Chinese development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century [*Chiny a procesy globalizacji w XXI w.*, by Karin Tomala] pioneering studies on the Vietnamese diaspora in Poland by Teresa Halik, the first monograph on the history of Eastern Arabia [*Historia Arabii Wschodniej* by Jerzy Zdanowski], Andrzej Krasnowolski's works on the role of Afro-Brazilians in the development of West African Societies (*Les Afro-Brésiliens dans les processus de changement de la Côte des Esclaves*) and Małgorzata Szupejko's comprehensive analysis of the problems of identity through the works of modern African writers (included in her book *Afrykańska tożsamość u progu XXI wieku. Anglojęzyczna literatura Czarnej Afryki i jej twórcy*), to mention just a few examples. The full list could be much longer as it is not possible to list here all the important and notable works. The impressive publication record of the Center for Studies on Non-European Countries includes dozens of monographies and several hundred articles, including author's own works on modern forms of slavery in Africa and the use of oral and written literary sources as material for research on history and social change.

The uniqueness of research conducted within the Center was not only its scope and the variety of subjects. The works published often relied on local sources and were based on materials written in Oriental languages, first-hand sources gathered during field research and original documents obtained during archive studies. The publications have often proposed a change of perspective from a Eurocentric point of view and given voice to local philosophers, theorists and scholars. The ideologists of Négritude,<sup>26</sup> the philosophers behind the Islamic fundamentalist movements and the Indian theorists of social dialogue were first introduced to the Polish literature through the materials published by the Center for Studies on Non-European Countries.

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<sup>26</sup> It is somewhat of a simplification as technically Hanna Bobrowska, who had a leading role in the popularization of West African philosophy in Poland, published her article *Czarna Afryka w poszukiwaniu drogi przyszłości* (Black Africa in Search of Future Ways) in 1975, just before the transformation of the Center. However, the majority of her work on this topic was published by CSNEC.

As the scope of research widened, so did the number of research disciplines. Soon the field of sociology which was an initial area for publications in the Chałasiński's era became too thin for the growing number of subjects and research perspectives. In addition to monographs published by the Center in cooperation with external publishers,<sup>27</sup> articles were published in leading scientific journals in Poland and abroad. Also, to accommodate the research needs and to underline the importance of the international cooperation, the Center launched two peer-reviewed journals concentrated on interdisciplinary research and with a specified geographic range. Both are still being published today. The first issue of "Hemispheres. Studies on Cultures and Societies" was released in 1984 and the journal operates as an annual publication excluding a short period when it appeared as a quarterly. Its first editor-in-chief was Andrzej Zajączkowski (from 1984 to 1994), followed by Jerzy Zdanowski (from 1994 to 2016), Mahnaz Zahirinejad (2017–2021), and finally Michał Moch, who holds this position at the time of writing. *Acta Asiatica Varsoviensia* was first published in 1988 as the brainchild of Roman Sławiński. He was the editor-in chief until his death in 2014. He was then succeeded by Jerzy Zdanowski in 2015 then followed by Krzysztof Trzciński (2016–2017) and Nicolas Levi (2018–2020). The current editor-in chief is Małgorzata Wielińska-Soltwedel. As a sign of modernity, both journals are now available online, but we can assume that the reader is well aware of this fact as this memoir is published in *Hemispheres*.

Above we have just a brief description of the activities of the Center for Studies on Non-European Countries – the institutional and intellectual successor of the Center started by Józef Chałasiński in 1962. However, even this short note offers a glimpse into the achievements of the academic staff and shows the importance of the institution for Oriental Studies in Poland also in a wider sense. That is especially if we combine it with the huge thematic library that includes more than 15,000 volumes from various fields.<sup>28</sup> It is a pretty impressive record for an institution which barely survived the times of system transformation in Poland and was almost completely disbanded in the early 1990s. Later events can be seen as a symbolic reference to the proverb about strength gained through hardship,<sup>29</sup> so despite the financial difficulties which plague academic studies (especially in the field of the humanities) in Poland up to this day, the Center for Studies on Non-European Countries not only remained on the academic map of Poland, but was a leading institution

<sup>27</sup> With the significant role of ASKON publishing house, which published not only monographs but also the first issues of CSNEC's journals.

<sup>28</sup> Including Chałasinski's works on rural development in Poland.

<sup>29</sup> "What does not kill us, makes us stronger".

concentrated on interdisciplinary research within widely considered Oriental Studies. It was like this until 2010, when the Center was... dissolved? No, it evolved again, showing resilience and devotion to the academic heritage of its founder.

### The transformation

Due to the legal changes within the Polish Academy of Sciences, smaller research institutions such as Centres (Zakłady) became obsolete. To avoid liquidation, those smaller units had to either expand or join ranks with other small units in order to comply with the new staff regulations. Thus in 2010 the Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures – IMOC PAS (Instytut Kultur Śródziemnomorskich i Orientalnych PAN – IKŚiO PAN) was born as a merger of two reputable research centres within the Academy – the Research Centre for Mediterranean Archaeology (founded in 1956 by Professor Kazimierz Michałowski) and the Center for Studies on Non-European Countries. As the matter of fact, some cooperation between those institutions was taking place before, due to the proximity of research subjects and geographical interests. Professor Tadeusz Dzierżykray-Rogalski, whom we briefly mentioned a few pages earlier, came to CSNEC after a long and successful career at the Research Centre for Mediterranean Archaeology, where he was a long time deputy director (under Kazimierz Michałowski) and a director for one year. He was a medical practitioner and anthropologist with significant academic achievements both in medicine and in strictly academic areas. An expert in the analysis of human remains, he was instrumental in organising the so-called “Yotvingian Expedition” to the northern regions of Poland, the results of which had a significant impact on the understanding of the culture of the Baltic people (Strzałko, Drozdowski, 1998). However, soon afterwards he moved his research interests towards Africa, and the majority of his works relate to this continent, with his four-volume book *Publications of the Arabic-Polish Anthropological Expedition*<sup>30</sup> and the book *Sudan. Kraj i ludzie* [Sudan. State and People, 1991]<sup>31</sup> as the two poles of his research interests. A full professor (since 1958), author of many academic publications, but also holder of many military decorations including the Silver Cross of the War Order of Virtuti Militari and the Warsaw Uprising Cross. With the perspective of time, we can say that the career of Dzierżykray-Rogalski in the Polish Academy of Sciences was a metaphoric bridge that connected two academic centres like a foretoken of change that happened many years after his death.

<sup>30</sup> Based on the results of two Polish-Egyptian expeditions between 1959–1962.

<sup>31</sup> The book written together with his wife – Elżbieta Promińska.

Symbolism aside, the decision to unify these two institutions was both pragmatic and scientifically justified. Pragmatically it was quite obvious as both centres shared the same floor in Warsaw's Staszic Palace. The scientific factor was also clear, as they shared similar regional interests, although, for obvious reasons, the approach to research conducted within each of them was significantly different. However, despite the differences, the creation of IMOC PAS was an unique opportunity to extend the interdisciplinary character of studies on non-European cultures to another level. The excavations in the Middle East (especially in Egypt) and North Africa (especially in Sudan) created the possibilities for cooperation within different fields of study and to supplement the materials with variety of findings. This includes material culture but also cultural studies in general and obviously history. Those areas are currently being explored within the research curricula of the Institute while some, such as in-depth research into the material and social culture of the Hausa diaspora in Sudan, are at the planning phase.

The first director of the new institution was Professor Jerzy Zdanowski who was acting director between 2010 and 2011. Afterwards, Professor Karol Myśliwiec – former director of the Research Centre for Mediterranean Archaeology – was appointed as the director of the institute, while Professor Jerzy Zdanowski took up the post of deputy director. At the end of their tenure, they were succeeded by Dr. hab. Teodozja Rzeuska, Associate Professor at the IMOC PAS, who was the director from 2015 to 2023, together with Dr. Henryk Meyza and Dr. Jadwiga Iwaszczuk as deputy directors (each held the position for one term). Subsequently, the management positions passed to Dr. Jadwiga Iwaszczuk and Dr. Katarzyna Kapiec, who took the positions of director and deputy director, respectively. In 2024, the board was expanded with addition of Dr. Daria Dulok who became a deputy director of the Administrative Affairs and such is the current state of the administrative board at the time of writing.

As for Oriental Studies within the new Institution, they have settled well enough. With numerous finished grant projects including ones by Jerzy Zdanowski, Anna Mrozek-Dumanowska, Malwina Bakalarska, Mariusz Kraśniewski, Sabina Brakoniecka, Bogumiła Hall, Michał Moch, Krzysztof Gutowski, Patrycja Kozieł and Natalia Bahlawan; international conferences, seminars and workshops; a variety of subjects and significant publication record containing monographs and articles.

Perhaps the most significant achievement in the context of international events was the series of five conferences on the Middle East organised between 2013 and 2018, which were coordinated mainly by Mahnaz Zahirinejad<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> At the time (2015–2020), she was a head of, now defunct, Center of Middle Eastern Studies within the Department of Islamic Civilization at the Institute.

and Agata Wójcik. With the participation of scholars from leading academic institutions from the USA, Turkey, Greece, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Romania, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Israel, Pakistan, Poland and other countries, the conferences provided a platform for scholarly discourse conducted above the political strife which influences international relations within the region. On the local level, the institute launched a series of open lectures with the cooperation of the Committee of Oriental Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences. The one-year project, which started in 2016, was founded by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education<sup>33</sup> and provided an opportunity to introduce to the general public the results of research conducted by specialists in the field of African and Oriental studies from leading Polish academic institutions. In the background, the Institute cultivated the idea of the “internal-but-open” seminar, which was first launched by Professor Chałasiński and then continued during the times of CSNEC. Initially, just as in the times of the Center, the seminars took place every Tuesday and apart from discussions on current research problems by the staff of the institute, it often provided a floor for scholars from other institutions to present the results of their academic interests. The seminar, which was suspended due to pandemic restrictions, was relaunched in a new, hybrid form in 2024.

From the publication department, notable books include studies on: the institution of slavery in the Arabian Peninsula [*Slavery and Manumission. British Policy in the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf in the First Half of the 20th Century* by Jerzy Zdanowski], Iran’s place in the politics and economics of Asia and the Middle East (*Iran’s Strategy in Energy Relations with China and India (1979–2010)* by Mahnaz Zahirinejad), the oral literature and modern Hausa music from Nigeria, Niger and Ghana (*In Da Haus. A Story of Hiphop and Oral Literature in Hausa Society* by Mariusz Kraśniewski), on the political system of North Korea (*Korea Północna. Zarys ewolucji systemu politycznego* by Nicolas Levy), on the monuments and memorial sites and their role in international relations with the USA from the perspective of Japan by Olga Barbasiewicz (*Pomniki i miejsca pamięci w relacjach międzynarodowych. Wpływ pamięci na stosunki japońsko-amerykańskie z perspektywy Japonii*), on authoritarianism and economic liberalisation in Egypt by Michał Lipa (*Autorytaryzm i liberalizacja gospodarcza w Egipcie*), on Shiite political mobilization in Lebanon in the years 1960-1982 by Rachela Tonta (*Czynniki mobilizacji politycznej szyitów w Libanie w latach 1960–1982*), on the social movements and the political system of Lebanon after 1990 by Natalia Bahlwan (*Nowe ruchy społeczne wobec systemu politycznego*

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<sup>33</sup> Within the funding stream “Activities for the Promotion of Science” [Działaność upowszechniająca naukę – DUN]

w Libanie po 1990 roku), on the regional development in Indonesia by Michał Sęk (*Archipelag nierówności. Rozwój regionalny w Indonezji*) and many others, including a comprehensive analysis of the religions and the process of globalisation (*Religia a globalizacja*, by Anna Mrozek-Dumanowska), a study of the modern history of India by Stanisław Tokarski and Surender Bhutani (*Indie w XXI wieku*, published in 2014 and again in a second edition in 2017). The Institute maintained the international contacts of its predecessors, including relations with leading academic institutions in Nigeria, India and China, as well as European research centres in the UK, Germany and Italy.<sup>34</sup>

The end of the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was marked by a gradual shift in the research profile of the Institute. With Poland's newly imposed strict policy towards disciplinary purity of academic activities, the Oriental part of the Institute moved towards cultural studies as a main discipline. Interdisciplinary research was simply no longer an option as staff requirements for research disciplines were too high to be handled by an institution with limited founding. African Studies remained mostly unaffected by these changes as the research profile was already focused on the processes of transition which affect cultures and societies in Sub-Saharan Africa.

We started this paper with reference to the African studies within the Polish Academy of Sciences as it was the root and the backbone of the further activities in the field of widely considered Oriental Studies and let us end it with the reference of the current condition of this area of research within IMOC PAS.

In March 2020, the Division for Research on Sub-Saharan Africa (Pracownia Badań nad Afryką Subsaharyjską) was created within the Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures and became one of the two academic pillars of the existing Department of Modern Asian and African Cultures,<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> The list of the scholars who joined the Center or, later, the Institute for a research visit or were shortly affiliated there through the academic exchange programme is long and still growing. Among the professors of international repute who do not need further introduction we can mention Abdalla Uba Adamu, Sergio Baldi, Milos Mendel, Harry T. Norris, Evariste Poda and Holger Weis. To list just a few examples.

<sup>35</sup> Currently, the African and Oriental studies are conducted mostly in two departments within the structures of the Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures. Those are: the Department of Islamic Civilization (with Michał Moch, Associate Professor of the IMOC PAS, as Head of Department) and the Department of Modern Cultures of Asia and Africa (with Dr. Małgorzata Wielńska-Soltwedel as Head of Department). Due to the academic profile of the Institute, some related research is also conducted by the more strictly archaeological units, mostly within the Department of Nubiology (with Prof. Bogdan Żurawski as the Head of the Department). The information about the current structure of the IMOC PAS and the research activities of all the departments and their particular divisions can be found on the Institute's website: <http://www.iksiopan.pl/index.php/en/structure/departments>

the other one being Section for the Study of Countries along the Silk Road (Pracownia Kultur Szlaku Jedwabnego) led by the head of the Department – Dr. Małgorzata Wielińska-Soltwedel. Dr. Mariusz Kraśniewski was appointed as the head of the Division and despite limited staffing, the new research unit is trying to continue work started in the early 1960s and follows the ideas important to Professor Chałasiński and his team within the “Africanist Centre” created in the early 1960s. These include a new approach towards research, ambitious scholarly goals and, above all, emphasis on the non-European perspective of research and ideas. Valuable works by Dr. Patrycja Koziel on the elements of feminism in the writings of Hausa female authors and the Brazilian diaspora in Nigeria are just two examples, while the former took the form of a monograph in 2024 and the latter was a subject of a grant project (within the *Miniatura* programme), which was finished in the same year. We can also mention here Kraśniewski’s works on West African popular culture, oral literature and education.

Operating with limited funds and in the Covid and early post-Covid reality the Division organised an international seminar on modern Hausa poetry and an international conference – *Culture in the Times of Plague. Coronavirus’ impact on the cultural development in Sub-Saharan Africa*, which was held (online) in Warsaw on 8 September, 2021 with participants from Europe and African countries such as Nigeria, Kenya and Zimbabwe. The staff also prepared a special issue of the *Hemispheres* journal which put emphasis on African culture and cultural studies and commemorated the creation of the new unit (*Hemispheres. Studies on Cultures and Societies*, No. 36, 2021). The Division has limited staff, but with the participation of its scholars in the conferences held in Poland and abroad (for example in Italy, Uganda, UK and USA), guest lectures (Poland, Italy), media participation (in Poland, Germany and Nigeria) and an emphasis on field research, the future is there, but as usual, it is an open book.

With this statement we’ve reached the end of our memoir, but we still hope that many more pages on this topic will be written in the future, as African and Oriental studies will persist within the Polish Academy of Sciences just as they have for the past 60 years. We’ve tried to chronicle the history of all the iterations of professor Chałasiński’s Center and through the academic works and achievements of its employers we’ve tried to show the research that was, and still is, conducted within this institution. However, we are well aware that each written account will have some flaws as long as it is, even partially, based on human memory. And even if memory serves right and is supported by the reliable sources it is simply not possible to record all the events and mention all the people who contributed towards the history

of a long-lasting and reputable institution. Sixty years is a long time and a short article is not enough to cover all the details. Maybe one day, a book will be written and it will explain all the twists and turns and provide extensive biographies of all the people involved. Who knows, maybe it will even record some of the dramas within this institution over the years? As for us, we will end our role here but before the author's voice fades into references and appendixes, let's give respect to the ones who, for all those years worked, behind the lines marked by the academic publications. Whatever we say about the research achievements of the staff, none of it would be possible without the contribution of the administrative personnel which provided the background for a safe and efficient work environment. People like Mrs Renata Dobrzyńska, long-standing secretary of CSNEC, who at some point was also an "acting librarian" due to the shortage of staffing related to the low funding of the institution.

The history of the Center was written by all the people who ever worked there.

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<sup>36</sup> The author was a part of academic staff in the later years of the Center for Studies on Non-European Countries and is currently the only remaining member of CSNEC staff in the Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures. As most of the members of the academic staff are now retired or deceased, this paper is based on archive research, personal memory and communication with the available members of the team. The author would like to express his gratitude especially to Małgorzata Szupejko and Andrzej Krasnowolski, for their valuable remarks about the history of the Center and for the selection of photos included in the paper. We would like to thank also Jerzy Zdanowski for his remarks and suggestions on various stages of paper preparation and for the list of CSNEC publications. As the author was not present during the formative years of the Center for Studies on African Societies and Cultures [Pracownia Zagadnień Społecznych i Kulturalnych Afryki Współczesnej] the bulk of information about this time comes from the article by Grzegorz Kaczyński: *Seminarium afrykanistyczne Józefa Chałasińskiego. Fakty i refleksje* [The African Studies Seminar of Józef Chałasiński: Facts and Reflections] (Kaczyński, 2013, pp. 156–177). Grzegorz Kaczyński was a participant of the sociologic seminars led by professor Józef Chałasiński and became a member of the academic staff of the Center. The author met Grzegorz Kaczyński several times after his departure from the Polish Academy of Sciences when Kaczyński was already working in Italy where he remained until his death in 2018.

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## Appendix 1

### The list of publications

The following section includes the list of publications released over the years by all the iterations of the Center that was started by Professor Chałasiński in 1962. It contains only the monographs, as if we had wanted to include also journal articles and conference papers we would have needed a full issue of *Hemispheres* and even that probably won't have been enough. We have done our best to make the list complete although we accept the possibility that some older books have been omitted by accident. However, some of the records were omitted on purpose as this catalogue does not include publications not relevant to the academic profile of the institution which were published by research staff during their employment in the Polish Academy of Sciences. Among those books are Professor Chałasiński's works on the working class and the social development of rural areas of Poland and Professor Zajączkowski's books on the Polish nobility. It excludes also the volumes which were self-published by members of the staff, released under different affiliations or are not purely academic by definition, such as textbooks for language learning (for example Vietnamese or Chinese).

<b>1963</b>		
Andrzej Zajączkowski	<i>Aszanti – kraj Złotego Tronu</i> [Ashanti – the Land of the Golden Stool]	Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa, pp. 210
<b>1964</b>		
Andrzej Zajączkowski	<i>Wybrane zagadnienia z socjologii Afryki</i> [Selected Aspects of the Sociology of Africa]	Studium Afrykanistyczne UW, Warszawa 1964, pp. 145
<b>1965</b>		
Józef Chałasiński, Krystyna Chałasińska	<i>Bliżej Afryki</i> [Closer to Africa]	Instytut Wydawniczy Pax, Warszawa 1965, pp. 543
Andrzej Zajączkowski	<i>Pierwotne religie Czarnej Afryki</i> [Primary Religions of Black Africa]	Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 1965, pp. 225
Andrzej Zajączkowski	<i>Plemię, rasa, socjalizm</i> [Tribe, Race, Socialism]	PW „Wiedza Powszechna”, Warszawa 1965, pp. 230

<b>1966</b>		
Bogdan Moliński	<i>Historia, osobowość, sztuka. Refleksje nad antropologią kultury</i> [History, Personality, Art. Reflections on Cultural Anthropology]	Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 1966, pp. 255
<b>1967</b>		
Edward Szymański, Lech Ratajski	<i>Kongo Kinszasa</i> [Congo Kinshasa]	Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 1967, pp. 195
Anna Mrozek	<i>Koran a kultura arabska</i> [Quran and Arabic Culture]	Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 1967, pp. 298
Anna Mrozek	<i>Średniowieczna filozofia arabska</i> [Medieval Arabic Philosophy]	PWN, Warszawa 1967, pp. 246
<b>1968</b>		
Józef Chałasiński	<i>Kultura i naród</i> [Culture and Nation]	Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 1968, pp. 616
Andrzej Zajączkowski	<i>Niepodległość Konga a kolonializm belgijski. Zarys historyczno-socjologiczny</i> [Congolesse Independence and Belgian Colonialism: A Historical and Sociological Outline]	PWN, Warszawa 1968, pp. 317
Elżbieta Podhorska-Reklajtis	<i>Rozwój szkolnictwa w Algierii</i> [Development of Education in Algeria]	PWN, Warszawa 1968
<b>1970</b>		
Andrzej Zajączkowski	<i>Muntu dzisiaj. Studium Afrykanistyczne</i> [Muntu Today. An Africanist Study]	PIW, Warszawa 1970, pp. 180
<b>1971</b>		
Elżbieta Podhorska-Reklajtis	<i>Być narodem. Problemy kultury współczesnej Algierii</i> [To Be a Nation. Cultural Problems of the Modern-Day Algeria]	PWN, Warszawa 1971, pp. 313

Karin Tomala	<i>Ośrodki badawcze i naukowe w RFN na temat Chin</i> [Research and Scientific Centres in FRG on China]	PISM, Warszawa 1971
Karin Tomala	<i>RFN wobec Chin Ludowych</i> [FRG Towards People Republic of China]	PISM, Warszawa 1971
Edward Szymański	<i>Tunezja</i> [Tunisia]	PWN, Warszawa 1971, pp. 187
<b>1972</b>		
Elżbieta Promińska	<i>Investigations on the Population of Muslim Alexandria. Anthropological-Demographic Study</i>	PWN, Varsovie 1972, pp. 124
<b>1973</b>		
Anna Mrozek	<i>Islam a naród w Afryce. Somalia, Sudan, Libia</i> [Islam and Nation in Africa. Somalia, Sudan, Libya]	PWN, Warszawa 1973, pp. 260
Andrzej Zajączkowski (ed.)	<i>Obrazy świata białych</i> [Images of the White People's World]	PIW, Warszawa 1973, pp. 292
Wanda Leopold	<i>O literaturze Czarnej Afryki</i> [About the Literature of Black Africa]	PIW, Warszawa 1973, pp. 194
<b>1974</b>		
Franciszek Bocheński	<i>500 zagadek ze świata arabskiego</i> [500 Riddles from the Arab World]	Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa 1974, pp. 233
Andrzej Zajączkowski	<i>Religia a struktura społeczna w Afryce</i> [Religion an Social Structure in Africa]	Studium Afrykanistyczne UW, Warszawa 1974, pp. 88
Wanda Leopold, Zbigniew Stolarek	<i>Antologia poezji afrykańskiej</i> [Anthology of African Poetry]	Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, Warszawa 1974, pp. 338
<b>1975</b>		
Maria Roman Sławiński	<i>La Societe des Piques Rouges et le mouvement paysan en Chine en 1926–1927</i>	Rozprawy habilitacyjne UW (UW. Nr 82), Warszawa 1975, pp. 201

<b>1976</b>		
Józef Chałasiński (ed.)	<i>Afryka naszych czasów. Problemy integracji państwowej, narodowej i panafrykańskiej</i> [Africa of Our Times: The Problems of State, National and Pan-African Integration]	Pracownia Zagadnień Społecznych i Kulturalnych Afryki Współczesnej PAN & Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich & Wydawnictwo PAN, Warszawa 1976, pp. 359
Elżbieta Podhorska-Reklajtis	<i>Maghreb współczesny. Z badań nad kontaktem i współrozwojem kultur</i> [Modern Maghreb. From the Research on Contact and Co-Development of Cultures]	PWN, Warszawa 1976, pp. 383
Augustyn Ponikiewski	<i>Problemy rozwojowe produkcji rolnej Maroka na tle warunków przyrodniczych i struktur agrarnych</i> [Development Problems of Agricultural Production in Morocco in the Context of Natural Conditions and Agrarian Structures]	Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 1976, pp. 297
<b>1977</b>		
Anna Mrozek-Dumanowska (ed.)	<i>Religie w procesie przemian w Afryce</i> [Religions in the Process of Change in Africa]	Pracownia Zagadnień Społecznych i Kulturalnych Afryki Współczesnej PAN & Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich Wydawnictwo PAN, Warszawa 1977 pp. 235
Wanda Leopold	<i>Eposy Czarnej Afryki</i> [Epics of Black Africa]	Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, Warszawa 1977, pp. 298

<b>1978</b>		
Edward Szymański	<i>Étude sur la formation des états maghrébins</i>	Pracownia Zagadnień Społecznych i Kulturalnych Afryki Współczesnej PAN, Varsovie 1978, pp. 267
Edward Szymański (ed.)	<i>Tradycja i współczesność w Azji, Afryce i Ameryce Łacińskiej</i> [Tradition and Modernity in Asia, Africa and Latin America]	Zakład Krajów Pozaeuropejskich PAN & Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich Wydawnictwo PAN, Warszawa 1978, pp. 387
<b>1979</b>		
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**Appendix 2,<sup>37</sup> Photographs**

**Photo 1.** Prof. Józef Chałasiński, Director of the Center for Studies on African Societies and Cultures from 1962 to 1974.

<sup>37</sup> Photographs come from the private collection of Małgorzata Szupejko and Andrzej Krasnowolski. The only exceptions are photo no. 8 which comes from the archive of IMOC PAS and photo no. 10 which was provided by Jerzy Zdanowski. As a disclaimer – we have decided to put the academic titles only in the descriptions of the individual photos. Including the recent titles at the photographs which refer to the particular time and space would be ahistorical and the mention of the titles which were adequate at the time would create unnecessary confusion.



**Photo 2.** From left to right: Józef Chałasiński, Halina Hanna Bobrowska, Rita Piana (Grzegorz Kaczyński's wife) and Grzegorz Kaczyński on the day of the public defense of the PhD theses of Bobrowska and Kaczyński at the University of Warsaw, 1976.



**Photo 3.** Józef Chałasiński among academics.



**Photo 4.** All the work and no play... Celebration of Prof. Chałasiński's name day at the Center for Studies on African Societies and Cultures' library in 1969 (those bookshelves are still there!). On the left side of the picture: Małgorzata Szupejko; Józef Chałasiński is standing in the centre, next to him, on the left is Jadwiga Komorowska. On the right side of the photo – Zygmunt Komorowski and Halina Bobrowska.



**Photo 5.** Dr. Wanda Leopold. Photo from the 1970s.



**Photo 6.** Prof. Andrzej Zajączkowski, Director of the Center for Studies on Non-European Countries (CSNEC) between 1981 and 1992.



**Photo 7.** CSNEC seminar, early 1990. In the upper row: Karin Tomala, Stanisław Tokarski (Director of CSNEC in 1992), Tadeusz Dzierżykray-Rogański. Partially visible – Professor Andrzej Zajączkowski.



**Photo 8.** Prof. Anna Mrozek-Dumanowska, Director of the Center for Studies on African Societies and Cultures between 1974 and 1976.



**Photo 9.** Conference, Accra 2001. Employees of CSNEC – Grzegorz Waliński and Robert Piętek are standing in the middle. Photo by Małgorzata Szupejko.



**Photo 10.** Prof. Jerzy Zdanowski, Director of CSNEC between 1994 and 2010, and Director of IMOC PAS between 2010 and 2011.



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Example:

There is still a labelling issue when it comes to flavourings in food. It is noted that, “flavours such as vanillin which occur naturally in food are called ‘nature–identical.’ The label does not have to state where it comes from.” (Wilson, 2009, p. 257).

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Other aspects of *sharī'a*, such as those dealing with the rights of religious minorities, women’s rights, and human rights in general, also need to be revised and reconsidered. Contextualisation of the Qur’ānic stipulation and examination of its linguistic and stylistic structure – as discourse – would reveal that the jurists’ work was basically to unfold the meaning of such stipulation and to re-encode this meaning in various social contexts (Abū Zayd, 2006, p. 95).

Paraphrasing is strongly recommended.

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Abaza, Mona. 2020. *Cairo Collages. Everyday Life Practices After the Event*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

- **Book chapters**

Abu-‘Uksa, Wael. 2015. ‘Liberal Renewal of the Turath: Constructing the Egyptian Past in Sayyid al-Qimni’s Works’, in: Hatina, Meir and Schumann, Christoph (eds.) *Arab Liberal Thought after 1967. Old Dilemmas, New Perceptions*. New York–Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 101–117.

- **Edited volumes**

Burkhalter, Thomas; Dickinson, Kay and Harbert, Benjamin J. (eds.). 2013. *The Arab Avant-Garde. Music, Politics, Modernity*. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press.

- **Theses and dissertations**

Rahman, Yusuf. 2001. 'The Hermeneutical Theory of Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd. An Analytical Study of His Method of Interpreting the Qur'ān'. Ph.D. thesis, McGill University, Montreal, Canada.

- **Journal Article (Print)**

Najjar, Fauzi M. 2000. 'Islamic Fundamentalism and the Intellectuals: The Case of Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd'. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 27(2), pp. 177–200.

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Abdul-Rahman, Rostam. 2017. 'Demythologizing the Qur'an. Rethinking Revelation Through Naskh al-Qur'an'. *Global Journal. Al-Thaqafah*, 7(2), pp. 51–78. DOI:10.7187/GJAT122017-2.

- **Article in newspapers**

Borger, Julian. 2002. 'US soldiers die in Afghan battle'. *The Guardian*, London, 5 March 2002: 1.

**Electronic article on a thematic website**

Gana, Nour. 2011. 'Rap Rage Revolt'. *Jadaliyya*, available at: <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/2320/rap-rage-revolt> (Accessed: 11 January 2022).

**Web pages and Websites**

Al-Daif, Rashid. 2021. *Rashid al-Daif's Biography*. Available at: <http://www.rachideldaif.com/biography/> (Accessed: 1 January 2022).

**Non-English Sources (translations of the titles in brackets)**

Lipczak, Aleksandra. 2020. *Lajla znaczy noc* [Layla Means Night]. Kraków: "Karakter".

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Tokarczuk, Olga. 2021. *The Books of Jacob*. Translated by Jennifer Croft, London: Fitzcarraldo Editions.

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